

## **How voters' perceptions of junior coalition partners depend on the prime minister's position**

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**Abstract.** Recent studies document that voters infer parties' left-right policy agreement based on governing coalition arrangements. This article extends this research to present theoretical and empirical evidence that European citizens update their perceptions of junior coalition partners' left-right policies to reflect the policies of the prime minister's party, but that citizens do not reciprocally project junior coalition partners' policies onto the prime minister's party. These findings illuminate the simple rules that citizens employ to infer parties' policy positions, broaden understanding of how citizens perceive coalition governance and imply that 'niche' parties, whose electoral appeal depends upon maintaining a distinctive policy profile, assume electoral risks when they enter government.

**Keywords:** coalition politics; niche parties; party positions; voter perceptions

### **Introduction**

Several recent studies have analysed how coalition cabinet participation alters the policy relationships between parties. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) find that voters perceive governing coalition partners' positions as more similar than is implied by their policy declarations alone; Whitten and Williams (forthcoming) demonstrate that the more similar a pair of parties' ideological positions, the more closely their electoral fortunes are tied; and Kluver and Sagarzazu (2014) conclude that coalition partners converge on their policy emphases during the middle of the legislative term, but diverge at the beginning and end of the term. Duch et al. (forthcoming) conclude that voters assign nearly all responsibility for policy outcomes to the prime ministerial (PM) party, even in the case of coalition policy-making arrangements – echoing previous, observational findings (Duch & Stevenson 2008). Here we extend this research to evaluate how coalition arrangements affect voters' perceptions of governing parties' ideological positions. We build on the Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) and Duch et al. (forthcoming) studies to explore how voters map the policy positions of the PM party onto its junior coalition partners, and how (and whether) voters map junior partners' positions onto the PM party. We present theoretical arguments and empirical analyses of data from 33 electoral surveys in 11 European countries, and conclude that voters map the PM party's policy positions onto its junior coalition partners but they do not reciprocally map junior partners' positions onto the prime minister. We also present suggestive evidence that these tendencies are strongest among less-educated respondents, who plausibly rely on the simple coalition-based heuristic to a greater extent than more educated citizens.

Our findings illuminate two longstanding puzzles concerning governing parties' electoral support and their coalition arrangements. The electoral puzzle is the well-known

‘penalty of governance’ whereby governing parties tend to lose votes over time (Fortunato 2013; Paldam & Skott 1995; Stevenson 2002). Our finding that voters project the PM party’s left-right position onto its junior coalition partner provides two plausible explanations for this pattern. First, as voters project that the junior partner’s policies resemble those of the prime minister, the coalition partners’ policy images converge and the ‘ideological range’ of the coalition shrinks, making the coalition parties’ perceived ideologies attractive to a narrower range of the electorate. Second, the perception that the junior coalition partner has shifted its policies towards the PM party may prompt voters to infer that the junior partner’s leaders have compromised their core principles. In this regard, remarkable experimental research by Tomz and Van Houweling (2012) demonstrates that politicians’ policy shifts prompt citizens to downgrade their assessments of these politicians’ honesty and leadership qualities – a finding echoed by experimental studies in the coalitional context where voters view policy compromise as ‘selling out’ and punish cabinet parties accordingly (Fortunato 2013). Hence the change in the junior partner’s policy image due to coalition membership may exact a ‘governance penalty’ by damaging the party’s image for integrity and leadership ability.

The reputational risks that junior partners court also pertain to the longstanding puzzle of minority governments in which small parties support larger governing parties from outside the formal governing coalition (Strøm 1990). Our findings suggest a strategic rationale for this behaviour – namely that by remaining outside the formal coalition the small party can secure policy concessions while maintaining a more stable ideological image that burnishes its reputation for principled policy advocacy. Furthermore, as we discuss below, this strategic dynamic may apply especially strongly to ‘niche’ parties, such as green and radical right parties, because previous research suggests that their electoral appeal depends on their distinctive policy profiles, and that they suffer acute electoral losses when they are perceived to compromise their policy principals (Adams et al. 2006).

### **Governing coalitions and parties’ policy images: Hypotheses**

Studies on party policy positioning encompass formal and empirical work exploring institutional incentives for policy convergence/divergence (e.g., Cox 1987, 1990; Calvo & Hellwig 2011; Ezrow 2008) and research on the relationship between parties and their supporters’ positions (e.g., Adams et al. 2009; Dalton 1985; Ezrow 2010; Iversen 1994). While this research posits that voters accurately perceive parties’ policy positions, this is, at best, a rough approximation, for while survey respondents’ mean perceptions of party positions generally match up well with alternative measures such as coding of parties’ policy manifestos or experts’ party placements (Bakker et al. 2012; Budge & Meyer 2013; Dalton et al. 2011; McDonald et al. 2007), individual respondents’ party placements vary dramatically. Furthermore, Adams et al. (2011) and Fernandez-Vazquez (2014) find that citizens largely fail to perceive parties’ policy shifts – that is, temporal changes in survey respondents’ party placements are only weakly related to shifts in the left-right tones of parties’ election manifestos.

The research described above prompts the question: Given that voters are imperfectly informed about party policy shifts, how and why do voters’ perceptions change? Fortunato

and Stevenson (2013a) argue that voters infer that governing parties have converged toward similar sets of policy positions. The authors base their argument on theoretical and empirical findings that parties who converge on policy are more likely to coalesce (Martin & Stevenson 2001, 2010), that coalition partners experience pressure to compromise over policy (Ganghof & Bräuninger 2006; Goodin 1996) and that parties leverage legislative institutions to enforce policy compromises struck at cabinet formation throughout the life of the government (Fortunato et al. 2014; Martin & Vanberg 2011; Thies 2001). Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) demonstrate that citizens perceive coalition partners' positions as more similar than is implied by the left-right tone of their policy manifestos alone.

Here we unpack the Fortunato-Stevenson findings to assess whether voters update their perceptions of cabinet parties symmetrically. In other words, do voters 'push' their perceptions of all cabinet parties together, or do they weigh the positions of cabinet parties differently? We present arguments in support of the following hypotheses:

*H1* (junior partner-PM effect): Voters update their perceptions of junior partners' left-right positions to bring them in line with the PM party's position.

*H2* (PM party-no junior partner effect): Voters *do not* update their perceptions of the PM party's left-right position in response to the positions of its junior partners.

There is extensive research supporting *H1* and *H2*. With respect to the junior partner-PM effect hypothesis (*H1*), in nearly every European country where coalition governance is the norm, formateurs are charged with forming a governing coalition and nearly always win the premiership (Snyder et al. 2005; Warwick 1996). Thus, the naive expectation, which is supported empirically (e.g., Martin & Stevenson 2001, 2010), is that parties seeking an invitation into cabinet must advocate policies compatible with the PM party. Furthermore, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013b) show that voters overwhelmingly expect the prime minister to invite ideologically compatible parties into the coalition. The empirical evidence that parties with policy preferences closer to the prime minister are more likely to join the PM party in cabinet, that voters' expectations of cabinet formation reflect this pattern, and that popular media coverage couches cabinet negotiations in terms of PM selection of junior partners (e.g., Donadio & Kitsantonis 2012; Eddy 2013) support the junior partner-PM effect hypothesis (*H1*).

The logic underlying *H1* is not limited to coalition formation, but extends to the policy-making process as well. For example, Stevenson (1997) finds that voters tend to focus their ire on the party of the prime minister when the economy is perceived to under-perform (see also Duch & Stevenson 2008). More directly, the experimental findings of Duch et al. (forthcoming) suggest that voters expect prime ministers ('proposers' in the parlance of their experiments) to dominate the policy-making process. We believe that these perceptions of government policy making will push voters' perceptions of junior partners' policy positions closer to those of the PM party. After all, every party has a *de facto* veto in nearly every cabinet so the passage of government policy implies agreement on the part of the junior partner.<sup>1</sup> Further, if the junior partner opposed the government's policies and was, for some reason, unable to prevent them, it could exit the cabinet. Finally, the opportunity for vocal junior partner dissent is curtailed by the norm of collective cabinet responsibility

that restricts the junior partner's ability to differentiate itself from the PM party and explicitly prohibits cabinet partners from openly attacking policies after they have been passed (Laver & Shepsle 1994).

The PM party-no junior partner effect hypothesis (*H2*) is motivated by the same considerations that support *H1*. Given the scholarly research summarised above stating that formateur parties initiate coalition negotiations and select coalition partners on the basis of shared policy interests – and that rank-and-file voters recognise these patterns and ascribe the lion's share of policy responsibility to the PM party – we expect that citizens will not shift their perceptions of the PM party's policy positions in the direction of the junior partner. An additional consideration relates to the extensive media coverage of the prime minister's policy statements, which provides the PM party with opportunities to forge its own policy image and blunts junior partner elites' abilities to shape voters' perceptions of the PM party (Poguntke & Webb 2004).

### Data and model specifications

Testing *H1* and *H2* requires data on voters' left-right party placements. To this end, we collected and analysed 33 electoral surveys from 11 European countries where coalition governance is the norm, each administered during the tenure of a coalition cabinet.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 reports the countries and years in which the surveys were administered. Each survey was part of either the European Electoral Study or the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems projects. In these surveys, respondents were asked to place each party in their system on a 0–10 left-right scale, with 0 the left-most position and 10 the right-most position. Table 1 lists the cabinet parties that respondents placed in each survey. Respondents were also asked to place themselves on this scale, and to provide other background information such as their age, gender and education level.

To evaluate the junior partner-PM effect hypothesis (*H1*), we regress the survey respondent's placement of the junior coalition partner (the dependent variable) on an objective measure of the PM party's position – namely the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) left-right coding of the PM party's election manifestos (see Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2013).<sup>3</sup> More specifically, we calculate the PM party's manifesto-based left-right position according to Lowe et al.'s (2011) recommendation and compute a ten-year rolling average CMP position for each party-year in our data.<sup>4</sup> As the Lowe et al. CMP computations lead to non-normalised positions (i.e., these positions do not fall within the –100 to +100 range that traditional CMP position codings fall into), we normalise the positions to the same 0–10 scale that the survey respondents confront.<sup>5</sup> We expect, of course, that citizens' perceptions of the junior partner's position respond to the left-right tone of its own manifestos, and we control for this variable in our analyses. However, *H1* posits that respondents' perceptions of the junior partner are also influenced by the left-right tone of the PM party's policy manifestos, even when controlling for the junior partner's own policy statements.

To evaluate the PM party-no junior partner effect hypothesis (*H2*), we regress the respondent's left-right placement of the PM party (the dependent variable) on the CMP-based estimate of the junior partner's left-right position, while controlling for the

Table 1. Sample of surveys

Country	Survey years	Cabinet parties
Austria	2004	FPÖ, ÖVP
Belgium	1994, 1999	CVP, PS, PSC, SP
Denmark	1994	CD, KRF, RV, SD
Denmark	1999, 2002	RV, SD
Denmark	2004	KF, V
France	1994	RPR, UDF
France	1999, 2002	PC, PS, Verts
Germany	1994	CDU, FDP
Germany	1998, 2000, 2002, 2004	Grüne, SPD
Iceland	2000, 2002	IP, PP
Ireland	1994	FF, Lab
Ireland	1999, 2002, 2004	FF, PD
Italy	1994	AN, FI, LN
Italy	1999	PDS, PPI, Verdi
Italy	2004	AN, FI, LN
Luxembourg	1994, 1999	CSV, LSAP
Luxembourg	2004	CSV, DP
Netherlands	1994	CDA, PVDA
Netherlands	1999, 2000, 2002	D66, PVDA, VVD
Netherlands	2004	CDA, D66, VVD
Portugal	2004	CDS-PP, PSD

CMP-based coding of the PM party's own manifestos. *H2* implies that the CMP coding of the junior partner's position will not display statistically significant relationships to respondents' left-right placements of the PM party.<sup>6</sup>

Our model also includes several control variables. First, voters' tendencies to project the PM party's position onto its junior partners may be mediated by the length of time these parties have co-governed. To evaluate this possibility, we employ the Martin and Stevenson (2010) 'familiarity' measure, which reflects the proportion of months the party pair has co-governed over the postwar period, with more recent service counting more heavily.<sup>7</sup> In the junior partner model this variable is interacted with the left-right position of the PM party, and in the PM model this variable is interacted with the junior partner's left-right position.

Voters may also infer that larger PM parties can extract greater policy concessions from smaller junior coalition partners. Indeed, Duch et al. (forthcoming) present evidence that size is the next best predictor of responsibility attribution for policy after PM status (this accords with Duch and Stevenson's (2008) observational evidence) and that the largest party in parliament is most likely to supply the prime minister (Glasgow et al. (2011) report that the largest party supplies the prime minister about 75 per cent of the time). To account for this possibility, we include a measure of the relative sizes of the junior partner and the PM party. In the junior partner model, this is the ratio of the junior partner's seat share to

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Junior partner's perceived left-right position	5.30	2.49	0	10
PM party's perceived left-right position	5.35	2.57	0	10
Junior partner's CMP position	5.61	1.49	0.55	8.57
PM party's CMP position	5.29	1.46	3.45	9.17
Mean opposition CMP position	5.24	0.82	4.14	7.11
Coalition familiarity	0.15	0.19	0.00	0.75
Junior partner/PM party seats ratio	0.42	0.33	0.02	1.18
PM party/junior partner seats ratio	5.26	6.98	0.85	47.00
Respondent extremism	1.77	1.45	0.00	5.00
Respondent between parties	0.16	0.37	0.00	1.00
Respondent education	5.55	2.09	1.00	8.00
Telephone survey	0.38	0.49	0.00	1.00
Self-administered survey	0.15	0.36	0.00	1.00

Notes: The [junior partner's perceived left-right position] variable is the survey respondent's placement of the party on the left-right scale, while the [PM party's perceived left-right position] variable is the respondent's placement of the PM party on this scale. The [junior partner CMP position] variable represents the Comparative Manifesto Project's left-right coding of the party's election manifestos, calibrated along a 0–10 scale. The [PM party CMP position] variable represents the same coding procedure applied to PM parties. The [mean opposition CMP position] variable is the mean position of all opposition parties, based on the CMP coding. The [coalition familiarity] variable is a measure of the proportion of months the party pair has governed together over the past 50 years, with more recent service counting more heavily. The 0.00 minimum is a function of the rounding coming from first-time cabinets in post-election surveys. Footnote 7 describes how coalition familiarity is calculated.

the seat share of the PM party and it is interacted with the PM party's left-right position. In the PM model, the ratio is flipped and the interaction is changed accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

We also include the mean position of all opposition parties in the system, based on the CMP left-right coding of these parties' election manifestos (again recalibrated to a 0–10 left-right scale) to control for the possibility that voters shift their perceptions of the governing parties away from opposition parties' positions. We reason that because opposition parties seek to differentiate their policies from those of the government – and also to portray the government in a negative light – left-wing (right-wing) opposition parties seek to portray government policies as excessively right-wing (left-wing). To the extent these efforts succeed, we expect that the more left-wing the opposition, the more right-wing voters' perceptions of the government.<sup>9</sup>

The rest of our controls are borrowed from the Fortunato-Stevenson model and are measured at the individual and survey levels. We include the respondents' level of education,<sup>10</sup> level of ideological extremity (how far from the median position they place themselves) and whether or not they place themselves between the two parties in question.<sup>11</sup> We also control for whether the survey was self-administered, administered in person or administered over the telephone.<sup>12</sup> Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for our dependent and independent variables.

In sum, our specifications for evaluating hypotheses *H1* and *H2* are as follows. To evaluate the junior partner-PM effect hypothesis (*H1*), we estimate the parameters of the following specification, where we model the survey respondent *i*'s placement of party *j* on the 0–10 left-right scale, where *j* is the junior coalition partner of PM party *k*:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \mathbf{i}'\text{s placement of junior coalition partner } \mathbf{j} = & \beta_1 + \beta_2 [\text{junior partner } j\text{'s CMP position}] \\
 & + \beta_3 [\text{PM party } k\text{'s CMP position}] + \beta_4 [\text{mean opposition CMP position}] \\
 & + \beta_5 [\text{coalition familiarity}] + \beta_6 [\text{PM party } k\text{'s CMP position} \times \text{coalition familiarity}] \\
 & + \beta_7 \left[ \frac{\text{junior partner } j\text{'s seats}}{\text{PM party } k\text{'s seats}} \right] + \beta_8 \left[ \text{PM party } k\text{'s CMP position} \times \frac{\text{junior partner } j\text{'s seats}}{\text{PM party } k\text{'s seats}} \right] \\
 & + \beta_9 [\text{respondent extremity}] + \beta_{10} [\text{respondent between parties}] \\
 & + \beta_{11} [\text{respondent education}] + \beta_{12} [\text{telephone survey}] \\
 & + \beta_{13} [\text{self-administered survey}]
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

To evaluate *H2*, the PM party-no junior partner effect hypothesis, we estimate the parameters of the following PM party specification, where the survey respondent *i*'s placement of the PM party *k* on the 0–10 left-right scale is modeled as a function of the left-right tone of its own election manifestos, and also of the manifestos of its junior coalition partner *j*:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \mathbf{i}'\text{s placement of PM party } \mathbf{k} = & \beta_1 + \beta_2 [\text{PM party } k\text{'s CMP position}] \\
 & + \beta_3 [\text{junior partner } j\text{'s CMP position}] + \beta_4 [\text{mean opposition CMP position}] \\
 & + \beta_5 [\text{coalition familiarity}] + \beta_6 [\text{junior partner } j\text{'s CMP position} \times \text{coalition familiarity}] \\
 & + \beta_7 \left[ \frac{\text{PM party } k\text{'s seats}}{\text{junior partner } j\text{'s seats}} \right] + \beta_8 \left[ \text{junior partner } j\text{'s CMP position} \right. \\
 & \left. \times \frac{\text{PM party } k\text{'s seats}}{\text{junior partner } j\text{'s seats}} \right] + \beta_9 [\text{respondent extremity}] \\
 & + \beta_{10} [\text{respondent between parties}] + \beta_{11} [\text{respondent education}] \\
 & + \beta_{12} [\text{telephone survey}] + \beta_{13} [\text{self-administered survey}]
 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

## Estimation and results

Our data are arranged dyadically, where each row corresponds to a respondent's left-right placement of a junior coalition partner in relation to the PM party, or vice versa. One wrinkle from this structure is that respondents may place several junior coalition partner parties in reference to one PM party or one PM party in reference to several junior partner parties. More specifically, the data present a complex hierarchical structure in which each respondent places one or more dyads on the 0–10 left-right scale, dyads are crossed with or nested within surveys, surveys are nested within countries, and respondents are nested within surveys but crossed with dyads. These multiple potential sources of bias from unmeasured factors – at different levels – present a problem: we can specify the model we prefer to estimate, but its estimation is computationally infeasible. Fortunato and Stevenson

Table 3. Analysis of survey respondents' placements of junior coalition partners

Variable	Parameter	(SE)
Junior partner CMP	0.664	(0.106)*
PM CMP	0.300	(0.169)*
Mean opposition CMP	0.013	(0.194)
JP/PM seats	0.987	(1.662)
JP/PM seats * PM CMP	-0.156	(0.267)
Familiarity	2.996	(2.616)
Familiarity * PM CMP	-0.679	(0.431)
Respondent extremity	0.030	(0.006)*
Respondent between parties	-0.139	(0.025)*
Respondent education	0.036	(0.005)*
Telephone survey	-0.646	(0.300)
Self-administered survey	-0.356	(0.077)*
Intercept	0.288	(1.507)
Survey	0.000	(0.000)
Dyad	0.927	(0.102)
Residual	1.850	(0.006)
N	44,043	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.299	
Log(likelihood)	-89706.757	

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , single-tailed test.

(2013a) confront a similar problem and recommend that the analyst estimate a series of linear regressions with standard errors clustered at each of the different levels, observe which levels influence the standard errors the most, and account for as many of the most salient sources of disturbance as possible. This procedure suggests that the most important levels to account for are the survey and the dyad levels (as in Fortunato and Stevenson 2013a), and therefore we compute an error components model where random intercepts are estimated for each survey and party dyad.<sup>13</sup>

Column 1 in Table 3 reports coefficient estimates for the junior partner specification (Equation 1), which pertains to the junior partner-PM effect hypothesis (*H1*) that voters update their perceptions of junior partners' left-right positions to bring them in line with the PM party's position. The estimate on the [junior partner's CMP position] variable (+0.66) is statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) and implies that a one-unit change in the left-right tone of the junior partner's own election manifestos, based on the CMP coding, is associated with an 0.66-unit shift in the same direction in the survey respondent's placement of the junior partner, where both the survey respondent's party placement and the CMP coding are calibrated along identical 0–10 scales. This implies that, as expected, the respondent's perception of the junior partner's position responds to the junior partner's own election manifestos. In contrast, the coefficient estimate on the [mean opposition CMP position] variable is near zero and statistically insignificant, so there is no evidence that



opposition parties' left-right positions influence citizens' perceptions of the junior coalition partner.

The key coefficient estimate for evaluating *HI* is on the [PM party's CMP position] variable. This coefficient (+0.30) is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) and indicates that a one-unit change in the CMP coding of the PM party's manifestos is associated with an 0.30-unit change in the survey respondent's left-right placement of the junior partner, in the same direction. However, given that the PM party's position also enters the model interacted with the junior partner to PM seat ratio and familiarity, we must take these variables into account when interpreting the effects. To this end, we produce several plots showing the marginal effect of a two-unit change in the PM party's position (from 5 to 7) on voter perceptions of the junior partner, given various seat ratios and values of familiarity.

We compute the effects by sampling from the posterior in the typical manner (King et al. 2000) to recover a vector 1,000 parameter estimates and calculate the change in the junior partner's perceived position holding the junior partner's CMP position and the mean opposition CMP position constant at 5 for the case of a respondent with education level 5, 0 absolute extremity (self-placed at the median of the ideological scale), who was not positioned between the junior partner and prime minister, and was administered their survey in person. We display the results in Figure 1, where the light band represents a 90 per cent confidence interval and the darker line is the median estimated change in the junior partner's perceived position. The top row shows the marginal effects over the observed range of seat ratios (the frequency of which is represented by the histogram in the background) while holding familiarity constant at its 1st, 2nd and 3rd quartiles (0.00, 0.05 and 0.17, respectively). The top row shows the effects over the range of familiarity, while holding the seat ratio constant at its 1st, 2nd and 3rd quartiles (0.16, 0.29 and 0.63, respectively). These results imply that if the junior partner co-governs with a PM party whose left-right ideology (based on its manifestos) differs meaningfully from that of the junior partner  $j$ , then  $j$ 's policy image can be pulled sharply into the PM party's orbit if the coalition is fairly novel and if the PM party is sufficiently large in reference to the junior partner (twice as large as the junior partner or greater). This finding is reasonable given the relationship between party size and policy responsibility uncovered by Duch et al. (forthcoming): as smaller parties are perceived as having less influence, voters view them as more beholden to their PM parties. It is important to note that the majority of coalitions in our data fall into the range of familiarity where PM parties exert a significant influence on perceptions of their junior partners. Indeed, a party pair like the VVD and PVDA in the Netherlands in 1998 have a familiarity score of about 0.06 after having governed together for the four years preceding. It is only party pairs with a very deep history of co-governance (e.g., Germany's CDU and FDP) that are unaffected.

These results offer nuanced support to the junior partner-PM effect hypothesis that voters update their perceptions of junior coalition partners' positions to bring them in line with the PM party's position. Voters indeed project the PM party's position onto its junior partners, but these projections attain statistical significance only when the coalition has a relatively short history of co-governance. One possible explanation is that during the early stages of a government's tenure, the composition of the cabinet – particularly the identity of the PM party – is a highly salient factor that colours voters' perceptions of junior partners' policy positions, but that as time elapses these junior partners gradually succeed

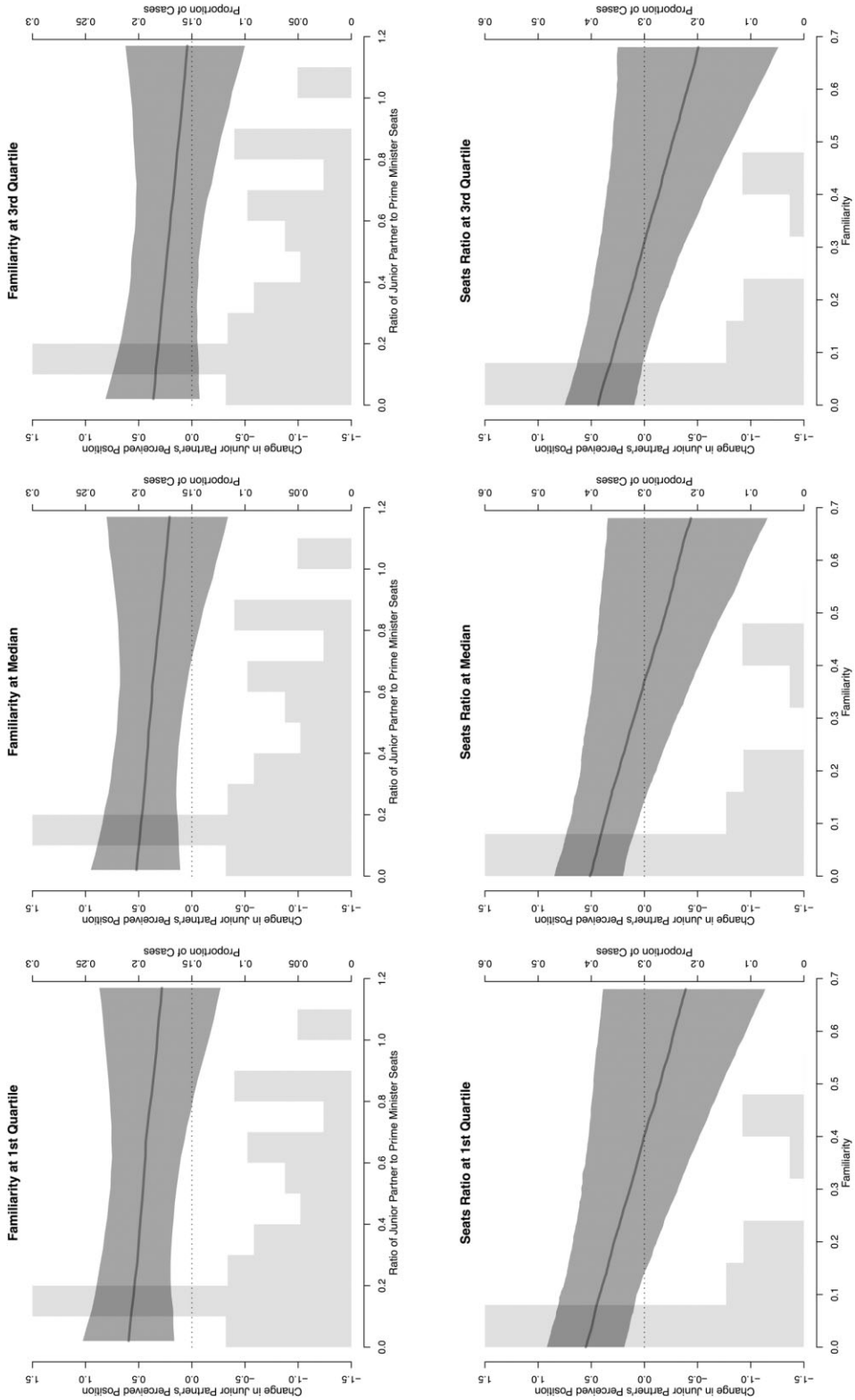


Figure 1. The substantive effect of a two-unit increase in the junior partner party position on voter perceptions of the junior partner party position for different ranges of Familiarity and Seat Ratios.

Table 4. Analysis of survey respondents' placements of prime ministers

Variable	Parameter	(SE)
PM CMP	0.742	(0.180)*
Junior partner CMP	-0.020	(0.031)
Mean opposition CMP	-0.208	(0.298)
PM/JP seats	-0.002	(0.004)
PM/JP seats * JP CMP	0.001	(0.002)
Familiarity	-0.107	(1.410)
Familiarity * JP CMP	0.024	(0.234)
Respondent extremity	0.058	(0.006)*
Respondent between parties	0.189	(0.025)*
Respondent education	-0.011	(0.004)*
Telephone survey	-0.296	(0.475)
Self-administered survey	-0.076	(0.078)
Intercept	3.203	(1.598)
Survey	1.332	(0.165)
Dyad	0.000	(0.000)
Residual	1.877	(0.006)
N	44,106	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.180	
Log(likelihood)	-90458.319	

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , single-tailed test.

in differentiating their policy positions (and emphases) from those of the PM party. To the extent this is the case, it implies that junior coalition partners such as the Liberal Democrats in the current British cabinet may be perceived, during the early phase of their tenure in government, through the lens of the PM party (in this case, the Conservative Party), but that over time the Liberal Democrats have opportunities to escape the policy shadow of the Conservatives by strategically highlighting policy differences between the parties. A related possibility is that junior partners with a short history of governance may have existed on the outskirts of the policy-making process for many years, and their entry into the governing coalition also signals their entry into political prominence. Consider the formation of the first SPD-Green cabinet (one of our cases) in 1998. This may have been the first time that many German voters (particularly in the traditional CDU/CSU strongholds of the south) considered the Greens to be a substantive political party. In this context, voters' point of departure was that the Greens were in coalition with the more moderate Social Democrats, and so it is plausible that this coalition-based rule initially shaped voters' perceptions of the Greens but that as time passed voters acquired more party-specific information about the newly prominent Greens that helped this party to differentiate its policy image from that of the Social Democrats. These results present an interesting puzzle for future research.

Table 4 reports estimates for the PM party specification given by Equation 2 to evaluate the PM party-no junior partner effect hypothesis ( $H2$ ). The estimate on the [PM party's

CMP position] variable (0.742) is positive and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) and denotes that, as expected, the left-right tone of the PM party's own election manifestos influence voters' perceptions of its position. Furthermore, the parameter estimate on the [junior partner's CMP position] is near zero and statistically insignificant, as are all interactions involving the [junior partner's CMP position] variable.<sup>14</sup> These estimates support *H2* in that voters do not update their perceptions of the PM party's left-right position in response to the positions of its junior partners.

### **Digging deeper: The effects of voter sophistication**

While the parameter estimates we report in Tables 3 and 4 support our hypotheses, our findings on the junior partner-PM effect raise a follow-up question: Do all voters update equally? Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) find that more sophisticated voters are less likely to update their perceptions of party positions in response to coalition arrangements, and these authors suggest that political sophisticates de-emphasise simple coalition-based updating rules and rely instead on more nuanced political information that can be gleaned from sources such as party elites' speeches and interviews, parliamentary debates and government policy outputs. To assess this possibility, we divided our survey respondents into two groups – a 'high sophistication' group and a 'low sophistication' group – by sorting all respondents in each survey according to their education level. More specifically, we calculated the mean level of education for each survey and sorted those at or above the mean into the 'high sophistication' group and those below the mean into the 'low sophistication' group.<sup>15</sup> We then repeat estimation of Equation 1 on this bisected sample.

Table 5 displays the parameter estimates for Equation 1, where the dependent variable is the respondent's left-right placement of the junior coalition partner, estimated separately on high and low sophistication respondents. The differences between the two sets of parameter estimates are striking. Compared to political sophisticates, unsophisticated respondents are less moved by the left-right tone of the junior partner's own policy manifestos, but are more strongly influenced by the PM party's manifestos – that is, the coefficient estimate on the [junior partner CMP] variable is lower for less sophisticated respondents at 0.596 than for the more sophisticated at 0.731, and the coefficient estimate on the [PM CMP] variable is higher for less sophisticated respondents at 0.363 than for the more sophisticated at 0.291. These estimates suggest that less sophisticated citizens rely disproportionately on coalition-based updating to infer junior partners' positions. But these patterns do not tell the whole story. Figure 2, a simplified version of Figure 1, reveals that the differences between sophisticated and unsophisticated voters are quite nuanced when we consider the structure of the cabinet that voters evaluate.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 2 shows the results of simulations estimating the effect of a two-unit change in the PM party's left-right position (based on the CMP codings of its manifestos) on respondents' placements of junior partners, computed separately for more and less sophisticated voters based on the parameter estimates reported in Table 5. The simulations examine a cross of four coalition types: coalitions where the history of co-governance between the parties may be either long or short; and where the difference in the PM and junior partners' seat shares may be either high or low. Long and short histories are defined by the 3rd and 1st quartiles

Table 5. Analysis of survey respondents' placements of junior partners: Sample divided into high and low sophistication groups

Variable	Voter sophistication			
	High		Low	
	Parameter	(SE)	Parameter	(SE)
Junior partner CMP	0.729	(0.114)*	0.592	(0.099)*
PM CMP	0.289	(0.186)	0.367	(0.165)*
Mean opposition CMP	-0.038	(0.205)	0.090	(0.178)
JP/PM seats	0.814	(1.816)	1.223	(1.559)
JP/PM seats * PM CMP	-0.144	(0.290)	-0.203	(0.253)
Familiarity	1.950	(2.871)	5.211	(3.086)*
Familiarity * PM CMP	-0.566	(0.470)	-0.992	(0.501)*
Respondent extremity	0.038	(0.008)*	0.023	(0.010)*
Respondent between parties	-0.044	(0.031)	-0.280	(0.042)*
Telephone survey	-0.617	(0.322)*	-0.609	(0.281)*
Self-administered survey	-0.377	(0.116)*	-0.377	(0.105)*
Intercept	0.589	(1.601)	-0.013	(1.413)
Survey	0.000	(0.000)	0.000	(0.000)
Dyad	0.989	(0.110)	0.846	(0.094)
Residual	1.704	(0.008)	2.032	(0.011)
N	26,300		18,437	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.195		0.177	
Log(likelihood)	-51449.946		-39324.221	

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , single-tailed test.

of the coalition familiarity measure, respectively, and high and low size differences are defined by the 1st and 3rd quartiles of the junior partner/PM party seat ratio measure, respectively.<sup>17</sup> The points represent the median effect and the lines represent a 90 per cent confidence interval.

Panes A and B in the figure show that when the history of co-governance is long, the effects of changing the PM party's left-right position are statistically insignificant for more sophisticated respondents and just barely robust for low sophistication respondents, but only when the difference in size between the PM party and junior partner is high. Further, when the history is long and size is high (pane A), the difference in the mean effect between high and low sophistication groups is negligible though bordering on robust with size differences being small (pane B).<sup>18</sup> However, as above, when histories of co-governance are short (panes C and D), both voter types significantly project the PM party's position onto junior coalition partners – even more so when size differences are high (pane C) – with less sophisticated voters projecting significantly more than their more sophisticated counterparts.

In sum, our estimates largely support theoretical expectations. We conclude that voters update their perceptions of junior partners' left-right positions in the direction of the PM

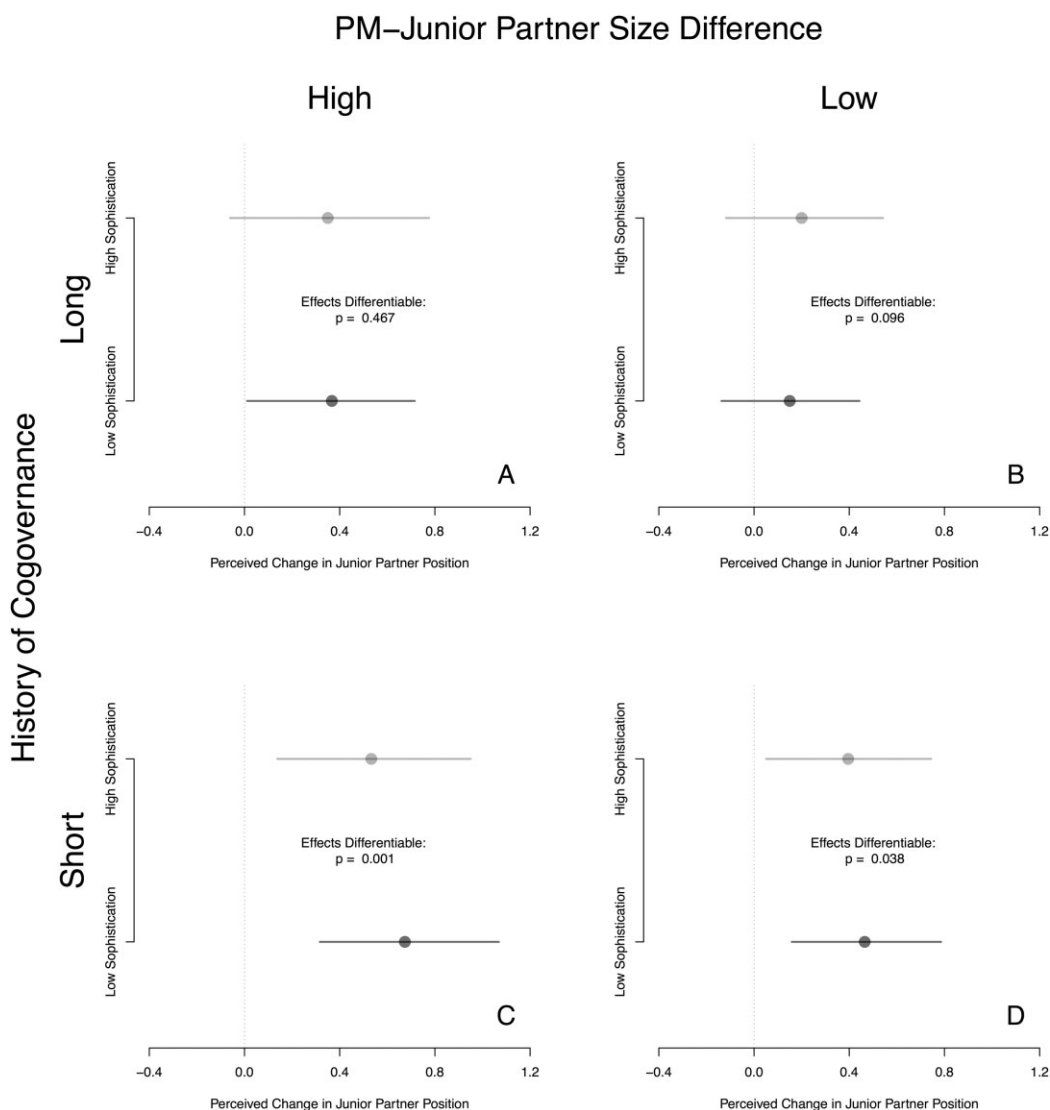


Figure 2. The substantive effect of sophistication on mapping PM party positions onto junior partners for different coalition types.

party, particularly when it is large relative to the junior partner; that this tendency is strongest among less-educated voters; and that voters *do not* project junior partners' left-right positions onto the PM party. These findings support our key hypotheses.

### Implications of our findings for niche party governance

Our finding that voters project the PM party's left-right position onto its junior coalition partners, particularly during the early years of co-governance, has implications for the

strategic calculations of niche parties, such as those of the greens and the radical right,<sup>19</sup> about whether to accept invitations to join governing coalitions. Niche parties are typically small parties, and to date all of them that have participated in national governments in Western Europe have done so as junior coalition partners.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, these niche parties, which typically advocate sharply noncentrist policies, have invariably coalesced with more moderate, mainstream, PM parties.<sup>21</sup> Our findings imply that in these scenarios the niche party's coalition participation will prompt voters to shift their perceptions of the niche party in the direction of the more moderate PM party. This may damage the niche party because scholarly research concludes that niche parties, unlike mainstream parties, typically lose votes when they moderate their policies. For example, Spoon (2011: Chapter 2) concludes that green parties' vote shares decline when their policies resemble those of a more moderate mainstream party, while Adams et al. (2006) find that niche parties' vote shares drop sharply when they moderate the left-right policy tone of their election manifestos. Adams et al. (2006) argue that policy moderation alienates niche parties' core supporters, who are highly policy-focused and politically engaged (see also Kitschelt 1994), viewing policy compromises as a betrayal of the niche party's core principles. Ezrow (2010) corroborates this finding, concluding that European niche parties' vote shares decline when voters perceive their left-right positions as being moderate, whereas mainstream parties benefit from the perception of policy moderation.

The research summarised above, in combination with our findings, suggests that green and radical right parties, but not mainstream parties, face a strategic dilemma when they contemplate entering government as a junior partner in coalition with a moderate PM party. For while entering government provides niche parties with opportunities to promote their policy objectives (see, e.g., Akkerman & De Lange 2012), our findings imply that coalition participation will prompt voters to moderate their perceptions of these parties' policies, which can sharply depress the niche party's support. The complicated trade-offs niche party elites confront as they weigh whether or not to formally enter a governing coalition are clear: cabinet participation advances the party's policy objectives and may demonstrate governmental competence; however, co-governance pushes the niche party's policy image towards that of the more moderate PM party and thereby damages the niche party's electoral appeal. Indeed, in the three short months since the extreme right Progress Party of Norway has coalesced with the mainstream Conservative Party, Progress has seen its support in public opinion polls fall from 17 to below 13 per cent.<sup>22</sup> Given the potential costs, it is little wonder that niche parties at times offer sustained, external support of minority coalitions rather than joining them formally.

Finally, our finding that citizens project the PM party's position onto its junior coalition partners is interesting in light of remarkable research by Kluver and Sagarzazu (2014) that details how governing coalition partners strive to differentiate their policy emphases around the time of national elections. The authors analyse over 20,000 press releases issued by the major German parties between 2000 and 2010, and conclude that coalition partners converged on their policy emphases during the middle of the legislative session – a strategic imperative that was driven by their goal of maintaining the coalition – but diverged in their emphases as the next national election approached in an effort to forge distinct identities that would maximise their electoral support. In light of this dynamic, our conclusion that the survey respondents we analysed (who were surveyed around the time of a national election,

when coalition partners strive especially hard to differentiate their issue profiles, according to the Kluwer-Sagarzazu study) nevertheless perceive junior coalition partners' positions converging towards the PM party suggests that junior partners' differentiation efforts often fail, especially in the eyes of less sophisticated voters. These voters appear to privilege the simple and easily applicable coalition heuristic over more nuanced information, such as the communications parties present via their press releases.

## Conclusion

We have argued that because voters believe PM parties dominate the coalition formation and policy-making processes (Fortunato & Stevenson 2013b; Duch et al. forthcoming), voters will map the PM party's policy positions onto their junior partners. Our analysis of 33 national election surveys suggest that voters indeed map the PM party's left-right position onto its junior cabinet partners, and that this tendency is especially pronounced among less educated voters, particularly in situations where they confront a novel governing coalition. By contrast, we find no evidence that voters project junior coalition partners' left-right positions onto the PM party.

Our findings contribute to a vibrant literature that explores how parties choose to present themselves and how voters respond to these presentations. First, by focusing on the structure of governing coalitions, we contribute to the literature emphasising the importance of easily available information – namely the composition of the governing coalition – for voter inferences about political parties (e.g., Fortunato & Stevenson 2013a; Adams et al. 2011).

Second, our findings support the growing consensus that prime ministers are perceived to have policy influence that dwarfs that of junior cabinet partners – a consensus supported by experimental research (Duch et al. forthcoming), observational studies of responsibility attribution (Duch & Stevenson 2008) and citizens' coalition expectations (Fortunato & Stevenson 2013b).

Third, our analysis illuminates a dilemma that niche parties confront when contemplating cabinet entry. Because niche parties, but not mainstream parties, pay a severe electoral penalty for the perception of policy moderation (Spoon 2011; Adams et al. 2006), they can expect to sacrifice considerable electoral support when they co-govern with mainstream parties. This dynamic may play a role in niche parties' tendencies to support coalitions informally without formally entering the cabinet (e.g., the Dutch Party for Freedom's external support of the first Rutte cabinet in 2010, and the Danish People's Party's external support of minority governments led by the Danish Liberals from 2001 to 2007).

Finally, our findings compliment contemporary research on the cost of ruling in coalitional systems. Fortunato (2013) finds that voters equate coalition participation with policy compromise or 'selling out', and penalise the cabinet for this at the polls. We extend these studies by showing that voters map the PM party's position onto the junior coalition partners, shrinking the ideological range of the cabinet and thereby potentially exacerbating governing parties' expected vote losses.



## Acknowledgements

David Fortunato would like to acknowledge financial support for this project from the collaborative research centre SFB 884 on the ‘Political Economy of Reforms’ at the University of Mannheim (<http://reforms.uni-mannheim.de>), funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), as well as the Hellman Fellows Fund.

## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web-site:

**Figure S1. Results of Error Clustering Exercise for Junior Partner Model (Test of Hypothesis 1) Percentage Change to the Standard Error for Each Parameter**

**Figure S2. Results of Error Clustering Exercise for Prime Minister Model (Test of Hypothesis 2) Percentage Change to the Standard Error for Each Parameter**

**Figure S3. Substantive effects from PM Model presented in Table 4 of the Main Text**

**Table S1. Analysis of Survey Respondents’ Placements of Prime Ministers – Junior Partner CMP interactions removed**

## Notes

1. Of course, not every party enjoys a veto in oversized coalitions and a few other special cases, but these are the exception more than the rule.
2. This is a subset of the sample used by Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a), omitting the surveys administered during the tenure of a single party cabinet.
3. The CMP codings are the only estimates of party left-right positions available over the range of countries and elections in our dataset. We note that recent advances in the computation of CMP estimates (Lowe et al. 2011) have increased the degree to which these estimates of parties’ left-right positions correlate with expert judgments.
4. This value is calculated as the mean CMP position of all manifestos published in the ten-year span leading up to – and including – the year of the current election. We choose this measure over the most proximate CMP measurement because Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) show that the rolling average exerts a somewhat larger influence on voter perceptions. However, our substantive conclusions persist when we replace this ten-year average with the manifesto coding for the current election.
5. The normalisation procedure takes each estimate  $x_i \in X$  and applies the following transformation:

$$\frac{x_i - \min(X)}{\max(X) - \min(X)} \times 10,$$

resulting in a 0–10 range. This normalisation eases substantive interpretation of the results, but we note that our results are robust to estimations using the raw values.

6. Note that, because some PMs have more than one junior partner, some of them will be evaluated by the same voter more than once (i.e., one evaluation in relation to each junior partner). Below, we discuss how we account for this data structure statistically.

7. The familiarity between a pair of parties at a given time equals the percentage of days (since the formation date of the first democratic cabinet after 1945) that the parties have co-governed up to that point. We then discount this variable at a rate of 0.99, so that, for example, the weight given to co-governing on 24 June 1983 counts 0.99 of the value of co-governing on 25 June 1983, which counts 0.99 of the value of co-governing on 26 June 1983 and so on. This measure assumes that previous periods of co-governance, even if interrupted by periods out of coalition, influence voters' tendencies to map the PM party's position onto junior partners and that more distant episodes of co-governance count less than more recent episodes. The empirical results we present are robust to more drastic discount factors as well as to eliminating the discount altogether (i.e., all co-governance counts equally). For more on this measure and its selection over other measures, see Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) and Martin and Stevenson (2010).
8. We thank a previous reader of this manuscript for this suggestion.
9. We note that replacing the mean opposition party position with that of the largest or median opposition party, as suggested by a previous reader, supports identical substantive conclusions.
10. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) include education as well as political interest in different models; however, we use only education for two reasons: Fortunato and Stevenson (2013a) present evidence that the two variables behave nearly identically; and political interest is asked in only about half of our surveys, dramatically decreasing our sample size when included. We note, however, that substituting political interest for education – and re-analysing the subset of surveys that included the political interest variable – does not change our conclusions.
11. Including additional individual-level variables, such as age, gender or income does not change our substantive conclusions.
12. The inclusion of survey administration type is important because the data show that respondents tend to cluster parties about the median or spread them across the continuum systematically according to their survey type. More specifically, those that self-administer tend to spread the parties out across the continuum more than their professionally administered counterparts.
13. The results of the error clustering exercise can be found in the online appendix.
14. Omitting these interactions from the analysis does not change the model results. Interested readers can see this model in the online appendix, as well as a replication of the substantive effects plots in Figure 1. All of these plots show a null result.
15. Unfortunately, the variation of political interest or knowledge questions across our surveys, or, in some cases, the lack thereof, prevented us from constructing a more nuanced measure of political sophistication. Given the well documented connection between education and sophistication (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996), however, we believe that education is an acceptable proxy.
16. Interested readers may find this analysis of Equation 2 in the online appendix. The model results show that there are significant differences between high and low sophistication respondents in the effects of a junior partner move on prime ministerial perceptions, but that none of the effects themselves are statistically differentiable from 0 – that is, both high and low sophistication groups respond insignificantly to a change in junior partner position, but there is a robust difference in their insignificant responses.
17. In these simulations, as in the simulations above, the junior partner's left-right position (based on the CMP codings) and the average opposition party position are held at the scale median of 5. The respondents in this scenario do not place themselves between the parties and the survey is administered in person, the model baseline category.
18. The probability of difference is derived from a simple *t* test. Of course, this means that the probability is conditioned by the size of the distribution – that is, the probability of difference is greater with a vector of 10,000 changes in junior partner perceptions than with 1,000. We therefore choose a relatively low number of simulations at random, 200, resample 1,000 times and display the average as the probability of difference. Alternate approaches, say a difference in differences ordinary least squares estimator, yield essentially the same results.
19. We note that there are alternative definitions of 'niche parties', with some scholars including communist parties in this category (e.g., Adams et al. 2006), others including regional and ethnoterritorial parties

- (Meguid 2005, 2008) and others arguing that niche party status is a continuous, as opposed to a dichotomous, variable (Wagner 2012).
20. The largest seat share for any green or radical right party for any election in our data (see Table 1) was 10 per cent for the Austrian Freedom Party in 2004. For reviews of the issues that niche parties confront in government, see Akkerman and De Lange (2012); Elias and Tronconi (2011); Rudig (2006).
  21. Examples include the German Greens co-governing with the mainstream Social Democrats, the radical right Dutch Pym Fortuyn List co-governing with the mainstream Christian Democrats (and the Liberals) and the radical right Austrian FPÖ co-governing with the mainstream Austrian People's Party.
  22. TNS Gallup/TV 2 Partibarometeret (<http://politisk.tv2.no/spesial/partibarometeret/>).

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