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Paper prepared for the Workshop:  
“Voters, Protest and Policies: Bridging Public Opinion, Social Movement Outcomes and  
Policy Responsiveness Research”, University of Leicester 16-17th June 2014

## Cheap talk or keeping/making promises? Party rhetorics between elections

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June 5, 2014

### Abstract

*Party rhetorics are often described as “cheap talk” used to silence the masses in the momentum of widespread opposition to the political elite’s position which is not succeeded by long-time policy positions. However, political science lacks clarity on whether the “cheap talk” assumption is tenable. Are politicians’ rhetorics short-sighted tranquillizers? Or are they instead made with consideration of parties’ past policy promises or anticipating future pledges? While studies on parties’ mandates in manifestos and positions during election campaigns are manifold, the reasons for political statements between elections are less well known – especially in comparative perspective. This paper seeks to contribute to this debate by using data on politicians’ verbal statements after the Fukushima nuclear accident and party manifesto positions prior and after it in 12 advanced democracies collected within the ResponsiveGov project.*

“Politics is oftentimes little more than an endless exchange of public conversations between those who control scarce resources and those who wish to control them” (Hart 1987: 5).

### 1 Introduction

**A**s stated in the quote above, the political arena reaches the public to an enormous extend by rhetorics: during election campaigns, candidates duel each other in TV, parliamentarians fight with words during debate sessions, politicians answer question by the press, send press releases or

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hold speeches at all kinds of public gatherings. Yet, political science knowledge on the informations delivered by such rather rhetorical acts is limited. Surprisingly, rhetorics have been mainly studied in the light of inaugural addresses – such as the state of the union address given by the American President (Cohen 1995; Canes-Wrone 2001; Druckman and Holmes 2004) or the Queen’s speech in the UK (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2007; Jennings, Bevan, and John 2011). Though some studies lately have unfolded the representational function parliamentary questions possess (Russo and Wiberg 2010; Saalfeld and Bischof 2013), rhetorical statements are still largely disregarded as symbolic acts and not as means to provide substantial policy positions to the public (For an overview of the debate, see: Cohen 1999: 24-26).

This paper shows that rhetorical representation is not only symbolic, but often provides political actors’ policy concerns and opinion. I link verbal statements made by politicians on nuclear energy after the Fukushima melt-down to parties’ manifesto positions before the accident.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of 55 parties in 11 Western democracies presents a overwhelmingly strong relationship between parties *prior* manifesto positions and the policy statements made after the Fukushima catastrophe. Furthermore, rhetorics appear to be an excellent indicator to track down party policy position changes in between elections and make intra party discourses more comprehensible.

The following section presents the current debate on politics’ rhetorical responses and potential limitations of the existing measurements of party positions. The third section outlines why rhetorics should not only be understood as symbolic acts in modern media democracy, but more as policy signals by parties. The fourth section describes the data used for the analysis in the following chapter, while the fifth sections shows the results of the pooled data analysis. Section six concludes.

## **2 Parties between symbolism and policy-making**

The position parties hold in order to compete in modern democracies are one of the core interests of political science (Downs 1957; Budge et al. 2001). The literature on parties’ positions is manifold and agrees that party positions matter for parties vote- (Adams et al. 2006), office- (Bäck, Debus, and Dumont 2011) and policy-seeking incentives (Budge and Hofferbert 1990). In fact, the positional

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<sup>1</sup> This will be extended to data on the Iraq intervention and to mortgage laws. Furthermore, parties’ final manifesto positions will also be included in future analysis. Unfortunately at the moment the final codes are only available for a third of the parties included in the analysis and have therefore been ignored in this draft.

left-right placements of voters and parties have been described as “super-issues” (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990: 211). In general political science seems to agree that party positions are pivotal in a variety of ways in modern democracies.

By using these positions, mandate theory scholars show that incumbent parties’ policy positions descending from manifestos are an excellent predictor for what parties subsequently were doing in government in a variety of different institutional settings: For Spain (Artés 2013), the Netherlands (Thomson 2001), UK (Bara 2005; Hofferbert and Budge 1992), the USA (King et al. 1993), Greece (Kalogeropoulou 1989), Ireland (Costello and Thomson 2008) and in comparative perspective (Mansergh and Thomson 2007). As Budge and Hofferbert (1990: 112) annotate, studies show that impressively around 70 % of pledges lead on to substantive policies and a recent review conforms these facts (Pétry and Collette 2009).

In contrast, parties’ rhetorical positions – made in statements or speeches – have found less interest in the literature on party politics. If discussed, rhetorics are often understood as purely symbolic acts. Thus in the American context, the president’s state of the union address has found large appeal amongst scholars of presidential responsiveness. On the one hand, Presidential speeches are understood as symbolism, containing little – if any – policy content (Tulis 1987; Hinckley 1990). In this vein presidential rhetorics do not share policy information, but are used to unite the public behind politicians’ policy endeavors. Presidents seek support by the public to put congress under pressure to deliver policy, in order to pass legislation which then helps presidents re-election goals (Ragsdale 1984; Brace and Hinckley 1993). Theoretically akin, but distinct in their arguments, studies showed that rhetorics are successfully used for priming (Druckman and Holmes 2004), to create trust among the public (Bianco 1994; McGraw, Best, and Timpone 1995) and to alter the public’s perception of president’s issue competence (Holian 2004).

On the other hand, it has been argued that speech is used to set the president’s or government’s policy agenda (Cohen 1995, 1999; Jennings and John 2009). Rhetorics are therefore understood as a step preceding policies: The priorities and positions presented in speeches are likely to result in substantive policy making. Bevan, John, and Jennings (2011) for instance show that the Queen’s speech is a strong and positive predictor of public policy-making in the UK.

What is missing in the discussion about party positions is a deeper insight into the instruments through which party positions reach the public. So to say the bridge between politics and the public. While political science found sub-

stantial evidence that the mass media seems to have a profound impact on the public's knowledge on politics (Schmitt-Beck 2003; Baum 2013), we know very little about the policy information shared by politicians' verbal statements via media, in speeches or during public gatherings. So far the literature mainly focusses on expert judgements of party positions (Benoit and Laver 2006), parties' manifesto positions (Budge et al. 2001; Pennings and Keman 2002) or politicians' roll call votes in parliaments (Poole and Rosenthal 1985) to estimate parties' policy positions.

Yet, reading through manifestos, following parliamentary debates or seeking information on candidates' voting records is costly for voters. Voters might select some information about candidates during election times from manifestos, but it seems more likely that they rely on politicians' rhetorics. Rhetorics are reasonable to access for voters via TV, newspapers, campaign events, public speeches or public assemblies. In fact, verbal statements presented in the media might even reach voters without them seeking such information. Just alongside everyday activities people are often exposed to party talk when listening to radio, watching TV, reading newspapers or checking twitter. Consequently, nowadays the public keeps itself mainly informed about politics via the media (Baum 2013: 442). Yet, the question remains what kind of messages politics sends to the public via their rhetorics.

### **3 Parties and cheap talk**

Sequential to the debate above, the question remains whether rhetorical statements are sheer symbols or whether they should be read as prefixes of more substantive forms of the policy cycle – such as policy outputs or manifesto positions. While political science provides profound knowledge of the meaning of speeches in the US and UK case, studies in comparative perspective are scarce (but, see: Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005, 2007). Furthermore, our knowledge on less institutionalized activities, such as statements forwarded to the press, in TV or public gatherings is similarly limited.

#### **3.1 Why talk is cheap**

Speeches are institutionalized activities: inaugural addresses are given in front of the parliament with MPs as the audience. They are well prepared and thought through by not only speakers but also by their policy consultants (Cohen 1999: 37). Usually orations do not significantly distance themselves from promises made during election campaigns. Speakers set the agenda of the talk. They

decide about what they want to talk and how much attention they designate to each topic. Above all, inaugural speeches are given by incumbents and therefore pledges in such speeches are costly, since voters expect these pledges to result in substantive policy outputs (Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011: 398).

In contrast to speeches, political statements are less institutionalized and constrained. Politicians' verbal statements are given in a variety of settings, with politicians also being asked to answer request on a topic by the media or public. Hence, politics does not always dictate the agenda, but reacts to an externally established agenda. Consequently, whether or not their statements reveal policy positions might depend on how much they chime with the given agenda (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010: 665).

Furthermore, party leaders' control of members' statements are limited. *Ex ante* party leaders are exposed to party members' potential unfaithful statements helping the disloyal cheap talker to gather public sympathy but not necessarily assisting the party and its position.

Finally, the opposition also gives verbal statement while not being measured against their own policy outputs. Thus, the opposition might feel less bound to provide policy claims which are sensible and rather trying to follow public claims in most situations to raise their electoral fortunes (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006: 103). All of these arguments point to the possibility that for politicians talk might be cheap: they might just say whatever they perceive as beneficial for their current short term goals.

### 3.2 Why talk isn't cheap

Yet, like speeches, parties' verbal statements are costly signals for politicians (Fearon 1997). Voters might punish or reward parties based on the distance between their preferences and the forwarded information.<sup>2</sup> As such politicians are not only believed to be judged for their actual policy decisions, but already for the policy sets they outline as feasible.

Clearly politicians' rhetorics are less detailed, informative and often less sophisticated than party manifestos or speeches. Yet, in their shortness rhetorics bring across an idea or tendency of what politicians intend to do. Rhetorics are thereby here understood as more than sheer symbolism. When we follow the debate between candidates in TV, when politicians debate about an issue in parliament, when they give short statements to the press, they share information

<sup>2</sup> In fact, message sending can only be cost-free in case the public does not listen to the messages at all. However, it is fair to assume that not all voters will be uninterested in seeking information about politicians' positions. As soon as one voter listens to the forwarded message, talk is no longer cheap.

about their policy intensions. Rhetorics mark out which set of policies politicians regard as feasible and sensible and which options they disregard. Above all, rhetorics give parties the opportunity to frame the debate on relevant issues or to prime one issue above the other (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010: 665; Druckman and Holmes 2004).

Voters are exposed to these rhetorics on a daily basis. By that they pick up what politicians and their parties stand for and how parties' positions on a topic might vary across their members and across time. The public can then estimate the distance between its policy preferences and what parties are willing to offer. However, what the public grasps as "cheap talk" is not defined by the distance between their preferences and party preferences.

Even more crucial for voters' damnation of party politics is the potential inconsistency of party messages across time: sending messages to the public creates audience costs (Fearon 1997). Once a larger part of a party is immune to party discipline on a certain topic or a party is ambiguous on important issues or constantly presents divergent policy ideas, the public will notice that the party itself cannot agree upon its position or is just trying to constantly move its position towards what the public wants and then eventually doing something else. In case parties only consistence is a constant fluctuation of their position, they are likely to be penalized by their audience in upcoming elections for not having a clear cut message (Dalton 1985: 294; Ferrara and Weishaupt 2004: 299). Therefore, parties need to be disciplined about the messages they are sending.

Thus, it is likely that politicians reflect on a pre-defined party position when posting a rhetorical statement. Party manifestos outline the most clear commitment through which a party holds itself and its members accountable. In most instances manifestos cover a broad range of issues and more important parties' policy preferences on a variety of topics. Given that, politicians are likely to refer to the agreed party position outlined in its manifesto, sometimes only for the sake of simplicity but more often because they share this position with their party colleagues. Since it is not a secret that many voters tend to not read manifestos (Bara 2005: 597), parties need to constantly re-assure voters about their policy goals by other means than their manifestos. In order to do so, parties need to keep track that their forwarded messages are consistent with what they previously promised to their voters. For that reason maximizing ambiguity about the party position is usually not a feasible and profitable strategy (Schedler 1998: 196). Party leaders need to make sure that members follow the party line and party members themselves should have an interest to follow the party line too. Especially in times of strong party leadership and the rise of media's importance,

party members' talk should be under the leaderships' scrutiny and keep members thinking twice about dissenting with the party line (Poguntke and Webb 2005).

Yet, besides a directional position, the importance of the issue at stake should also influence parties' talk. In fact, scholars argued in the past that salience matters more than positions, since parties often do not hold divergent positions within party systems due to consensus among them on many policy issues (Budge and Farlie 1983). Thus, parties need to differentiate each other by assigning different salience to different topics in their platforms: the more space an issue receives within a manifesto, the stronger the commitment to act on the relevant issue (Budge and Hofferbert 1990: 114). In fact, the amount of space attributed to an issue in a party platform might interact with the position held on the issue. Parties which are particularly ideological about their positions are the least likely to talk cheap: parties holding a position located on the extremes of an issue dimension and associating high importance to the topic, might be the most likely parties to talk in line with their manifestos.

Changing environmental circumstances though provide parties opportunities to update and change their beliefs (Harmel and Janda 1994; Schedler 1998: 202-206; Pétry and Collette 2009: 66). Unpredictable events – such as environmental catastrophes, economic crisis, war or massive public opinion shifts – can lead parties to rethink their policy promises and update them in order to produce reliable and feasible positions. In those situations parties might be able to renege their initial positions and start to forward new messages to voters, divergent to their initial policy promises. Doing so might in fact be the only possibility to not lie to the voter. For instance a party might have promised to increase pensions in the following legislative term after the elections. The party could have promised the pension reforms under prosperous economic conditions, but an unforeseen economic crisis hits the nation shortly after the elections. Given the massive alteration compared to the starting situation, drifting away from its prior beliefs might be the only option left to not lie to voters. As such, environmental conditions could restrict party rhetorics. However, admittedly such circumstances are rare events. They are rather exceptions in the game of democracy and not the rule.

Finally, with the amount of people talking, the possibility rises that some members' rhetorics deviate from the party line. Larger parties might be more endangered to ambiguous rhetorics than smaller ones. In addition to that large parties are more difficult to monitor by the leadership than their smaller counterparts.

In summary, we should expect parties to largely stick to their initial policy positions in their rhetorical reactions. It does not seem plausible that parties would betray themselves and send divergent policy message via their rhetorics. Neither does such a strategy appear to be successful to persuade voters, nor should politicians nested in party branches have incentives to weaken their party's reputation.

#### 4 Data & methods

I use the ResponsiveGov data to analyse whether and to which degree party rhetorics reflect manifesto positions. The ResponsiveGov data stem from manual coding of the main news agencies of the countries included in the project, supplemented with codings from legislative and parliamentary databases. As such, the database presents a rich data source containing a variety of events undertaken by parties to communicate their policy positions to the public.

In the case of Fukushima, the data collection starts on the day of the Fukushima accident (11.03.2011) and ends two years after the accident of Fukushima (31.03.2013). However, in case a government decided to phase-out nuclear energy (Germany, Italy<sup>3</sup> & Switzerland) *or* in case general elections take place a minimum of half a year after the Fukushima accident (France, Spain & Netherlands), these events mark the end of the coding period. The Responsivegov data on the Fukushima accident reports data for Belgium, Canada, France, Finland,<sup>4</sup> Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the US. For these eleven countries any party activity reflecting on nuclear energy reported by a nation's press agency, its parliamentary and legislative database are included in the ResponsiveGov data.

The external shock of Fukushima provides an excellent test ground to study the ambiguity of party rhetorics. As has been outlined in the last section, parties are especially likely to deviate from their initial policy positions once external and unforeseeable events undermine their plans. As a sensational issue nuclear energy remains rather unobtrusive to the public (Soroka 2002; Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans 2007; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010), but once the dramatic Fukushima accident happens, attention by the public and the media to the issue incrementally rises. Given that, many parties might have been stimulated by the media and/or the public to not only talk about nuclear energy

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<sup>3</sup> To be precise in the case of Italy the government withdrew from the plan to re-enter nuclear energy.

<sup>4</sup> Yet, for Finland the initial party positions are not coded yet and therefore Finland is excluded from the analysis at the moment.



and its safety, but also to update their beliefs on the matter and reject their initial policy positions. As such, the Fukushima case provides a rigorous test for the assumption that parties mainly reproduce their initial policy positions when talking.

Not all parties which talked will be included in the following analysis. The ResponsiveGov project carefully selected the parties for which manifesto positions were coded to assure comparability across countries and time. As a general rule parties that manage to secure at least five seats in the national parliament and at least 5 % of the national vote share are included in the analysis (For more details, please see: Bischof, Lühiste, and Morales 2013). Furthermore, parties needed to repeat this success at least once during the period of interest of the ResponsiveGov project (1980-2013).<sup>5</sup> This results in 55 parties included in the following analysis across 11 countries (For an overview of these, see: Table 5 on page 29).

#### 4.1 Measuring rhetorics & controls

**Rhetorics** Since the ResponsiveGov project is interested in governments' responsiveness, party's rhetorics coded during the Fukushima case are recorded in relation to the government's initial policy position on the issue (For more information on the coding procedure, please see: Lühiste and Morales 2013). Government positions are coded on a pre-defined five point scale – ranging from 'very progressive' to 'very conservative'. Based on governments' manifestos, coalition agreements or policy documents prior to the Fukushima accident, whether they are favoring nuclear energy or whether they intend to phase-out nuclear energy at a certain point in time, they are then matched into the five point scale to assure across country comparison. Progressive positions thereby outline positions against nuclear energy and conservative positions outline positions in favor of nuclear energy.

Coders are then asked to place any statement they code on a five point scale as well, ranging from '*(-2) an actor's position is radically more progressive*' to '*(2) an actor's position is radically more conservative*' than the government's initial policy position – with '*(0) being the same position as the government's initial position*'. In the case of Fukushima, statements coded as progressive on the scale thereby are more against nuclear energy than the initial government position, while conservative statements picture more support for nuclear energy than the initial government position. This scale is not comparable *across* countries due to varying initial government positions. A statement outlining a more progressive posi-

<sup>5</sup> While these rules pertain to most parties included in the following analysis, exceptions have been made in several occasions to guarantee to not ignore country particularities (Please see:

**Table 1:** Rules for recodes of rhetorics

Initial government position	statements' original classification	position after recode
-2 (Radically more progressive)	-2	Anti-nuclear
	-1	Anti-nuclear
	0	Anti-nuclear
	1	Anti-nuclear
	2	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
-1 (slightly more progressive)	-2	Anti-nuclear
	-1	Anti-nuclear
	0	Anti-nuclear
	1	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
	2	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
1 (Slightly more conservative)	-2	Anti-nuclear
	-1	Anti-nuclear
	0	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
	1	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
	2	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
2 (Radically more conservative)	-2	Anti-nuclear
	-1	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
	0	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
	1	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>
	2	<i>Pro-nuclear</i>

Source: Author's own, based on Lühiste et al. (2014: 12-16).

tion than the government might still be a statement in favor of nuclear energy depending on the government's initial position in the country. Therefore, I recoded the scale according to the rules outlined in table 1 (see also: Lühiste et al. 2014: 12-16). For example in the case of Italy, the Berlusconi government's position was to re-enter nuclear energy and construct new nuclear plants – which was coded as '(2) *very conservative*'. Any statement by a politician which was classed between '-1' and '2' was then recoded into a statement supporting nuclear energy, while any statement classified as '-2' was recoded into a statement rejecting the use of nuclear energy.

Since parties undertake a wide range of activities, events which are rhetorics need to be selected: statements to the media (Interviews); press conferences; any kind of speech made during assemblies or party meetings; public letters which also include tweets; statement/speeches given during rally and campaign events; party resolutions and declarations; parliamentary questions; statements given during hearings or any other event are included in the following analysis. All of

Bischof, Lühiste, and Morales 2013). Table 5 on page 29 in the appendix gives an overview of all included parties in this study.

these activities are undertaken to persuade the public or share information on a party's position with the public. None of these are events of substantial policy making, but might also reflect on past policy decisions or present upcoming ones. Yet, none of these events are *directly* resulting in a policy output.

Furthermore, only statements undertaken by members of the national party branch and the government are included. Neither statements by parties' regional or members of the European Parliament are included. Regional and supranational politics substantial differ from national politics and therefore party branches on these levels often differ substantial from the national party branch. Since this study is not interested in party fragmentation between regional, national and supranational politics, these statements have been excluded from the analysis.

**Manifesto data** Manifesto positions (*manifesto position*) are also taken from the ResponsiveGov project and are again categorized on a five point scale ranging from '(-2) *Very progressive*' to '(2) *Very conservative*', with zero being the neutral/vague category (For a detailed description of every category, please see in the appendix A.2 on page 30). Again, higher points on this scale stand for more supportive positions towards the use of nuclear energy. For these codes the same coding scale as for the government position was used. In order to assure that these positions are not affected by the Fukushima shock and capture party positions prior to the Fukushima shock, the manifesto in the elections before the Fukushima shock have been used to code party positions.

Besides party positions, the salience of the issue within the manifesto could interact with parties' policy positions. Once a party not only established a position on the nuclear case, but also considers the issue salient for itself, it is hugely unlikely that its members talk cheap about the issue. Following this argument drawn from salience theory (Budge and Farlie 1983), the salience of all issues have been coded within the ResponsiveGov project in a comparable effort to the Manifesto Research Group (MRG/CMP). Thus, the salience variable (*manifesto salience*) used here measures how many words of a party's manifesto is being dedicated to the nuclear issue.

**Controls** As has been argued beforehand, larger parties are more likely to have deviators within their cadres. It is more difficult to assure and control party unity the more members a party has. To account for this the amount of seats hold by each party in the legislature is being used to approximate party size (*party size*). Furthermore, how salient an issue in general is within a given country might

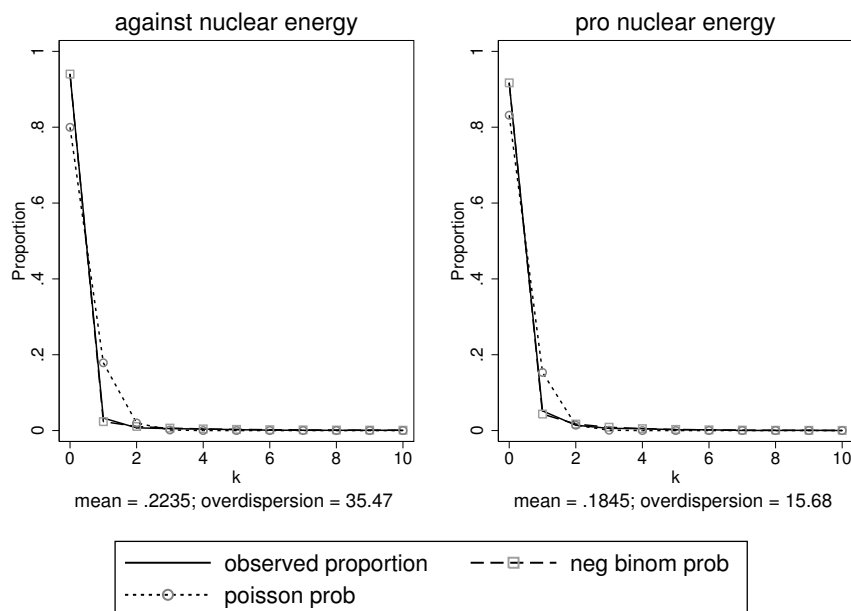
also affect the statements given: higher salience might put pressure on parties to pay attention to an issue. Therefore, parties might just need to talk without having had a clear cut position on an issue before the elections. Thus, a variable (*salience*) measuring all events that happened in a country is included drawn from the ResponsiveGov data.

## 4.2 Model specifications

All of this results in two count variables (rhetorics in favor/against nuclear energy) being the variables of main concern in the following analysis. One counts the number of rhetorics supporting the use of nuclear energy and the other one counts the number of rhetorics opposing the use of nuclear energy. These two variables will be used as dependent variables in the following model.

As figure 1 shows both rhetorical variables are overdispersed count data with a high zero-inflation. As such, they cannot be described by a normal distribution and ordinary linear regressions would result in highly biased estimates due to their gigantic right-skewness. Such data is better modeled by either using a pois-

**Figure 1:** Distribution of dependent variables in comparison



Source: Author's own.

**Note:** graphed are the observed proportions along with the poisson and negative binomial probabilities for the dependent count variables.

son or a negative binomial model. The observed proportions of both variables seem to fit better to a negative binomial model than to a poisson distribution

as shown in figure 1, which is due to the fact that the mean in both cases is clearly smaller than the variance. Zero-inflated models might be needed in such occasions to control for the huge amount of zeros in the model. Yet, insignificant Vuong tests for both dependent variables show that there is no need to control for zero-inflation.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the underlying data are measured across 55 parties per week and therefore should be treated as pooled time-series-cross-section (tscs) data. To account for the temporal correlation in the data (autoregression), a lagged dependent variable (LDV) is usually used in standard regression models (Beck and Katz 1995). Besides criticism that such LDVs tend to dominate results and thereby might camouflage other relationships in the model (Achen 2000; Plümper, Troeger, and Manow 2005), they are insufficient to control for serial correlation in event count models and instead report growth rates between time intervals (Brandt et al. 2000; Brandt and Sandler 2012). Therefore, in addition to standard negative binomial regression techniques, I follow the suggestions by Brandt et al. (2000) and also run negative binomial population averaged models with an ar(1) correlation structure which can also be used for unbalanced count panel data.<sup>7</sup> The results might also be subject to common shocks within a party system at certain points in time, models with robust standard errors clustered by country and week try to account for such shocks. Finally, to control for correlation within parties, I also run models with clustered standard errors by party.

Thereby, the general model reads as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \Theta_{ti} = \exp[ & \alpha_0 + \beta_1(\text{manifesto position}_i) + \beta_2(\text{manifesto salience}_i) \\ & + \beta_3(\text{manifesto salience}_i \times \text{manifesto position}_i) \\ & + \beta_4(\text{party size}_i) + \beta_6(\text{salience}_{it})] \end{aligned}$$

It is important to annotate that the perceived goal of this paper is not to maximize the explained variance of the model shown above. The goal is to understand how much variation of parties' rhetorical positioning can be explained by parties' substantive positions in manifestos – especially once the named controls are included. Thus, non-manifesto related covariates in the model should be un-

<sup>6</sup> This is also supported running a poisson model on the data. The goodness of fit for both variables calls for rejecting poisson distributions to model the data.

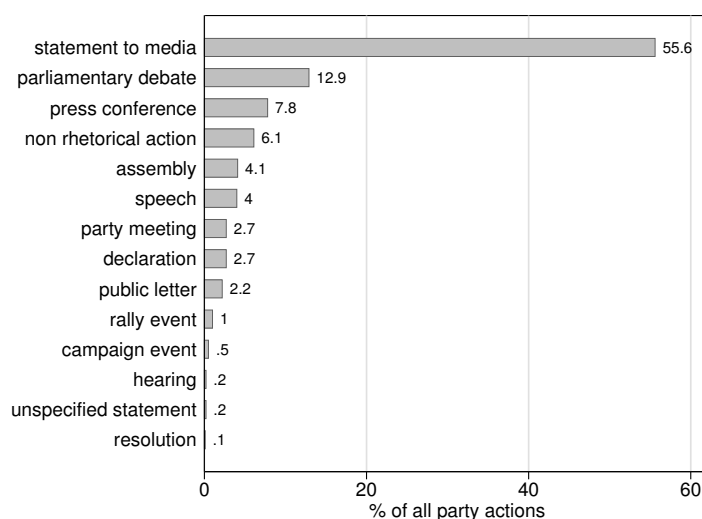
<sup>7</sup> Dickey Fuller tests reveal that both dependent variables follow a stationary structure. Therefore, an one week autoregressive model fits the data best.

derstood as controls and nothing more or less. I am aware that public opinion, protests, industrial or international pressures might also force parties to talk, but before such analysis can be made this paper tries to understand what all these rhetorics are actually about. It should be read as a preceding step to more detailed analysis taking remaining covariates into account. The following analysis is rather conducted in an explorative fashion and not strictly hypothesis driven. It is, therefore, impossible to assume how high the correlation between the covariates and the dependent variable should be in order to conclude that parties largely reflect on their party positions when talking. Yet, high correlations between the two is expected even when all controls are included. Furthermore, the following analysis does not try to establish any causal direction between manifestos and rhetorical statements. I want to understand whether or not verbal statements reflect to a strong extent on parties' substantive policy positions.

## 5 Results

Looking first into descriptive statistics might already reveal how important rhetorics are for parties and hence how costly ambiguous policy signals might be. Figure

**Figure 2:** Party activities in comparison within 11 countries



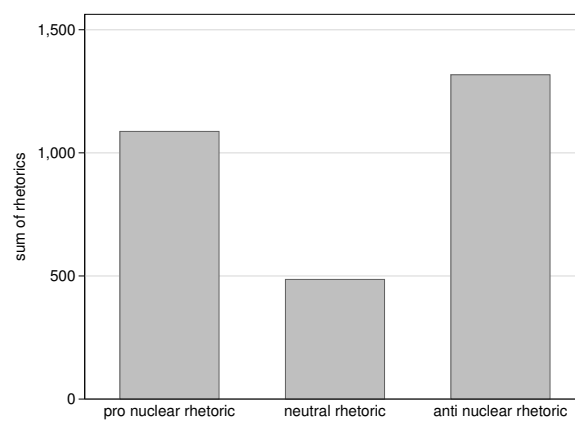
Source: Author's own.

2 shows parties' usage of all subcategories included in the rhetorical measurement and any other activity (non rhetorical action) during the Fukushima case in the ResponsiveGov data. Only 6.1 % of all activities are of non-rhetorical natures – such as parliamentary motions, laws or votes. While an overwhelming amount

of 55.6 % can be subsumed under statements or interviews given to the media. Parties also talk more in parliament (12.9 %) and give press conferences (7.8 %) than they use non-rhetorical activities. It seems that Hart (1987: 5) was right when stating that parties mostly do nothing more than talk. But how do they talk? Do they mainly talk without revealing their true positions on the nuclear case?

Clearly, parties position themselves by their rhetorics as either supporting or opposing nuclear energy (figure 3). In less than a quarter of the cases their po-

**Figure 3:** Overview of rhetorics in total within 11 countries



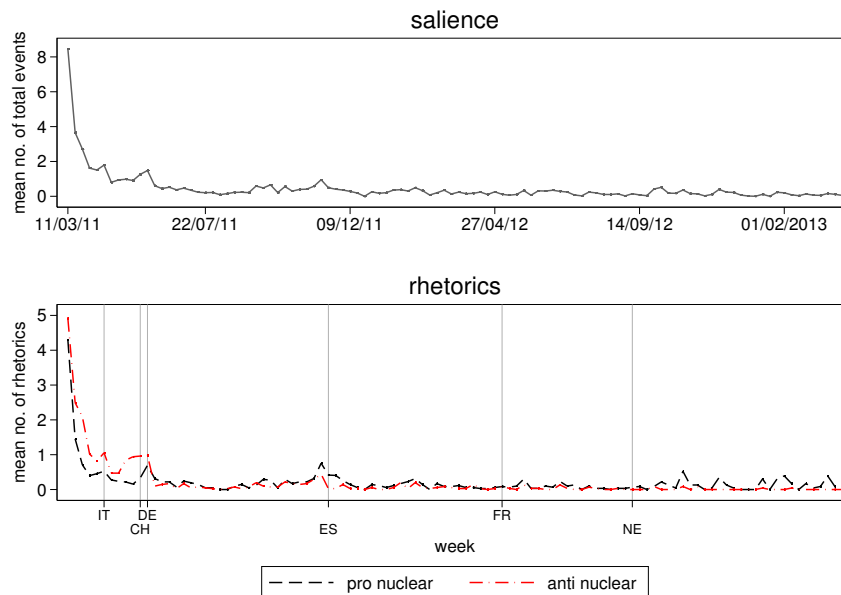
*Source:* Author's own.

sitions have been coded as neither supporting nor rejecting the usage of nuclear energy (neutral rhetoric). The anti nuclear camp appears to be slightly stronger. There seems to be a positional competition between parties on the matter – at least from this rather gritty perspective.

Emphasis has to be put on the information covered by rhetorical activities. For example, one MP for the départemente Gironde Noël Mamère (EELV) “[...] denounces the lies of the nuclear industry lobbies. Taking into consideration the risk of nuclear energy, he speaks in favor of an exit of nuclear energy and a reform of the nuclear powerplant control system in France” in a parliamentary debate. And in Spain, Josep Antoni Duran i Lleida (CiU) states to the press that he “[...] criticizes the ideological tone of the debate around nuclear energy and requests a serious energy debate. He says that nuclear energy is not ‘right-wing’ and renewables ‘left-wing’ because all energies are necessary.” Even though both statements are not specified in their plans, intentions and mechanisms, they both unfold positions on nuclear energy. While the former statement expresses concerns and the need to phase-out nuclear energy, the latter argues in support

for nuclear energy as a needed energy source. Politicians oftentimes clearly state whether they dislike the use of nuclear energy or whether they support the utilization of nuclear energy, but detailed reasoning is rarely given.

**Figure 4:** Overview of salience & rhetorics across time



*Source:* Author's own.

**Note:** The upper graph shows totals within all countries. The lower graph reports the means within all countries, reference lines mark the last week of data collection for the labeled countries.

Figure 4 shows in the upper graph the mean salience of the nuclear issues across weeks in all countries and in the lower graph the mean development of party rhetorics across weeks in all countries. It comes as no surprise, that the salience sharply shrinks across time. Especially once the Italian, Swiss and German governments made their decisions to end their nuclear ages, the remaining parties seemed to care less about the issue. As soon as the German parties drop of the sample, the debate around the nuclear issue becomes almost balanced – with pro an anti nuclear rhetorics outweighing each other. Yet, there is significant variation across time and it is therefore likely that some parties changed their nuclear rhetorics across the course and deviated from their manifesto positions.

Table 2 and 3 report the results for various negative binomial regression models as incidence-rate ratios. While table 2 reports the results for pooled negative binomial regression models, table 3 reports the results of the population averaged panel models. As can be seen the results of the pooled negative binomial



regression models, are fairly stable across models and tend to support the preliminary argument that parties rarely talk cheap (table 2). The baseline model in column one reports a strong and negative relationship between parties' initial policy positions and their anti nuclear talk: Each additional step towards a more supportive position towards nuclear energy results in an estimated 45 % decrease in anti nuclear rhetorics. This essentially means that parties holding positions on the extreme anti-nuclear position, are the ones using rhetorics against nuclear energy, while their pro nuclear counterparts remain silent.

On the other hand, a party making one step towards a more pro nuclear initial manifesto position is approximately 43 % times more likely to speak in favor of nuclear energy. This actually means that in both directions the theoretical assumption seems to hold true, that parties do not talk cheap, but remain true to their election promises when acting rhetorically. However, in the outlined models I treated the initial manifesto position as quasi-metric to ease the interpretation of the regression results and included manifesto positions as continuous variables. Figure 5 relaxes this assumption and pictures the predicted events for parties' initial manifesto positions included as a categorical variable – for anti nuclear rhetorics in the left hand graph and pro nuclear rhetorics in the right hand graph respectively. As can be seen the relationship between parties' initial manifesto positions and their rhetorics appears to be more complex than it might appear on the first sight in the regression models. For both dependent variables the argument holds true that parties located on the extremes in favor or against nuclear energy are the most likely to talk in line with their initial beliefs. Yet, the predicted rhetorics for parties strongly against nuclear energy are almost five times higher than the predicted values for parties in favor of nuclear energy. This means, that parties which strongly favored nuclear energy prior to the Fukushima accident guarded against sharing their pro nuclear position with the public. As such, these parties did not deny their beliefs, but tried to decrease the salience of the issue by sharing their positions. Exactly the opposite is true for parties with a strongly anti-nuclear initial policy position: These parties on average issued more than one pro nuclear rhetoric every week.

Parties with neutral policy positions remained largely silent. Given the fact that only five parties across the whole sample hold a neutral policy positions this result has to be read with caution and its effect is not significant in the pro nuclear rhetorics model. Interestingly, holding a favorable position on the nuclear issue led to almost the same amount of pro nuclear talk as having an extreme pro nuclear position. Yet, such parties were also likely to post almost the same amount of anti-nuclear rhetorics and thus released slightly ambiguous rhetorics

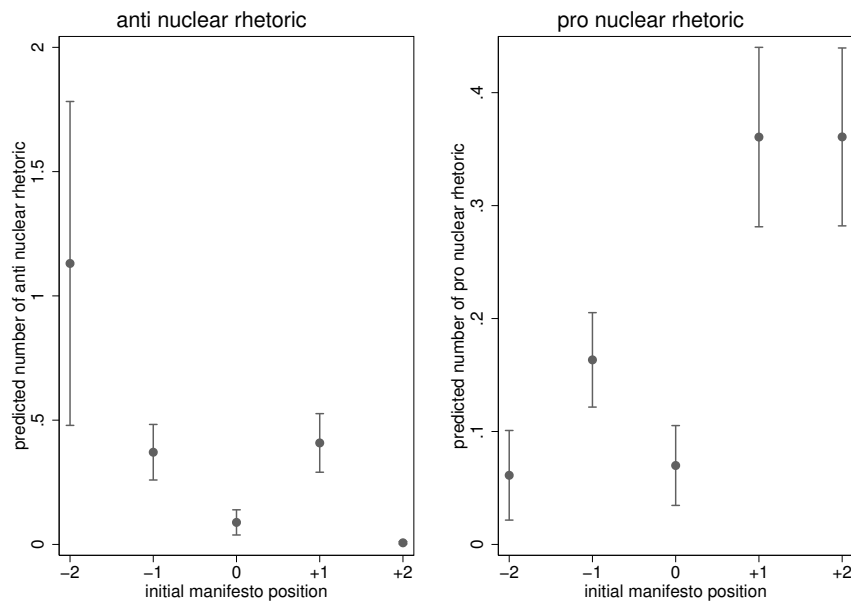
Table 2: Pooled negative binomial regression results

	(1) Baseline		(2) Controls		(3) Controls (Robust SE)		(4) Controls (SE by party)		(4) Interaction (Robust SE)	
	anti	pro	anti	pro	anti	pro	anti	pro	anti	pro
manifesto position	0.558*** (0.045)	1.431*** (0.074)	0.449*** (0.031)	1.227*** (0.056)	0.449*** (0.029)	1.227*** (0.067)	0.449*** (0.025)	1.227*** (0.062)	0.453*** (0.034)	1.140 (0.076)
manifesto salience			1.368*** (0.101)	0.840* (0.067)	1.368*** (0.092)	0.840* (0.059)	1.368*** (0.089)	0.840* (0.058)	1.391*** (0.138)	0.637* (0.117)
salience			1.078*** (0.006)	1.044*** (0.004)	1.078*** (0.013)	1.044*** (0.011)	1.078*** (0.008)	1.044*** (0.006)	1.078*** (0.013)	1.044*** (0.011)
party size			1.004*** (0.001)	1.006*** (0.001)	1.004*** (0.001)	1.006*** (0.001)	1.004*** (0.001)	1.006*** (0.001)	1.004*** (0.001)	1.006*** (0.001)
manifesto positionX manifesto salience										
constant	0.981 (0.208)	0.0972*** (0.015)	0.137*** (0.022)	0.0410*** (0.006)	0.137*** (0.022)	0.0410*** (0.006)	0.137*** (0.020)	0.0410*** (0.006)	0.135*** (0.022)	0.0479*** (0.008)
lnalpha										
constant	26.74*** (2.155)	10.95*** (0.821)	5.402*** (0.524)	3.109*** (0.317)	5.402*** (0.698)	3.109*** (0.434)	5.402*** (0.544)	3.109*** (0.375)	5.401*** (0.697)	3.051*** (0.444)
$N_{party/week}$	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705
$R^2_{(McFadden)}$	0.0189	0.0122	0.224	0.163	0.224	0.163	0.224	0.163	0.224	0.164
$adj.R^2_{(McFadden)}$	0.0170	0.0106	0.220	0.160	0.220	0.160	0.220	0.160	0.219	0.161

Incidence-rate ratios; Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

**Note:** All models pooled negative binomial models; models (3) & (5) include robust standard errors clustered by country/week; model (4) includes robust standard errors clustered by party.

**Figure 5:** Predicted number of pro & anti-nuclear rhetorics (margins at means)

Source: Author's own.

**Note:** Results based on table 2, model 1 but party position included as a categorical variable. The dots represent predictive margins of the dependent variable conditional on parties' initial manifesto positions as observed. The capped spikes indicate 95% confidence intervals.

after the Fukushima shock. Which is not the case for slightly anti nuclear parties which favored to talk more strongly against nuclear energy. In summary, this means that parties which held manifesto positions on the extremes are largely sticking to their policy pledges (2; -2). Parties which were leaning towards less strong positions (1; -1) were more unclear in their rhetorics and also deviated from their manifesto positions.

Looking into the models including controls supports these observations (table 2; models (3) & (4)). The manifesto effect is even stronger for anti nuclear rhetorics, while it significantly decreases for supportive nuclear rhetorics. This means, once we control for the overall salience of the nuclear policy issue per country and for party size, the chances to hear pro nuclear rhetorics decrease. It is fair to argue that the Fukushima accident was not opportune for parties supporting nuclear energy. In the sense that the accident rather depicts a challenge to their positions than the opportunity to emphasize them. Again this seems to support the claim, that in case the salience of a displeasing issue increases and parties might feel the pressure to update their beliefs, they strategically try to

tranquelize the salience of the issue by not talking about it (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010).

Party salience has a strong influence on party rhetorics and tends to increase both pro and anti nuclear rhetorics. Yet, this effect is barely significant for rhetorics in favor of nuclear energy and disappears in the panel models in table 3. Given the fact, that parties located on both extremes talk the most in their manifestos about nuclear energy, this again underpins the possibility for an interaction effect. However, the interaction effect reaches conventional statistical significance only in the case of the pro nuclear rhetorics (table 2; model (4)). Thus, the possibility of a general interaction between a parties' initial manifesto position and manifesto salience needs to be rejected based on the presented results.<sup>8</sup> The interaction has a slightly positive effect for pro nuclear rhetorics which is significant on the five percent level. As such, parties favoring more strongly nuclear energy and assigning the nuclear issue more space in their manifestos are slightly more likely to present rhetorics in line with their manifesto position.

Finally, while both controls – party size and issue salience – are significant across all models, their ratios are comparably small to the remaining covariates: both seem to matter, but only partially.

The population averaged negative binomial models in table 3 generally support the so far outlined results – even though the ratio affects are slightly smaller. Therefore, parties largely related to their manifestos when rhetorically reacting after the Fukushima accident. Parties appear to be true to their manifesto promises and rather remain silent instead of talking cheap about the nuclear issue. The often claim brought forward by the media and the public, that parties talk cheap cannot be supported here. The relationship between parties manifesto positions and their succeeding rhetorics is strong. Of course, the question remains how the remaining variation of party rhetorics not explained by their manifesto positions can be explained.<sup>9</sup> The analysis also reveals that parties with less strong manifesto beliefs are more likely to talk cheap and present ambiguous rhetorics across time.

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8 This result is also supported by again including parties' manifesto positions as a categorical variable.

9 Future drafts will also include a measurement for party position changes between parties positions before the Fukushima accident and the succeeding elections after the ResponsiveGov data selection ends. Unfortunately, these codes are only available for one third of the parties included in this analysis at the moment. Running models with these expands the here forwarded argument, that parties largely reflect on their prior manifesto position or anticipate their future positions with their rhetorics.

**Table 3:** Population averaged negative binomial regression results

	(1) Baseline		(2) Controls		(3) Interaction	
	anti	pro	anti	pro	anti	pro
manifesto positions	0.615*** (0.031)	1.400*** (0.060)	0.500*** (0.034)	1.191*** (0.058)	0.520*** (0.045)	1.095 (0.067)
manifesto salience			1.431*** (0.101)	0.906 (0.075)	1.532*** (0.179)	0.658* (0.122)
salience			1.019*** (0.001)	1.030*** (0.001)	1.019*** (0.001)	1.030*** (0.001)
party size			1.009*** (0.001)	1.006*** (0.001)	1.009*** (0.001)	1.007*** (0.001)
manifesto positionX manifesto salience					0.947 (0.076)	1.130* (0.065)
constant	1.173 (0.133)	0.118*** (0.016)	0.246*** (0.042)	0.0496*** (0.008)	0.238*** (0.042)	0.0592*** (0.010)
$N_{(party/week)}$	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705	3705

Incidence-rate ratios; Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Note:** All models population averaged negative binomial panel models with an autoregressive ar(1) correlation structure.

## 6 Conclusion

Party positions are one of the core interests of comparative politics (Downs 1957; Budge et al. 2001; Laver 2001). The literature on party manifestos and their means and meanings is tremendous and likely to be further expanded in the future. Parties' manifesto positions have been used in a variety of ways and it has been shown that they are strong predictor of what parties will do once elected into office. In contrast, party rhetorics – made in statements, speeches, press conferences or in parliament – found less interested amongst party scholars. Even though the work on speech making has been growing lately (Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005), we still know little about party rhetorics and their meanings for parties and voters.

This paper aimed to scrutinize whether party rhetorics are “cheap talk” or whether they represent more substantial statements by parties – such as manifesto positions. It has been shown that party platforms influence policy making (Budge and Hofferbert 1990) and speech making (Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011), but how much do party rhetorics echo policy positions made in party manifestos?

Drawing on 55 party manifesto positions on nuclear energy and a rich amount of data on the nuclear energy debate after Fukushima gathered by the ResponsiveGov team, I show that indeed party rhetorics are strongly affected by prior policy positions from party platforms. Especially parties having strong posi-

tive or negative positions on the usage of nuclear energy do not talk cheap, but remain true their initial policy positions. These results remain strong across several model specifications and even when I control for the salience of the nuclear debate in a country as well as party size. Furthermore, the space parties devote to the nuclear issue in their manifestos has a weaker influence than their actual policy position. This seems to be conflicting with arguments by salience theory scholars stating that parties mostly distinguish themselves from each other by the amount of attention parties designate to an issue. At least for nuclear policy this claim needs to be rejected. Parties differ in their manifesto positions and talk differently depending on such positions.

The paper gives a first insight into party rhetorics and how parties compete with rhetorics. There is still a lot to discover about party rhetorics and future work will take a look at when party rhetorics change and due to which influences parties are responsive rhetorically. From a normative point of view it is important that party rhetorics do not perfectly match what parties were promising during elections. The public and political scientists expect parties to adapt to changing environmental circumstances and to be responsive to what the public wants. Rhetorics might give us the possibility to study parties' responsiveness in a more fine grained weekly – if not even daily – perspective. How much influence does public opinion and protest have on rhetorics in comparative perspective? Do parties talk differently across political systems and if so due to which incentives?

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## A Appendix

## A.1 Further figures and tables

Table 4: Overview of variables used in the study

Variable		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Observations
party	overall	29538.42	17175.45	11110	62901	N = 3705
	between		15266.04	11110	62901	n = 55
	within		0	29538.42	29538.42	T-bar = 67.3636
week	overall	46.43752	30.63941	1	108	N = 3705
	between		20.5046	3.5	54.5	n = 55
	within		27.61045	-7.062483	99.93752	T-bar = 67.3636
anti nuclear	overall	.2985155	2.144096	0	50	N = 3705
	between		3.800701	0	18.83333	n = 55
	within		1.488257	-14.70148	31.70835	T-bar = 67.3636
pro nuclear	overall	.259919	1.470984	0	50	N = 3705
	between		2.372092	0	16.83333	n = 55
	within		1.202582	-14.57341	33.42659	T-bar = 67.3636
manifesto position	overall	2.463968	1.321798	0	4	N = 3705
	between		1.403939	0	4	n = 55
	within		0	2.463968	2.463968	T-bar = 67.3636
manifesto salience	overall	.7431323	.992015	0	4.285193	N = 3705
	between		.9224837	0	4.285193	n = 55
	within		0	.7431323	.7431323	T-bar = 67.3636
salience	overall	5.957085	19.34711	0	290	N = 3705
	between		33.94593	1.231481	111.8333	n = 55
	within		13.60053	-82.87625	215.3738	T-bar = 67.3636
party size	overall	63.90634	83.35642	0	313	N = 3705
	between		87.31598	0	313	n = 55
	within		4.186717	2.795232	106.4989	T-bar = 67.3636

Table 5: Party selection overview

country	party	country	party
BE	SP.A Socialistische Partij Anders PS Parti Socialiste VLD Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats MR Mouvement Réformateur CD&V Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams PSC Parti Social Chrétien N-VA Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie VB Vlaams Blok	NE	GL GroenLinks SP Socialistische Partij PvDA Partij van de Arbeid D'66 Democraten 66 VVD Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie CDA Christen Democratisch Appèl PVV Partij voor de Vrijheid IU Izquierda Unida
CA	NDP New Democratic Party LP Liberal Party CP Conservative Party BQ Bloc Québécois V Les Verts	ES	PSOE Partido Socialista Obrero Español PP Partido Popular CiU Convergència i Unió SAP Socialdemokraterna MP Miljöpartiet de Gröna FP Folkpartiet liberalerna Kd Kristdemokraterna
FR	PCF Parti communiste française PS Parti socialiste UMP Union pour un mouvement populaire FN Front National	SE	MSP Moderata samlingspartiet SD Sverigedemokraterna C Centerpartiet
DE	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen Die Linke SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands FDP Freie Demokratische Partei CDU/CSU Christlich Demokratische Union/Christlich Soziale Union	CH	GPS Grüne Partei der Schweiz SPS Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz FDP Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei der Schweiz CVP Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei SVP Schweizerische Volkspartei
IT	PDL Il Popolo della Libertà PD Partito Democratico UdC Unione di Centro LN Lega Nord	UK	LAB Labour Party LIB Liberal Democrats CON Conservative and Unionist Party DEM Democratic Party REP Republican Party
		US	

## A.2 Codebook for party positions:

In the case of coding parties' (pre-Fukushima) nuclear energy policy positions, the following categories applied:

- 2 = *Very progressive*: The party is completely against the use of nuclear energy. If there are no nuclear power plants but some political or public stakeholders want the party to build (or allow the building) of nuclear power station, then code "-2" only if the party is fundamentally against such plans. If the country has nuclear power station(s), code "-2" only if the party is committed to close ALL the nuclear power stations in the near future (within the next 5-10 years).
- 1 = *Progressive*: The party is against the use of nuclear energy but is not very radical in its views. If there are no nuclear power plants but some political or public stakeholders want the party to build (or allow the building) of nuclear power station, then code "-1" if the party is in principle against such plans but may be open for some talks and negotiations. If the country has nuclear power station(s), code "-1" only if the party indicates that it is committed to close some or all nuclear power stations (the plans do not have to be very clear and the planned closure can be in more than 10-years' time).
- 0 = *No position / neutral / vague*: Try to avoid using this category. Use it only if the document used for coding the party position EXPLICITLY mentions that the party does NOT have a clear position on nuclear energy. See the notes below for coding party's policy position when NO references are made in ANY document to party's position on nuclear energy.
- 1 = *Conservative*: The party is in favour of the use of nuclear energy but is not very radical in its views. If there are no nuclear power plants but some political or public stakeholders want the party to build (or allow the building) of nuclear power station, then code "1" if the party is in principle in favour of such plans but may be open for some counter-arguments from parties and interest groups against such plans. If the country has nuclear power station(s), code "1" only if the party does NOT indicate that it wants to close some or all nuclear power stations BUT also does NOT plan to build any new nuclear power plants.
- 2 = *Very conservative*: The party is strongly in favour of the use of nuclear energy. If there are no nuclear power plants but some political or public stakeholders want the party to build (or allow the building) of nuclear power station, then code "2" if the party is the principal stakeholder advocating for the building of nuclear power plants and is not open for any discussions to halt these plans. If the country has nuclear power station(s), code "2" only if the party does NOT indicate that it wants to close ANY of the nuclear power stations within the next 20 years, sees no alternative to nuclear energy, and plans to build or is building new nuclear power stations.