Voting Against the Establishment. The Effect of Government Composition on Voting for Challenger Parties

Tarik Abou-Chadi, University of Zurich

Eelco Harteveld, University of Amsterdam

We investigate how the composition of governments affects voting for challenger parties. While a growing body of research has identified supply side conditions under which the policy appeals of challenger parties are more successful, no such comparative work exists for their anti-establishment appeals. We argue that the composition of governments plays a crucial for challenger parties' capacity to mobilize anti-elite sentiment and investigate two mechanisms: representation and contestation. If voters feel that their policy preferences are not represented in government and that changing their vote has only little effect on the composition of governments then this will increase the credibility of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeal. Analyzing data on voting behavior from the CSES for 13 countries between 1996 and 2011, we find that the congruence of consecutive governments, the policy range of positions in government and policy distance to government all affect individuals' likelihood to vote for a challenger party.

Introduction

The emergence and success of new parties challenging the existing party systems in advanced industrial democracies has fundamentally altered the dynamics of multi-party competition. Not only have new issues such as immigration and European integration become vote defining issues, but these parties themselves have become established actors that are regularly represented in parliament and have even joined government coalitions. A growing literature in political science has investigated the determinants of these parties' failures and successes.

Scholars of challenger party success have analyzed two main factors determining vote choice for these parties: protest and issue positions. The central finding of earlier work in this direction was that the success of challenger parties and especially radical right parties could not be reduced to their anti-establishment appeal but was determined by the positions that these parties offered (van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000). Building on this earlier work studies then have moved on to identify the context conditions that facilitate the issue appeals of challenger parties. These studies generally agree that challenger parties fare best when they can provide a unique appeal be it by providing a distinct position (Kitschelt and McGann 1995) or by functioning as issue entrepreneurs (de Vries and Hobolt 2012; Hobolt and de Vries 2015). The behavior of mainstream parties can be regarded as the crucial context condition determining the uniqueness of a challenger or niche party's appeal (Green-Pedersen 2012; Meguid 2008). What all these studies have in common though is that they focus on the context conditions for one element of challenger parties' offer, namely their issue appeals. What the literature to date has investigated to a much lesser extent is how context conditions

and especially the behavior of mainstream parties determine the success of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeal.

In this article, we focus on this second aspect of challenger party success. The fate of challenger parties should not only depend on the novelty and uniqueness of the positions they emphasize but also on their capacity to mobilize anti-elite sentiment. Here, we argue that the composition of governments plays a crucial role in determining the success of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeal. More specifically, we investigate two mechanisms that will affect the credibility and efficiency of these appeals. The first one is *contestation:* the mechanism determining how strongly citizens can affect changes in government positions by changing their vote. The second is *representation*: the question if and how much citizens' preferences are represented in the current government. When voters feel that their voices are not heard in government and that there is little they can do to induce change, then we should expect challenger party appeals to be more successful.

We test our hypotheses combining data from the CMP/MARPOR project with survey data on electoral behavior from the CSES for 13 countries from 1996 - 2011. Our findings demonstrate that low levels of (1) contestation and (2) representation are indeed conducive for challenger party success. (1) When consecutive governments are very similar and when a broad range of policy positions is represented in the current government – both of which signal high levels of elite collusion – then voters become more likely to choose a challenger party. (2) When individuals' policy preferences are far away from the government's current position they also show a higher propensity of voting for a challenger party. Crucially, we also demonstrate that these factors equally

determine the choice between a challenger and other mainstream opposition parties and are not simply driven by a vote against the government.

Our findings thus constitute an important contribution to the literature on challenger parties as they demonstrate that supply side conditions for their success go beyond the policy positions offered and issues emphasized in an electoral campaign. More generally they contribute to a growing literature that focuses on the role of governing for the dynamics of multi-party competition. Similarly they demonstrate that in order to explain electoral behavior it is not enough to focus on the supply side at one election but it is important to take into account the temporal aspects of policy positions. Our findings also provide an important insight into the recent success of anti-establishment parties and candidates in Europe and North America especially after the Great Recession (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). They demonstrate why in a context in which governments are often constrained in the choices they can make and in which policies are often justified through a logic of "there is no alternative" challenger parties flourish and see increasing levels of electoral support.

Explaining the Success of Challenger Parties

Demand side explanations for challenger and niche party success have long been divided over the question if their vote share is mainly driven by protest and anti-elite sentiment or if the policies that these parties offer matter for their voters (van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000). In the case of the populist radical right, the most intensely studied family of challenger parties, its supporters have been shown to be less trusting in politics and less satisfied with the way democracy works than other voters. This has

lead them to be labelled *protest voters* (Betz 1994; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2009). However, some have criticized this notion of radical right supporters, showing that issue proximity is as important for them as for other voters when deciding which party to vote for (van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000). Hence, a broad body of research has demonstrated that if we want to understand the success of the radical right we need to investigate both their issue as well as their anti-establishment appeal.

The literature that looks beyond challenger parties' protest and anti-elite appeal and investigates context conditions for their issue appeals can be divided into two broader strands. First, there is a large literature that looks at specific party types such as radical right, green or anti-EU parties. Certainly, the largest share of these studies has investigated the success of radical right parties. However, some general patterns about conducive conditions for the success of these parties can be distilled from this literature. Going back to the work of Herbert Kitschelt (1988; 1995) one general expectation is that in the changing political space of post-industrial societies new parties such as left-libertarian or radical right parties can establish themselves if mainstream parties do not occupy this space. Somewhat reducing the complexity of the original argument, several studies have tested how the positions of mainstream parties affect the electoral fortunes of especially the radical right. The findings are relatively mixed, however. On the one hand, for example, van der Brug et al. (2005) find that the radical right benefits if the mainstream right takes a centrist position. However, Arzheimer and Carter (2006) show that radical right-wing parties actually benefit from a relatively extremist right-wing competitor, which they attribute to a legitimizing mechanism.

A second strand of literature has started investigating supply side conditions that are conducive to challenger and niche party success more generally. Instead of only focusing on mainstream parties' policy positions these studies additionally take issue salience and thus parties' issue emphasis strategies into account. For challenger parties, *issue entrepreneurship* generally plays a crucial role in determining their success (de Vries and Hobolt 2012; Hobolt and de Vries 2015). Challenger parties – most simply understood as parties that have never held public office – can be seen as losers on the current dimension of political conflict. Hence, they have an incentive to politicize novel issues that may change the existing pattern of competition. Issue entrepreneurial strategies are successful if they can create *clarity* and *affect* (Carmines and Stimson 1986; 1989). This means that there need to be different choices on offer for voters on the issue dimension (clarity) and that voters need to perceive issues as important and political (affect). At the micro level, we can thus speak of a successful issue entrepreneurial strategy if challenger parties can increase the level of issue voting for their preferred issue (de Vries 2007; 2010). The success of these strategies, however, is not only determined by the behavior of the challenger party but crucially depends on contextual factors, most importantly the behavior of mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi 2016; Green-Pedersen 2012). The strategic interaction of mainstream parties with challenger parties determines when and how they can act as issue entrepreneurs. Combining a positional with a salience perspective Meguid (2005; 2008) also shows how accommodative strategies of mainstream parties limit niche party success. Hence, what we can see for more positional approaches as well as for those taking issue competition into account is that the uniqueness of a challenger party's appeal is crucial

for determining its support. Similarly, the plausibility of this unique appeal crucially depends on the behavior of mainstream parties.

Hence, the literature on challenger parties has gathered wide-ranging insights into the conditions that determine the success of their issue appeals. However, what all of these studies have in common is that they regard policy strategies (position or issue emphasis) as the defining factor for challenger party success. What they ignore is the appeal that challenger parties can derive simply from the fact that they are not part of a governing elite that regularly alternates between government and opposition. While reducing challenger parties to protest parties is certainly inaccurate, they can and often do use anti-establishment rhetoric in order to appeal to voters. Similar to their issue strategies, if and when these anti-establishment appeals are successful crucially depends on contextual factors and as we will argue in the next section most importantly on the composition of governments.

Government Composition and Challenger Party Success

We argue that government composition is a crucial factor determining challenger parties' anti-establishment appeal. We expect that at least part of the success of these parties depends on the extent to which their critique of governing elites resonates with political dissatisfaction among their potential electorate. In the case of populist parties, it has been well-documented that a central element in their appeal is to oppose a 'caste' of self-serving and undistinguishable mainstream parties (see Mudde 2007). Indeed, research shows that voters of (right-wing) populist parties show higher levels of distrust towards and dissatisfaction with the political system (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers

2002; Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2009). Challenger parties add relevance to their ideological position or issue – and to their own credibility in addressing it – by stressing the impossibility of mainstream parties to bring about any change. This critique, however, is most likely to gain hold among potential voters if voters indeed perceive the remaining parties as highly similar and immobile.

We argue that a crucial factor shaping such perceptions is the composition of *governments*. Importantly, the composition of governments should matter beyond the positions that individual parties take that form the government. There are several reasons why it is specifically governments that should matter for the success of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeal and why government composition should matter beyond parties' individual positions. First, as Adams et al. (2011) have demonstrated, voters might not even be aware of parties' positional shifts or might at least be slow in updating their perceptions (Fernandez-Vazquez 2014). Hence, analyzing how mainstream party positions affect the success of challenger parties at the same election might inaccurately represent the dynamics between parties' strategic position shifts and voter perceptions that are relevant for challenger party success. In contrast, government participation has a strong effect on how parties are perceived by the electorate (Adams, Ezrow, and Wlezien 2016; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). In addition, how governments are made up should be particularly important for the success of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeals. While political parties themselves can be the target of anti-establishment rhetoric, governments most clearly present the reference point for arguments surrounding elite collusion and the necessity for change.

Hence, we argue that the composition of governments will be a crucial factor determining the success of challenger parties. More precisely, we argue that there are

two context conditions that will affect the credibility and mobilization potential of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeals: (1) contestation and (2) representation. Both constitute the core mechanisms of accountable government in liberal democracies. When the composition of governments signals a lack of these mechanisms, claims of non-responsive political elites should resonate more successfully with the public.

Contestation

Contestation describes citizens' capacity to change government through the mechanism of political competition. The opposite of this can be seen in (elite) collusion (Bartolini 1999; 2000). If contestation is low within a democratic system, then changing votes will have low effects on the composition of governments.[1] A typical example of this can be seen in so-called pivotal parties such as the Dutch CDA which because of their central position in the party system will nearly always end up in government and that independent of their actual electoral performance (Green-Pedersen 2001; Keman 1994). Low levels of contestation will be conducive for the anti-establishment appeals of challenger parties. If changes in votes matter little for who is in government this plays into the hands of arguments referring to the dominance of elites over the democratic process and the impuissance of voters vis-à-vis these elites. Within this context, challenger parties can present themselves as the harbinger of change that will "shake things up."

A clear signal for a lack of contestation is the policy congruence of consecutive governments. When consecutive governments are similar and assuming that there is

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[1] Strøm refers to this as performance sensitivity Strøm (1989)

variation in electoral behavior then this should demonstrate to citizens that their choices are constrained and that vote shifts have little effect. Within this context, anti-establishment appeals of challenger parties should be much more successful. When challenger parties can point to the similarity of governments as a sign of elite collusion they can successfully present themselves as the only alternative.

H1 Higher levels of government congruence will increase the likelihood of voters choosing a challenger party

The second relevant factor signaling the degree of contestation within a political system is the range of policy positions included in the current government. When government coalitions are broad then this increases the perception that mainstream parties are very similar to each other. The literature on radical right voting, for example, has demonstrated a potential positive effect of so-called grand coalitions leading to higher vote shares for radical right parties (Arzheimer and Carter 2006). If government coalitions are formed despite nominally big differences in party positions this will strengthen an idea of elite collusion. This, in turn, will be conducive for challenger parties' anti-establishment message.

H2 A higher policy position range of current governments will increase the likelihood of voters choosing a challenger party

Representation

A second factor that will determine the effectiveness of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeals is the representation of citizens' preferences in the democratic process. The core theme of populist and anti-establishment appeals is the idea that the

elites do not represent the will of the people (Mudde 2004; Riker 1982). While contestation can be regarded as the mechanism assuring the responsiveness of political elites to the preferences of the electorate, representation can be seen as its outcome.

Challenger parties will be more successful when voters feel that their policy preferences are not represented in government. From an individual's perspective this is most clearly the case when the policy position of a government is far away from the individual's preferences. Importantly, the position of a government should matter independently of the positions offered in a campaign. While mainstream parties' policy positions should clearly matter for challenger success, it is our argument that the composition of government determines the credibility of anti-establishment appeals beyond the strategic positioning of political parties. We thus hypothesize:

H3 A higher distance between an individual's ideological position and the perceived policy position of the government increases the likelihood of voting for a challenger

In terms of representation the range of policy positions in government should equally affect the credibility of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeals. In contrast to contestation though, seen through the lens of representation a broad range of policy positions should rather work against the appeals made by challenger parties. When a broad range of positions is represented in government it will be harder to argue that the political elites are detached from the will of the people. Even an individual whose own opinions are not represented would need to acknowledge a broader range of positions in government. We can thus formulate a competing hypothesis to hypothesis 2:

H4 A higher policy position range of current governments will decrease the likelihood of voters choosing a challenger party

Data, Operationalization, and Method

Individual-level

Our data at the level of individuals was obtained from the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (CSES) project, waves 1 – 3 (www.cses.org 2012). CSES data consists of harmonized question batteries included in national election studies in a broad range of countries. This ensures that, in contrast to most other comparative survey initiatives – such as the European Social Survey – respondents were interviewed in the context of an actual election campaign. This, in turn, makes it likely they respond in a non-artificial way to questions pertaining to vote choices.

Our key dependent variable is the *Vote for a challenger party*, taking values 0 (did not vote for a challenger party) and 1 (did vote for a challenger party). As discussed in the theory section, challenger parties are usually operationalized as parties that have never participated in government (Hobolt and de Vries 2015). While this is a straight forward and easily implemented way of operationalizing challenger parties, our argument crucially depends on anti-establishment appeals of challenger parties. The question thus is if all parties that have never participated in government alike make these appeals. The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) 2014 (Bakker et al. 2014) allows us to empirically investigate this question as it includes an item that places parties "anti-elite salience" on a 0-10 scale. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of parties' anti-elite salience in Western Europe for mainstream government, mainstream opposition and challenger parties.
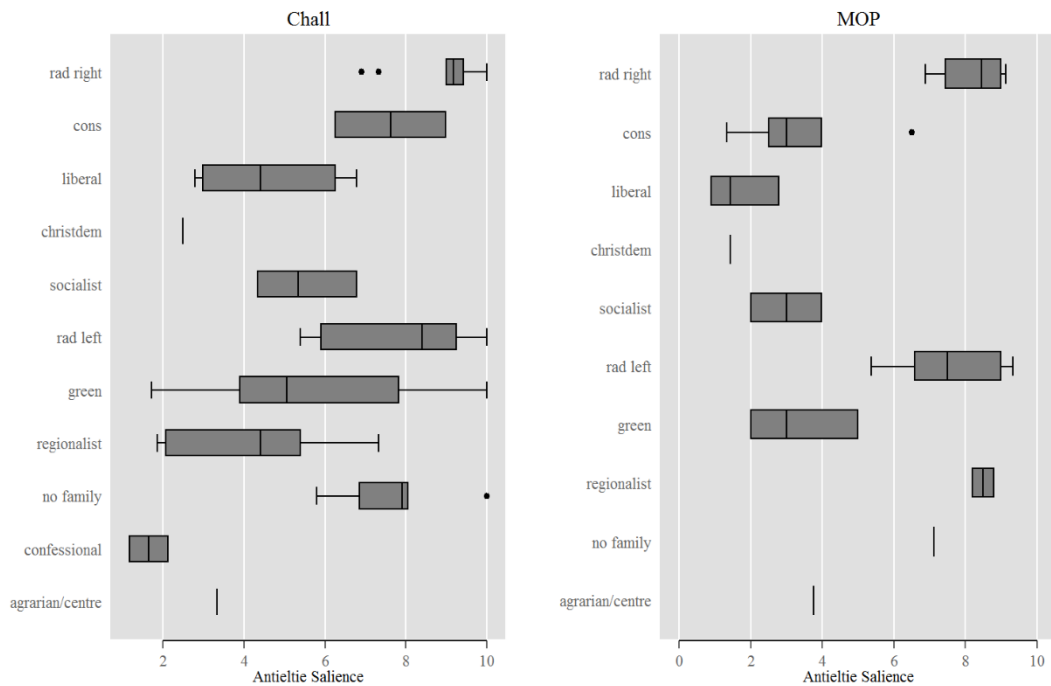
Figure 1 – Anti-Elite Salience by Party Type
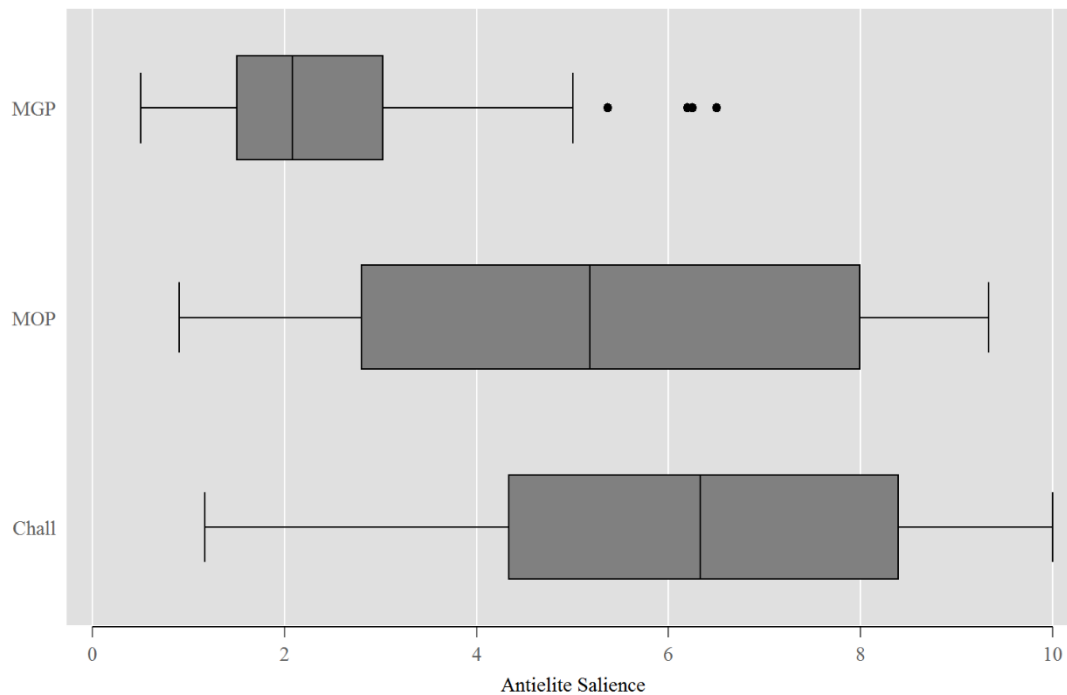
Distribution of anti-elite salience according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey among mainstream government (MGP), mainstream opposition (MOP) and challenger (Chall) parties

We can see that mainstream government parties clearly emphasize anti-elite issues much less than their other competitors. While challenger parties – defined as parties that never participated in government – use anti-elite appeals somewhat more than mainstream opposition parties this difference is not very pronounced. For both mainstream opposition and challenger parties there still is considerable variation within the types. Looking at Figure 2 we can see why this is the case.

Figure 2 – Anti-Elite Salience by Party Family

Distribution of anti-elite salience according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, by party family

Figure 2 shows parties' anti-elite appeals for challenger and mainstream opposition parties but divided by party families. It becomes obvious that some party families – most notably radical right and radical left parties – make anti-establishment appeals no matter if they have governed before or not. On the other hand, we can see that some party families show very little anti-elite appeals or large variation even if they are challenger parties. These findings speak against operationalizing challenger parties by their lack of government participation if one wants to investigate the context conditions for the success of their anti-establishment appeals.

Further looking at the CHES data we can also see that there is a strikingly high correlation (r=0.76) between parties anti-EU position and their emphasis of anti-elite

issues (the scatter plot can be found in the Appendix). It should not be surprising that parties positioning themselves against the European Union make use of anti-establishment appeals as this constitutes one of their core avenues of criticizing European integration. For our analysis we thus operationalize challenger parties as radical right, radical left and other anti-EU parties (e.g. some Northern European green parties). As Figure A2 in the Appendix demonstrates, with a median over 8 on a 10-point scale, this group of parties shows very high levels of anti-elite salience. The Appendix also provides a list of included parties. In order to assure that our findings are not driven by a simple government/opposition distinction (challenger parties in our definition too are much less likely to be in government) we present additional results that demonstrate that our findings hold using a dependent variable that distinguishes mainstream opposition from challenger parties and excludes government parties.

We make use of data provided by the CMP/MARPOR project to construct our main independent variables of interest (Volkens et al. 2013). The data set is based on the coding of quasi-sentences following 56 issue categories which are then used to estimate how much emphasis is put on an issue in a manifesto. The items, thus, measure position and salience of an issue in a manifesto. Based on this data, we calculate a measure of *government congruence* between consecutive governments.

$$congruence = -(abs(\Delta Position) + abs(\Delta Range))$$

In order to calculate government congruence we take the negative of the absolute *Shift in Position* (which is the absolute difference, from one administration to the next, in governing parties' mean left-right position) added to the absolute *Shift in Range* (which

is the absolute difference, from one administration to the next, in the range between the most left-wing and the most right-wing coalition party). We argue a measure of government congruence should not only take changes in the ideological center of a coalition into account, but also in its range. Governments may represent fundamentally different policy positions despite having the same mean position. If a subsequent government for example is centered around the same position as the previous one, but does now include very extreme parties rather than merely centrist ones, this does present a substantive change. Parties' individual left-right positions are calculated following the log-approach (Lowe et al. 2011). Government parties' positions are then weighted by their seat share.

Second, *Ideological Range*, is calculated as the interval between the left-right positions taken by the most left-wing and the most right-wing party in the current ruling coalition. Party positions are again weighted by their seat share. High values indicate that a government consists of ideologically diverse parties, which we have argued should signal low levels of contestation but high levels of representation.

Third, an individual's *Distance to Government* is measured as the absolute distance between an individual's left-right position and the mean of policy positions of government parties based on this individual's perception.

As control variables at the macro level we add the ideological position of the *mainstream right* as well as the *mainstream left* party, as these positions will likely affect individuals' likelihood to vote for a challenger party and are at the same time correlated with government positions. Since the strength of a challenger party will likely affect government formation and representation of a challenger party in parliament improves its performance at subsequent elections (Dinas, Riera, and Roussias 2015), we

include the *seat share of challenger parties* at the previous election. We also control for the electoral system with a measure for *average district magnitude*. We then present additional results for models including measures of individual *distance to the mainstream left* and *mainstream right* party as well as a control for the *number of parties in government*.

We also include a number of control variables at the individual level. We control for left-right placement and its squared term; a range of socio-demographics (age, sex, education, employment, blue collar employment, private sector, income, religiosity) and union membership.

We model voting for a challenger party as a dependent variable which we explain by characteristics of the outgoing government as well as individual-level variables. We run a multilevel logit model including random effects for elections. All our findings are robust against including an additional random effect for countries as suggested by Schmidt-Catran and Fairbrother (2016).

Results

Table 1 presents our main findings for the effects of government congruence, policy range and ideological distance to the government. Model 1 includes our main variables without any second level controls. In Model 2 we add mainstream parties' policy positions, district magnitude, and the seat share of challenger parties at the previous election. As one can see, the inclusion of the additional control variables barely affects the other coefficients.

For our control variables we find a number of statistically significant effects[2] that are in line with our expectations and the findings from previous studies. We find a significant negative effect of age, religiousness and union membership indicating that those voters have stronger bounds to mainstream parties and are less likely to switch to a challenger party. Unemployed as well as blue-collar workers are more likely to vote for challenger parties, while voters with higher income are less likely to do so. At the macro level we can find that the seat share of challenger parties at the previous election positively affects their fortune at the polls at the next election. We also find that electoral systems with a higher district magnitude seems to encourage challenger party voting.

Table 1 – Predicting the vote for a challenger party

|	Model (1)	Model (2)
	No L2 controls	*With L2 controls*
Distance to government	0.296 (0.016)	0.295 (0.016)
Government congruence	1.005 (0.433)	0.836 (0.278)
Ideological range	1.407 (0.447)	1.012 (0.295)
Individual controls Left-right self-placement	-0.171 (0.036)	-0.172 (0.036)
Square left-right self-placement	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)
Age	-0.008 (0.001)	-0.008 (0.001)
Male	0.041 (0.035)	0.041 (0.035)
Education	0.033 (0.039)	0.033 (0.039)
Unemployed	0.187 (0.080)	0.189 (0.080)
Blue-collar worker	0.173 (0.046)	0.174 (0.046)
Private sector worker	-0.037 (0.041)	-0.035 (0.041)

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[2] We refer to statistical significance if $p<0.05$

Income	-0.083	-0.083
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Union membership	-0.163	-0.162
	(0.039)	(0.039)
Religious	-0.479	-0.473
	(0.047)	(0.047)
Case-level controls		
Previous strength challenger		0.066
		(0.014)
Position of mainstream left		-0.430
		(0.252)
Position of mainstream right		0.006
		(0.008)
Average district magnitude		0.004
		(0.002)
Intercept	-1.180	-2.485
	(0.365)	(0.370)
Case-level variance	0.809	0.281
	(0.265)	(0.103)
N	31063	31063

Multilevel logistic regression on vote for challenger parties with random effects for elections. Standard errors in parentheses.

For our main variables of interest, we can already see a statistically significant effect in the expected direction. Government congruence as well as an individual's ideological distance to the government position both positively affect the likelihood to vote for a challenger party. Policy range has a significant positive effect which speaks for a mechanism of contestation rather than representation. In order to better interpret these findings Figures 3, 4, and 5 present the predicted probabilities based on the variation in those variables and based on Model 2 in Table 1.[3]

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[3] For the calculation of the predicted probabilities the other variables are held at their observed values.

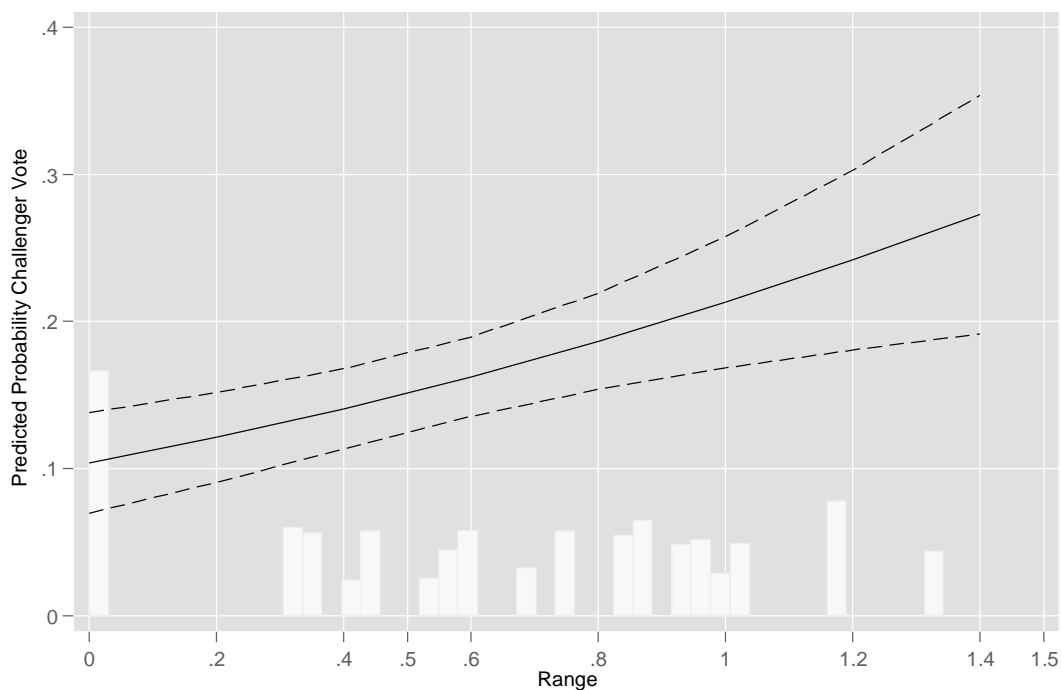**Figure 3 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote and Government Congruence**
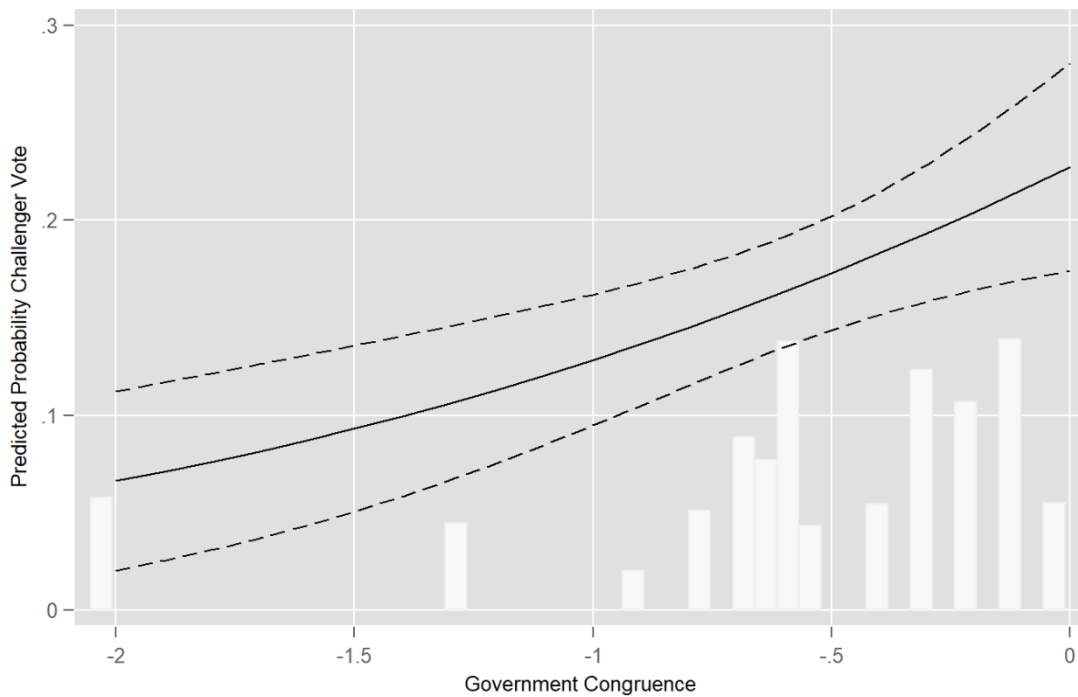
Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party, by government congruence (based on Model 2 in Table 1), with 95% confidence interval. The histogram presents the distribution of government congruence.

Figure 3 shows the predicted probability (with 95% CI) of an individual voting for a challenger party depending on how similar the current government is to the previous one. When two consecutive governments are very distinct (more negative values on congruence), then we see a low probability of an individual voting for a challenger party. The more similar a government is to the previous one, the higher the likelihood that an individual votes for a challenger party. We should emphasize again that this is the effect of government composition independent of the positions offered by the mainstream parties in the current election. For very high values of congruence we predict the probability for a challenger party vote to be about 23%. Considering that in

our sample only 16% of respondents have voted for a challenger party, this effect constitutes a 50% increase at the mean and is thus quite considerable. Hence, Figure 1 confirms hypothesis 1: when consecutive governments are more similar, then this is beneficial for challenger parties.

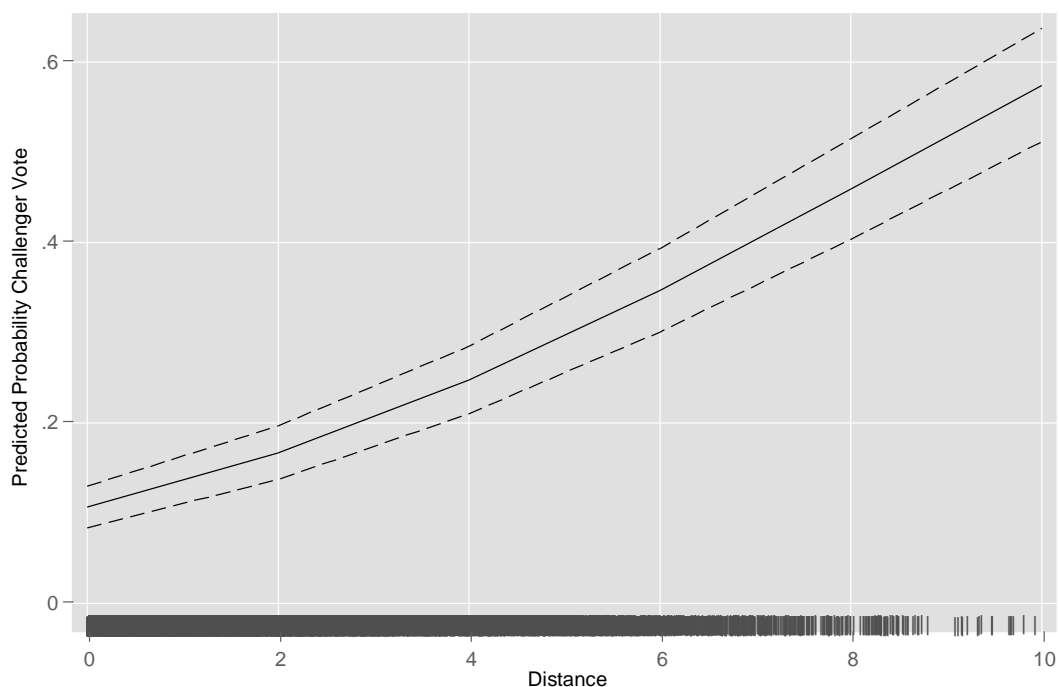**Figure 4 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote and Policy Range**

Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party, by policy range of current government (based on Model 2 in Table 1), with 95% confidence interval. The histogram presents the distribution of policy range.

Figure 4 demonstrates that the policy range of the current government also affects voting for challenger parties. With increasing range of the left-right policy positions represented in government it becomes more likely that an individual votes for a challenger party. This finding supports hypothesis 2 and supports a contestation rather

than a representation logic. When parties that are far apart on the left-right scale can form a government then this gives credibility to challenger parties' anti-establishment message and makes people more likely to vote for them. In sum, using measures of government congruence and policy range based on parties left-right positions we can confirm that challenger parties are more successful in contexts where there are low levels of government contestation.

We have also hypothesized that challenger parties' anti-establishment appeals should be more successful when voters feel that their policy preferences are not represented in government. We present the predicted probabilities for distance to the government mean in Figure 5.

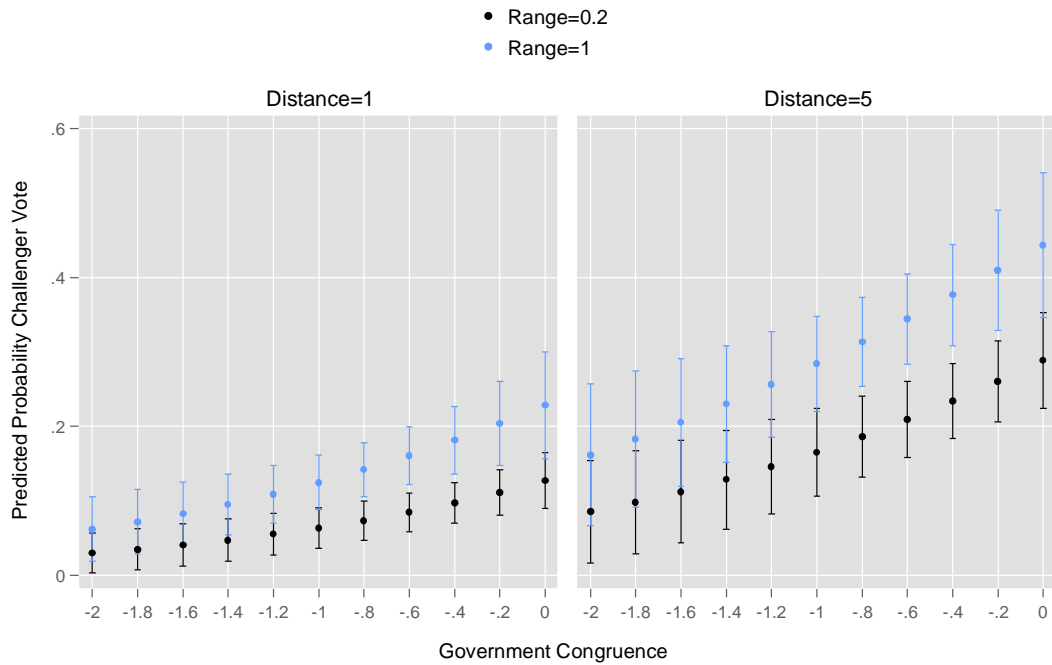**Figure 5 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote and Distance to Government**

Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party, by distance to government (based on Model 2 in Table 1), with 95% confidence interval. The histogram presents the distribution of distance to government.

Figure 5 shows the predicted probability of a challenger vote depending on the absolute distance between an individual's policy position and the government mean. We can see that the probability of voting for a challenger party strongly increases with this distance. While a voter with a very small distance to the government mean shows a predicted probability of about 10 percent to vote for a challenger party this increases to nearly 60 percent for the highest distance in the sample. We thus find strong support for hypothesis 3. Individuals that perceive the government to be far away from their own ideology become much more likely to vote for a challenger party.

In order to get a better sense of the substantive effects of our findings, Figure 6 shows the predicted probabilities of voting for a challenger party based on variation in our three main variables of interest. The left panel shows the predicted probability of voting for a challenger party depending on levels of government congruence and range for individuals whose ideological distance to the government is small (1) while the right panel shows the same relationship for individuals who are quite distant from the government's position (5).

Figure 6 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote by Distance, Range, and Congruence

Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party, by distance to government, policy range, and government congruence (based on Model 2 in Table 1), with 95% confidence interval.

We can clearly see the dominant effect of ideological distance with the government as predicted probabilities of voting for challenger parties are much higher in the right panel. We also get a sense of the substantive effect of combinations of our effects. With high levels of range, high levels of congruence and an individual being quite distant from the government we arrive at a predicted probability of voting for a challenger party of around 50 percent. Even for people who are ideologically close to the government we can still see how government congruence and policy range significantly affect voters' propensity to vote for a challenger party. In sum, we can demonstrate that in line with our expectations low levels of contestation and representation lead to substantively

higher levels of challenger party voting. Figures C1-3 in the Appendix also demonstrate that all our findings hold if we successively exclude one country at a time from our analysis.

Robustness

We run some additional analyses in order to demonstrate the robustness of our findings to the inclusion of additional controls variables and changing the dependent variable to the distinction between challenger and mainstream opposition parties. Model 1 in Table 2 includes an additional variable for the number of parties in government. The number of parties in government is positively correlated with the range of policy positions in government. In order to assure that we do not simply pick up a party system effect, we thus include this additional control variable. As we can see in Table 2 the inclusion of the number of parties in government somewhat decreases the effect of congruence and range but they remain statistically and substantively significant.

Table 2 – Additional Analyses

	Model (3) # parties in gov't	Model (4) Individual distance to mainstream	Model (5) MOP vs Challenger
Distance to government	0.295 (0.016)	0.206 (0.021)	0.276 (0.019)
Government congruence	0.833 (0.269)	0.846 (0.295)	1.761 (0.615)
Ideological range	0.828 (0.319)	1.025 (0.324)	1.722 (0.441)
Individual controls			
Left-right self-placement	-0.171 (0.036)	-0.119 (0.040)	-0.285 (0.044)
Square left-right self-placement	0.002 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.004)	0.009 (0.004)

Age	-0.008	-0.008	-0.007
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Male	0.041	0.028	0.036
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.041)
Education	0.034	-0.015	-0.047
	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.046)
Unemployed	0.188	0.198	0.173
	(0.080)	(0.085)	(0.095)
Blue-collar worker	0.173	0.161	0.112
	(0.046)	(0.050)	(0.054)
Private sector worker	-0.034	-0.069	0.049
	(0.041)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Income	-0.083	-0.077	-0.111
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)
Union membership	-0.163	-0.180	-0.146
	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.046)
Religious	-0.474	-0.434	-0.420
	(0.047)	(0.049)	(0.056)
Case-level controls			
Previous strength challenger	0.064	0.071	0.054
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.021)
Average district magnitude	0.003	0.004	0.007
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Position of mainstream left	-0.409		-0.527
	(0.244)		(0.375)
Position of mainstream right	0.008		-0.003
	(0.008)		(0.011)
Number of parties in government	0.176		
	(0.145)		
Individual distances to mainstream			
Distance to mainstream left		0.098	
		(0.012)	
Distance to mainstream right		0.049	
		(0.012)	
Intercept	-2.687	-2.443	-1.174
	(0.401)	(0.365)	(0.520)
Case-level variance	0.262	0.359	0.583
	(0.096)	(0.137)	(0.197)
N	31063	27474	15700

Multilevel logistic regression on vote for challenger parties with random effects for elections. Standard errors in parentheses.

Model 2 in Table 2 includes control variables for an individual's ideological distance to

the mainstream left and the mainstream right party. Again, we want to assure that our

findings do not simply pick up party level or party system effects but are based on the

effects of government composition independent of party positions. Including these control variables somewhat reduces our sample size as not all respondents are able to place the mainstream parties on a left-right scale. As we can see, all our main effects remain statistically significant and the substantive effect size remains very similar to our main model. In sum, we can demonstrate that our findings are robust to controlling for additional party system variables that could have potentially confounded our assumed relationship.

We additionally want to assure that our findings are not simply driven by government/opposition distinction - challenger parties are much less likely to be in government - but actually capture voting for a challenger party. Model 3 in Table 2 thus presents our findings using the distinction between mainstream opposition party (0) and challenger party (1) as our dependent variable. Table 2 shows our results for this dependent variable. As we exclude all government parties, our sample size is considerably reduced in this model. Nevertheless, our main variables of interest remain statistically significant. Figure 7 summarizes the predicted probabilities based on this model.[4]

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[4] Figures B1-3 in the appendix present separate predicted probability plots for the three variables.

Figure 7 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote and Distance, Range, and Congruence (opposition parties only)
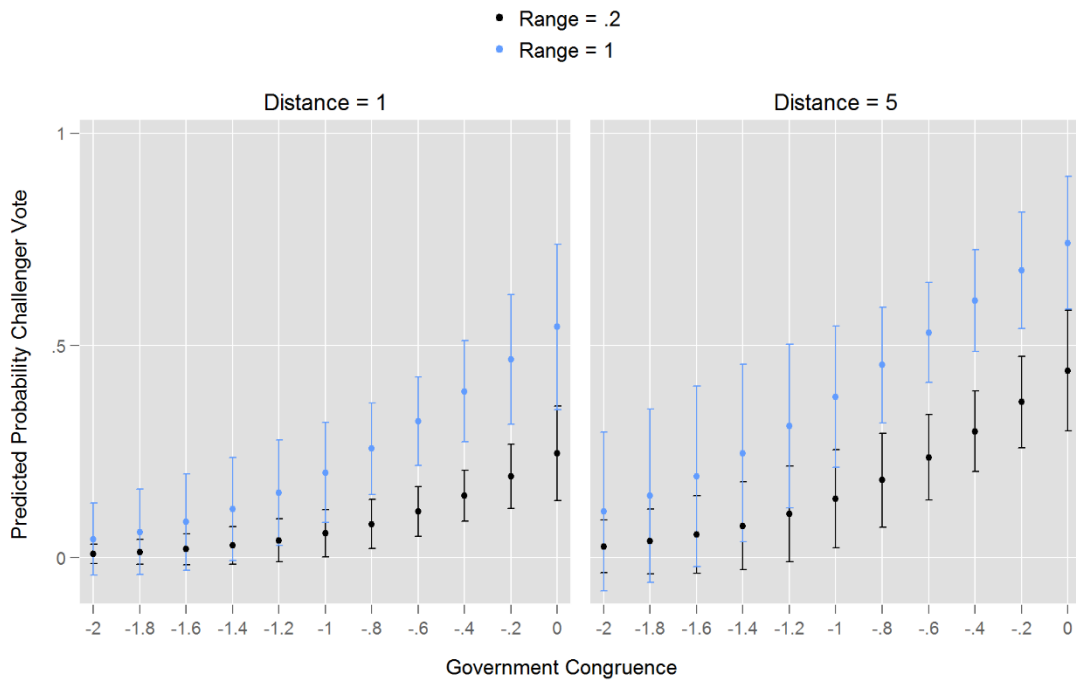
Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party, by distance to government, policy range, and government congruence (based on Model 3 in Table 2), with 95% confidence interval.

We can see a picture that is quite similar to Figure 6. Congruence, range and distance all substantively affect voting for challenger parties. As we only look at opposition parties the predicted probability of voting for a challenger party is generally higher. While the effect of an individual's ideological distance to the government is less dominant than in our main model, there still is a significant and substantive effect. This strongly underlines our proposed mechanism of elite dissatisfaction when individuals feel that they not represented by the governing parties. When this is the case they do not only not choose a government party in the subsequent election, but they also become much more likely to choose a challenger party over a mainstream opposition party and thus turn

their backs on the established parties that regularly alternate in forming the government coalition.

Conclusion

In this paper we demonstrate that government composition plays a crucial role for determining challenger party success. While supply side explanations for those parties' breakthroughs and lasting success have generally focused on other parties' policy positions and issue emphases, we argue that the conditions preventing or promoting successful anti-establishment appeals are equally important. By showing that the congruence of consecutive governments, a high policy range in the current government, and high ideological distance to the government are conducive for challenger party success, we can demonstrate that the composition of government matters beyond the positions taken by individual parties.

While we regard this as an important first step in analyzing the context conditions of successful anti-establishment appeals, we see two main roads ahead for further research. At the individual level, additional analyses can help us understand the mechanism behind our findings. With appropriate items on attitudes towards government, it would be possible to investigate the mediating mechanism of these items.

At the macro level so far we have relied on measuring congruence in terms of policy positions. However, governments can be similar/different in other regards. First of all, governments crucially differ in their policy agendas. Based on the literature on issue competition and challenger party success, we should expect that similarities in agendas should equally affect the credibility of challenger parties' anti-establishment appeals.

Second, the most visible output of governments are actual policies and reforms. Hence, it would be possible to compare governments in for example their immigration policies and again test if similarity/difference is conducive for challenger party success.

Beyond its role for the academic debate, our findings have important implications for the broader debate about the rise of challenger and anti-establishment parties. When the composition of governments signals low levels of contestation and representation challenger parties can more successfully mobilize anti-elite sentiment. Global economic cooperation, European integration, and increasing authority of supra-national institutions limit governments' possibilities to offer clear alternatives at a national level. The constrained variation for citizens' choice that results from this lack of alternatives will be conducive for the anti-establishment appeals of challenger parties.

Indeed, the literature on populism has identified exactly such constrained, technocratic 'politics without policy' (Schmidt 2013) as a key factor explaining populist success. Populists self-identify as a force that 'redeems' democracy from colluding elites. They promise to return popular sovereignty and thus to give the "true people" a *choice* again (Mudde 2004). Our findings show that populist and other anti-establishment parties thrive in contexts of actual reduced contestation. This suggests that in those contexts the critique of collusion resonates more strongly with potential voters. It also shows that mainstream parties' response to populist challengers is unlikely to succeed if it merely consist of adopting or diverging populists' core ideological critique (for instance, nativism).

In addition, our findings show that the relationship between government composition and challenger party success is likely self-reinforcing. When challenger parties become

more successful then this will force established parties to form the kind of coalitions (broad and similar) that we have shown to increase challenger party popularity. The attempts to form coalitions after the most recent Dutch and German elections clearly demonstrate this increasing dilemma. In sum, the self-reinforcing mechanism of challenger party strength and government composition will likely lead to further transformations of the European party systems and the "establishment of anti-establishment parties."

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Table A1 – Parties coded as challenger parties

Country	Election	Party
Austria	2008	Alliance for the Future of Austria
		Freedom Party of Austria
Germany	1998	German People's Union
		Party Of Democratic Socialism
		The Republicans
	2002	National Democratic Party Of Germany
		Party Of Democratic Socialism
		Party Of The Rule Of Law Offensive
		The Republicans
	2005	Left / Party Of Democratic Socialism
		National Democratic Party Of Germany
		The Republicans
	2009	Left Party
		National Democratic Party
		Republicans
Denmark	1998	Danish People
		Socialist People
		United List
	2001	Danish People's Party
		Progress Party
		Red - Green Unity List
		Socialist People's Party
	2007	Danish People's Party
		Socialist People's Party
		United List - The Red - Greens
Spain	1996	United Left
	2008	United Left
Finland	2003	True Finns
	2007	For Peace And Socialism
		Left Alliance
		The Communist Party Of Finland
		True Finns
	2011	The Communist Party Of Finland
		True Finns (Ps)
France	2002	National Republican Movement
		Socialist Party
		Workers' Struggle
Greece	2009	Coalition Of The Radical Left
		Communist Party Of Greece
Ireland	2002	Sinn Fein ('We Ourselves')
Iceland	2007	Left Green Movement
	2009	Left Green Movement
Italy	2006	Communist Refoundation Party
		National Alliance
		Northern League
		Party Of Italian Communists
		The Socialists
Netherlands	1998	Centre Democrats
		Green Left
		Socialist Party
	2002	Green Left
		List Pim Fortuyn
		Livable Netherlands
		Socialist Party
	2006	Green Left
		One NL
		Party For Freedom
		Party For The Animals
		Pim Fortuyn List
		Socialist Party
	2010	Green Left
		Party For The Animals
		Party Of Freedom

		Proud Of The Netherlands
		Socialist Party
Norway	1997	Progress Party
		Socialist Left Party
	2001	Progress Party
		Red Electoral Alliance
		Socialist Left Party
	2005	Progress Party
		Red Electoral Alliance
		Socialist Left Party
	2009	Progress Party
		Red Electoral Alliance
		Socialist Left Party
Portugal	2002	Left Block
		Left Bloc
		Unitary Democratic Coalition
	2009	Portuguese Workers' Communist Party
Sweden	2006	Sweden Democrats

Figure A1 – Anti-EU position and anti-elite salience
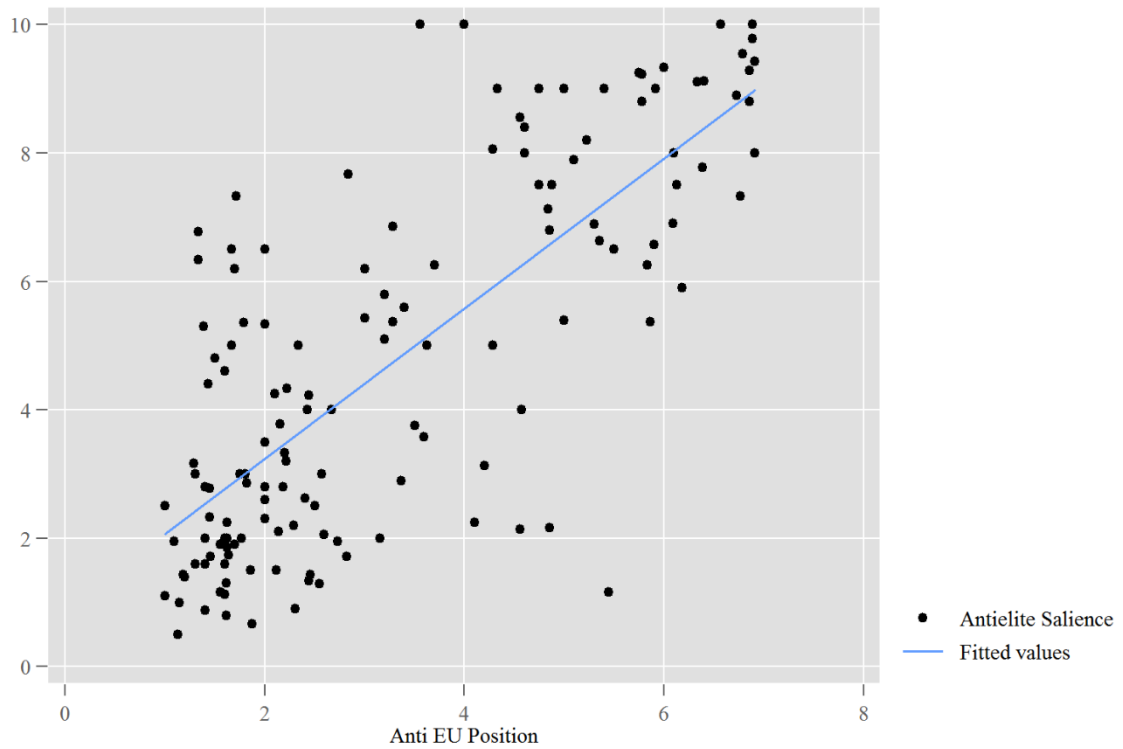
Parties' anti-EU position (X) and anti-elite salience (Y) in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey

Figure A2 – Distribution anti-elite salience new challenger coding
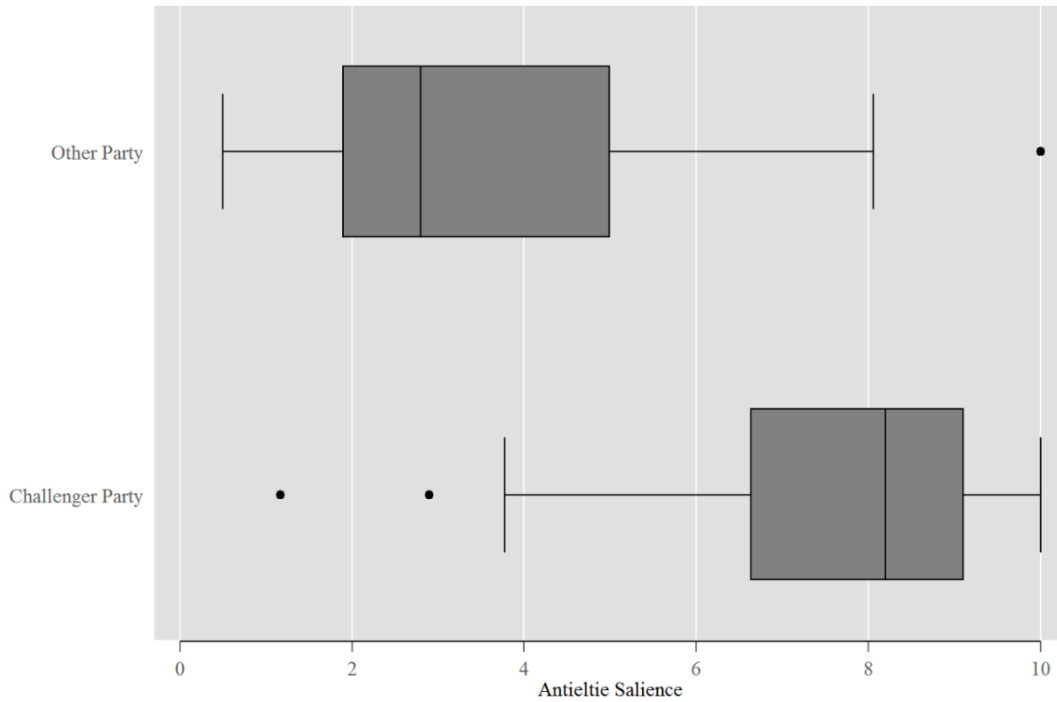

Distribution of anti-elite salience according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, by alternative coding of challenger status

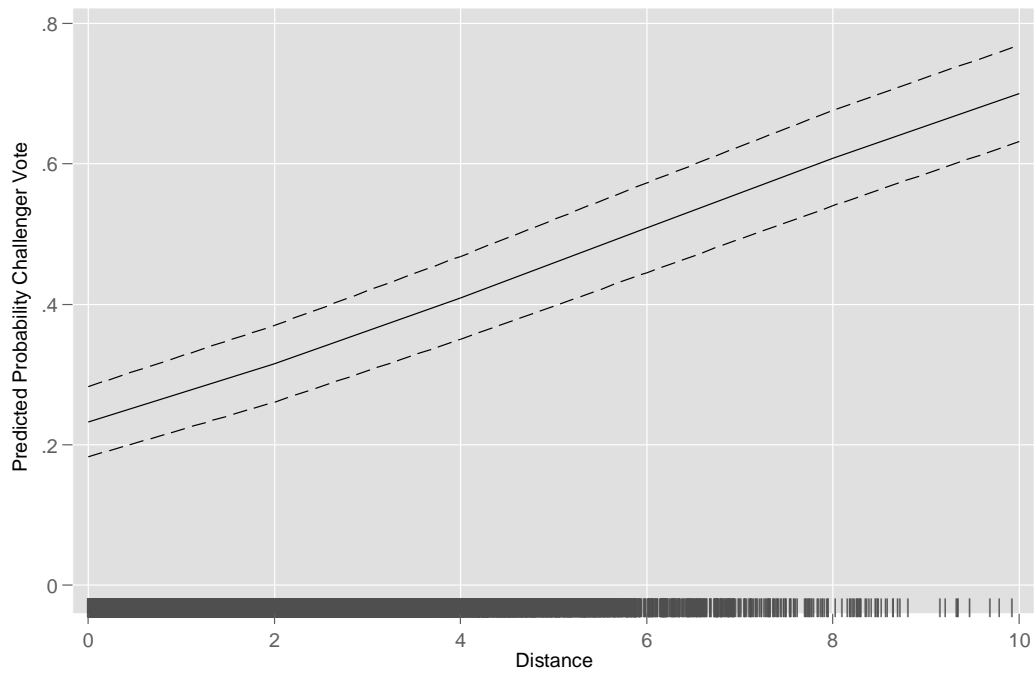**Figure B1 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote versus MOP Vote, by Government Congruence**
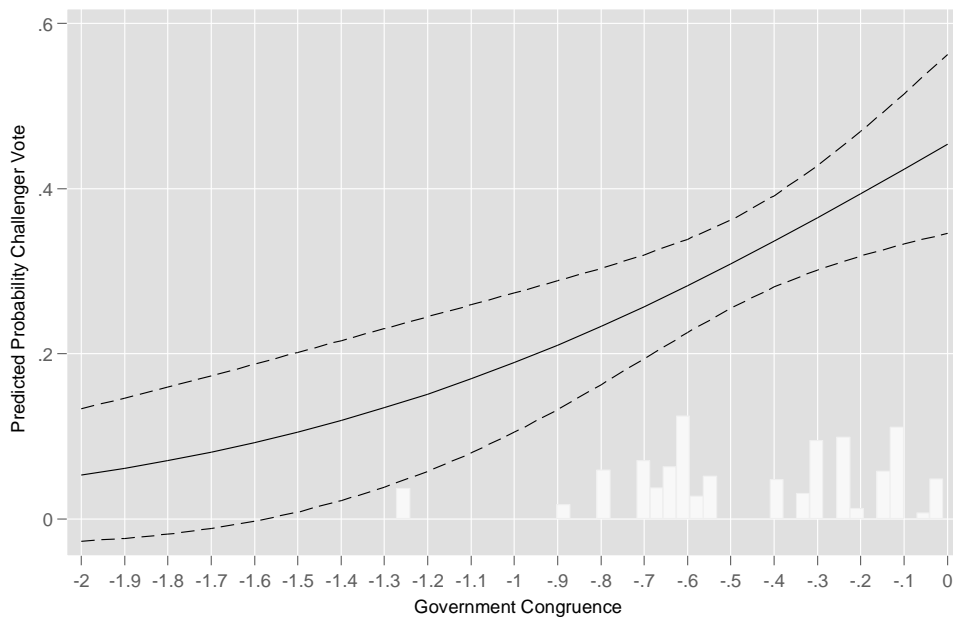
Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party versus mainstream opposition party, by government congruence (based on Model 3 in Table 2), with 95% confidence interval.

Figure B2 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote versus MOP Vote, by Policy Range
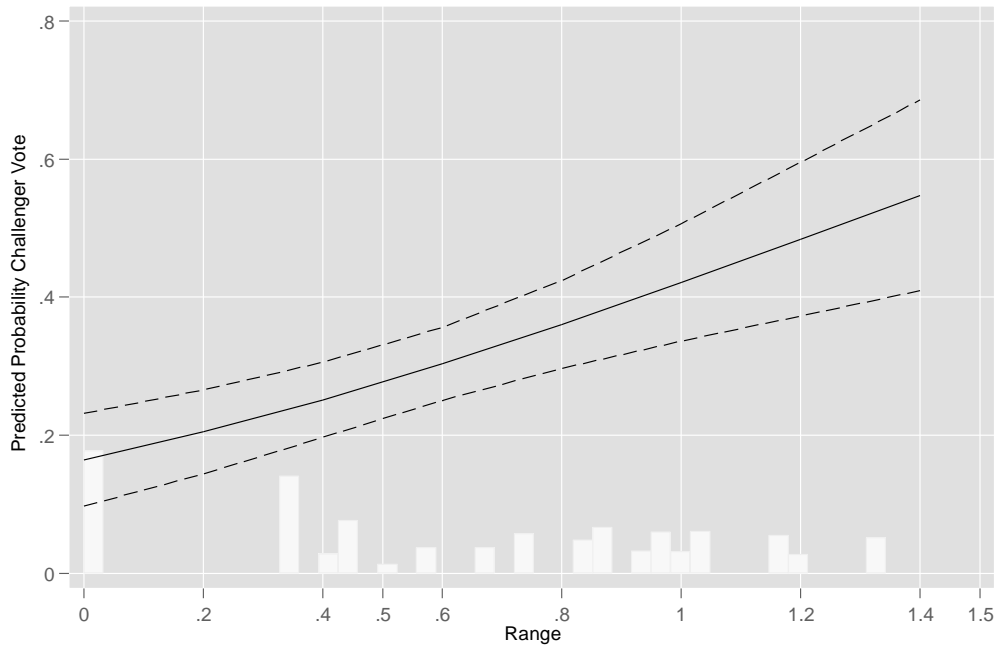

Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party versus mainstream opposition party, by policy range (based on Model 3 in Table 2), with 95% confidence interval.

Figure B3 – Predicted Probability Challenger Vote versus MOP Vote, by Distance to Government
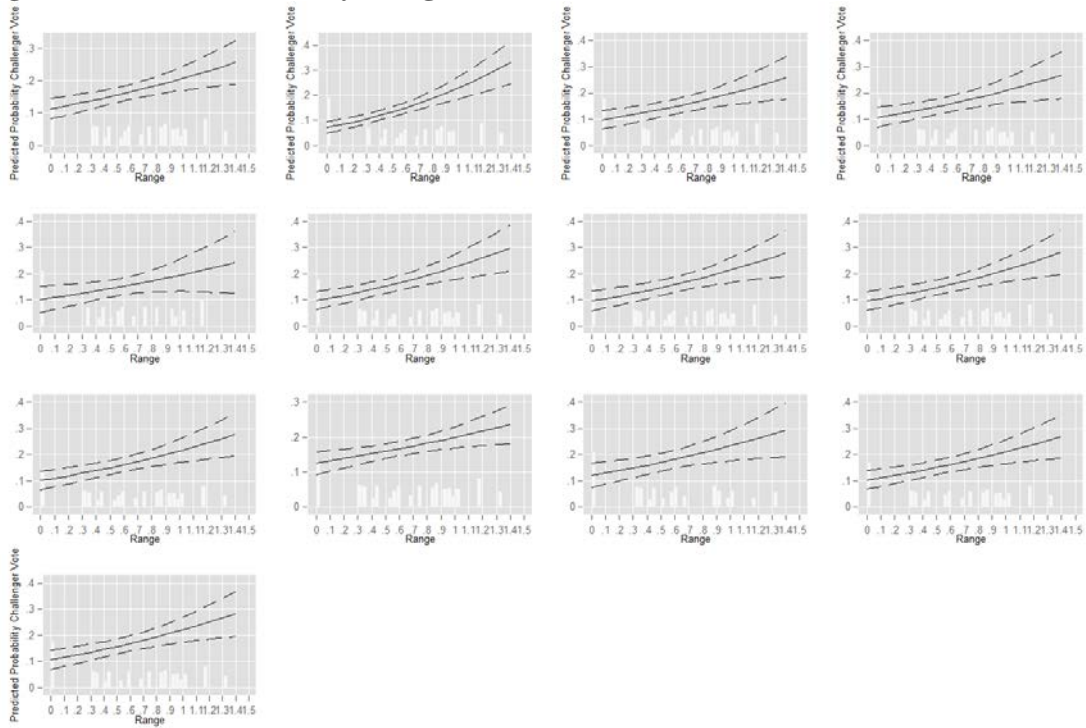

Predicted probability to vote for a challenger party versus mainstream opposition party, by distance to government (based on Model 3 in Table 2), with 95% confidence interval.

Figure C1 – Effect of Government Congruence: Countries Excluded One at a Time
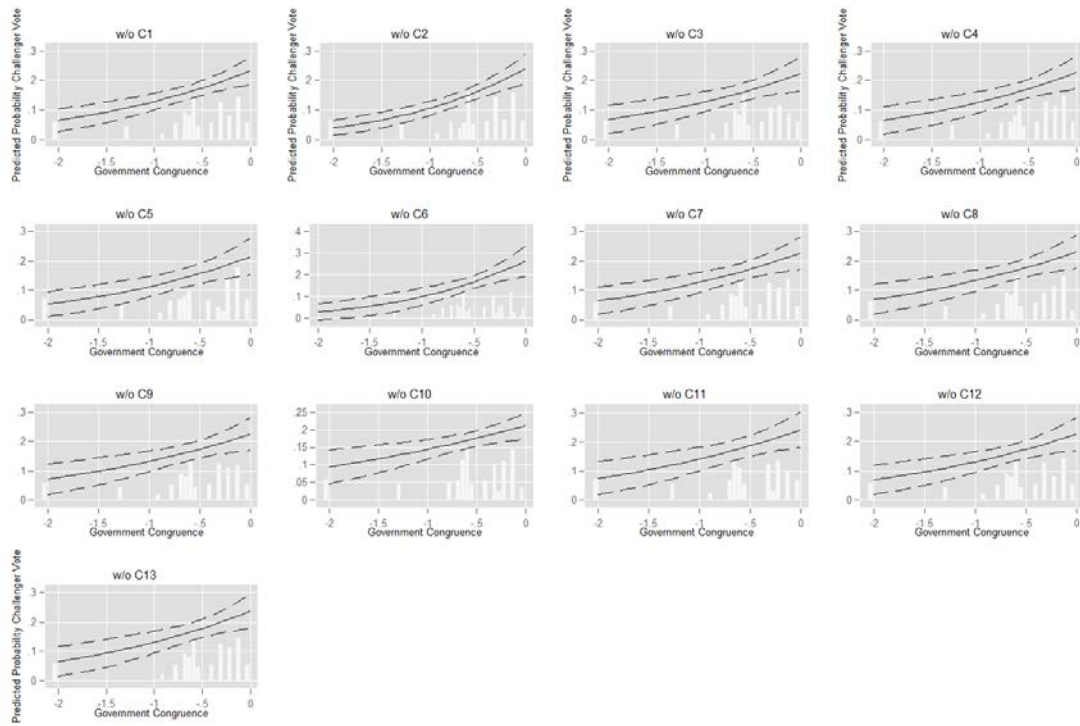
Figure C2 – Effect of Policy Range: Countries Excluded One at a Time

Figure C3 – Effect of Distance to Government: Countries Excluded One at a Time