

Competing on Credibility:
How Political Parties Strategically Use
Policy Commitments in Their Public
Communication

Mathias Bukh Vestergaard

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PhD Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

As a child, I was constantly asking my parents questions about the world around me, from the mysteries of ants in my bedroom to the seemingly impossible feat of heavy airplanes flying through the sky. However, at some point, these questions became too complex for my mother to provide simple answers (or she might simply have lost her patience), and she suggested that I go to the library and find the answer myself. So, I did. I grew older, and for the past three years, I have probably taken her recommendation too far by going through several library books and hundreds of scientific articles, all in an effort to answer one specific question.

While my research question asks why political parties commit to their *future* behaviour, and the rest of this summary report will deliver an answer to this, I will use the acknowledgement section to dwell on the *past*. In particular, I would like to mention my two supervisors, Carsten Jensen and Helene Helboe Pedersen. Carsten, ever since I took your seminar in the first semester of my master's, you have supported me and helped me understand life as a researcher. Half of the time, you taught me extremely useful skills. The other half, I laughed at your jokes (or laughed about you laughing at your own jokes). Often, these latter moments took place at a bar, and I guess that we have drunk more beers together than the number of pages in this summary report. Today, you are not only a mentor and colleague, but also a very good friend. Helene, you have always been generous with your feedback and taken the time to give me written comments on my (often quite long) drafts. I have also enjoyed the Christmas gatherings at your home. Together, both of you have challenged me with your high-quality questions, laughed with me about non-academic matters, and, last but definitely not least, taken care of me during those periods of my PhD when I was completely burned out.

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Mathias Bukh Vestergaard
Aarhus, January 2023

Preface

This summary report is part of the PhD dissertation “Competing on Credibility: How Political Parties Strategically Use Policy Commitments in Their Public Communication” written at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. The report gives an overview of the dissertation. First, a review of the policy commitment and party competition literature. Second, a theoretical framework to understand the importance of policy commitments in parties’ public communication. Third, a method section that describes my approach and especially my empirical strategy to identify commitments. Fourth, the main findings of this PhD project, and fifth, a discussion of these findings. The dissertation consists of three single-authored papers:

- A. Vestergaard (n.d.). The paradox of positional convergence: How political parties use commitment strategies to stand out from competitors. *Working paper*.
- B. Vestergaard (n.d.). A credible change: How parties use commitments to counteract the loss of reputation when they dilute their policy positions. *Working paper*.
- C. Vestergaard (n.d.). ‘What is your agenda?’ How political parties use commitments to credibly change their issue priorities. *Working paper*.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Policy commitments play a significant role in the everyday coverage of politics. In 2013, the British Conservative Party promised to hold a referendum on the country's membership in the European Union, which later resulted in Brexit. In 2016, Donald Trump made a commitment to build a wall against the border to Mexico, which was an essential part of his campaign that led to his presidency. In 2019, the Danish Social Democratic Party committed to implementing an early retirement for worn-out workers, which caused intense debate with the main competitor, the Liberal Party.

These remarkable examples of commitments dominated the national media's political coverage at the time of announcement; they were highly debated among voters and parties during the specific election campaigns; and they had strong implications for the policy-making process as well as for individual citizens in each country and abroad. The Conservative Party and the Social Democratic Party both fulfilled their commitments, while Donald Trump only partly built his wall. A two-third chance of fulfilment corresponds roughly to the general success rate of commitments (Thomson et al., 2017).

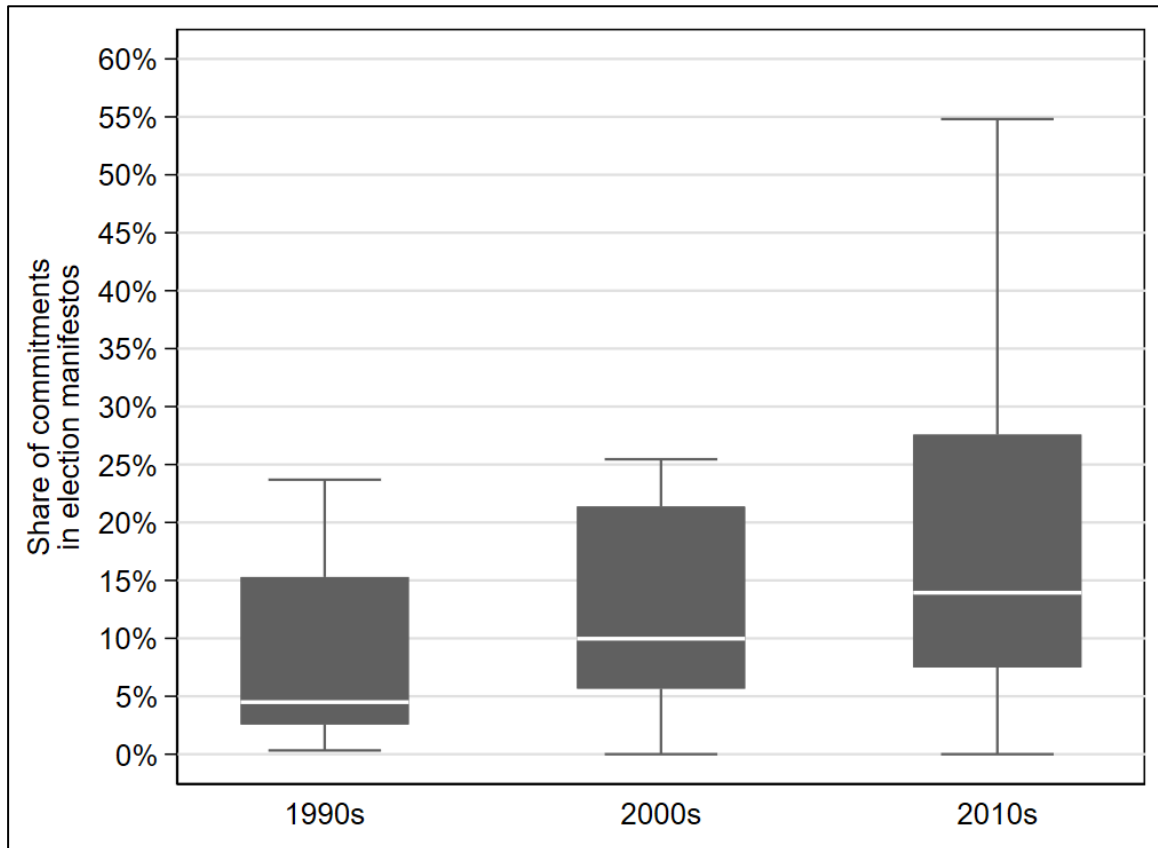
The three examples are also part of a larger picture of a change in the way modern political parties communicate in the public sphere. British, American, and Danish parties commit to a higher extent than previously, as shown in Figure 1.1 below. The box plots illustrate how large a proportion of the election manifestos parties devote to commitments (based on my own coding, as explained later). In the figure, each box plot shows the main descriptive statistics of the share of commitments within election manifestos across parties in all three countries, separated into three decades. Illustrated by the white horizontal lines in the grey boxes, the median value shows a clear time trend: Parties are increasing the share of commitments within their manifestos. While the party of the median manifesto dedicated 3.7 percent of the campaign material to commitments in the 1990s, the share more than doubled to 10.0 percent in the 2000s and more than tripled to 14.0 percent in the 2010s.¹

The box plots show considerable and increasing variation in the share of commitments within manifestos across parties in all three decades. The interquartile range, which is the difference between the 25th percentile (bottom of the grey box) and 75th percentile (top of the grey box), is 8.5 percentage points

¹ In Appendix 1 (Figure A1.1), I use another dataset to show that the trend is similar when the operationalization of commitments is different and when I include ten other Western democracies (Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden).

in 1990s, 15.7 in 2000s, and 20.1 in 2010s. Some parties make many commitments; other parties are more hesitant to commit.

Figure 1.1: Box plots of the share of commitments within election manifestos written by parties from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Denmark (1990s, 2000s, 2010s)



Notes: One observation outside the upper adjacent value in the 1990s is omitted (see Figure A2.1 in the appendix for the inclusion of this observation).

Despite the increasing prominence of and high variation in parties' policy commitments, we do not yet have a theory on when and why these policy commitments are made. From the outset, making commitments seems like risky behaviour for political parties. If they break them after the election, they lose votes (Matthieß, 2020), and voters do not even reward parties if they keep their commitments (ibid.). When people evaluate a government's performance, broken commitments carry more weight in their assessment than fulfilled ones (Naurin, Soroka, et al., 2019). The reason for this focus on broken commitments could be the negativity bias in the media coverage (S. Müller, 2020). Moreover, while broken pledges receive criticism in the media, fulfilled pledges do not get corresponding applause (Duval, 2019). To sum up, although parties do not win any particular reputation, votes, or positive media coverage by fulfilling commitments and lose on these aspects if they break

them, they keep making commitments to a very high extent. Therefore, I ask the following question:

Why do parties make policy commitments?

In the dissertation, I develop the main argument that parties use the policy-committing strategy to gain credibility. This is essential in three situations: First, when a party's position is similar to other parties' positions, it can use commitments to distinguish itself positively. Second, when a party has changed position from one election to the next, it can use commitments to convince voters that the new position is sincere and reliable. Third, when a party has increased the saliency of an issue between elections, it can use commitments to convince voters that its solutions on this issue are credible, even though it did not pay much attention to these issue-specific problems previously. In all three situations, commitments have the advantage of making parties' political statements more credible.

Why do commitments increase the credibility of a party's statements? Since policy commitments are electorally costly if they are broken (Matthieß, 2020), they are credible signals about the sincerity of a party's intentions. As such, a commitment is a costly signal given by parties. Voters can increase their expectations about a party's willingness to pursue its stated policy preferences if it has made commitments on them compared to more vague signals of intention (Bonilla, 2022). To understand this credibility feature of commitments, we need to examine the concept more closely.

I define policy commitments as statements in which a party takes high responsibility for a future policy. The party makes a connection between itself and the provision of a policy, and it is exactly because of this connection that voters can blame the party if the policy is not provided after the election. In the three cases of the British Conservatives and the EU-referendum, Donald Trump and the border wall, the Danish Social Democrats and the new retirement scheme, the party or candidate took high responsibility for a specific policy in the future and promised a specific policy scenario if they took office after the election. The repetitive nature of elections in democracies allows voters to hold parties accountable at the next election if they do not ensure the occurrence of the policy.

However, since policy commitments are costly to make, parties do not produce them carelessly. They save them for situations where they need credibility the most. From the large literature on party competition, I identify three circumstances under which parties should be particularly likely to seek out for credibility. I will explain each circumstance in turn.

First, parties will often become similar in their political positions because they want to appeal to the same large voter groups (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009b; Downs, 1957; Vries & Hobolt, 2020). A good example is the welfare issue in Denmark, where most parties take a left-oriented position, especially in the 2000s. In the United States, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party both talk very positively about the country's nation and history. Many centre-left and centre-right mainstream parties in Europe converged to the centre in the decades following the World War II because they used a catchall party strategy (Kirchheimer, 1966). In these situations, the parties need to share their position and cannot compete on political viewpoints. Instead, they can compete on being perceived as most credible party on this position, and the policy-committing strategy is a valuable tool for this purpose.

Second, from the literature on party competition, we know that parties risk losing credibility when they change their standpoint. A famous example is the Labour Party, which became more moderate from the mid-1990s to 2010 under the leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Another example is former American President, Barack Obama, who made a U-turn on same-sex marriage. After being against it in 2004, he explicitly supported it in 2012 (Steinmetz, 2015). In Denmark, the Social Democratic Party changed its relatively pro-immigration position to a far more anti-immigration position after losing several elections during the 2000s to a centre-right government that relied on support from a right-wing party (Bale et al., 2010).

In these examples, the voters might be sceptical about the party's sincerity and reliability because it has not promoted the specific position previously (Christensen & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2012). Voters should be particularly critical of the party's intentions if it moderates its position because it signals opportunism (Christensen & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022). Therefore, when a party moderates its issue position between elections, it needs to gain credibility among the electorate, and again, the policy-committing strategy is a valuable tool.

Third, the literature on party competition argues that parties will lack credibility when they have to engage with issues that they did not pay much attention to previously (Düpont & Rachuj, 2022; Petrocik, 1996; Van Den Bulck, 1993; Walgrave et al., 2009). In fact, parties are quite often pushed to increase their emphasis on an issue, for instance, when other parties succeed in putting them on the agenda (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010; Meguid, 2005; Vries & Hobolt, 2020), when electoral defeats incentivize parties to change their issue priorities (Damore, 2004; Janda et al., 1995; Meyer & Wagner, 2013), or when problems become too large to ignore (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010; Kristensen, 2020; Seeberg, 2021). Again, voters might be sceptical

tical of a party's intentions and sincerity when it signals change between elections (Christensen & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2012). Parties can use the policy-committing strategy to make its policy solutions more credible.

Based on these arguments, I formulate the following three hypotheses: Parties make more commitments when they are close to other parties on their political position. Parties make more commitments when they have changed their political position towards the centre. Parties make more commitments when they have increased their emphasis on a political issue. In all three expectations, the main mechanism is the pursuit of credibility.

Testing these three hypotheses and reliably identifying policy commitments across parties requires a demanding data collecting effort. If the data also include several countries and elections, which is the case here, it only increases the workload in the data preparation and data collection phases. For this dissertation, I developed and tested a new codebook that allowed me to hand-code political texts to measure how political parties communicate their policy viewpoints in various ways. While I focus on commitments, the dataset can be used to categorize parties' political communication more broadly (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 3).

I measured parties' communication in their election manifestos. While parties make commitments elsewhere (social media, websites, ads, television, etc.), manifestos function as contracts between parties and voters: Parties explain their political visions to voters, and voters either accept or discard them by their vote choice on Election Day. In this way, manifestos ensure a process of accountability between parties and voters. Furthermore, parties spend considerable time preparing manifestos (Dolezal et al., 2012), which form the basis of parties' campaigns, including specific candidates' communication (Eder et al., 2017). Finally, research shows that there is a relatively high correlation between parties' position in manifestos and their position in the media (Helbling & Tresch, 2011), which means that parties' viewpoints in manifestos are mediated to the general public. Parties' issue positions and issue emphases are part of my independent variables (positional distance as well as position and saliency change) and therefore important data for testing my hypotheses. Manifestos are an advantageous data source because the Comparative Manifesto Project has already assigned issue codes to them (Volgens et al., 2020).

In the hand-coding phase, I included manifestos from three countries that maximise variation on party systems and thereby increase generalizability of the findings to countries with varying types of party dynamics: The United States represents a pure two-party system (with the Republican Party and the Democratic Party as the only two parties represented in Congress). Denmark represents a pure multi-party system (the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal

Party, the Social Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Socialist People's Party, the Danish People's Party, and several smaller parties). The United Kingdom is somewhere in between with two large parties (the Conservative Party and the Labour Party) and several small parties (such as the Liberal Democrats). When parties compete in a multi-party system, each party potentially has more parties with which they have to share positions. More parties will fight for the political agenda, and challenger parties will bring new issues to the debate (Vries & Hobolt, 2020). The number of parties in the political arena affects the incentives structure of holding and changing issue positions as well as issue emphases. At the same time, a complex policy-making environment makes it less predictable whether a party can implement its policies after the election (Thomson et al., 2017), which might dampen incentives to commit to policies.

I used the codebook to hand-code 65,630 quasi-sentences from election manifestos in the three countries (a quasi-sentence is 'the verbal expression of one political idea or issue' (Volkens, 2001: 34) and can be a full sentence or part of a full sentence). A team of trained coders, who scored almost perfect levels of reliability on the relevant codes, did the coding.

Using the manually coded data as well as the issue coding of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2020), I find support for all three hypotheses. Specifically, I show that a party makes more commitments the lower the distance is to other parties (supporting my first expectation). I also show that a party makes more commitments when it has changed issue position towards the centre relative to no change or an extreme change (supporting my second expectation). Finally, I find that a party makes more commitments the more it has increased the saliency of an issue (supporting my third expectation). All effects are significant and substantial.

With these findings, I contribute theoretically and empirically to the literature on policy commitments and party competition. I summarize the contributions in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Contributions from this dissertation

	Commitment literature	Party competition literature
Theoretical contribution	I have developed a theory that explains <i>why</i> parties make commitments.	I have developed the argument that parties can try strategically to <i>increase</i> the credibility of their viewpoints in the short term.
Empirical contribution	I have developed a coding scheme that can situate commitments in a wider rhetorical landscape.	I have shown how parties' viewpoints can be defined not only by their issue position and issue saliency but also by their degree of commitment.

First, I have explained the “why” of commitments. Until now, the literature has mainly been interested in the effects of commitments: on policymaking (Naurin, Royed, et al., 2019; Thomson et al., 2017); on voters (e.g. Elinder et al., 2015; Lindgren, 2018; Naurin, Soroka, et al., 2019; Pétry & Duval, 2017; Thomson, 2011); and on media coverage (e.g. Duval, 2019; Ergün & Karsten, 2019; S. Müller, 2020). This dissertation is the first study to develop a comprehensive theory on the causes of commitments that focuses on the value of commitments in itself rather than only understanding it as a way for parties to make their statements more clear (see Praprotnik, 2017a).

Second, the dissertation contributes to the literature on party competition by arguing that parties strategically can try to *increase* their credibility in the short term by the way they talk about an issue. While previous research has emphasized that parties’ credibility on specific positions and issues is important to them, it has mainly used it theoretically as part of parties’ cost-benefit analyses. The focus of these studies has been on how this credibility characteristic incentivizes parties to take specific positions and draw attention to specific issues; how parties can change their viewpoints in a way where it minimizes the loss of credibility; or under which circumstances parties decide to change their viewpoints despite the loss of credibility (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009a; Budge & Farlie, 1983; Koedam, 2021; Sides, 2006; Tavits, 2007; Wagner & Meyer, 2014). According to this literature, credibility is a characteristic that a party achieves after many years of dedication to a specific position or issue (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Meguid, 2008; Petrocik, 1996; Seeberg, 2017). However, this is problematic if the party needs credibility here and now (in an election where it wants to distinguish itself from similar parties), or if it has changed its position or emphasis on an issue (in which the party cannot achieve credibility by referring to its past). The main advantage of the policy-committing strategy is that parties can use it to try to gain credibility in the short term by taking high responsibility for future policies.

Third, and related, the dissertation contributes empirically to the party competition literature by showing that parties compete not only on positions and saliency but also on the degree of commitments on their policy viewpoints. As such, I have shown that parties can assign a higher weight to their policy viewpoints by committing to them, which will bind them to these viewpoints. The dissertation, thus, provides a new understanding of how parties strategically communicate their policies. They make decisions not only on their position on and priority of different issues but also their level of commitment on these political viewpoints.

Fourth, the extensive dataset on how parties communicate their issue statements is an empirical contribution to the commitment literature. The dataset makes it possible to situate parties' policy commitments in a broader rhetorical landscape. To what extent do parties talk about future policies? When they do, how much responsibility do they take for them? While this dissertation is interested in the making of policy commitments, future studies can use the dataset to examine how parties take positions and emphasize issues in a variety of ways (differing on the time perspective, degree of responsibility taken, degree of responsibility ascribed to other parties, and the specificity of the policy).

The findings are important for how we understand the linkage between voters and parties in representative democracies. Earlier, voters' social classes mainly structured this link (Kriesi et al., 2006), but a new policy-based system is gradually replacing the old one. In the old system, parties did not implement policies that would hurt the class interests of their core voters because they did not want to be punished by them at the next election (Hibbs, 1977; Korpi, 1983). In the new system, voters hold parties accountable by evaluating their success in fulfilling their commitments from the election campaign (Matthieß, 2020). In the new system, parties increasingly compete by changing positions and emphasizing different issues over time. More specifically, parties often share positions (because their constituencies are less distinct) and often have to dilute their position and change issue priorities (because they cannot rely on the same voters from election to election).

As I have shown, these situations incentivize parties to make commitments, and commitments ensure that parties are accountable to what they campaigned on before the election even if their voter groups are less well defined. Structural changes might therefore explain this transformation of party communication that have taken place within the past 30-50 years, and which I described in the beginning of this introduction. In a political environment that is more volatile than perhaps ever before (Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2017; Mair, 2013), parties' need of credibility before an election is important because this need incentivises parties to make commitments that enables voters to hold parties accountable after the election.

In Chapter 2, I present a theory on the policy-committing strategy that explains why and under which circumstances parties will make more commitments. In Chapter 3, I present my method with particular focus on how I identify parties' commitments. In Chapter 4, I show my main results, which support my three hypotheses. In Chapter 5, I discuss the dissertation's contributions to the literatures on policy commitments, party competition, and voter behaviour. I conclude by discussing the implications for representative democracies.

Chapter 2: A theory on the policy-committing strategy

To try to gain credibility.

This is the main answer to my research question why parties make commitments. As I will elaborate on below, parties often need credibility when they compete. Using insights from the large literature on party competition, I identify three specific circumstances under which parties will pursue credibility the most. The first circumstance occurs when parties become similar in their viewpoints (and compete to be the party with the most credible political position). The second circumstance occurs when parties moderate their viewpoints (and need to make the new position credible). The third circumstance occurs when parties increase the saliency of an issue (and need to make their new political agenda credible). Parties frequently end in all three circumstances, as the party competition literature has argued theoretically and showed empirically. Yet, while the literature is clear about the problematic aspects of these situations for a party's electoral fortune, it has been hesitant to provide tools parties can use to maintain their competitiveness under these circumstances. Below, I will present my argument why the policy-committing strategy is a valuable tool for parties to increase the credibility of their viewpoints. Then, I elaborate on the three situations where parties are in need of credibility. Finally, I end the theoretical chapter by deriving three hypotheses.

2.1 Why commitments increase credibility

Before I make the argument why policy commitments increase credibility, I will first define this type of political communication. Policy commitments are statements where a party takes high responsibility for a future policy. For instance, when the British Conservative Party says, "We will hold a referendum on the British membership of the European Union", the party makes an explicit connection between the party itself and the provision of the policy (that is, holding a referendum). Studies have found that voters are more likely to perceive a statement as a commitment if the party takes high responsibility for it by using words such as "We will" or "We promise" (Dupont et al., 2019; Krishnarajan & Jensen, 2021). Commitments relate to the future, but when in the future is not important for voters' inclination to define a statement as a commitment (Krishnarajan & Jensen, 2021).

Since the crucial mechanism behind the theory of this dissertation is that parties will make commitments to try to gain credibility, the important question is why commitments should have this feature. To understand this, I will

change perspective from parties to voters. Why would voters value commitments? The short answer is that commitments provide information to voters that helps them pick the party that best represents their interests. Below, I will elaborate on this answer using principal-agent theory as a framework to understand the relationship between voters and parties (Strøm et al., 2003).

When a voter votes for a party, it is important that the voter delegates decision-making power to the party that will pursue policies closest to the voter's own interests after the election, and that the voter holds the party accountable for its actions. Otherwise, the voter will experience agency loss (Strøm et al., 2003). To minimize agency loss in the delegation phase, the voter needs to reduce the problem of adverse selection, which arises when voters vote for a party that is not the best for the voter in terms of shared interests (Fearon, 1999; Maravall & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2008). To minimize agency loss in the accountability phase, the voter needs to reduce the problem of moral hazard, which arises when a voter cannot fully observe the party's actions, which might give the party incentives to relax or take actions that are contrary to the voter's interests (Ferejohn, 1986; W. C. Müller, 2000). Policy commitments have the potential to reduce both the problem of adverse selection and the problem of moral hazard.

In the delegation phase, voters need to know what policies parties want and how much they want it. When parties communicate specific policy proposals, voters can aggregate these proposals to gain a better understanding of the party's position on and priority of specific political issues (Budge, 2015; Downs, 1957). Voters can then compare these with their own opinions. However, this information on position and saliency is not enough. As Downs (1957: 39, text in brackets added) writes:

Hence, he [the voter] cannot merely compare platforms; instead he must estimate in his own mind what the parties would actually do were they in power.

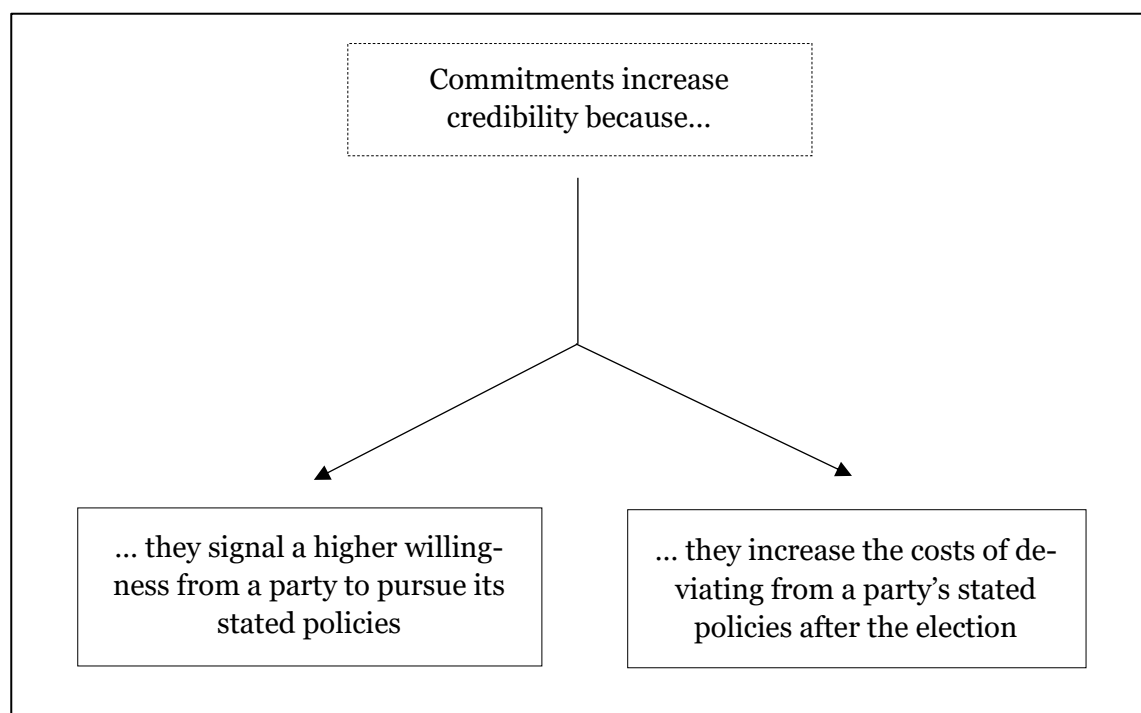
In order to make this estimation, voters need additional information. Particularly valuable is information that helps voters predict how *willing* the party is to pursue its stated policies (Strøm et al., 2003). If the party is not willing to pursue them after the election (for instance because the party hid its real policy viewpoints during the campaign), the party might turn out to be a suboptimal representative for the voter. In this regard, policy commitments are valuable because a party can signal to voters that their statements are not cheap talk but policy proposals that the party is determined to pursue.

In the accountability phase, voters need to know what parties have done in the recent election period (Strøm et al., 2003). Policy commitments from the previous election campaign are particularly useful because the voter can evaluate whether the party fulfilled them when it was in office (Mansbridge,

2003). For this reason, commitments should be valued prospectively as well because they allow the voter to hold the party accountable at the next election. Not fulfilling its commitments will potentially be costly to the party at the following election (Matthieß, 2020). Therefore, commitments increase the costs of deviating from the stated policies in the future.

To sum up, commitments help voters in two regards, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. First, commitments signal to voters that a party is highly willing to pursue its policies. Second, commitments increase the costs parties will experience if they deviate from their stated policies after the election. For these two reasons, voters can use commitments as a credible signal of a party's intentions. Research does show that commitments increase voters' expectations that parties will pursue their policy proposals after the elections compared to more vague signals of intention from the party (Bonilla, 2022). Studies also find that commitments help parties gain votes prospectively (Bøggild & Jensen, 2022; Elinder et al., 2015).

Figure 2.1: Why commitments increase credibility



Therefore, the policy-committing strategy is a useful tool to parties when they want to make their policy viewpoints more credible and, thereby, increase their prospects among the electorate. In the next sections, I explain under which circumstances parties particularly need credibility.

2.2 Indistinguishable positions: When parties become too similar

Research on party competition has argued that political parties will often converge to near-identical policy positions because they want to appeal to the same large voter groups (Downs, 1957; Vries & Hobolt, 2020). Yet, becoming too similar comes with potential costs to the individual party.

The main challenge is to convince voters to choose one party over the others when they virtually share the same policy viewpoints. Vries and Hobolt (2020) argue that parties will try to avoid converging entirely as well as leap-frogging. Instead, they will keep some distinctiveness in their ideological positions. However, when parties only differ marginally on their positions, voters could potentially still find it difficult to distinguish between them. Furthermore, if one party is only a bit more unwilling to pursue a position after the election compared to another party, it can easily become the suboptimal representative for the voter if the two parties are very similar (Callander, 2008; Kartik & McAfee, 2007). After the election, the party only needs to deviate a bit from its campaign position before it becomes the second-best option for the voter. Since similarity in policy positions should make voters less certain about their vote choice, parties should be hesitant to take positions close to each other.

Empirically, studies have found that parties risk losing votes from converging. Voters abstain from voting to a higher extent and become less engaged in politics when differences among the parties are less pronounced (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Wilford, 2017). Party identity lessens (Grant & Tilley, 2022). Voters also become more volatile in their vote choice (Bartolino & Mair, 1990), and they shift to newer parties (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Spoon & Klüver, 2019). For the individual party, positional convergence can be detrimental for its electoral ambitions.

However, I argue that a party can use the policy-committing strategy to take positions that are popular among the voters and simultaneously make themselves distinctive from competing parties that want to attract the same voters. By using the strategy, the party can make its position more credible compared to its similar competitors.

2.3 Unreliable and inconsistent: When parties change their mind

Parties frequently shift their positions because they need to adapt to changes in their political, social, natural, or economic environment (see for instance Abou-Chadi & Stoetzer, 2020; Adams et al., 2009; Adams & Somer-Topcu,

2009b; Ezrow et al., 2011; Miller & Schofield, 2003; Somer-Topcu & Williams, 2014). The need for adaptations has been particularly high in recent decades when new parties have entered the political scene (Vries & Hobolt, 2020), voters are less stable in their policy choice (Hernández & Kriesi, 2016), and voters feel less attached to parties (Dalton, 2000). Yet, changing position comes with potential costs to the individual party.

The main challenge is that the party will find it more difficult to convince voters about the sincerity of its new position. Dating back to Downs (1957), research on party positions has often emphasized how policy change can harm a party's reputation (Laver, 1997: 115-16; Wickham-Jones, 2005). Rival parties and the media might highlight these shifts as "opportunistic" and "insincere" (Adams et al., 2011). More importantly, voters might distrust the party (Meguid, 2008: 35). Parties are therefore careful not to change position if this can decrease their support among core voter groups (Koedam, 2021).

Empirically, Tavits (2007) shows that voters are particularly likely to react negatively when the positional change signals unreliability and inconsistency. Repositioning also makes voters more sceptical about a political candidate's honesty (Tomz & Van Houweling, 2012). A recent study shows that voters are strongly critical of positional moderation in which a party moves its position closer to the voters at the centre of the ideological scale (Christensen & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022). For the individual party, a positional change can thus be detrimental to its electoral ambitions, especially if the party moderates its viewpoints.

However, I argue that a party can use the policy-committing strategy to make its new position credible to voters. In this way, the party can adapt to changes in the environment by moderating its political position without compromising on its credibility. Even though the party did not have the position previously, it commits to pursuing it after the election.

2.4 Hidden agenda: When parties abruptly increase their attention to an issue

The literature on issue competition offers many reasons why parties change their political agenda, for instance, other parties succeed in putting the issue on the common political agenda (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010; Meguid, 2005; Vries & Hobolt, 2020); a party might need to change its own agenda to respond to the loss of voters (Damore, 2004; Janda et al., 1995; Meyer & Wagner, 2013); or some problems can become too large for a party to ignore (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010; Kristensen, 2020; Seeberg, 2021). Yet, shifting attention to a new issue comes with potential costs to the individual party.

The main challenge is that the party needs to convince voters that it cares about its new issue priorities and is not hiding its real agenda. As such, the party needs to show that it can provide credible solutions to problems on an issue it did not care much about previously. As Petrocik (1996) famously has argued, parties gain credibility on an issue by dedicating time and effort to it over many years. When parties change their policy package, they risk losing their political identity (Janda et al., 1995; Walgrave et al., 2015).

Seeberg (2017) has shown that voters' perceptions of parties' issue credibility are very stable over time. While parties can improve these perceptions with a communication effort, Stubager and Seeberg (2016) show that it is mainly by referring to the past – by emphasizing linkage to specific constituencies or previous performance. Based on an online experiment, Tresch et al. (2015) conclude that parties find it difficult to increase their own standing on an issue when they shift attention towards it. Therefore, when a party has increased its attention to an issue abruptly, voters find it less credible than if the issue had been salient to the party for many years.

However, I argue that a party can use the policy-committing strategy when it has increased its emphasis on an issue to make its policy solutions to the issue more credible. Even though the party did not pay as much attention to the issue previously, it can signal determination and willingness to solve the problem in the future and increase the costs of not doing so by committing to its policies.

In the final section, I summarize this theoretical chapter by deriving three hypotheses on parties' use of the policy-committing strategy.

2.5 My expectations on the use of the policy-committing strategy

As shown in this theoretical chapter, parties often need to make their political statements more credible. This occurs when their positions become too similar, and when they rebrand their policy programme by moderating positions or increasing their emphasis on an issue. The policy-committing strategy is a useful tool to increase credibility because commitments both signal high willingness from a party to pursue its policies and increase the costs of deviating from stated policies later. A party can use the strategy to make its position more credible compared to parties that share the same position and to gain credibility when it has moderated its position or increased the saliency of an issue. In Figure 2.2, I sum up the arguments from this theoretical chapter.

Figure 2.2: How parties can use commitments when they need credibility

Situation 1 When a party's policy position is similar to other parties' positions, it can use commitments to distinguish itself positively.	Situation 2 When a party has diluted its position between elections, it can use commitments to convince voters that the new position is sincere and reliable.	Situation 3 When a party has increased the saliency of an issue between elections, it can use commitments to convince voters that its solutions on this issue are credible despite less attention previously
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Overall, this chapter leads me to formulate the following three hypotheses:

H1: The lower the distance a party has to other parties on its position, the more commitments the party will make on this issue.

H2: When a party has diluted its position on an issue, it will make more commitments relative to situations where the party has not changed its position, or where it has crystalized its position by moving to the extreme.

H3: The more a party has increased the saliency of an issue, the more commitments the party will make on this issue.

In the next chapter, I explain how I can test the three hypotheses with a particular focus on how I identify the policy commitments made by parties.

Chapter 3: Identifying policy commitments in political texts

3.1 Where to identify policy commitments

Parties communicate their policy viewpoints in many forums: election manifestos, newspapers, TV-debates, election meetings, social media, and so on. I chose to identify commitments in manifestos for a number of reasons. First, manifestos function as a contract between a party and its voters. The party announces to voters what it will give them in return for their vote. Second, the manifesto is “unique in being the only authoritative party policy statement approved by an official convention or congress” (Klingemann et al., 2006: xvii). Even though the process of writing the manifesto varies from party to party, they generally spend considerable time on it (Däubler, 2012; Dolezal et al., 2012; Victor & Reinhardt, 2018). The candidates use them to get a notion of the party’s official policy stances (Eder et al., 2017), so it is likely that parties have thought carefully about what commitments to make on which issues. Third, commitments made in manifestos are public and in writing – voters can easily return to the programme and read parties’ previous commitments. Even if voters do not read manifestos, they might reach them through interest groups and media (Harmel, 2018; Helbling & Tresch, 2011). Fourth, by using manifestos to identify commitments, I can combine this with information about a party’s position on and priority of issues. The Comparative Manifesto Project has already coded manifestos on different issue codes (Volkens et al., 2020), which I can use to measure parties’ positions and the saliency of each issue. The advantage is that I can measure parties’ positional and salience strategies from the same source as the parties’ policy-committing strategy. Therefore, there is no time gap between the parties’ decisions on different strategies, which would potentially be problematic if a party decided to change its positional or salience strategy before I measure the party’s committing strategy. Instead, I can measure the parties’ overall strategy as one coherent whole.

3.2 Selection of countries, parties, and elections

I chose election manifestos from three countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, which differ on several aspects but most importantly on the type of party system. The United States represents a pure two-party system (with the Republican Party and the Democratic Party as the only two

parties represented in Congress). Denmark represents a pure multi-party system with several large parties (e.g., the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party) and several small parties (e.g., the Red-Green Alliance, the Liberal Alliance, and the Alternative). The United Kingdom is somewhere in-between with two large parties (the Conservative Party and the Labour Party) and several smaller parties (e.g., the Liberal Democrats). The number of parties affects the party dynamics within the political system. The more parties, the more competition for setting the agenda, and parties might be more likely to change their positions as a reaction to other parties' emergence and criticism. A higher number of parties also complicates the fulfilment of commitments, which might limit parties' willingness to make them in the first place. The three countries also differ on other institutional aspects: The United States has a majoritarian, presidential system, the United Kingdom has a majoritarian, parliamentary system, and Denmark has a proportional, parliamentary system. As Thomson et al. (2017) find, power sharing decreases the likelihood of fulfilment of commitments. By having three countries with different institutional settings, I increase the likelihood that my findings can be generalized to other countries with varying types of party dynamics and institutions.

I collected all election manifestos available in the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2020). This covers 27 parties, 97 manifestos, and 17 elections from 1992 to 2019 (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Manifestos included in the dataset

Country	Party	Elections
Denmark	The Alternative	2015 2019
	Centre Democrats	1998 2005
	Christian People's Party	1998 2005
	Conservative People's Party	1998 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	Danish People's Party	1998 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	Social Liberal Party	1998 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	Liberal Alliance	2007 2011 2015 2019
	Liberals	1998 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	Progress Party	1998
	Red-Green Alliance	1998 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	Social Democratic Party	1998 2001 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	Socialist People's Party	1998 2005 2007 2011 2015 2019
	The New Right	2019
United Kingdom	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	2019
	Conservative Party	2015 2017 2019
	Democratic Unionist Party	2015 2017 2019
	Green Party of England and Wales	2015 2017 2019
	Labour Party	2001 2015 2017 2019
	Liberal Democrats	1997 2015 2017 2019
	Scottish National Party	1997 2001 2015 2017 2019
	Social Democratic and Labour Party	2015 2019
	The Party of Wales	2015 2017 2019
	Ulster Unionist Party	2015
	United Kingdom Independence Party	2015 2017
	We Ourselves	2015 2017 2019
United States	Democratic Party	1992 2004 2012 2016
	Republican Party	2004 2008 2012 2016

3.3 How to identify policy commitments

3.3.1 Quasi-sentences

The Comparative Manifesto Project splits each election manifesto into multiple quasi-sentences. Each quasi-sentence contains exactly one political idea or issue (Volkens et al., 2020). Usually, one quasi-sentence equals one full sentence, but one full sentence can contain more than one quasi-sentence. For

instance, the Democrats wrote the following sentence in their election manifesto from 2016: “Wages have barely budged and the racial wealth gap remains wide, while the cost of everything from childcare to a college education has continued to rise”. This sentence contains three quasi-sentences: “Wages have barely budged”; “and the racial wealth gap remains wide,”; “while the cost of everything from childcare to a college education has continued to rise”.

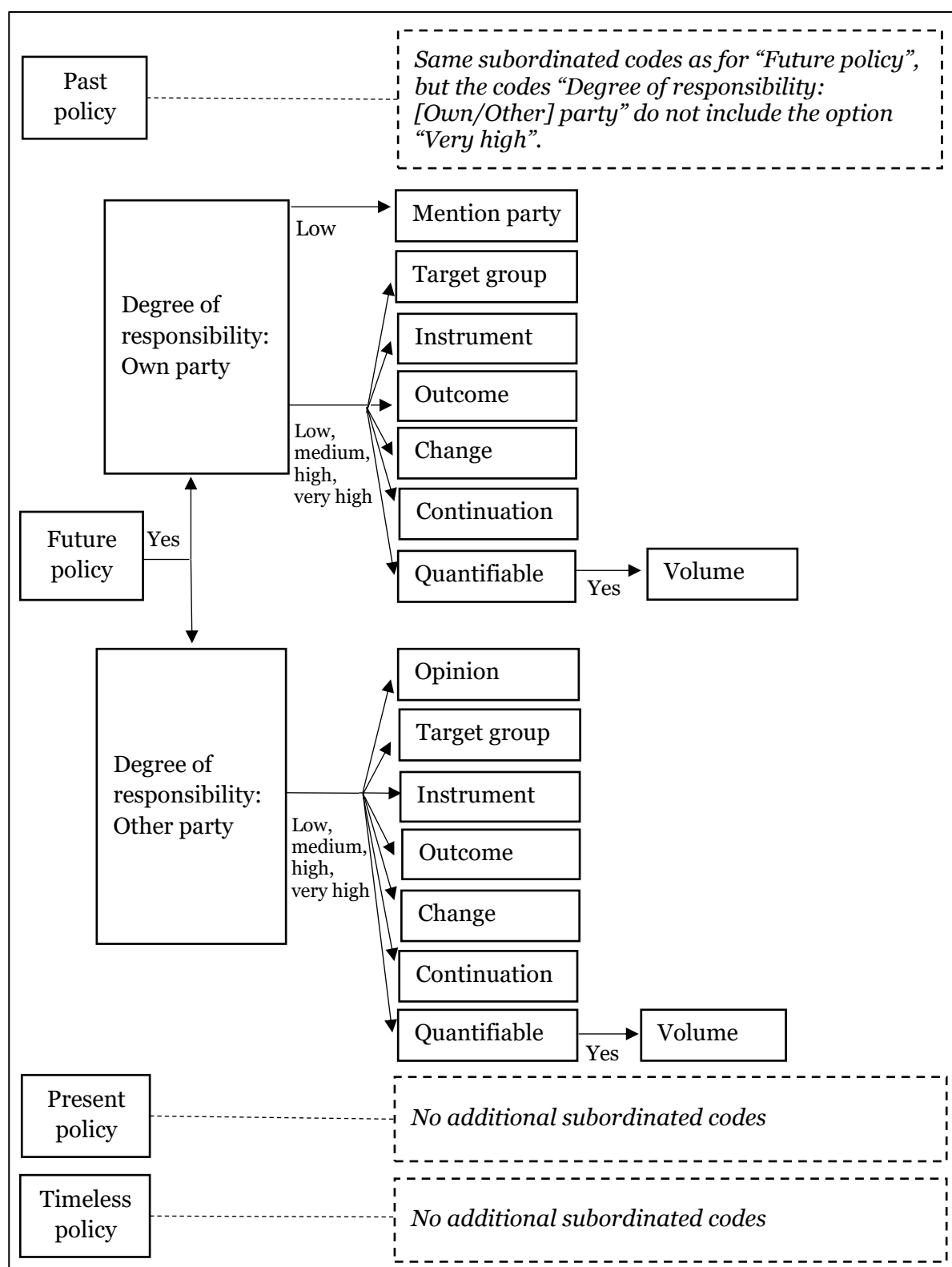
3.3.2 Overview of codes

Since I define commitments as statements where a party takes high responsibility for a future policy, three important aspects were important to clarify in the coding of each quasi-sentence. What is a policy? When does the policy relate to the future? When does the party take responsibility for the policy?

Later in this chapter, I will explain what I consider a policy. In order to classify whether a policy relates to the future, it is important to consider what other types of time categories the policy can take (e.g., the past, the present). This is similar to the responsibility aspect. In order to categorize whether a party takes high responsibility for a policy, it is necessary to consider what it means to take low responsibility for a policy, to not take responsibility, or to ascribe responsibility to other parties. Besides the time and responsibility dimensions of policies, I measured different aspects of the types of policies (e.g., policy instrument or policy outcome). While I do not use these codes here, since they are not part of my definition of commitments, I include them in this method chapter and in the appendix to give a full overview of the coding process. Furthermore, these codes might be useful for future studies that want to get a more nuanced view of the types of policies on which parties make commitments.

The coding tree in Figure 3.1 gives an overview of the different codes. The codes are hierarchical, which means that I only coded subordinated codes if the coding of a superior code received a specific value. In the codebook, I wrote in the beginning of a code if it was dependent on another code, using square brackets, e.g., “A3.2.4: [if 1 in A3.2.2] Is the party explicitly mentioning themselves as being responsible?” Here, the subordinated code was only answered if the answer to the superior code A3.2.2 was 1 (“Low responsibility”). The software R helped coders keep track of the different hierarchical codes so the coder did not have to figure out whether they had to deliver an answer to a specific code (read more about the use of R in paragraph 3.4.2).

Figure 3.1: Coding tree: An overview of the codes



Notes: Time codes (past, future, present, and timeless) are superior codes. Responsibility codes are subordinated to past and future (no subordinated codes to present and timeless). Mention party, opinion, and codes about policy type are subordinated to the responsibility codes. Volume is subordinated to the quantifiable code. Words outside the boxes show the category that the superior code needs to take before a subordinated code has to be coded.

3.3.3 First step: Identifying policy statements

Politics is about the “authoritative allocation” of values (cf. definition in Easton, 1953), i.e. politics is about policies. The first task was therefore to identify whether a party was talking about a policy in the quasi-sentence. A policy is about a political value in society (material as well as immaterial). The value can be economic, legal, health related, environmental, cultural, social, technological, infrastructural, educational, diplomatic, democratic, bureaucratic and/or safety-related. The statement did not need to mention the value explicitly but might refer to it implicitly (e.g., “We will implement a comprehensive programme to expand the number of school pupils” concerns the educational value). If the statement was without political substance, it was coded as 0 on each of the following time variables (e.g. “The world is not as it was before”, “The election is about the future”, “We wanted a revolution”, “We offer you new ideas and a new president”).

The coder derived the political value from the quasi-sentence. In contrast, the policy’s attributes regarding the time perspective (e.g. past or future), responsibility (own or another party), target group and change/continuation could be derived from other quasi-sentences, but only if these quasi-sentences belonged to the same full sentence (between two full stops) or the same bullet list. Furthermore, if a quasi-sentence used a pronoun that clearly related to a noun from another quasi-sentence, the pronoun was perceived as if the noun took its place (e.g. in the two quasi-sentences “We oppose any carbon tax” and “It would increase energy prices across the board,” the pronoun “it” clearly refers to carbon tax).

3.3.4 Second step: Assigning attributes (time and responsibility)

After having identified a policy in a quasi-sentence, the next step was to assign attributes to the policy. Is it related to the future or not? Is the party taking responsibility for the future policy? A policy relates to the future if the party writes about something that will or should take place in the future. The party takes high responsibility for the future policy if the party explicates an involvement with the provision of a policy (e.g., “We will do”), while it takes very high responsibility if it uses stronger words to guarantee this provision (e.g., “We promise to”). I consider both high and very high responsibility as commitments. If the party only takes low (e.g., “We support to”) or medium (e.g., “We will work to”) responsibility for the future policy or no responsibility at all (e.g., “In 2030, the number will increase”), the statement does not include a commitment. The detailed descriptions for the future and responsibility codes

are in Appendix 3. In Appendix 3, I also include the descriptions for the rest of the codes.

3.4 Coding procedure

3.4.1 Overview of the coding process

Eight coders coded the election manifestos. They were introduced at different stages of the process from the production of the codebook to the final coding (see Table 3.2 for an overview).

Table 3.2: Overview of training period – across eight coders (C1-C8)

Phase	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
Large modifications of codebook	X	X						
Training incl. minor modifications of codebook	X	X	X	X	X			
Reliability test		X	X	X	X			
Final coding (part 1)	X	X	X	X	X			
Training						X	X	X
Reliability test						X	X	X
Final coding (part 2)		X	X	X		X	X	X

Before I describe each phase of the process below, I explain how the coding team used R during the training and final coding phases.

3.4.2 Using R when coding

Coding was done in R during the training phase as well as in the coding phase. When a coder ran the script in the programme, the coder was shown an opening question about whether they were ready to begin. When the coder pressed “1”, quasi-sentences from the manifesto were shown. One quasi-sentence was red, which meant that this was the sentence being coded at that moment. A few quasi-sentences before and after the current quasi-sentence were also shown to give the coder information about the textual context. If the coder needed additional textual context, the coder could find the whole election manifesto in a separate file.

The coder was then asked to give the quasi-sentence a value on a set of codes, and when the coder pressed “1” to the final question (“Finish?”), the procedure began again with the next quasi-sentence. A view of the screen in R is shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: The screen in R during coding (the red line is the quasi-sentence being coded)

```

Ready to begin? (1 = Yes): 1
353 •Since the PATRIOT Act was passed, four terrorist cells have been broken up inside the United States and more than 189 individuals
have been convicted or pled guilty to terrorism-related offenses.
354 First Responders
355 President Bush knows that America's firefighters, local law enforcement, and other first responders play a critical role in protec
ting the homeland.
356 Hundreds of firefighters and police officers gave their lives to help their fellow citizens on September 11, 2001, and should anot
her attack ever come, they will be first at the scene again.
357 They must have the tools they need to perform their jobs as safely and effectively as possible.
358 To this end, the President and Congress have massively increased spending for our nation's first responders.
359 They have worked with governors, mayors, and tribal and local leaders to implement an integrated and federally supported approach
to protecting communities.
360 • States and localities have received more than $13 billion since 2001.
361 • Assistance to Firefighter Grants are up 400 percent since 2001.
Past policy (0 = No, 1 = Yes): 0
Future policy (0 = No, 1 = Yes): 1
--> Degree of responsibility - own party (0 = No responsibility, 1 = Low, 2 = Medium, 3 = High, 4 = Very high): 1
--> Mentioning party (0 = No, 1 = Yes): 0
--> Group (0 = No, 1 = Yes): 1
--> Instrument (0 = No, 1 = Yes): |

```

Using this computer programme had several advantages: First, I expected to minimize the number of errors made by each coder. For instance, the coder could only use numbers accepted by the programme, which were defined by me (if the coder entered a wrong number, R asked the coder to answer the code again), and the coder was only asked about a code if it was relevant given the answer to a code that it was eventually dependent on (that is, a subordinated code). Furthermore, R reminded the coder about each category when the code was being coded. Second, I expected that the coding was faster than doing it in a spreadsheet, since it could be too demanding to keep an overview of the different hierarchical codes. Finally, I had the opportunity to keep track of how long it took the coders to code each quasi-sentence. This was useful to know when I was planning how many manifestos I had time to code.

3.4.3 Training phase

As a first step, I produced the codebook based on initial readings of election manifestos to get a sense of how parties write these documents. Afterwards, I created the different codes, wrote a short description of each code, added values to each code, and included examples to illustrate what kind of quasi-sentences belongs to each value. The coding team (C1 and C2) read the codebook, discussed clarifications, and suggested improvements of the codebook before and after coding actual manifesto quasi-sentences. The codebook took on many forms during this stage.

Once the codebook was close to a final version, and the coding was sufficiently reliable, I hired additional coders to code manifesto quasi-sentences (C3, C4, C5). Again, they trained based on examples of manifesto quasi-sentences, they asked questions, and we had weekly meetings to discuss uncertainties about interpretation of specific codes and specific quasi-sentences. I made minor modifications of the codebook when necessary. After I had achieved high reliability scores, five coders started to code the manifesto

quasi-sentences (the allocation of quasi-sentences was randomized, see below). Later, I hired and trained three additional coders (C6, C7, C8) to help me finish the coding of all manifestos. The training phase of these coders resembled the training phases of the initial coders.

The coders were very motivated to increase the agreement rate, wrote notes, and asked clarifying questions, which partially explains why the results improved greatly during the training phase. The student workers could write questions to me in an online spreadsheet, so each student worker was aware of questions from the others and my responses to them. However, during the reliability tests, coders were not allowed to ask questions to each other or to me in order to ensure valid kappa values. They asked around 60 questions in the training phases and 160 questions in the final phases in this online spreadsheet. After several weeks of training and satisfactory levels of reliability, I began the real coding phase.

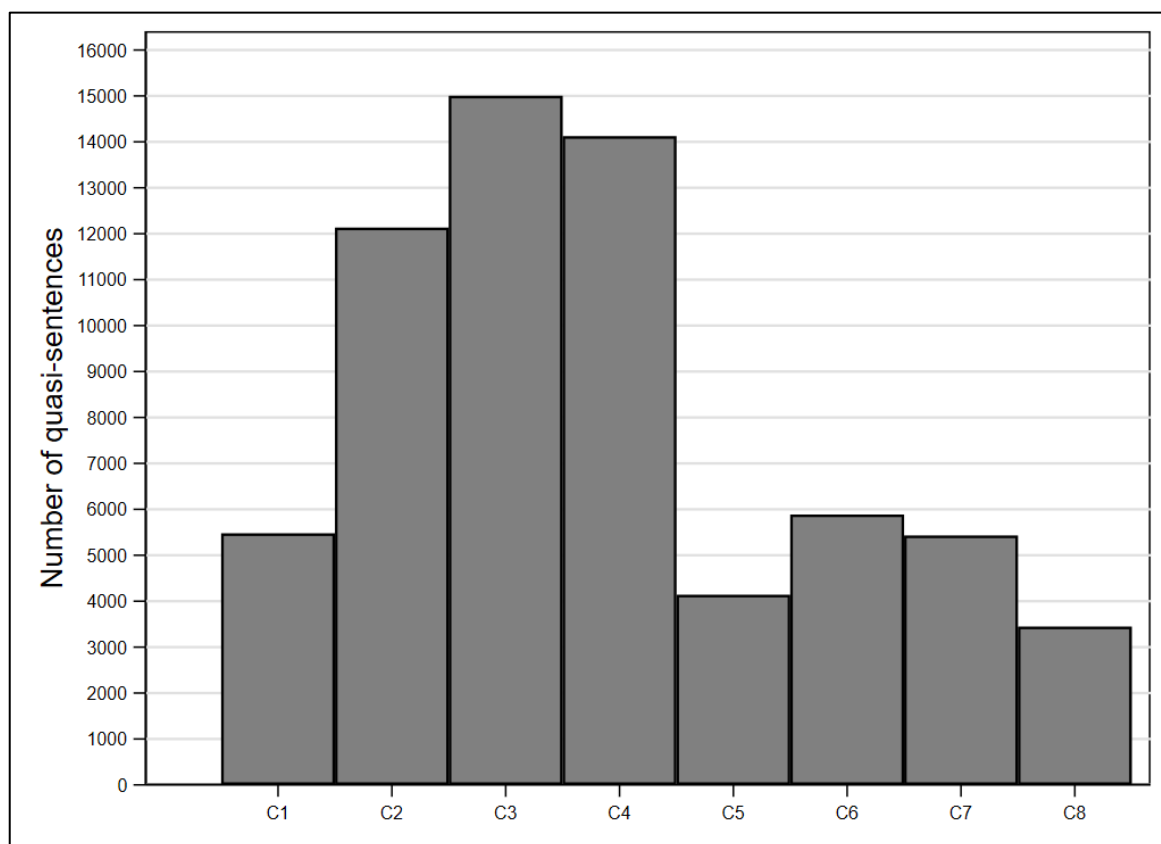
3.4.4 Coding phase

In the coding phase, coders were assigned to different quasi-sentences. These quasi-sentences were randomized to avoid systematic biases within and across manifestos. For instance, one coder coded quasi-sentences 1, 4, 9 and 10 from an election manifesto, and another coded sentences 2, 8 and 11 from the same manifesto. If a manifesto is divided into paragraphs or chapters focusing on one or a few other issues, it would be a problem to allocate the quasi-sentences in lumps (e.g. quasi-sentences 1-200 to C1, 201-400 to C2, etc.). If one coder was consistently a bit more likely to code a quasi-sentence as, say, being related to the future, this could bias the results in the analysis, so any effects were due to coder biases, not strategic considerations by the political parties. Another advantage of randomizing the sentences, reported by the coders, was that each quasi-sentence was now evaluated with fresh eyes. Before randomization, there was a risk that the coders did some of the coding on autopilot because the coding of one quasi-sentence was mistakenly coded based on the previous sentences.

Some coders had to stop coding during the final coding phases, and other coders took over their quasi-sentences. However, each manifesto was coded by at least four and up to seven coders, and even though some coders coded more quasi-sentences in a manifesto than others, each quasi-sentence was still chosen randomly. I did one randomization before the final coding 1 and another randomization before the final coding 2 (because I wanted to randomize the quasi-sentences that C1 and C5 were not able to code). Figure 3.3 shows the number of quasi-sentences that each coder coded for the final dataset. In

total, 65,630 quasi-sentences across the 97 election manifestos were coded for the dissertation.

Figure 3.3: Number of quasi-sentences by coder



Notes: N: 65,630.

3.5 Reliability tests

I conducted several reliability tests with the coders. Table 3.1 shows the results of the final reliability tests for the first group of coders (before part 1 of the final coding phase) and the second group of coders (before part 2 of the final coding phase). The tests are combined.

Table 3.3: Results from reliability tests

Code	N	Agreement	κ
Past	797	0.91	0.75
Past - Own responsibility	163	0.83	0.65
Past - Own responsibility - Mention party	7	1.00	1.00
Past - Own responsibility - Group	43	0.93	0.73
Past - Own responsibility - Instrument	43	0.79	0.58
Past - Own responsibility - Outcome	43	0.77	0.52
Past - Own responsibility - Change	43	0.65	0.46
Past - Own responsibility - Continuation	43	0.95	0.73
Past - Own responsibility - Quantifiable	43	0.88	0.69
Past - Own responsibility - Quantifiable - Volume	8	0.75	0.50
Past - Other responsibility	163	0.89	0.79
Past - Other responsibility - Opinion about other party	57	0.81	0.38
Past - Other responsibility - Group	57	0.88	0.52
Past - Other responsibility - Instrument	57	0.75	0.53
Past - Other responsibility - Outcome	57	0.77	0.54
Past - Other responsibility - Change	57	0.54	0.33
Past - Other responsibility - Continuation	57	0.95	0.00
Past - Other responsibility - Quantifiable	57	0.82	0.58
Past - Other responsibility - Quantifiable - Volume	12	0.83	0.67
Future	797	0.90	0.81
Future - Own responsibility	394	0.80	0.66
Future - Own responsibility - Mention party	200	0.94	0.88
Future - Own responsibility - Group	346	0.88	0.71
Future - Own responsibility - Instrument	346	0.78	0.56
Future - Own responsibility - Outcome	346	0.74	0.46
Future - Own responsibility - Change	346	0.57	0.37
Future - Own responsibility - Continuation	346	0.90	0.57
Future - Own responsibility - Quantifiable	346	0.85	0.36
Future - Own responsibility - Quantifiable - Volume	20	0.95	0.77
Future - Other responsibility	394	0.94	0.36
Future - Other responsibility - Opinion about other party	9	0.78	-0.13
Future - Other responsibility - Group	9	0.89	0.61
Future - Other responsibility - Instrument	9	1.00	1.00
Future - Other responsibility - Outcome	9	0.67	0.37
Future - Other responsibility - Change	9	0.89	0.75

Future - Other responsibility - Continuation	9	1.00	1.00
Future - Other responsibility - Quantifiable	9	0.89	0.78
Future - Other responsibility - Quantifiable - Volume	4	1.00	1.00
Present	797	0.92	0.55
No time	797	0.92	0.65

In Table 3.4, I group agreement and kappa values into intervals. In the table, I show how Landis and Koch (1977) interpret the strength of agreement for each interval (based on the kappa-values).

Table 3.4: The number of codes within different intervals of agreement and kappa values

Interval	Agreement	κ	Strength of agreement (κ)
< 0.00	0	1	Poor
0.00-0.20	0	1	Slight
0.21-0.40	0	6	Fair
0.41-0.60	2	12	Moderate
0.61-0.80	11	14	Substantial
0.80-1.00	23	2	Almost perfect

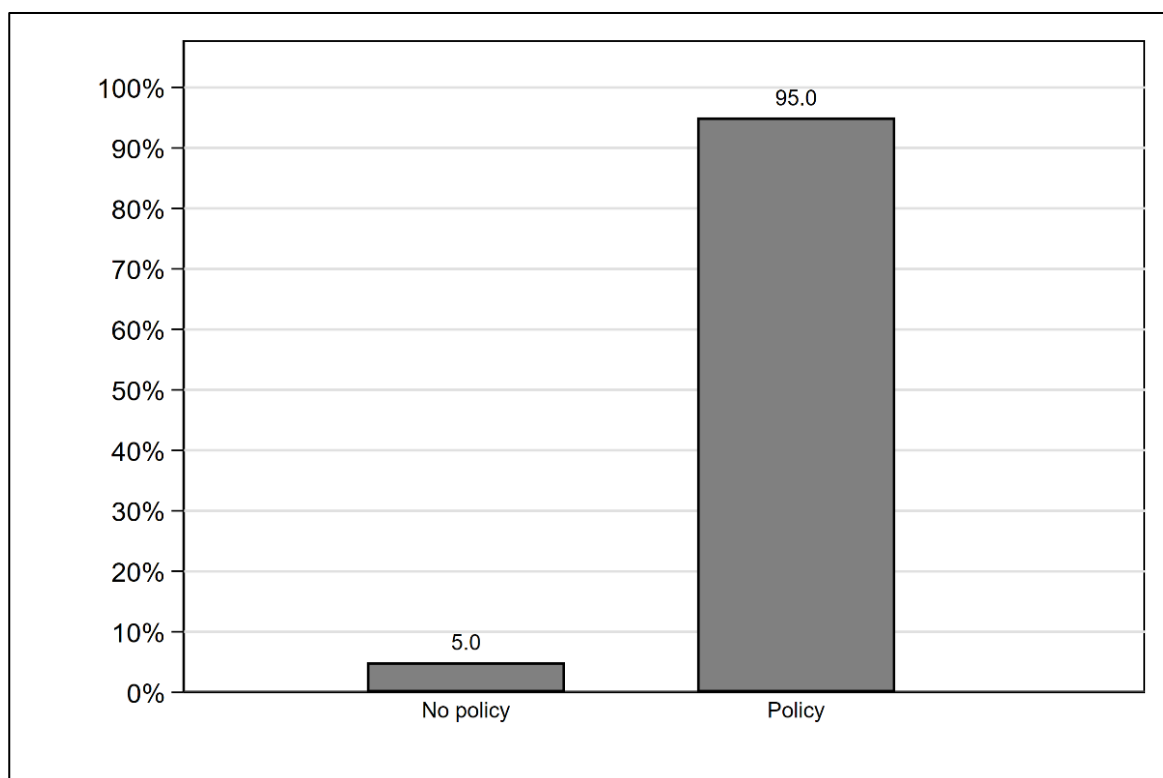
Notes: The interpretation of the strength of agreement (κ) comes from (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Only two codes have poor or slight values, six codes have fair values, and 28 of the codes (or 80%) have at least moderate values. This suggests that future research can reliably use many of the codes from this dissertation. The two codes that I use for this dissertation are “Future” and “Future – Own responsibility”. Their kappa values are 0.81 (almost perfect) and 0.66 (substantial). However, for the responsibility code, I only include those statements where the party takes high or very responsibility for the future policy. If I calculate the reliability of this code by only distinguishing between future policies with this level of responsibility (high/very high responsibility) and future policies without (no/low/medium responsibility), the kappa value is 0.82 (almost perfect). Therefore, I can reliably use these two codes to identify commitments.

3.6 Distributions: Policy, future, responsibility

Figure 3.4, Figure 3.5, and Figure 3.6 show the distribution of the three aspects relating to my definition of a commitment: policy, future, responsibility. As shown in Figure 3.4, most quasi-sentences contain policies, which makes sense since election manifestos are written with the purpose of discussing politics in election campaigns.

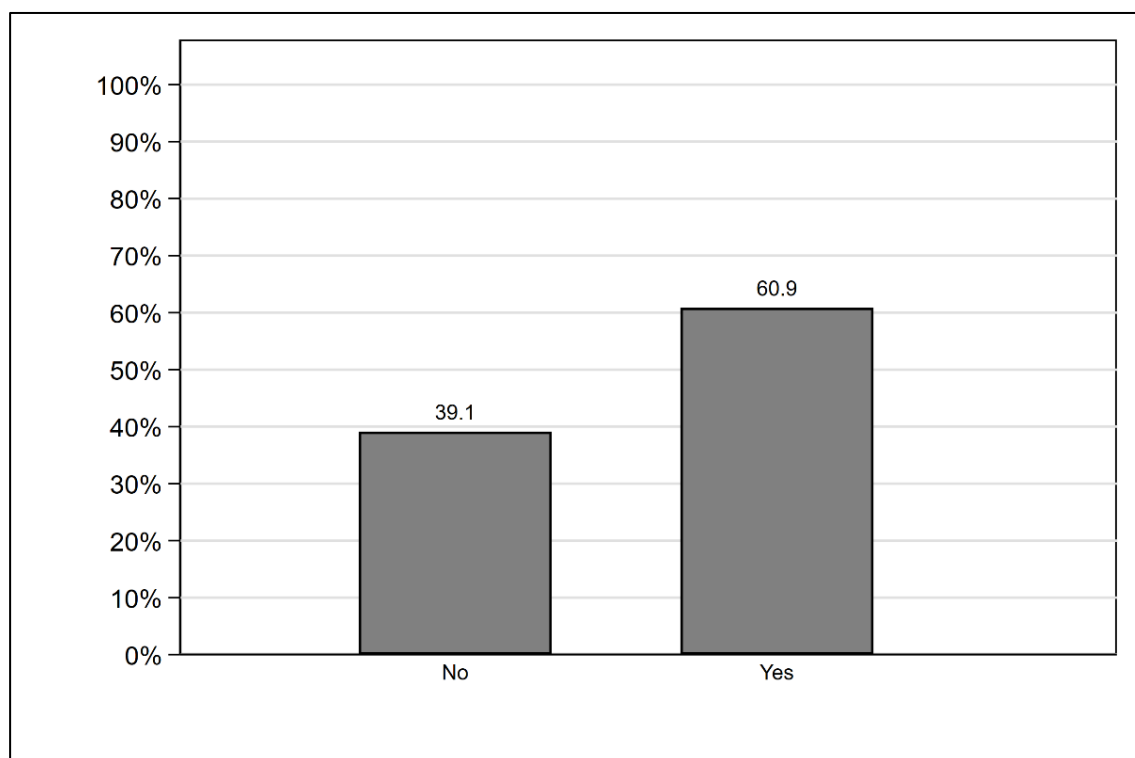
Figure 3.4: Policy or no policy.



Notes: N: 65,630. Policy = at least one of the four superior codes (future, past, present, or timeless) scores 1. No policy = none of the four superior codes score 1.

Figure 3.5 shows that parties do spend most of the time talking about future policies. However, almost 40 percent of the quasi-sentences do not relate to the future. This suggests that elections are not only used to make claims about what will happen after the election but also, perhaps, what happened in the previous election period.

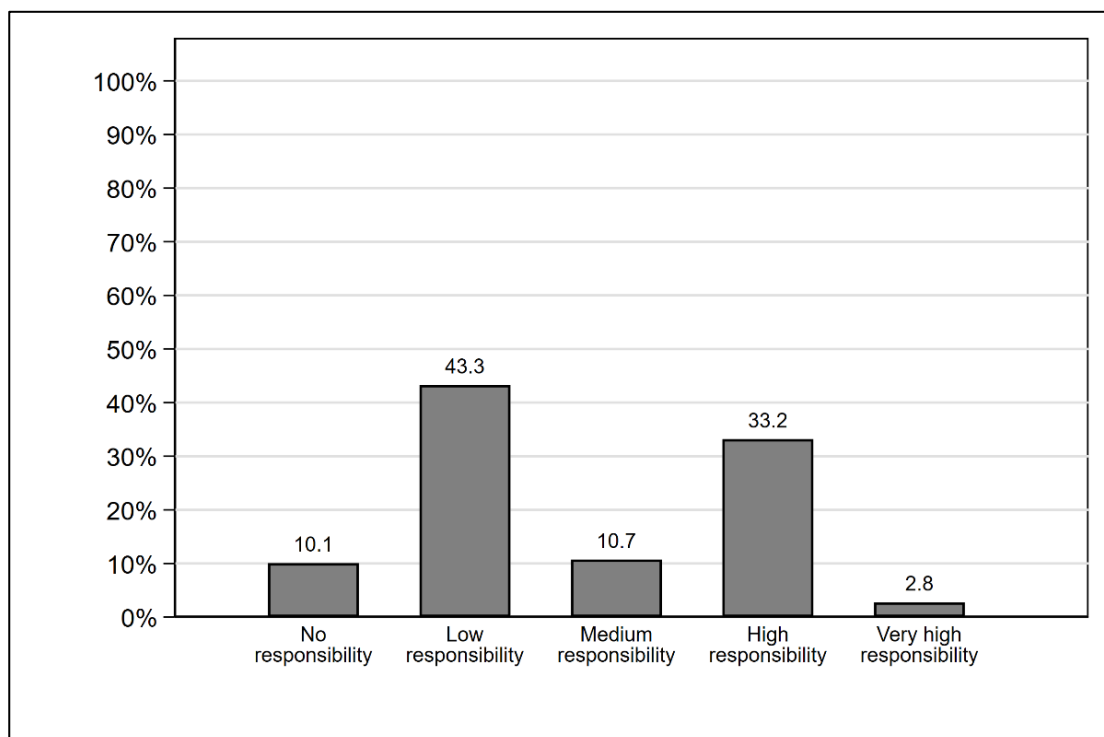
Figure 3.5: Is the statement about one or more policies in the future?



Notes: N: 65,630.

Figure 3.6 shows that parties very often take high responsibility for their future policies. Note that the figure only includes quasi-sentences that talk about a future policy. When parties talk about future policies, they do it in a committing way 33.2 percent (high responsibility) and 2.8 percent (very high responsibility) of the time.

Figure 3.6: How much responsibility is the party taking for the policy? (Future)



Notes: N: 39,951. The distribution of responsibility taking is only among future policies.

Appendix 4 shows the distribution for all of the codes in the dataset.

3.7 The dependent variable: The share of policy commitments

After all quasi-sentences were coded, I categorized each of them based on whether they contained a commitment. If a quasi-sentence contained future policies, and the party took high responsibility for at least one of them, I defined it as a commitment. Table 3.5 provides examples from the dataset.

Table 3.5: Examples of quasi-sentences belonging to different coding categories (welfare issue)

Own party			
	No responsibility	Low responsibility	High responsibility
Future	<p>“There will be more vulnerable old people who need a helping hand” (Denmark, Social Democratic Party, 2015)</p> <p>“one in four care homes may go out of business within three years” (United Kingdom, United Kingdom Independence Party, 2017)</p>	<p>“At the same time, regular ambulances should be improved” (Denmark, Socialist People’s Party, 2011)</p> <p>“Our ambition is to prevent 300,000 avoidable deaths over the next decade” (United Kingdom, Labour Party, 2001)</p>	<p>“We will implement a ban on smoking during school hours for everyone under the age of 18” (Denmark, Conservative People’s Party, 2019)</p> <p>“We will provide tax credits to Americans who are approaching retirement age and those who are between jobs so they can afford quality, reliable coverage.” (United States, Democratic Party, 2004)</p>
Past	<p>“50,000 people have had accessible vehicles removed since PIPs [Personal Independence Payment] were introduced” (United Kingdom, United Kingdom Independence Party, 2017)</p> <p>“Since 2010, billions of pounds have been cut from budgets that pay for adult social care” (United Kingdom, Labour Party, 2015)</p>	<p>“The Government was right to ensure people make greater pension provision” (United Kingdom, Democratic Unionist Party, 2019)</p> <p>“We also applaud the addition of income relation for the Medicare Part B premium to further protect the Medicare program for the future and to protect low income seniors from increased costs” (United States, Republican Party, 2004)</p>	<p>“We have created more freedom for doctors under education by abolishing the 6-year-rule” (Denmark, Liberal Alliance, 2019)</p> <p>“Over the last nine years, we have extended the offer of free childcare hours to more working parents” (United Kingdom, Conservative Party, 2019)</p>

The table shows how parties can take different levels of responsibility (or even no responsibility) for future as well as past policies within welfare. I have not shown examples where a party ascribes responsibility to other parties. The table clearly illustrates how parties can talk about welfare issues in different ways. A party can make a commitment by saying that it will place a ban on smoking or provide tax credits. It can also emphasize what it has done previously, for instance creating more freedom for doctors or extending the offer of free childcare hours. The party can also talk about the future or the past with-

out taking responsibility, for instance by predicting how the number of vulnerable old people will increase or by highlighting how many people have lost access to vehicles.

Since this dissertation focuses on parties' policy-committing strategy, I only measure parties' relative use of commitments in their communication. As a final step, I therefore calculated the share of commitment within an issue.

In order to know the issue of a quasi-sentence, I take advantage of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2020), which categorizes each quasi-sentence on a number of issue codes. Some are positional (e.g. the military issue, which has two related codes: "Military: Positive (per104)" and "Military: Negative (per105)"); some do not have a clear counterpart (e.g. the environment has one related code: "Environmental protection (per501)"). Which issues I include depends on the specific hypothesis. For hypothesis 1 and 2, I focus on the effect of positional distance and positional change and therefore only include positional issues. For hypothesis 3, I include all political issues.

I use the following formula to calculate the share of commitments within an issue:

$$SC_i = \frac{C_i}{N_i} \times 100,$$

*where i is the issue, C is the number of commitments,
and N is the number of quasi-sentences.*

If there are no quasi-sentences on an issue, the issue is excluded from the analysis. These issues are less relevant since I am interested in how parties talk about specific positions or issues *when* they talk about them. Furthermore, the share of commitments can only be zero if the party does not talk about an issue so I risk overestimating the number of zeros if I include them. However, in each paper, I have shown that the results do not change substantively when I include these observations.

3.8 Measuring the independent variables

When I measured parties' positions on and saliency of different issues, I followed the often used logarithmic formulas proposed by Lowe et al. (2011).

Position (P) comes from the following formula:

$$P_i = \log(R_i + 0.5) - \log(L_i + 0.5),$$

*where i is the issue, R is the number of right-oriented quasi-sentences,
and L is the number of left-oriented quasi-sentences.*

If a party did not write any right- or left-oriented quasi-sentences on an issue, the position is 0. I measured positional distance by taking the average distance from one party to each of the other parties on an issue at a specific election. I measured positional change from one election to the next by separating observations into three categories: No change (including minor changes below 0.5 on the positional scale), ideological dilution (changes towards or across the centre), and ideological crystallization (changes towards the extreme from a centre, a left-leaning or a right-leaning position).

Saliency (Sa) came from the following formula:

$$Sa_i = \log\left(\frac{Se_i+1}{N}\right),$$

where i is the issue, Se is the number of quasi-sentences within an issue i , and N is the total number of sentences in the manifesto.

I measured saliency change from one election to the next by subtracting the saliency of an issue at the current election from the saliency at the previous election.

3.9 Estimation model

The specific estimation model and details about the included control variables are explained in each of the papers that are part of this dissertation.

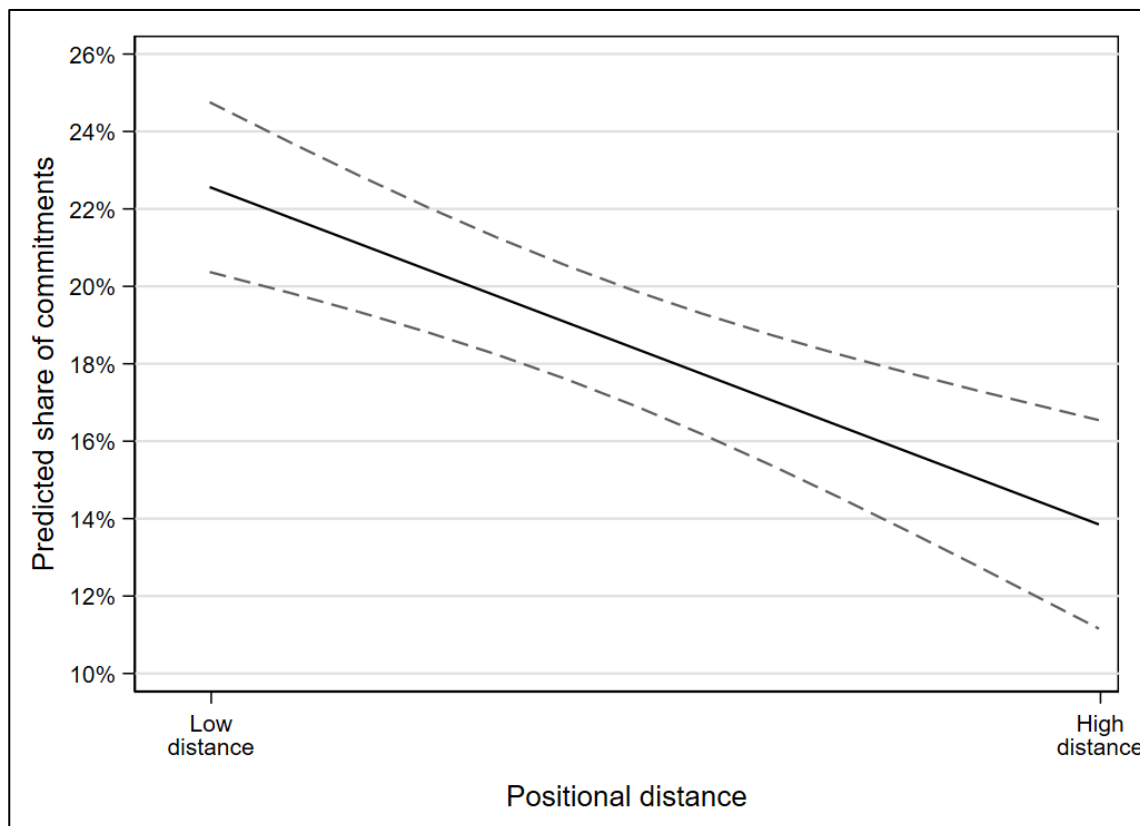
Chapter 4: Main findings

In this chapter, I will give a brief overview of the findings from the dissertation by going through each of the hypotheses in turn.

4.1 Hypothesis 1: When parties become too similar

In the first hypothesis, I expected that parties would make more commitments when they are closer to other parties on their positions. The regression analysis supports this expectation. The coefficient of positional distance is -3.36 and significant ($p < 0.001$), meaning that parties make fewer commitments when they are more distant to other parties (see Table A5.1 in the appendix). This is similar to saying that parties make more commitments when they are closer to their competitors.

Figure 4.1 The effect of positional distance on share of commitments within issues



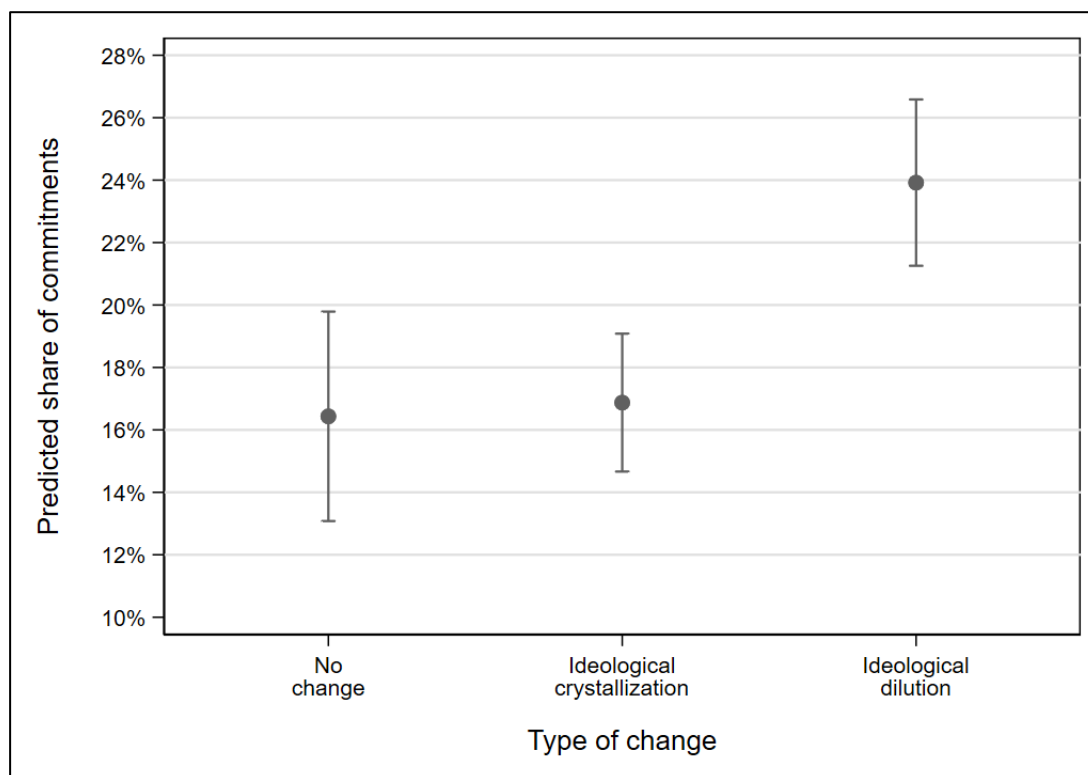
Notes: Pooled OLS-regression (N: 924), see Table A5.1 in the appendix. Controlling for issue-specific effects and time trends. Confidence intervals are at the 95-level. Low distance is 0.97 (10th percentile), high distance is 3.56 (90th percentile).

Figure 4.1 illustrates the size of the effect with predicted values on the dependent variable across different levels of the independent variable (spanning from the observation at the 10th percentile to the observation at the 90th percentile). The share of commitments within issues is 22.6 percent when the distance is low compared to 13.8 when the distance is high.

4.2 Hypothesis 2: When parties change their mind

In the second hypothesis, I expected parties to make a higher share of commitments within issues when they have diluted their position compared to when they have not changed or crystallized their position. In Table A5.2 in the appendix, I find support for this hypothesis. The significant coefficient of 7.49 ($p < 0.001$) for the ideological dilution category illustrates that parties make more commitments when they have diluted their position compared to the reference category (no change of position).

Figure 4.2 The effect of positional change on share of commitments within issues



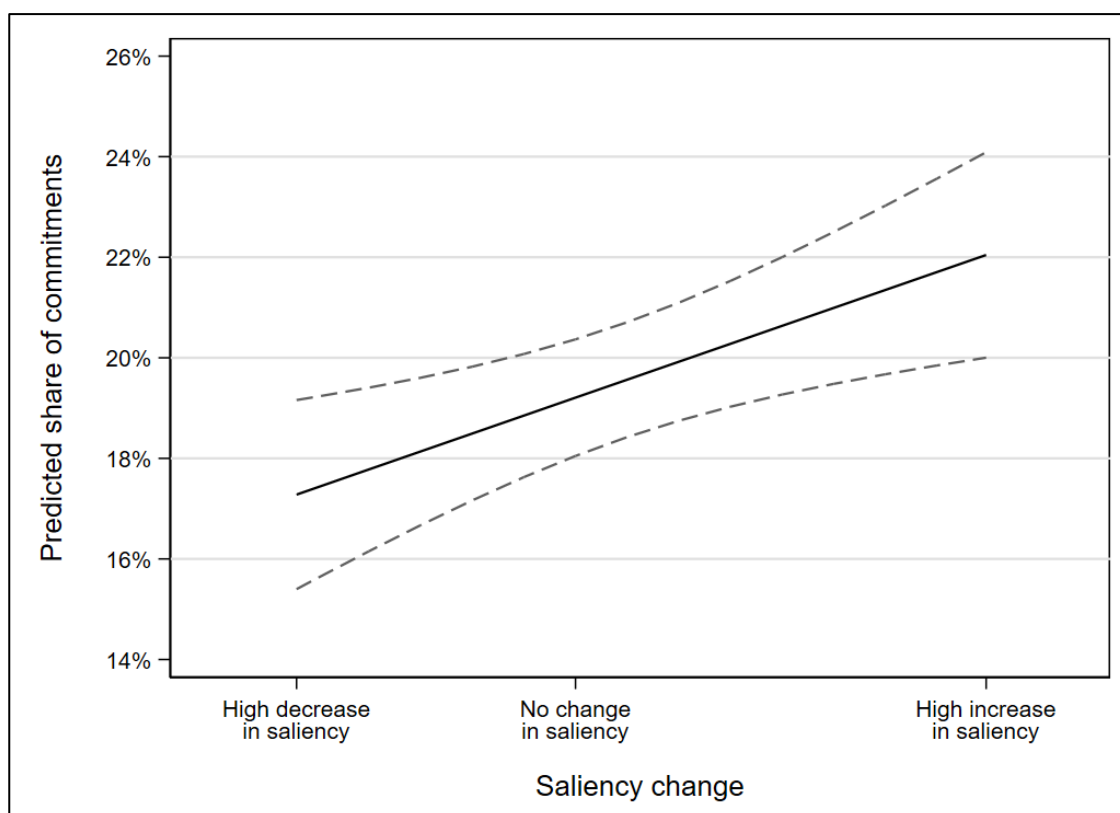
Notes: Pooled OLS-regression ($N = 764$), see Table A5.2 in appendix. Controlling for country-specific as well as issue-specific effects, government status, issue saliency, and time trends. Confidence intervals are at the 95-level. “No change” includes minor changes (less than 0.5). “Ideological crystallization” includes changes towards the extreme. “Ideological dilution” includes changes towards the centre.

Figure 4.2 clearly depicts this difference by showing the predicted values of the share of commitments within issues across the three categories on the independent variable. When parties do not change position or crystallize their position, they make around 16.4 and 16.9 percent commitments. When parties dilute their position, the predicted share of commitment is more than seven percentage points higher with 23.9 percent commitments.

4.3 Hypothesis 3: When parties abruptly increase their attention to an issue

The third and final hypothesis expected that parties would make more commitments when they have increased the saliency of an issue. This is exactly what Table A5.3 in the appendix finds. The coefficient of 1.79 is positive and significant ($p < 0.01$).

Figure 4.3 The effect of saliency change on share of commitments within issues



Notes: Pooled OLS-regression ($N = 1,437$), see Table A5.3 in the appendix. Controlling for issue engagement at previous election, issue-specific effects, and time trends. Confidence intervals are at the 95-level. High decrease in saliency is -1.08 (10th percentile). High increase in saliency is 1.59 (90th percentile).

Figure 4.3 makes it easier to interpret the substantial size of this effect by showing the predicted share of commitments within issues across selected values of the saliency change variable. When parties have a large decrease in saliency of an issue (the 10th percentile of the independent variable), the share of commitments is only 17.3 percent, while it increases to 22.0 percent when the parties have increased saliency significantly (the 90th percentile of the independent variable).

4.4 Are the effects limited to specific countries and the government status of the party?

To test the universality of these findings, I ran two interaction analyses. First, I tested whether each of the three main effects is dependent on the specific country in which it occurs. Second, I tested whether each of the three main effects is dependent on the government status of the party. When I moderate each of the two variables with the main independent variables, I use the same estimation strategy as for each of the three main analyses (including the control variables). I find no overall interaction effects with the two moderating variables (country and government status) for any of the three primary independent variables (positional distance, type of change, and saliency change). Wald test scores show p-values of 0.66 (positional distance X country), 0.26 (positional distance X government status), 0.34 (type of change X country), 0.29 (type of change X government status), 0.22 (saliency change X country), and 0.31 (saliency change X government status).

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Why parties make commitments

This dissertation started with the question why parties make policy commitments. Even though parties eventually fulfil a large majority of commitments (Thomson et al., 2017), the motivation for making commitments have remained largely unexplored until now. With this dissertation, I have shown that parties are likely to make more commitments under three circumstances. When a party's position is similar to other parties' position, when a party has diluted its political position, and when a party has increased the saliency of an issue. I argue that in all three situations, the motivation is credibility.

The findings contribute to the literature on policy commitments, which has mainly studied the effects of commitments (on policy-making, voters, and media) not why they are made. I will discuss the importance of these findings for research on the fulfilment of commitments later, but first, I will explain their wider implications for research on party competition and voter behaviour. I conclude the chapter by discussing the implications of this dissertation for the functioning of representative democracies.

5.2 A new understanding of party competition

5.2.1 Explaining the increase of commitments over time

The findings of this dissertation provide a way to understand party competition in modern time. In the introduction, I highlighted the increase in policy commitments over the last 30-50 years (see Figure 1.1 and Figure A1.1). This increase coincided with major structural changes in the linkage between parties and voters across Western societies, which have made parties' need for credibility higher than perhaps ever before.

Previously, parties could rely on the support of specific voter groups based on their social classes. Workers supported the social democratic parties, while employers voted for the liberal and conservative parties (Hibbs, 1977; Korpi, 1983). Yet, the effect of structural factors such as socioeconomic class on vote choice has gradually diminished (Kriesi et al., 2006; Stubager, 2013). Even if a new type of socioeconomic conflict based on education and occupation has taken over (Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Stubager, 2013), research concludes that the party system has generally become more volatile and fragmented (Mair, 2013; Vries & Hobolt, 2020). The number of parties has increased

in multi-party systems, people feel less attached to specific parties, they increasingly postpone their voting decisions until few weeks or even days before the election, and when they vote, they are less loyal to specific parties (Dalton, 2000; Mair, 2013; Schmitt-Beck & Partheymüller, 2012; Thomassen, 2005). In short, elections increasingly become competitions on issues and positions that are not necessarily rooted in voters' socioeconomic background but strategically chosen by parties (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010; Wattenberg & Dalton, 2000). Combined with a generally high level of mistrust in politicians (Catterberg, 2006), the parties' pursuit of credibility is not surprising. As I have argued, the policy-committing strategy is crucial for parties that compete on making voters perceive them as the most credible party.

When elections become less predictable, parties have to be more flexible in their viewpoints to better accommodate the preferences of the volatile voters. More often than previously, they might end in situations where they take the same positions as other parties (because their constituencies are less distinct) or need to change positions and issue priorities (because they cannot rely on the same voting base election after election). The findings of this dissertation show that parties respond to these situations by committing to their viewpoints in order to gain credibility. The need for credibility, therefore, might not only explain parties' production of commitments at the individual election; it might also explain the broader transformation of party communication that has occurred in recent decades.

5.2.2 Increasing credibility in the short term

The main argument of this dissertation is that parties make commitments to gain credibility and can use the policy-committing strategy to try to increase credibility in the short term. This provides a new way of understanding credibility in the context of party competition, since the literature mainly perceives achievement of credibility as a long-term endeavour.

The argument has been that parties can increase credibility by focusing on a specific issue or position over many years (Meguid, 2008; Petrocik, 1996). A party gains credibility after a history of attention, initiative, and innovation on specific issues (Petrocik, 1996). Empirically, voters' perceptions of a party's credibility is rather stable over time (Seeberg, 2017). The literature has mainly argued that in the short term, parties try to avoid a *decrease* in credibility when they make decisions on their position on and saliency of specific issues (Adams et al., 2011; Downs, 1957: 109; Laver, 1997: 115; Tavits, 2007; Wickham-Jones, 2005).

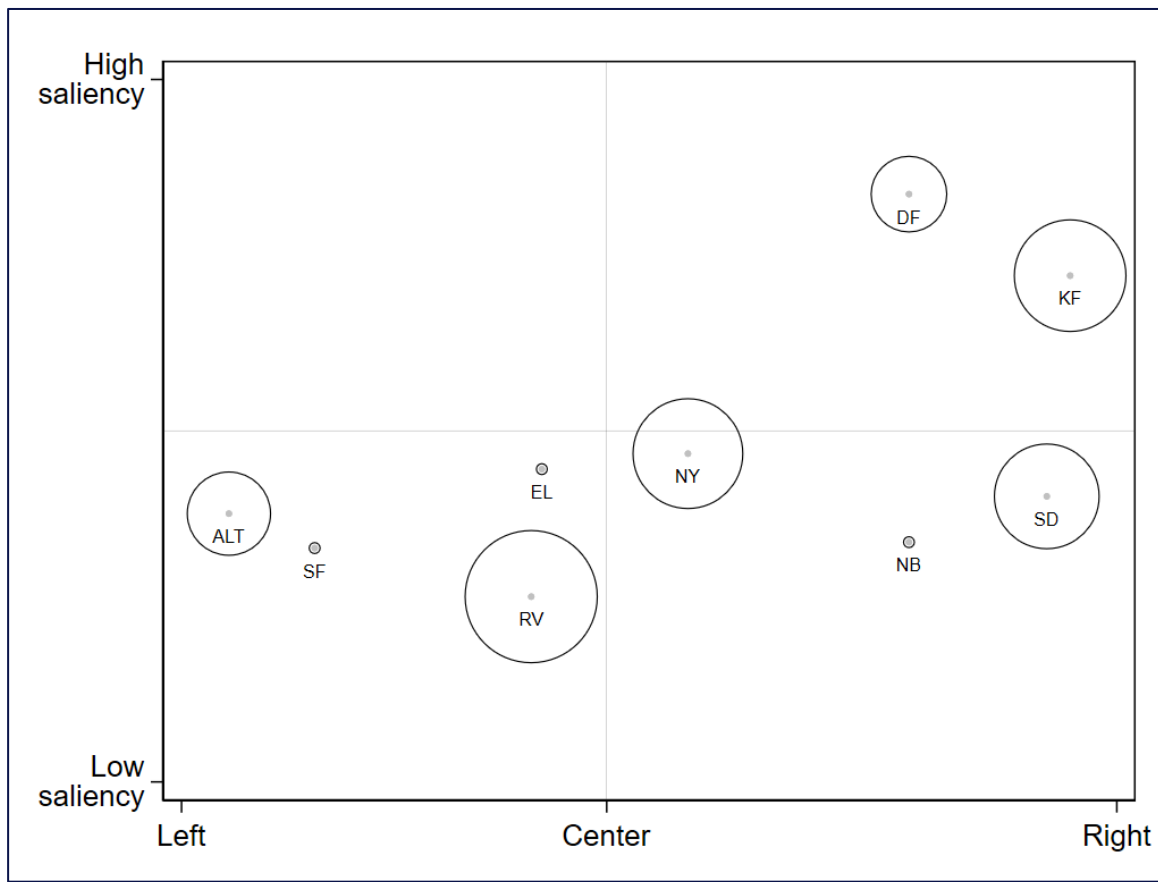
However, if parties are without chance of increasing their credibility in the short term, they will often be in trouble in modern-day politics. For instance, as I have argued in this dissertation, when parties become too similar, or when parties change their positions or issue priorities, they need credibility here and now in order to be competitive at the election. The policy-committing strategy allows parties to attempt to make their policy viewpoints credible in the short term. Parties do so by directing their attention to the future instead of focusing on their past behaviour and long-term dedication to an issue.

5.2.3 Defining party viewpoints in a new way

The findings also provide the party competition literature with the empirical insight that we should not only define parties' viewpoints based on what they want (position) and how much they want them (saliency) but also how they articulate these viewpoints (degree of commitment). In this way, a party can strategically give its viewpoints more weight by binding themselves to them. With the policy-committing strategy, I thus add to the literature a new dimension on which parties compete.

Figure 5.1 visualizes the three dimensions position, saliency, and commitment on law and order in the 2019 Danish election. The parties took very different positions. The green party, called the Alternative (ALT), is to the left and the Conservative People's Party (KF) is to the right. Similarly, the issue was highly salient to some parties, such as the Danish People's Party (DF), while it was less important to others, such as the Social Liberal Party (RV). More interestingly from the perspective of this dissertation, parties committed themselves to different degrees, illustrated by the size of the black circles in Figure 5.1. While the Socialist People's Party (SF), the Red-Green Alliance, and the New Right (NB) differed a lot on their positional stances on the law and order issue, they all chose not to commit on their viewpoints. In contrast, the Social Liberal Party (RV) made a high share of commitments within the issue, just like the party's almost diametrically opposite issue competitor, the Conservative People's Party (KF).

Figure 5.1: Locating Danish parties on the law and order issue, 2019



Notes: Denmark (2019), Law and order-issue. ALT = Alternative, SF = Socialist People's Party, RV = Social Liberal Party, EL = Red-Green Alliance, NY = Liberal Alliance, DF = Danish People's Party, NB = New Right, KF = Conservative People's Party, SD = Social Democratic Party. Horizontal and vertical axes define the position and saliency of parties respectively (marked by the grey dots). The size of the black circles marks the degree of commitment of parties.

5.2.4 Using commitments on ambiguous positions

While I present parties as having one specific position in Figure 5.1 (marked by the grey dots), parties can take positions that are more ambiguous in reality, for instance by taking different positions across different candidates and/or party leaders (Somer-Topcu, 2015; Tromborg, 2020) or within the same election manifesto (Bräuninger & Giger, 2018; Lo et al., 2016). Parties that want to be ambiguous on their positions can benefit by combining this with the policy-committing strategy, as I will explain below.

A party may choose to be ambiguous to broaden its constituency by convincing “different groups of voters with diverse preferences that the party is now closer to their preferred ideological position” (Somer-Topcu, 2015: 842).

With the policy-committing strategy, parties' purpose is not to appear ideologically proximate to different voter groups but to appear credible on their political viewpoints among voters who support these viewpoints (both in terms of position and saliency of the issue).

Being committed to one's viewpoints might sound like being unambiguous about them. However, they differ on the intention by which parties use them. While ambiguity intends to create room for interpretation about a party's position, the policy-committing strategy intends to create certainty about the party's responsibility for a policy. A party can take high responsibility for an ambiguous position (e.g., if the party promises to both *increase* and *decrease* taxes), just as it can take low responsibility for an unambiguous position (e.g., consistently saying that it *supports* lowering taxes). These two dimensions are thus distinctive even though they might correlate.

How do I then expect that the policy-committing strategy will fit into the strategy of ambiguous position taking? A party that wants to appeal broadly by taking ambiguous positions can take advantage of the policy-committing strategy to convince new voters to join its constituency. As Somer-Topcu (2015) argues, a party's core supporters will likely stay with the party. The main challenge is to convince other voters to join them. When a party increases the ambiguity of its position to make it appear proximate to other voters, it can commit to statements that aim to attract them.

For instance, if a party has been left-oriented on welfare and immigration but then takes a more sceptical view on immigrants, it can make its policy stance credible to the anti-immigration voters it wants to attract by committing to this view. They do not have to commit to the welfare issue if the position already aligns with the preferences of their core voters.

Similarly, within a specific issue, a party might become more ambiguous to appeal broadly. For instance, if it takes a left-oriented position on integration of existing immigrants (e.g., "increase public spending on immigrants") but moves to a right-oriented position on the level of immigration (e.g., "stop the immigration flow"), it can commit to the policies related to the latter position (e.g., "We promise to stop the immigration flow"). In this way, the party can appear close *and* credible to the other voters it wants to attract.

5.3 Voter implications of this dissertation

I have argued that commitments should make policies more credible among voters, and that vote-seeking parties should produce commitments for this purpose in three situations: under high positional similarity, after positional dilution, and after an increase in saliency. Future studies could test whether the argument about voters holds in reality.

Results from previous studies suggest that the argument will find support. Bonilla (2022) shows that voters increase expectations to parties when they have made commitments and simply find it more likely that a party will pursue its policies after the election if it has made a commitment on it relative to more vague signals of intention. Stubager and Seeberg (2016) show that parties can increase voters' perceptions of their competency on a specific issue by talking about its past performance on the issue. Similarly, parties might be able to affect their credibility on an issue by making commitments on their future activity. Finally, Bøggild and Jensen (2022) and Elinder et al. (2015) find that parties win voters when they make commitments. A likely mechanism here is that voters find the committing party more credible and therefore vote for it.

My argument that commitments increase credibility is not the only voter implication of this dissertation. More specifically, I can derive three individual-level implications based on the three party-based hypotheses.

First, voters will be more likely to vote for one party rather than another party with a similar position if the former has made more commitments on the issue than the latter. An important question is of course to what extent positional proximity outweighs the degree of commitment if parties are not located at the exact same position. So, if Party A is closer to a voter than Party B, but Party B is more committed to its position than Party A is, how does the voter choose between the two parties?

Second, voters will be more likely to perceive a party as credible and to vote for it if it has committed to a new, more moderate position than if it diluted its position *without* committing to it. The question is if the party can increase the credibility of its position after changing it. Even if the party cannot make up for the credibility it might have had before the change, the policy-committing strategy can still have a positive effect compared to the situation where the party did not commit to its new position. If there is indeed a positive effect, research can determine whether the effect is dependent on other factors, such as the credibility and importance of the party's previous position (e.g. did it have a strong reputation on its previous position, and is the issue salient to the party?).

Third, voters will be more likely to perceive a party as credible and to vote for it if it commits to an issue that it recently started to pay attention to than if it does not commit. An important step here is to study whether the commitment has an effect in this situation and to study the effect of making a commitment relative to other types of campaign statements. When a party has increased the saliency of an issue, the voter needs to know how the party will solve problems related to the issue. Even if commitments make the party's solutions credible, the party's more vague statements about the future policies that it supports might still provide more valuable information than statements

related to the past or present (e.g., defining problems or criticizing other parties for their previous performance). The credibility-enhancing feature of commitments compared to other kinds of statements is important to reveal.

These three individual-level implications of the dissertation's arguments call for experimental studies testing the effects of policy commitments in each situation. However, it is important to stress that even if voters do not react in the way that I have argued here, it is not a disqualification of the theory per se. The main argument is that parties *reason* about voters in the way that I have proposed, not that voters actually behave this way.

5.4 How the making of commitments might matter for their fulfilment

From this dissertation, we know why parties make commitments. They commit to a higher extent when their positions are too similar, when they have diluted their position, and when they have increased the saliency of an issue. These three factors might not only be important for a party's decision to commit but also for the likelihood of fulfilment after the election. Most research on commitments does not include the pre-election environment as explanation for post-election fulfilment (except Kostadinova, 2018, who studied the effect of media attention in the campaign on later fulfilment). Instead, the literature focuses on institutional factors, e.g. government structure and configuration (Artés & Bustos, 2008; Thomson et al., 2017) or socioeconomic factors, e.g. state of economy (Praprotnik, 2017b). Naurin (2014) also points to party-level factors (such as ideology) and type of commitment as important for the likelihood of fulfilment.

However, the specific issue or position on which the party produced the commitment might matter as well (for instance, Thomson et al., 2017 show in the appendix that different types of commitments - e.g. tax cuts versus tax increase - vary in the likelihood of fulfilment). Specifically, if a party shared position with other parties or if a party had recently changed its viewpoints on an issue, when it made a commitment, the likelihood of fulfilment after the election might be higher. Other parties, the media and the electorate might be more attentive to the party's progress in fulfilling the commitment if the party produced it under one of these circumstances.

For instance, if a party made commitments because it wanted to distinguish itself positively from its similar competitors, these other parties might be particularly alert to any deviation the party makes on this standpoint. If the party breaks its commitment, these other parties can take advantage and highlight their own credibility in light of the commitment-breaking party's lack thereof. In contrast, other parties might be less likely to raise criticism against

a party's breach of a commitment if they disagree with the position behind this commitment.

Similarly, the media might highlight the breach of a commitment if the party made the commitment to compensate for a lack of credibility after a change in policy positions. An important task for the media is to “ring the burglar alarm” when serious political and societal problems arise, such as breach of commitments (Duval, 2019). The problem should be more severe when a party that has previously had one position commits to a new stance and then does not live up to this commitment after the election. In contrast, the breach is less severe if the party made the commitment on a position it has had for a longer time because the party is at least consistent on the position taken (even if the policy-making after the election is not in line with the campaigned position).

Finally, voters might react negatively if a party breaches commitments on an issue to which it recently started to pay attention. Before an election, voters may be optimistic about the chances of having their problems solved after a new party enters the issue arena with credible policy solutions. The more disappointment these voters feel if the party does not live up to these commitments after the election. In contrast, if the party has paid attention to an issue for a longer time, the breach of a commitment might not be particularly bad for its credibility because it still has a strong reputation for caring about the issue.

5.5 The importance of the findings for representative democracies

To sum up the discussion so far, the findings are important for our understanding of policy commitments, party competition, and voters' decision-making. However, they also have strong implications for representative democracies that have undergone large structural changes in recent decades, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Previously, the socioeconomic bases defined the party system and ensured continuity in what parties said during campaigns and what they did in the policy-making phase afterwards. Parties competed on different ideologies based on class interests, and if parties did not serve the class interests of their constituency, the voters could punish them at the next election (Hibbs, 1977; Korpi, 1983). Since class matters less in politics (Kriesi et al., 2006; Stubager, 2013), and the electorate is more unstable in their vote choice (Dalton, 2000; Mair, 2013; Thomassen, 2005), a potential risk is that voters' ability to hold parties accountable has weakened over time. Parties do not feel committed to specific voter groups to the same extent as before.

Yet, the findings imply that class politics is being replaced by a new system with a policy-based structure where parties strategically make decisions on the optimal set of viewpoints. When parties become too similar, and when parties change their viewpoints, they make commitments to appear credible. These commitments are later transformed into real-world policies (Thomson et al., 2017). If parties do not fulfill their commitments, they are heavily covered and criticized by the media (Duval, 2019; S. Müller, 2020), they are evaluated worse by voters (Naurin, Soroka, et al., 2019), and ultimately, punished by them at the next election (Matthieß, 2020). As such, fierce party competition in electoral campaigns, which creates a strong need for credibility, enables accountability processes in the policy-making phase. To some extent, this implication is paradoxical: Situations that are usually perceived as the negative sides of politics (that is, when parties “are all the same” and “change their viewpoints as the wind blows”) actually ensure electoral accountability in modern democracies.

However, the new policy-based structure of politics might also have negative side effects. Sometimes, parties need flexibility in the policy-making phase, and commitments made in the previous election campaign will only impede them later. They might get new information that changes how reasonable it is that they fulfill their commitment, for instance if experts argue against it or the public does not support it (Werner, 2019). Parties might also have to make compromises in negotiations with other parties, which is difficult when they are bound by commitments (Thomson et al., 2017). Acute problems after an election, unforeseen during the campaign, might also require parties to implement policies that go against their commitments (Baumgartner et al., 2011).

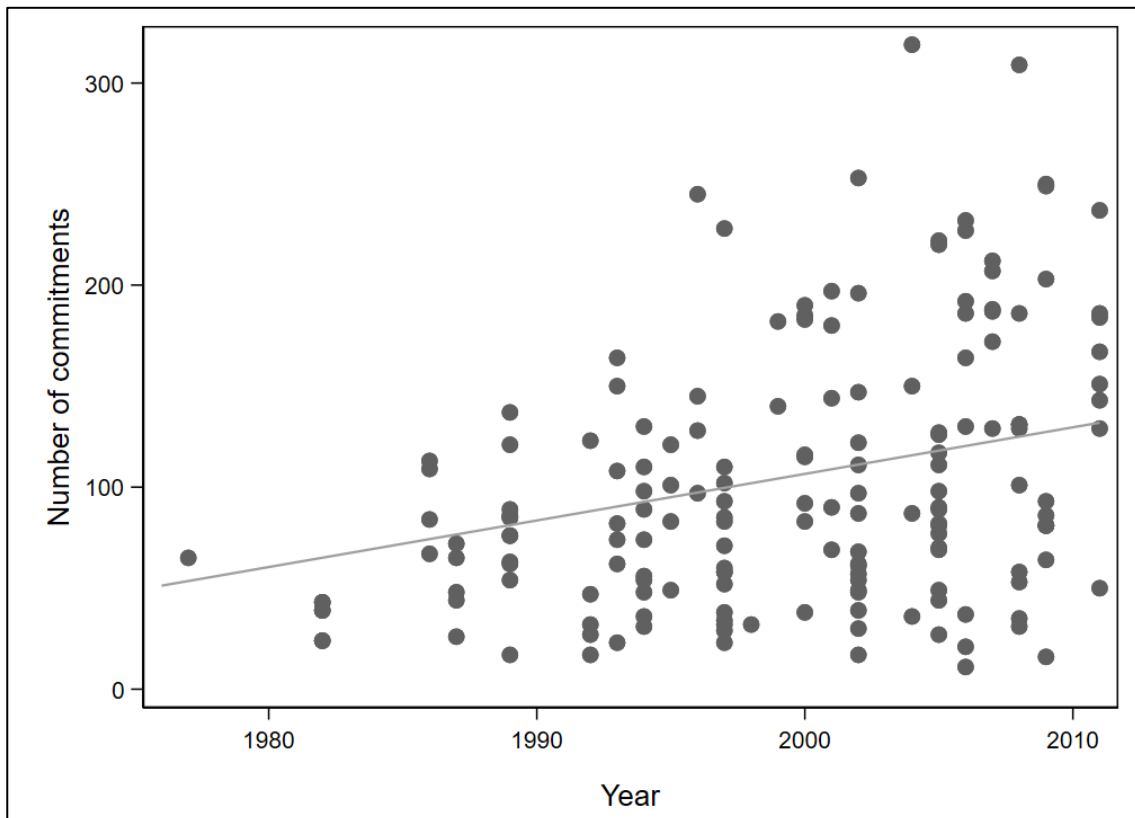
Another question worth asking is how desirable it is to have a democracy where accountability is mainly ensured by parties’ short-term, vote-seeking self-interest during campaigns. The potential risk is policies that are mainly developed because the policy proposals were attractive to voters during the campaign, not because they were best for society in the long term. Strong pressure on parties to appear competitive when they are indistinct from competitors, and when they have changed policy viewpoints, might push them to make commitments the consequences of which are not deliberatively considered.

Positive and negative consequences aside, this dissertation has shown that the policy-committing strategy is increasingly a part of parties’ political communication. Therefore, we cannot ignore this strategy if we fully want to understand party dynamics in modern democracies. In today’s politics, parties compete on credibility, and the policy-committing strategy is essential in this competition.

Appendix 1: Increase in commitments

In Figure A1.1, I show the increase in commitments using the dataset from Thomson et al. (2017) with ten other countries than the three countries included in this dissertation. The dataset uses another operationalization of commitments (see Thomson et al., 2017).

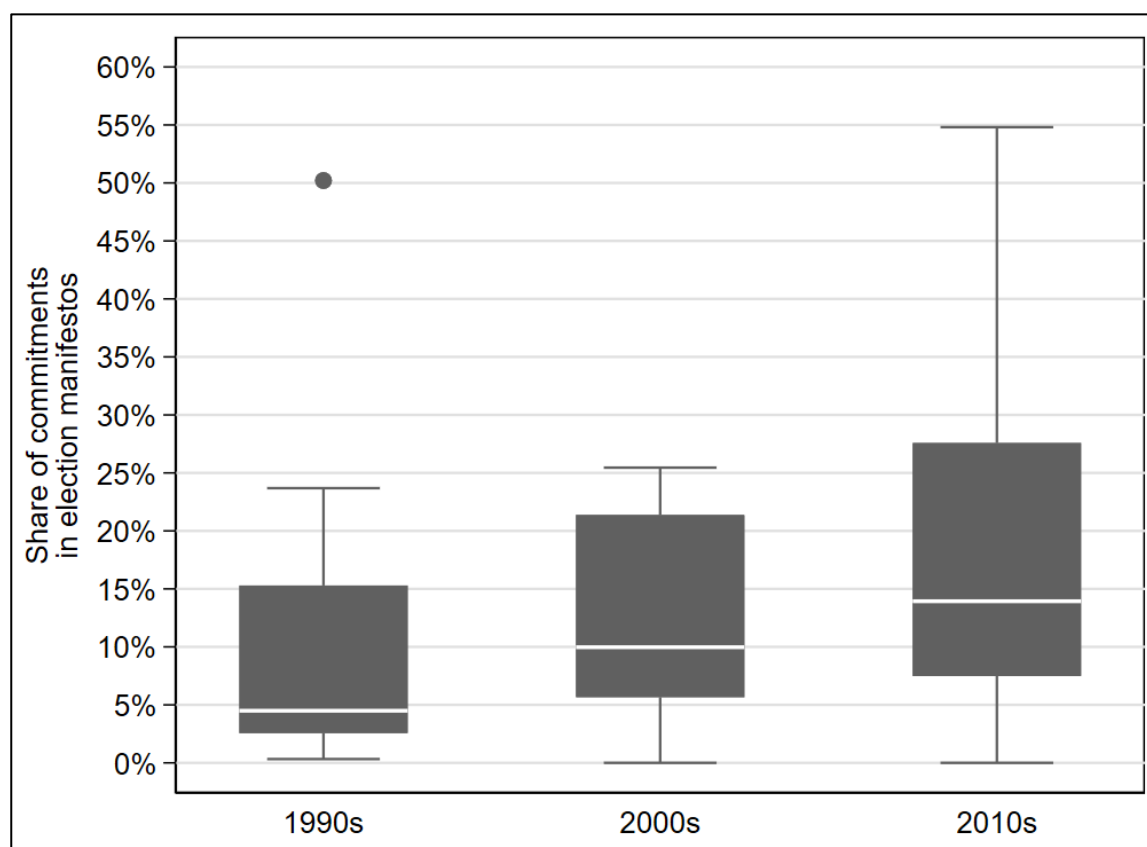
Figure A1.1: The number of commitments made by parties in ten Western democracies, covering elections from 1977 to 2011



Notes: The following ten countries are included: Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. Each dot represents a party. Grey line shows linear fit. Data source: Thomson et al. (2017).

Appendix 2: Box plots

Figure A2.1: Box plots of the share of commitments within election manifestos from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Denmark (1990s, 2000s, 2010s)



Notes: Based on election manifestos from parties in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Denmark. The dot in the 1990s' box plot is outside the upper adjacent value and includes the Liberal Democrats' election manifesto from 1997.

Appendix 3: Complete codebook

A3.1 Time

A3.1.1 Is the statement about one or more policies from the past?

Code description

A policy is related to the past if the policy refers to something that did or did not happen or should or should not have happened before the situation when the manifesto was written (e.g. “The finance policy was a mistake”, “The deal should not have been made”, “The Republican Party hails the brave and energetic response of America’s allies in the Asia-Pacific region”, “Americans have shed their blood to stop North Korean aggression before”, “Republicans support the Bush Administration’s efforts to protect the peace on the Korean peninsula.”, “With the rise of the digital economy, it has become even more critical that we protect intellectual property rights”). Usually, the policy is described grammatically in past tense, present perfect, or past perfect (e.g. “poverty has exploded”).

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.1.2 Is the statement about one or more policies in the future?

Code description

A policy is related to the future in four cases: First, if the policy refers to something that will or will not happen after the situation when the manifesto was written (e.g. “We will reduce the nuclear arsenals of our nation”, “We will seek a constructive relationship with China”, “China’s leaders will also discover that freedom is indivisible”). Usually, the policy is described grammatically with future-oriented words like “will”. Second, if the party explicitly takes a positive or negative stand on a policy, and the policy is not related to the past or present (e.g. “We want to withdraw from NATO”, “We support the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values”, “We oppose federal funding of embryonic stem cell research”, “We support a constructive relationship with China”, “We respect the right of each American to follow his or her deeply held beliefs.”, “We denounce bigotry, racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic prejudice, and religious intolerance”). Third, if the policy refers to something that should or

should not be in a certain way (e.g. “There must be no use of force by China against Taiwan”, “[A]ll legislation, regulation, and official actions must conform to the Constitution’s original meaning as understood at the time the language was adopted.”, “We believe that welfare is a right, not a privilege”, “Keep those on low income out of the tax net”). Usually, the policy is described grammatically with future-oriented words like “should” or “must” or by referring to the future (e.g. “Through a strong partnership with India, we can best address any differences and shape a dynamic future.”, “The enactment of a maternity fund in the coming election period”). Fourth, if the policy is written in an incomplete sentence with no subject and/or no finite verb, the policy should be considered future-related if it is about something that the party wants to be in a specific way in the future (e.g. “Maximum tax rate of 50 percent”, “More environment friendly energy”, “Fewer payments for child care.”, “Cleaning deduction to busy parents”). If the party writes about a policy from the past and at the same time writes about a future-oriented aim or result connected to this policy, this part of the policy should not be considered future (e.g. “There is growing recognition that federal dairy policies, crafted during the Great Depression, are increasingly an impediment to the ability of our dairy producers to meet the expected doubling in global demand coming by 2030”).

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.1.3 Is the statement about one or more policies in the present?

Code description

A policy is related to the present if it is about the current situation of a policy (e.g. “The unemployment rate is low”, “The current Medicare drug program serves drug companies more than seniors”, “For the most fortunate, America offers the best health care in the world.”, “High-wage jobs are more dependent than ever on high-level skills”, “Our national debt is a burden on our economy and families”). This also includes policies where the party compares the *current* situation of a policy with other policies around the world, across sectors, across groups in society, across time (e.g. “Our country has greater energy resources than any other place on earth”, “Our engineers and miners, the men and women whose labor taps the forces of nature, are the best in the world”, “Our air and waterways are much healthier than they were a few decades ago”). The policy is also present if the party talks about the potential effects of the present situation of the policy (e.g. “We are concerned, however, that some voting procedures may be open to abuse”). If the party writes about a policy

from the past and at the same time writes about a present-oriented aim or result connected to this policy, this part of the policy should not be considered present (e.g. “We appreciate the fact that market-based health care has given America the most advanced medical system in the world”).

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.1.4 Is the statement about one or more policies not situated in time?

Code description

A party can talk about a policy without situating it in time. These are general statements about a policy, where the party is defining a policy (e.g. “GDP is measured as the market value of all goods and services”, “Our ranks include Americans from every faith and tradition”) or describing (the party’s view on) different relationships, where the policy is included without a reference to the past, present, or future (“High unemployment creates low GDP”, “High inflation has many causes”, “Education requires the engagement of the whole community in order to teach the whole child”, “A strong economy is one key to debt reduction”, “Traditional marriage and family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is the foundation for a free society”, “Republicans believe that America’s relationship with China is an important part of our strategy to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region.”, “The democratic development of China is crucial to that future”, “By protecting the proprietary rights of creators and innovators, the Constitution promotes the general welfare by providing incentives for investment in all sorts of technology”, “Protecting intellectual property is also a national security issue.”, “The legitimate powers of government are rooted in the consent of the American people”). If it is not possible to define the tense of a policy (e.g. by references to a text like “The Declaration sets forth the fundamental precepts of American government”, “The Constitution makes clear that these powers were granted to Congress by the people and must therefore remain solely with the peoples elected representatives.”, “The Bill of Rights lists religious liberty, with its rights of conscience, as the first freedom to be protected.”), choose yes.

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.2 Responsibility

A3.2.1 The following codes: When there is more than one policy

A party may talk about more than one policy in a quasi-sentence (e.g. “We must also tackle spending, by putting everything on the table; eliminate non-productive programs; achieve defense savings; reform entitlement programs to control soaring health care costs; cut federal administrative costs by 3 percent annually for four years”). If the party talks about more than one past policy or more than one future policy, and the characteristics of each policy differ, the following codes can have more than one answer (if, for instance, the party is assessing one future policy but guaranteeing another, A3.2.2 could both be coded 1 and 4). In these cases, choose the highest value on the following codes.

A3.2.2 [if 1 in A3.1.1 or A3.1.2] How much responsibility is the party taking for the policy?

Code description

If the party behind the manifesto assesses the policy (either explicitly, e.g. with words like “there should be”, “we favour”, “we appreciate”, “we believe in”, “we support”, “we dislike”, “unemployed people should have”, “nobody should be unemployed”, “we have supported”, “we have been against”, “there should have been” or implicitly, where the policy is mentioned in a way that it signals what the party intends to ensure or has ensured, e.g. “Growth-Denmark – maximum 50 % tax rate”), the party is taking low responsibility for the policy. If the party explicates its own work effort related to the policy (e.g. “we will work for”, “we will try”, “we have fought for”), the party is taking medium responsibility for the policy. If the party explicates an involvement with the provision of a policy (“we will rebuild”, “we provided”, “they destroyed”, “we insured”, “we delivered”), the party takes high responsibility for the policy. If the party talks about a future policy, the party may use stronger words to guarantee the provision of a policy (“we promise”, “we pledge”, “our commitment is”, “we guarantee”). In these cases, the party is taking very high responsibility for the policy. If the party does not attach itself to the policy in any way, the answer is “No responsibility”. A party includes all political actors running for election that are part of the party writing the manifesto. It can include a group of parties (e.g. the government, opposition, left wing) if the given party belongs to this group, or a politician representing the party (president, prime minister etc.).

Values:

0: No responsibility

- 1: Low responsibility (assessment)
2. Medium responsibility (work effort)
3. High responsibility (provider)
4. Very high responsibility (guarantee) [only possible, if 1 in A3.1.2]

A3.2.3 [if 1 in A3.1.1 or A3.1.2] How much responsibility is the party ascribing to another party for the policy?

Code description

If the party expresses how another party assesses or is involved in the policy, the answer should be the relevant degree of responsibility (cf. A3.2.2). If the party is not ascribing responsibility for a policy to another party, the answer is “No responsibility”. ‘Another party’ includes all political actors running for election that are not part of the party writing the manifesto. It can be any other political party, group of parties (e.g. the government, opposition, left wing) to which the given party does not belong, or a politician representing another party (president, prime minister etc.)

Values:

- 0: No responsibility
- 1: Low responsibility (assessment)
2. Medium responsibility (work effort)
3. High responsibility (provider)
4. Very high responsibility (guarantee) [only possible, if 1 in A3.1.2]

A3.2.4 [if 1 in A3.2.2] Is the party explicitly mentioning itself as being responsible?

Code description

The party is explicitly mentioning itself as being responsible if it refers to itself (e.g. “we think”, “The Conservative party supports”, “Franklin Roosevelt preferred”) when it makes the assessment of the policy. Be sure that the party is referring to itself and not to the country/citizens in general (e.g. “we [as a country] must strive to [X]”). If the party does not mention themselves when making the assessment (“There should be”, “The deal was a mistake”), the answer is no.

Values:

- 0: No
- 1: Yes

A3.2.5 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.3] Does the party explicitly state a positive, neutral, or negative opinion about the policy that the party ascribed another party responsibility for?

Code description

The party is positive if it is explicitly using positive, value-laden words (e.g. “good”, “reasonable”, “sensible”) or explicitly praising, supporting, or collaborating with the other party about the policy (e.g. “Only a few years ago, a bipartisan consensus in government valued the role of extractive industries”). Contrarily, the party is negative if it uses negative, value-laden words (e.g. “unfortunately”, “disgrace”, “destroyed”, “problematic”, “catastrophic”, “creating instability”, “The Democratic Party’s campaign to smother the U.S. energy industry takes many forms, but the permitting process may be its most damaging weapons”), or if the party is explicitly criticizing or against the policy (e.g. “The Keystone Pipeline has become a symbol of everything wrong with the current Administrations ideological approach”, “The current Administration’s refusal to work with Republicans took our national debt from \$10 trillion to nearly \$19 trillion today.”, “and we will end the Administrations disregard of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act with respect to the long-term storage of nuclear waste”). The party’s opinion about the other party’s policy should be derived from the words it uses, not from the coder’s prior knowledge about the party’s opinion about the policy. If the party does not use clear value-laden words or clearly takes a stance on the other party’s policy, the answer is “Neutral” (e.g. “Those who mine it and their families should be protected from the Democratic Party’s radical anticoal agenda”).

Values:

0: Positive

1: Neutral

2: Negative

A3.3 Policy type

A3.3.1 The following codes: When there is more than one policy

In one quasi-sentence, the party may take or ascribe responsibility for more than one policy. Each of these policies can have different characteristics, which means that more than one value could be chosen in the following codes. If this is the case, choose the highest value.

A3.3.2 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.2 or A3.2.3] Is the party mentioning a target group related to the policy?

Code description

A party mentions a group if it refers to a group of people within the country (e.g. “civil rights protection for gay men and lesbians”, “increase the wealth of the poor”, “higher achievements for pupils in English and Science”). The party should mention the group explicitly. If the party refers to a group implicitly (e.g. “We want more tests in the public school”) or to the population (e.g. “citizens”, “Americans”) as a whole, the answer is no.

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.3.3 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.2 or A3.2.3] Is the policy about an instrument?

Code description

A policy instrument related to the political value is a political mean (i.e. could be implemented or controlled by a public authority) that can change or keep a political value in a certain way. Rights, rules (including laws), public programmes, governmental operations, agreements, informational campaigns, prohibitions, public spending (including public programmes), public building projects, grants, subsidies, investments, taxes, establishment or modification of agencies, exhortations, services, savings, and goods are considered as instruments. If the policy is not clearly mentioning these types of instruments (e.g. if the party writes “offering tools that can improve [...]” or “take all appropriate steps to”), the answer is no.

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.3.4 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.2 or A3.2.3] Is the policy about an outcome?

Code description

A policy outcome concerns the situation of the value (e.g. “less poverty”, “a worthier life for the old”, “protecting the national culture”, “improving the environment”).

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.3.5 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.2 or A3.2.3] Is the policy about a change?

Code description

If the party talks about a change without explicitly stating what the change consists of, the change is without direction, i.e. the answer is 1 (e.g. “We will reform the system of unemployment benefits” – and other words like “address”, “change”, “challenge”). A directional change can be either dichotomous or a matter of degree. It is dichotomous if the party talks about introducing something new or removing something existing (e.g. “We will enact a new law”, “We have removed the restrictions”, “The Republicans brought America a false and fragile prosperity” – and other words like “permit”, “enable”, “end”, “control”). It is a matter of degree when the party talks about more or less of something or uses a comparative adjective (e.g. “better economy”, “faster procedure”). If it is unclear whether the party talks about a change (e.g. “Like the rest of the economy, agriculture has suffered through eight years of the Democrats’ regulatory juggernaut, particularly from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).”), the answer is 0.

Values:

0: No

1: Yes – without direction

2: Yes – with direction (dichotomous)

3: Yes – with direction (degree)

A3.3.6 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.2 or A3.2.3] Is the policy about a continuation?

Code description

A continuation is when the party talks about keeping something present (e.g. “We will keep [X]”) or absent (e.g. “We will not change [X]”). It should be clear from the statement whether the party talks about an existing policy or not. If it is unclear (e.g. “The members of our Armed Forces must not be denied the basic rights that they are defending for others”), the answer is 0.

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.3.7 [if 1, 2, 3, or 4 in A3.2.2 or A3.2.3]: Is the policy quantifiable?

Code description

The policy is quantifiable if it is possible to put a number on it (e.g. “more growth”, “fewer immigrants”, “NATO enlargement”, “keep the growth as high as now”). In these cases, choose 1. If the word signalling the policy is imprecise, choose 0 (e.g. “better economy”, “strengthen health care system”). If the object of the policy is unmeasurable, if the object is more qualitative than quantitative (e.g. in the sentence “We support lifting restrictions”, restrictions could be measured as the number of restrictions, but the important thing here is not the number of restrictions, but the content of the restrictions – therefore, this policy is not quantifiable), or the measurement of it is unclear, choose 0 (e.g. “We will keep the justice as high as now”, “the freedom of speech has been restrained”, “We will build the new Afghan national army”).

Values:

0: No

1: Yes

A3.3.8 [if 1 in A3.3.7] Is the quantifiable policy specific about the volume?

Code description

A policy is specific about the volume if it clearly defines how much the policy consists of, either explicitly (e.g. “speed limit on 50 km/h”, “the stock market tripled”, or “3 % growth in GDP) or implicitly (e.g. “all”, “no one”, “we have seen the highest GDP growth since the Great Depression”, “we will close the budget deficit”).

Values:

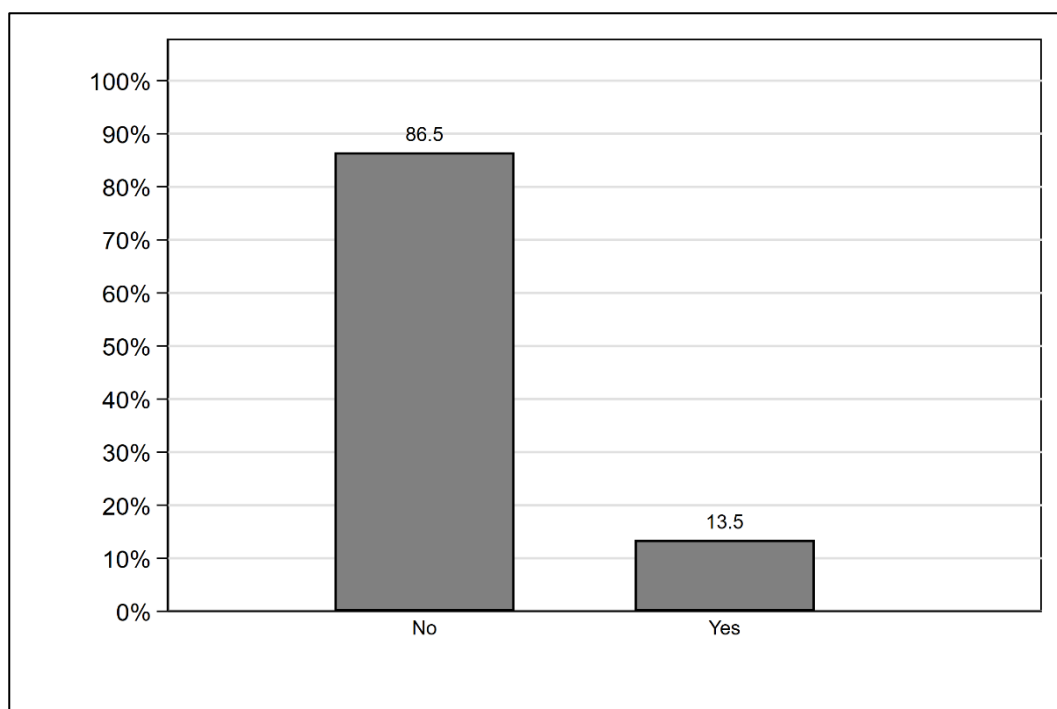
0: No

1: Yes

Appendix 4: Distribution on each code

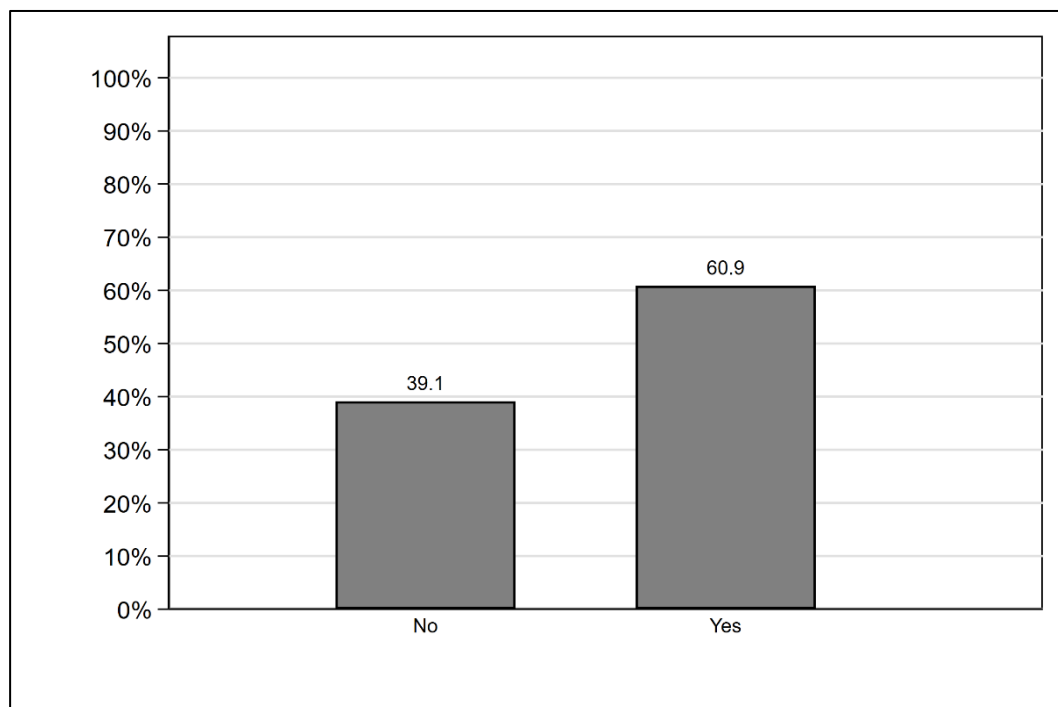
A4.1 Time

Figure A4.1: Is the statement about one or more policies from the past?



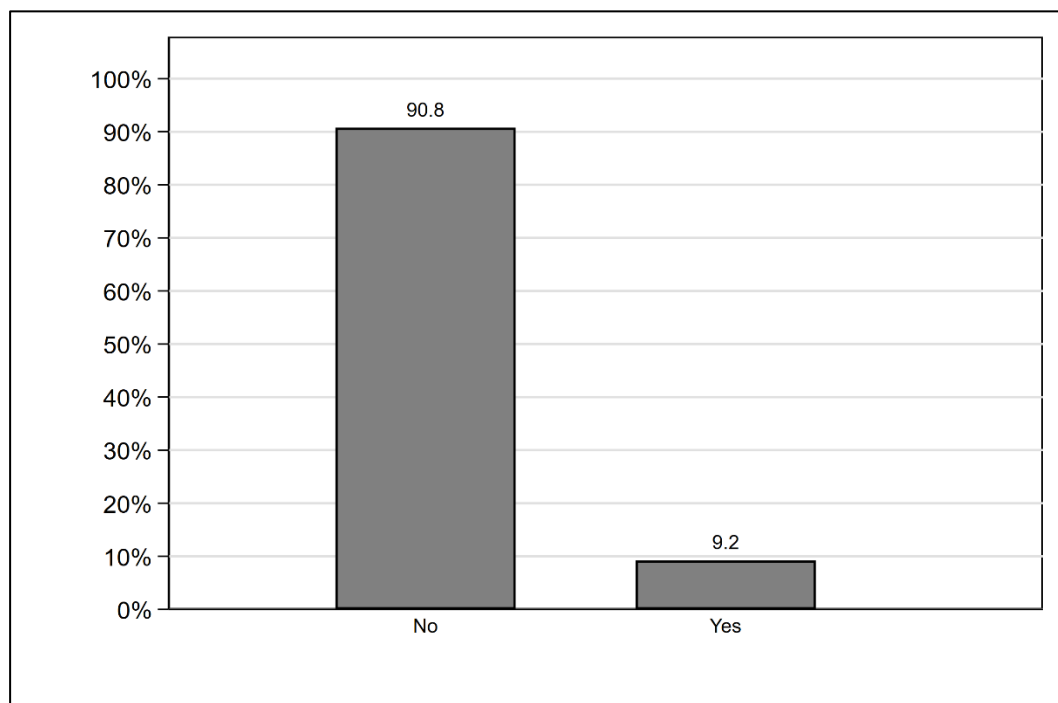
Notes: N = 65,630.

Figure A4.2: Is the statement about one or more policies in the future?



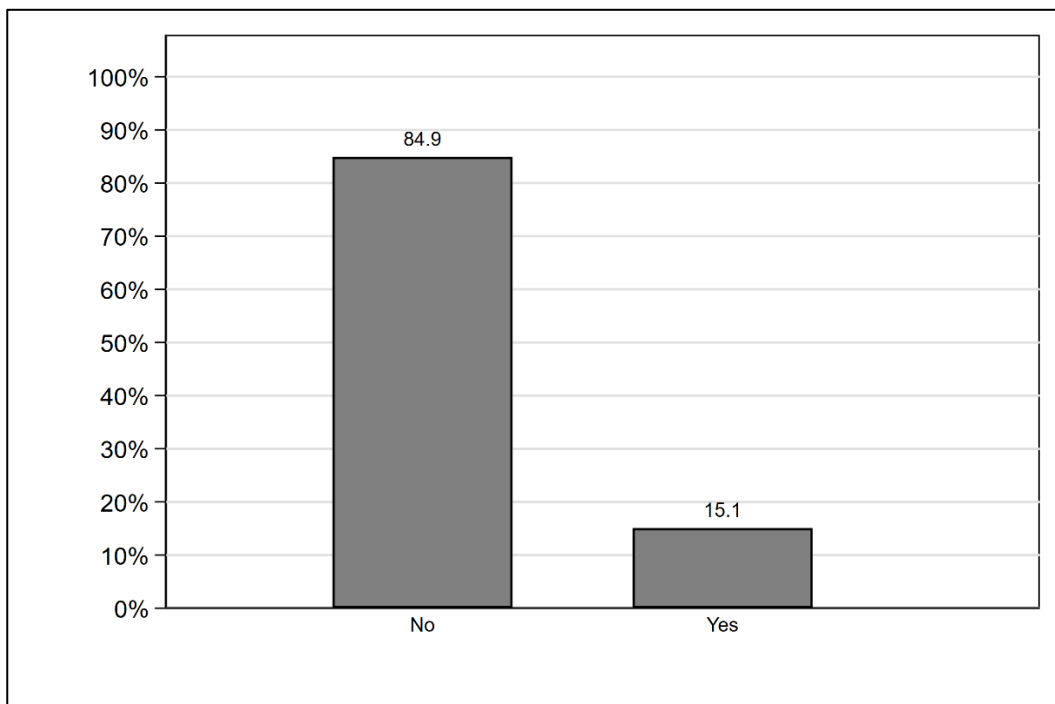
Notes: N = 65,630.

Figure A4.3: Is the statement about one or more policies in the present?



Notes: N = 65,630.

Figure A4.4: Is the statement about one or more policies not situated in time?

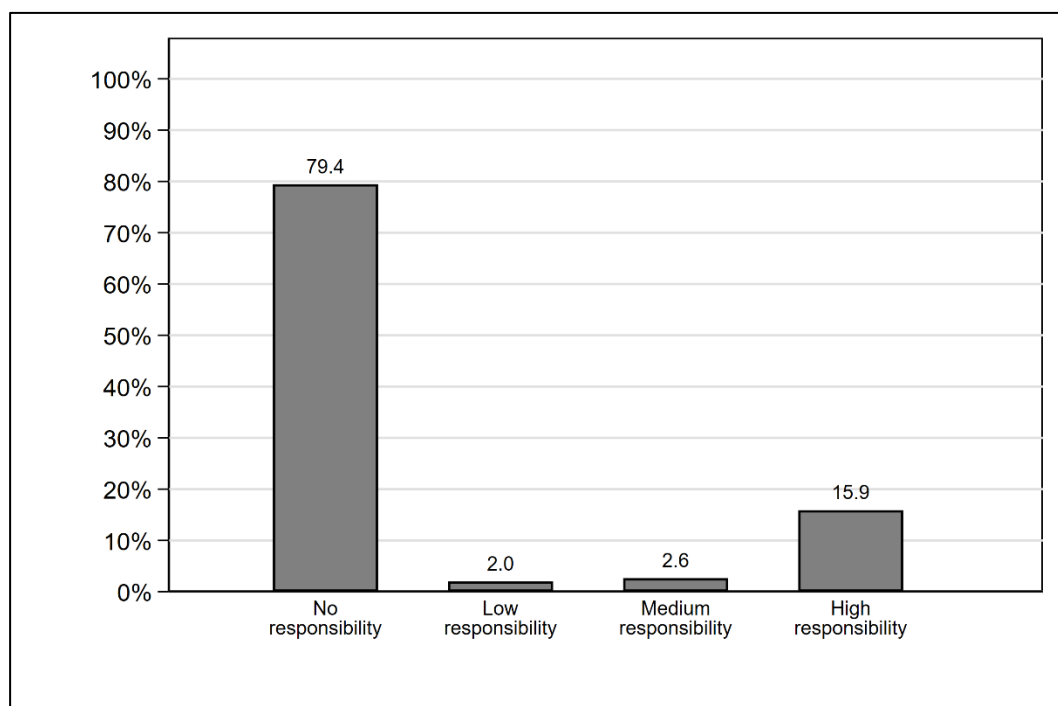


Notes: N = 65,630.

A4.2 Responsibility

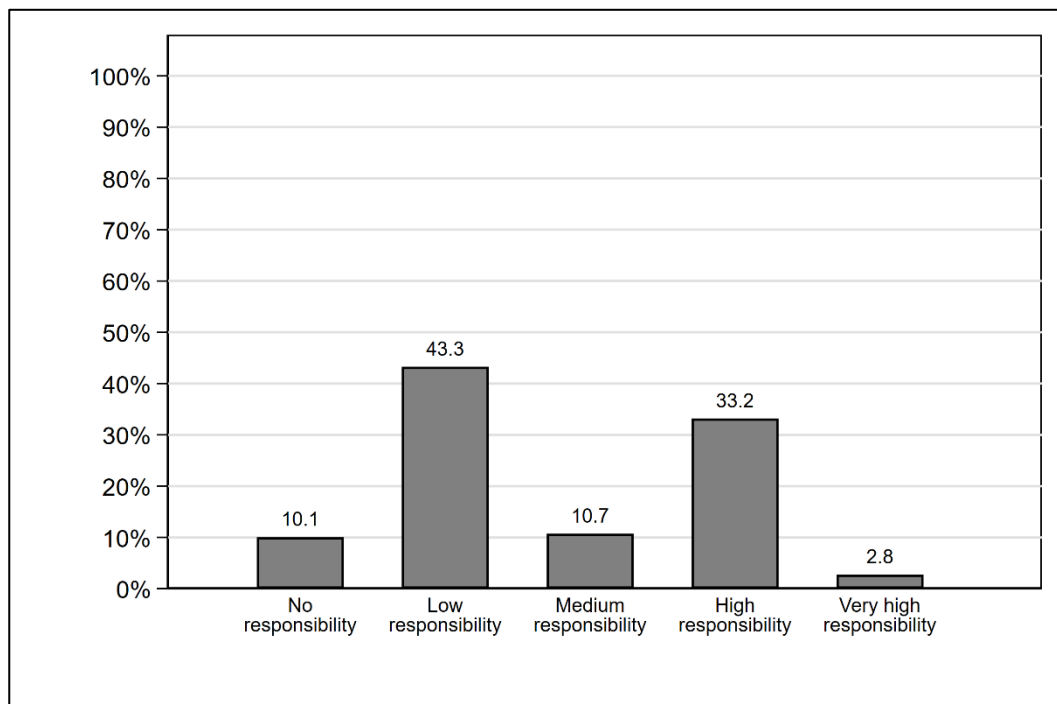
A4.2.1 Responsibility taking

Figure A4.5: How much responsibility is the party taking for the policy? (Past)



Notes: N = 8,850.

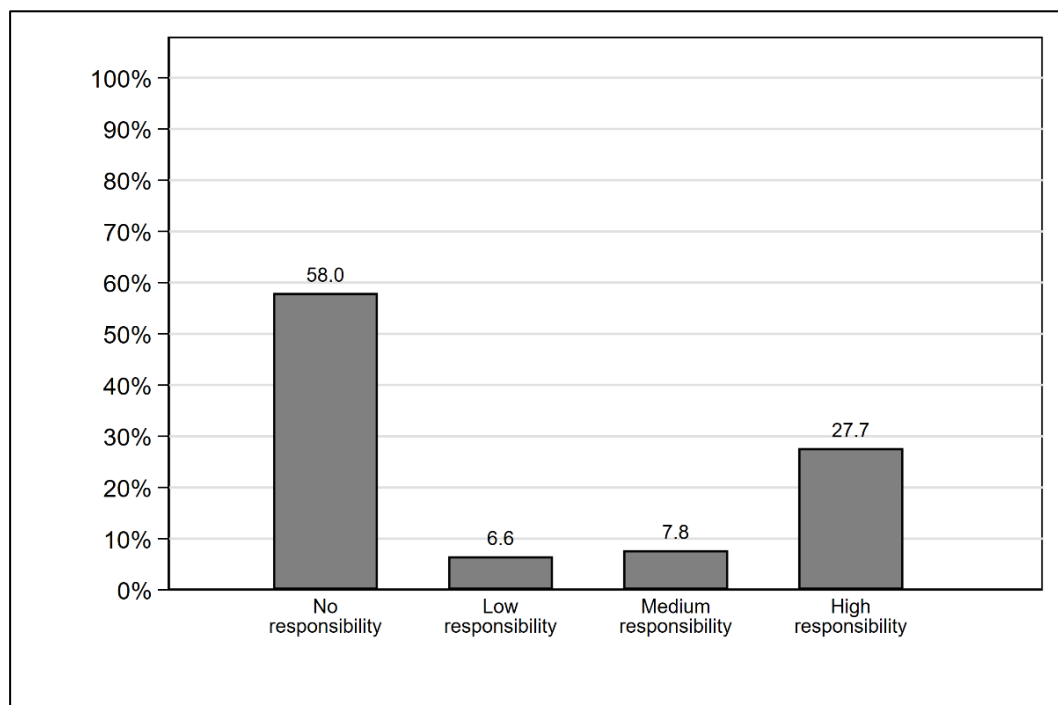
Figure A4.6: How much responsibility is the party taking for the policy? (Future)



Notes: N = 39,951.

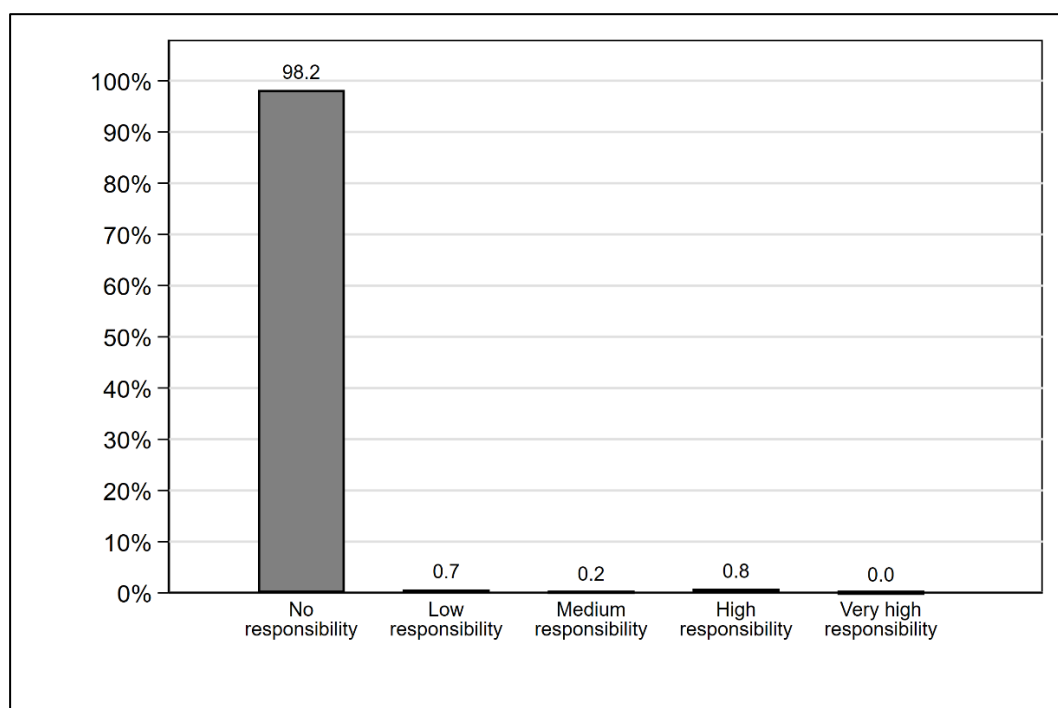
A4.2.2 Responsibility ascribing

Figure A4.7: How much responsibility is the party ascribing to another party for the policy? (Past)



Notes: N = 8,850.

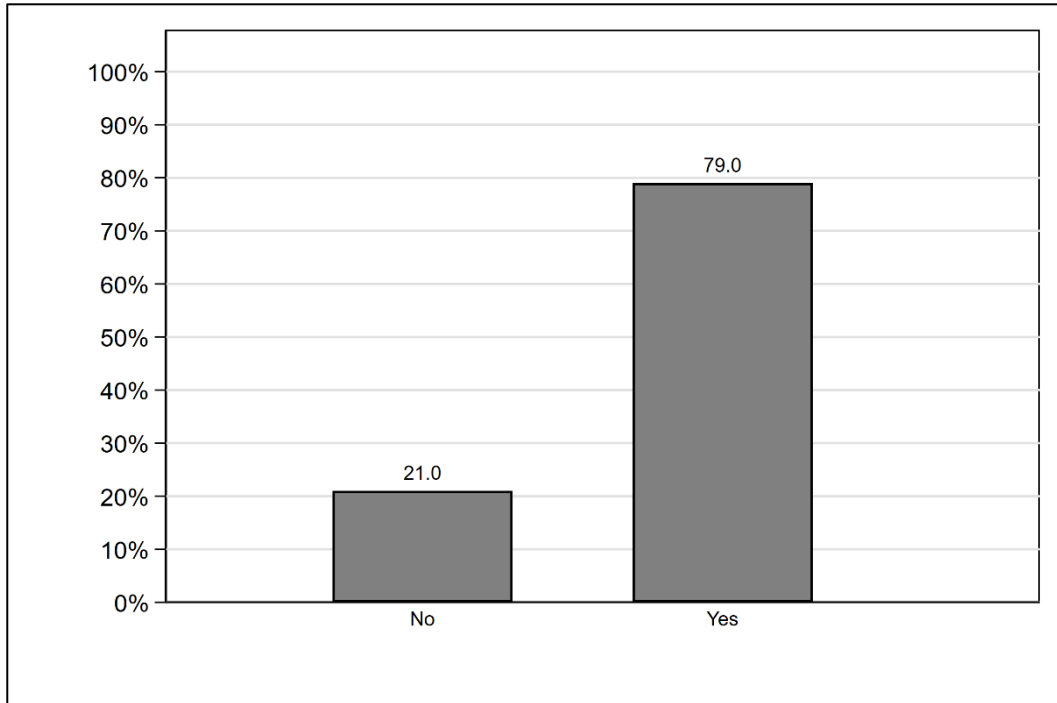
Figure A4.8: How much responsibility is the party ascribing to another party for the policy? (Future)



Notes: N = 39,951.

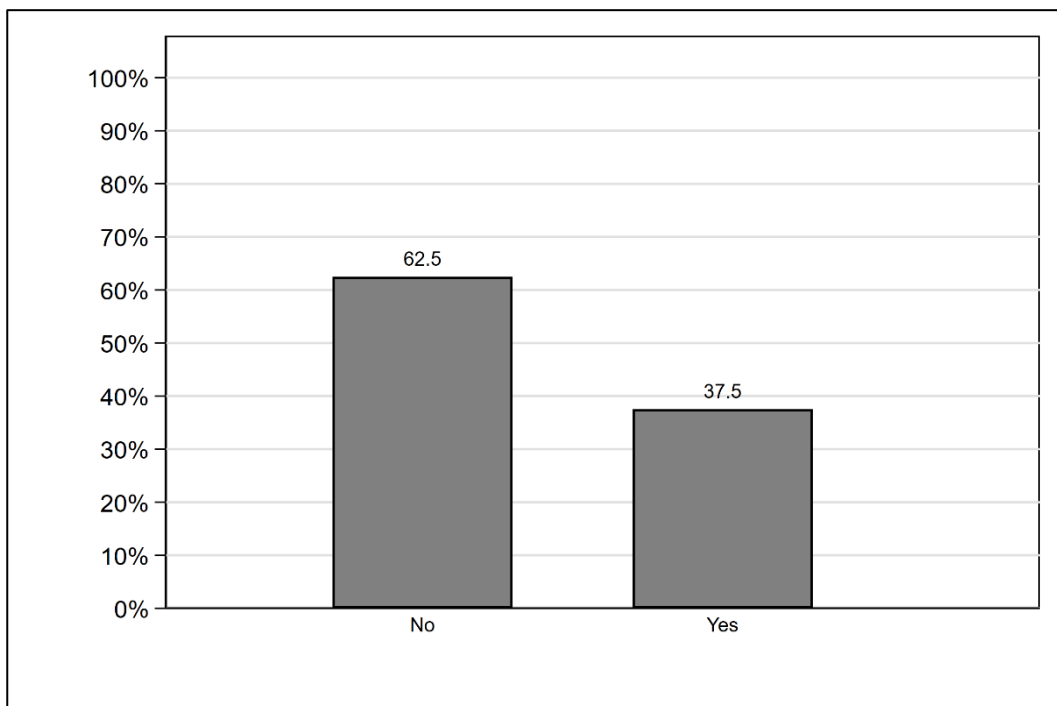
A4.2.3 Explicitly mentioning own party

Figure A4.9: Is the party explicitly mentioning themselves as being responsible? (Past)



Notes: N = 581.

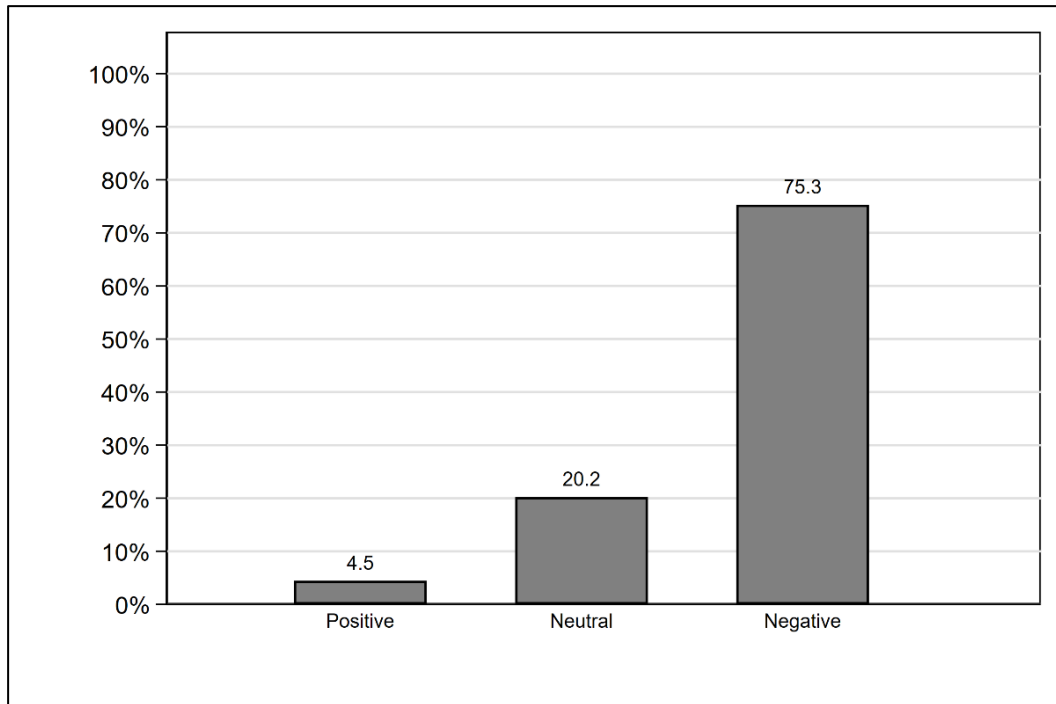
Figure A4.10: Is the party explicitly mentioning themselves as being responsible? (Future)



Notes: N = 17,292.

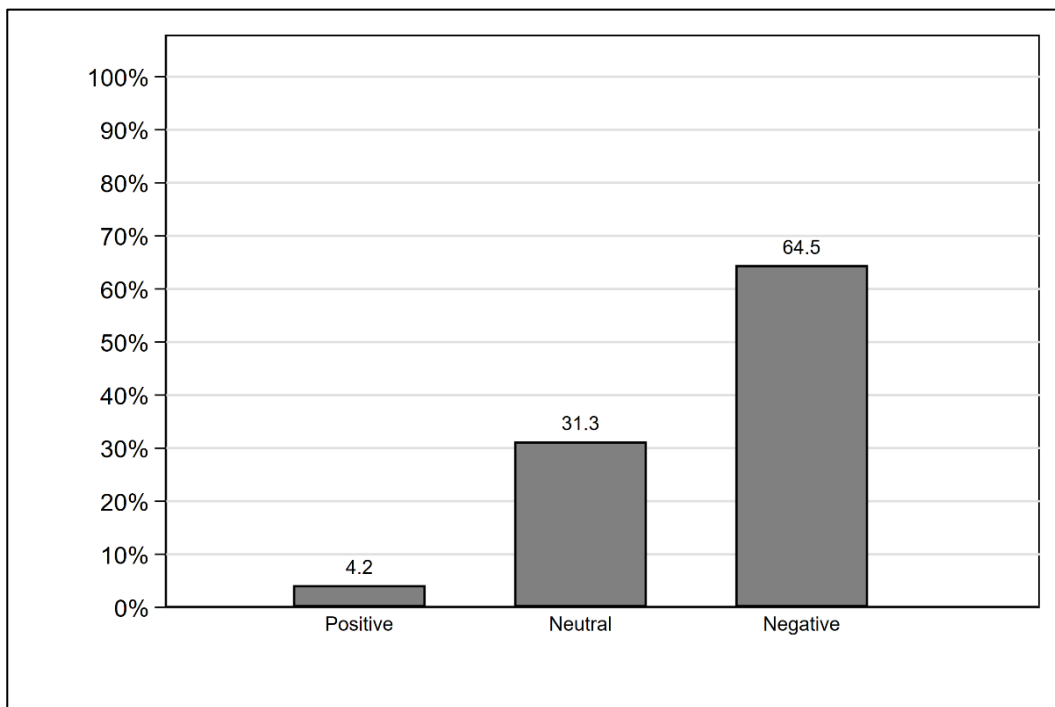
A4.2.4 Opinion towards other party

Figure A4.11: Does the party explicitly state a positive, neutral, or negative opinion towards the policy that the party ascribed another party responsibility for? (Past)



Notes: N = 1,819.

Figure A4.12: Does the party explicitly state a positive, neutral, or negative opinion towards the policy that the party ascribed another party responsibility for? (Future)

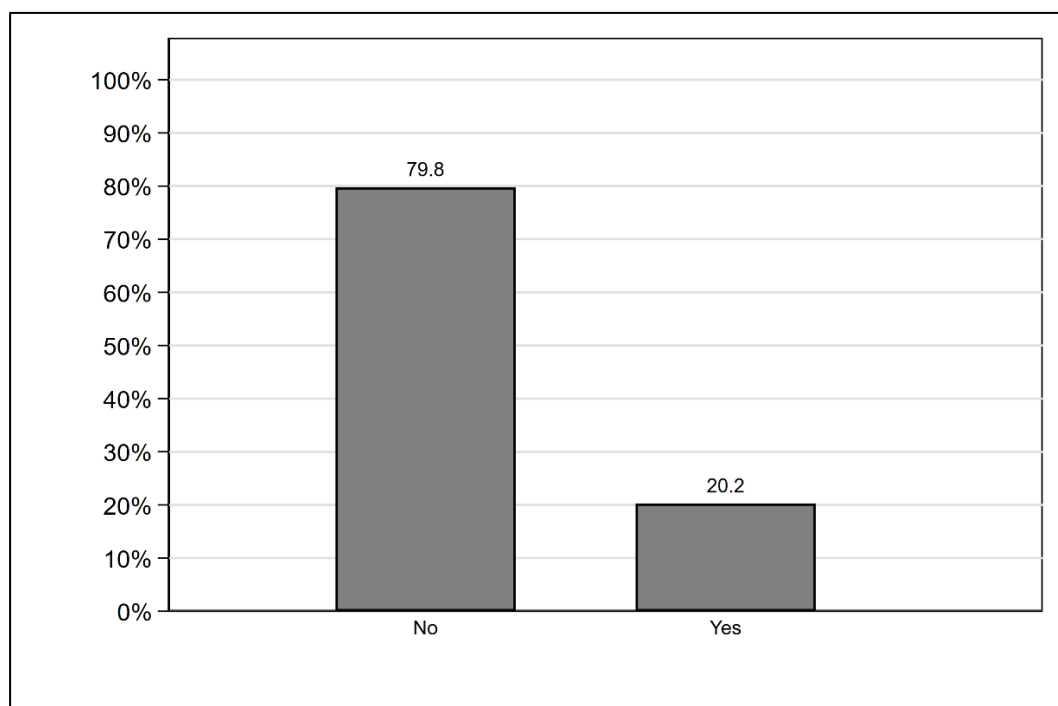


Notes: N = 713.

A4.3 Policy type

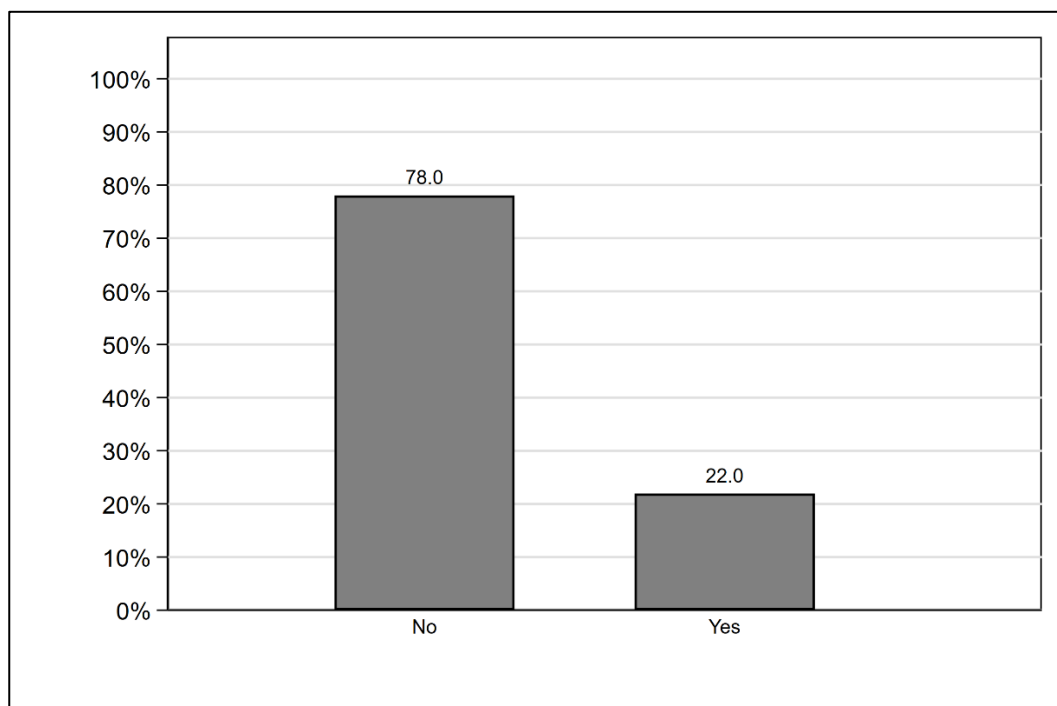
A4.3.1 Target group

Figure A4.13: Is the party mentioning a target group related to the policy? (Past, Own responsibility)



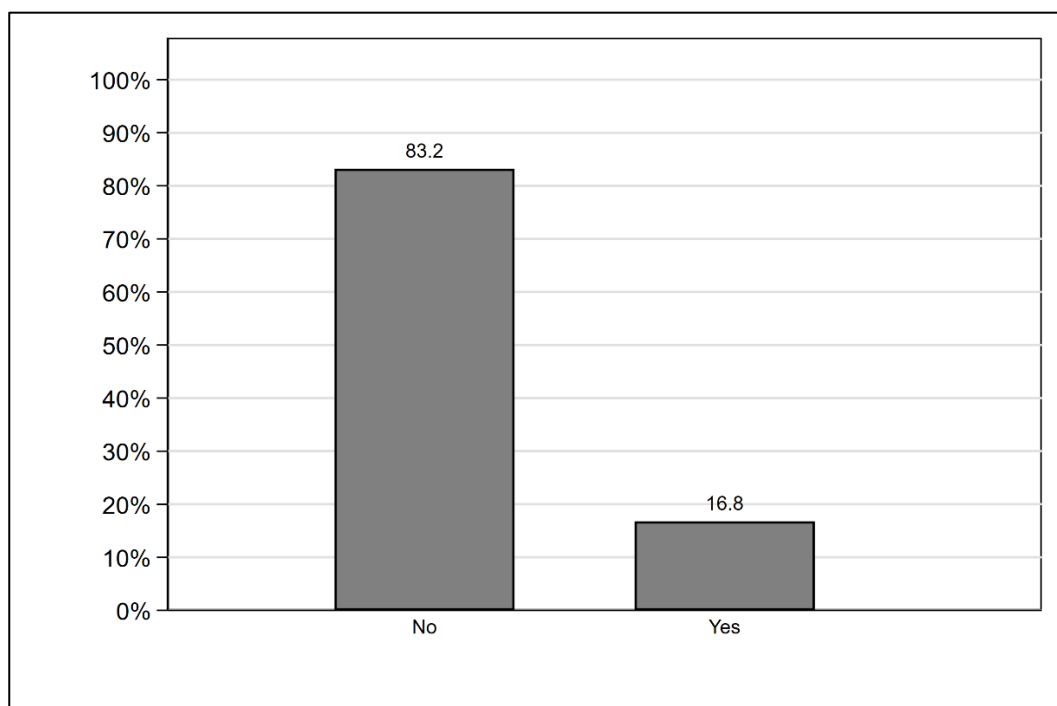
Notes: N = 3,719.

Figure A4.14: Is the party mentioning a target group related to the policy? (Future, Own responsibility)



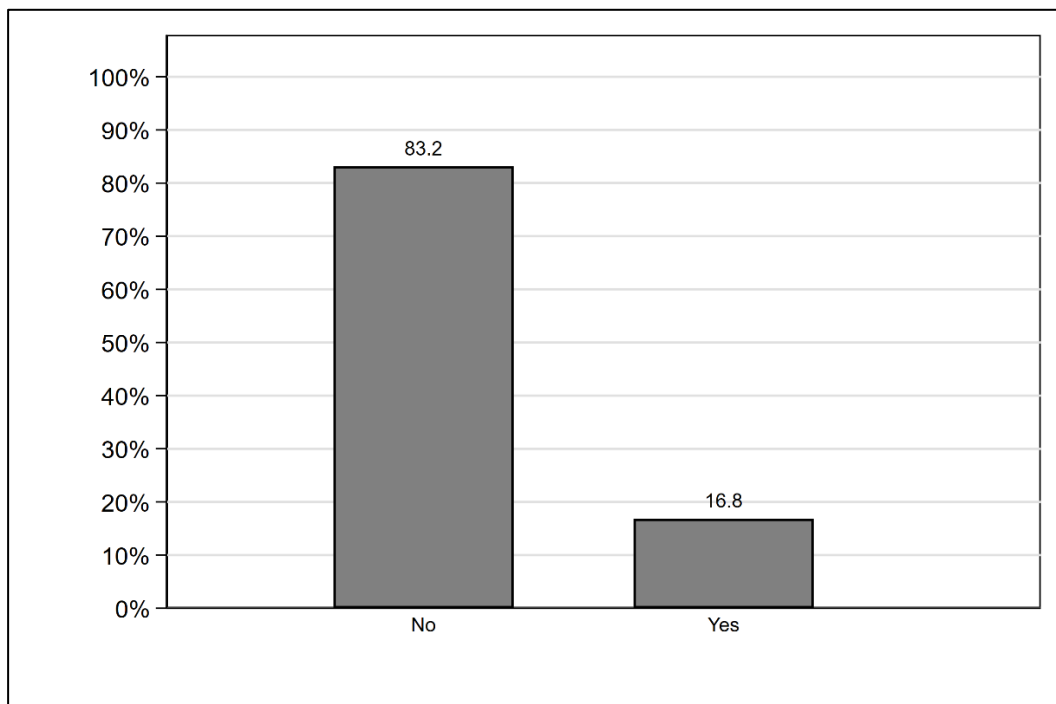
Notes: N = 35,933.

Figure A4.15: Is the party mentioning a target group related to the policy? (Past, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 1,819.

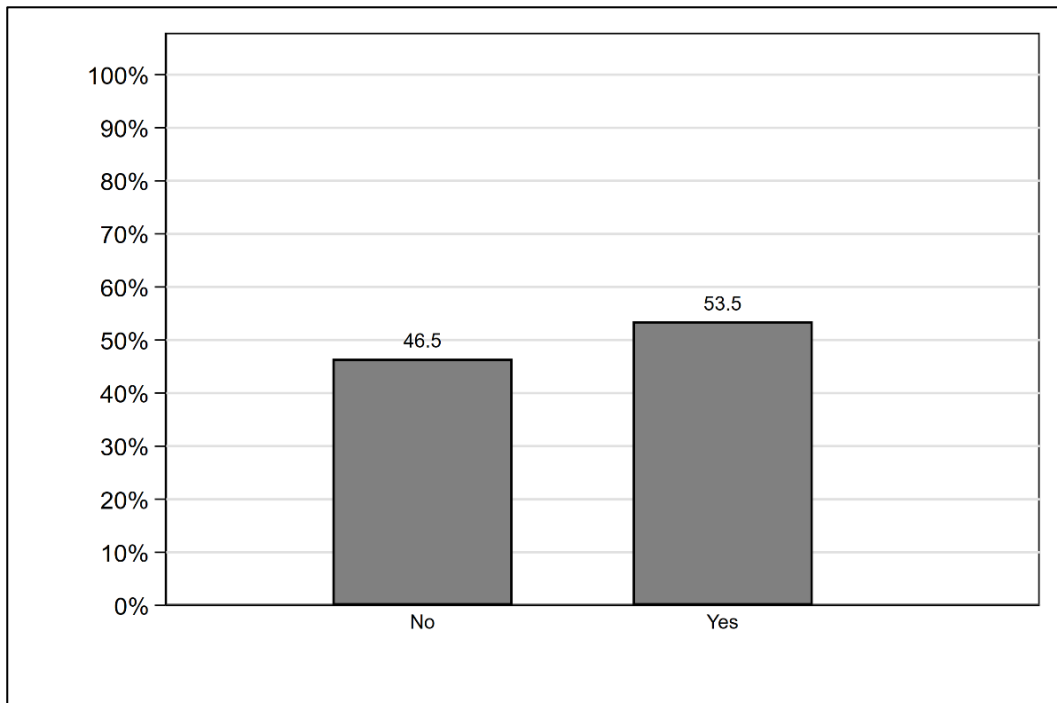
Figure A4.16: Is the party mentioning a target group related to the policy? (Future, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 713.

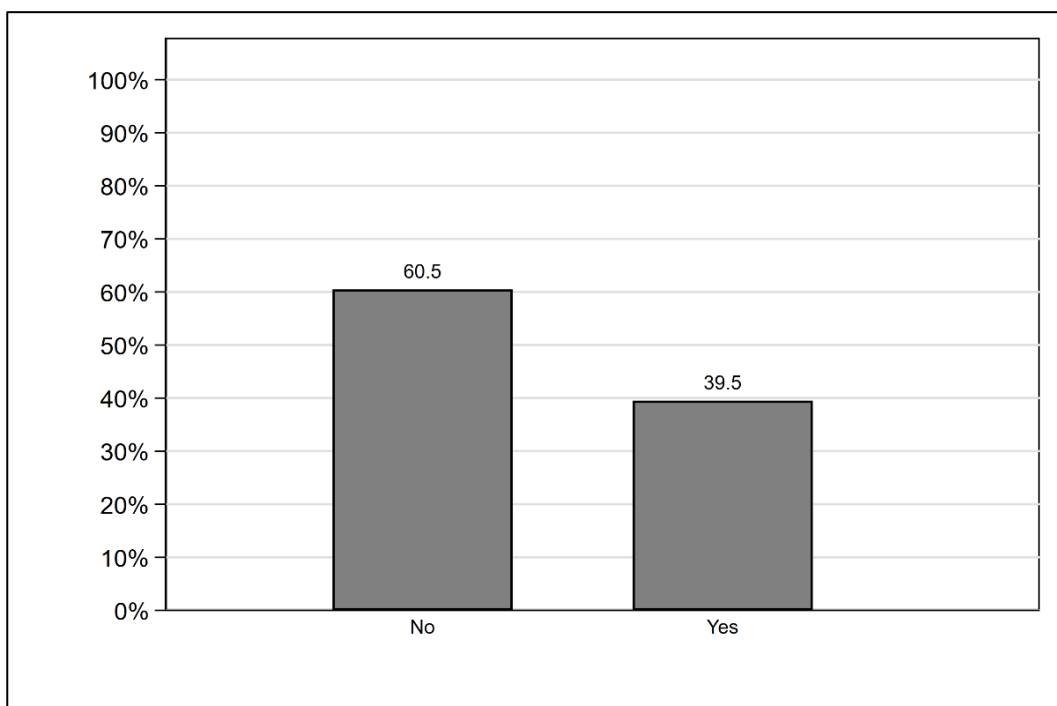
A4.3.2 Instrument

Figure A4.17: Is the policy about an instrument? (Past, Own responsibility)



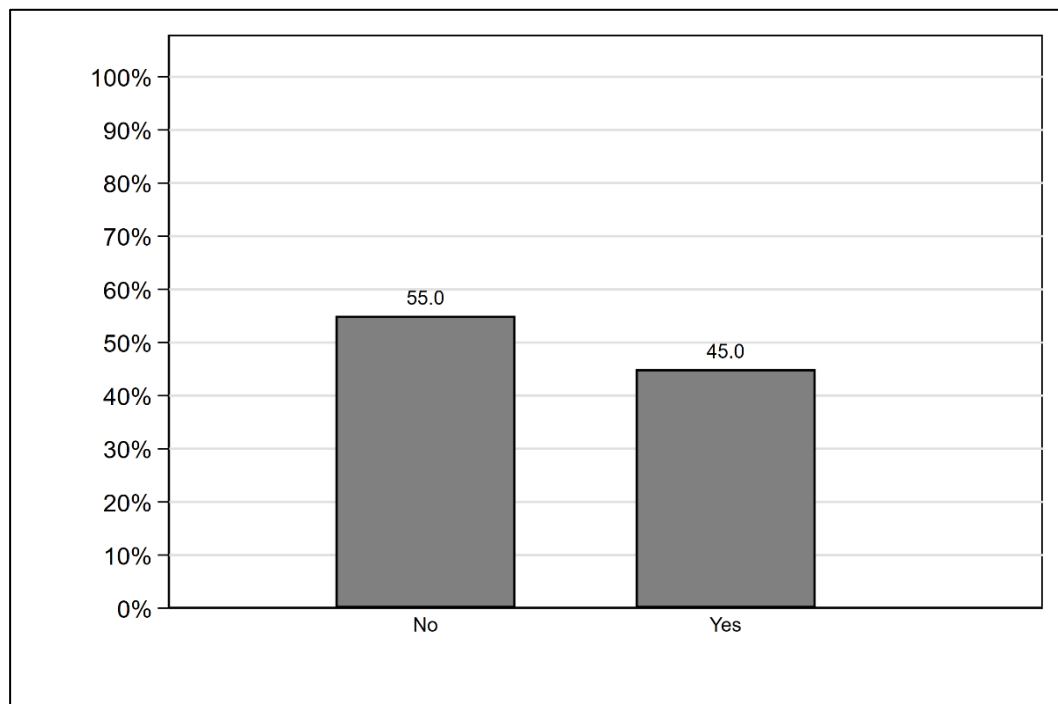
Notes: N = 3,719.

Figure A4.18: Is the policy about an instrument? (Future, Own responsibility)



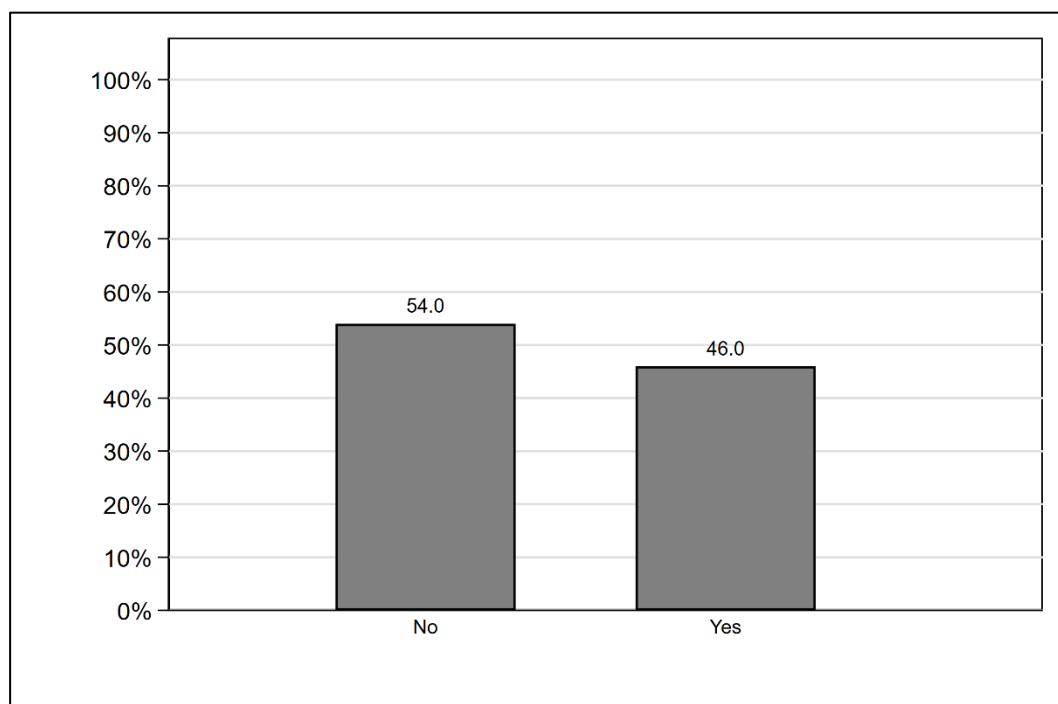
Notes: N = 35,933.

Figure A4.19: Is the policy about an instrument? (Past, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 1,819.

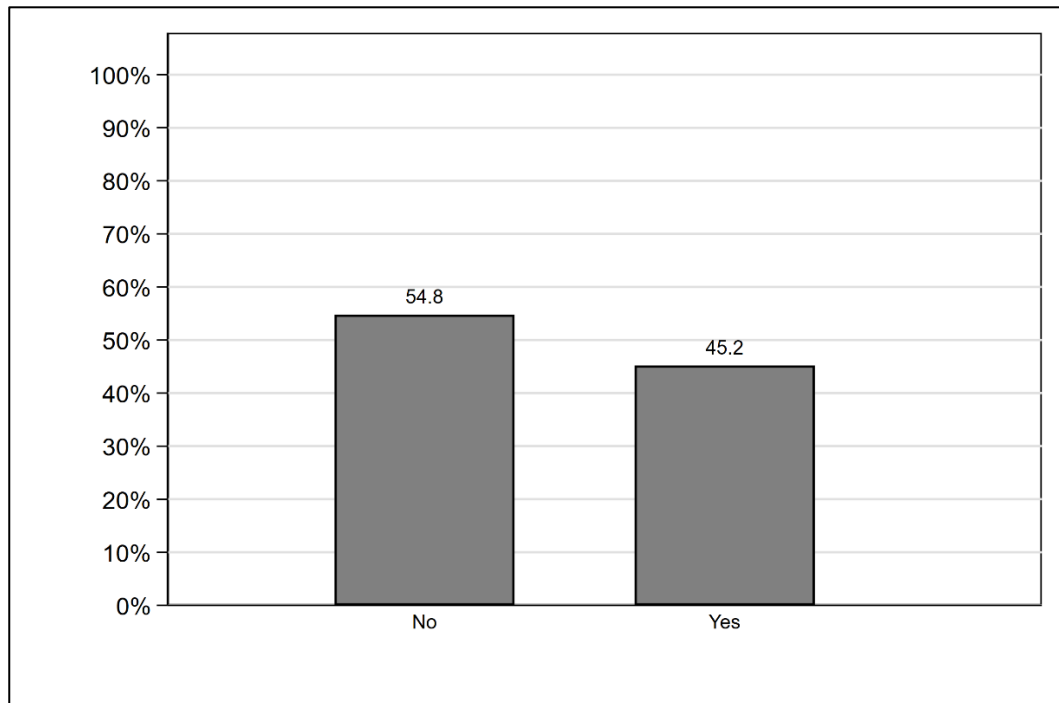
Figure A4.20: Is the policy about an instrument? (Future, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 713.

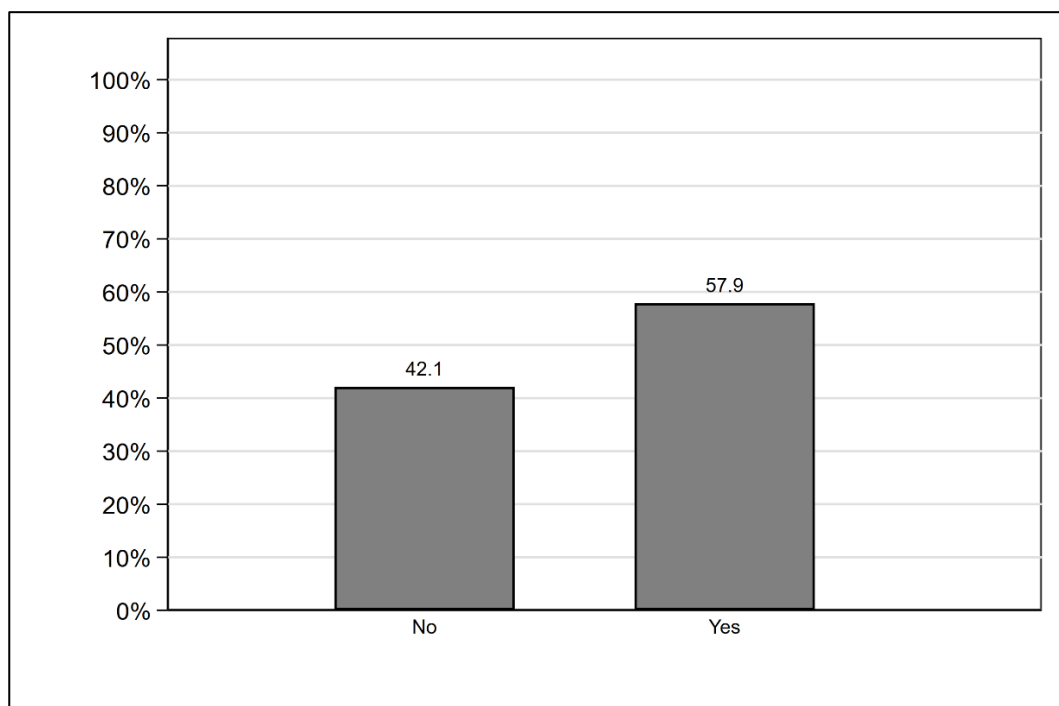
A4.3.3 Outcome

Figure A4.21: Is the policy about an outcome? (Past, Own responsibility)



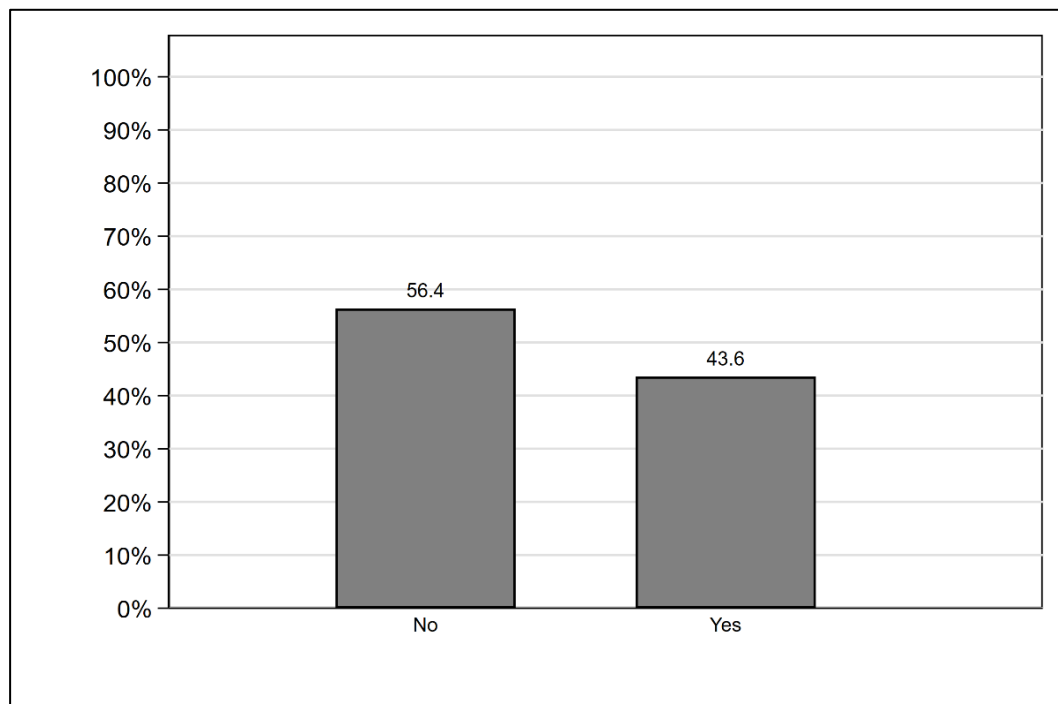
Notes: N = 3,719.

Figure A4.22: Is the policy about an outcome? (Future, Own responsibility)



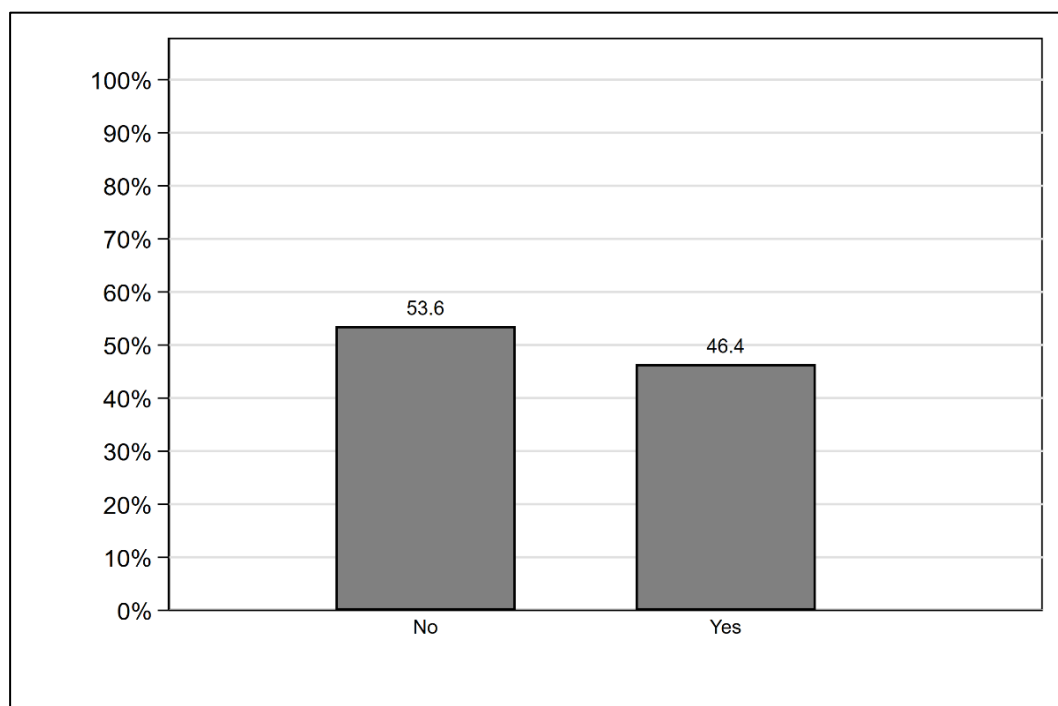
Notes: N = 35,933.

Figure A4.23: Is the policy about an outcome? (Past, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 1,819.

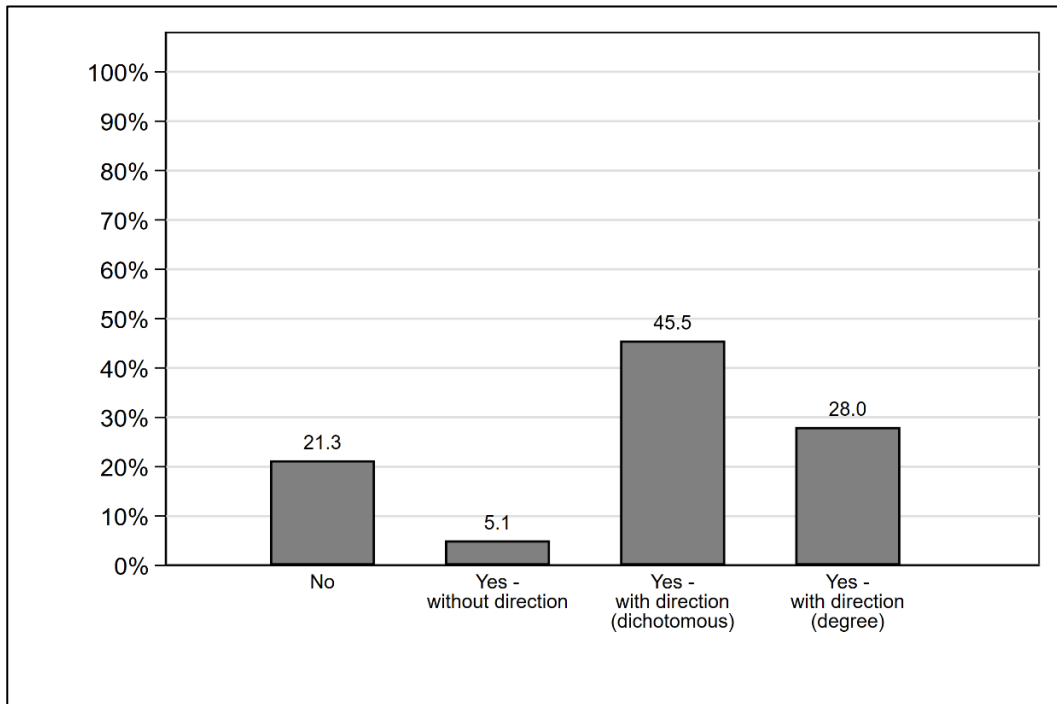
Figure A4.24: Is the policy about an outcome? (Future, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 713.

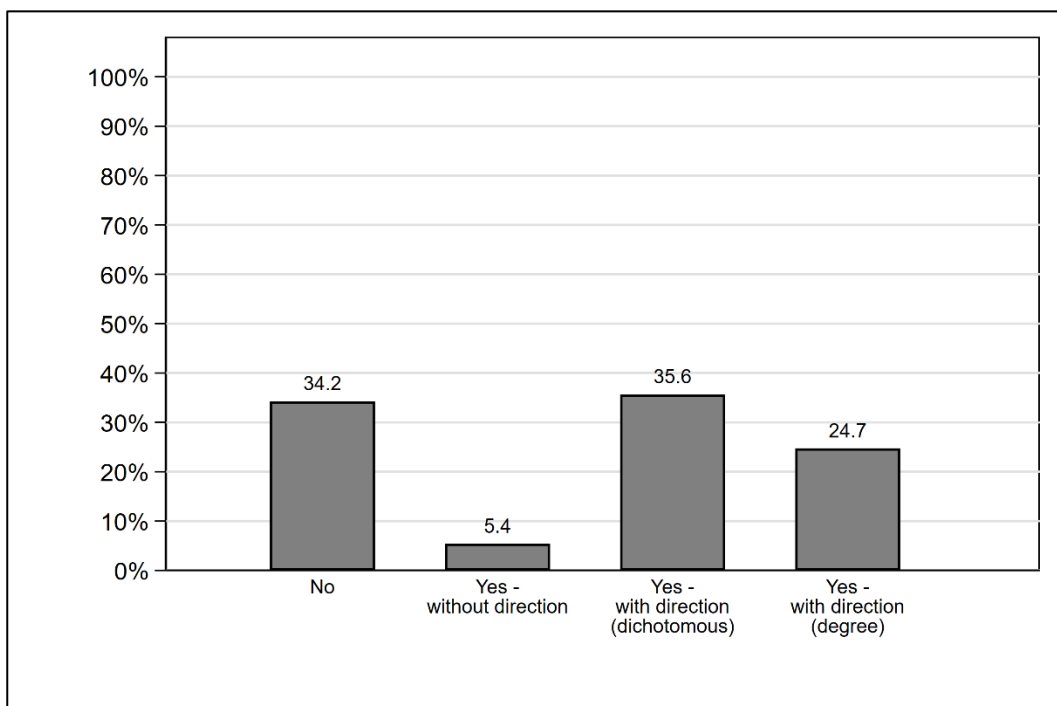
A4.3.4 Change

Figure A4.25: Is the policy about a change? (Past, Own responsibility)



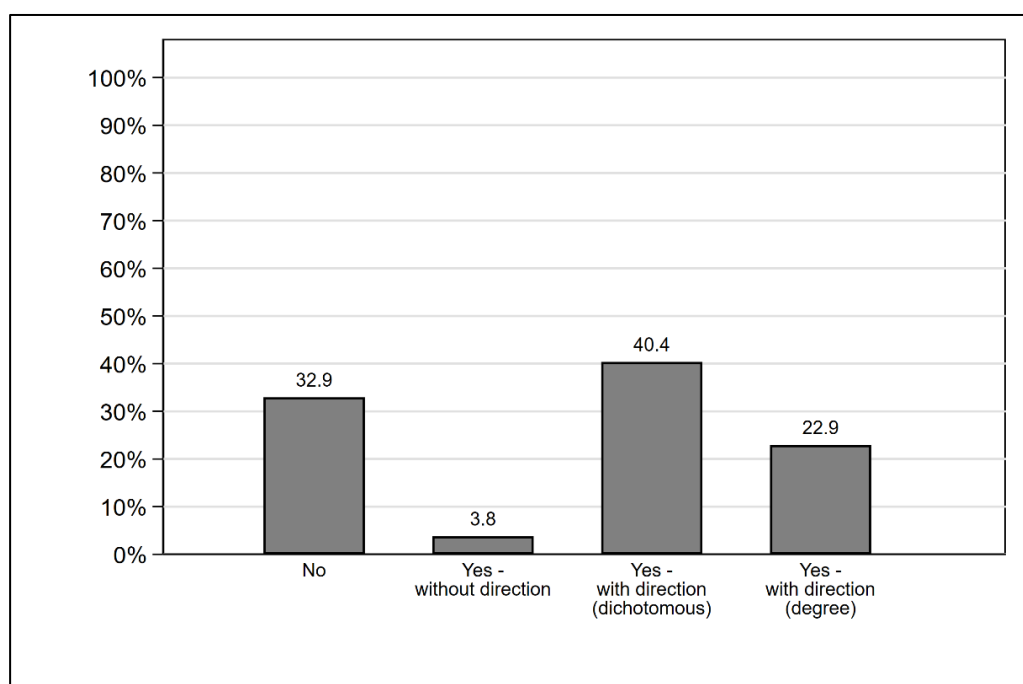
Notes: N = 3,719.

Figure A4.26: Is the policy about a change? (Future, Own responsibility)



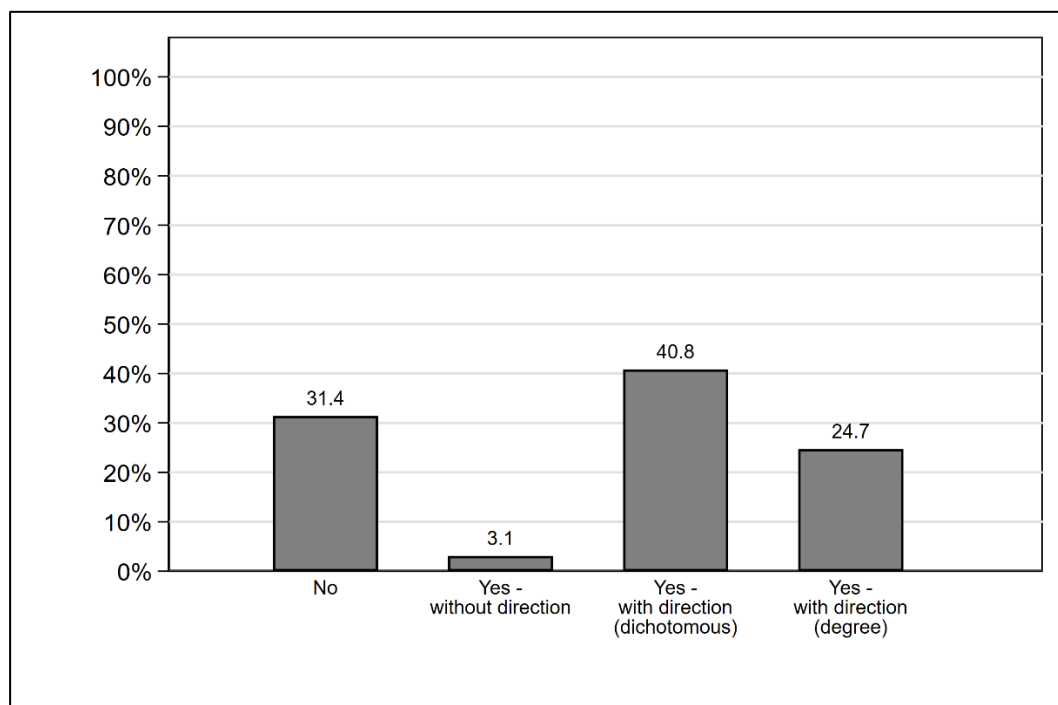
Notes: N = 35,933.

Figure A4.27: Is the policy about a change? (Past, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 1,819.

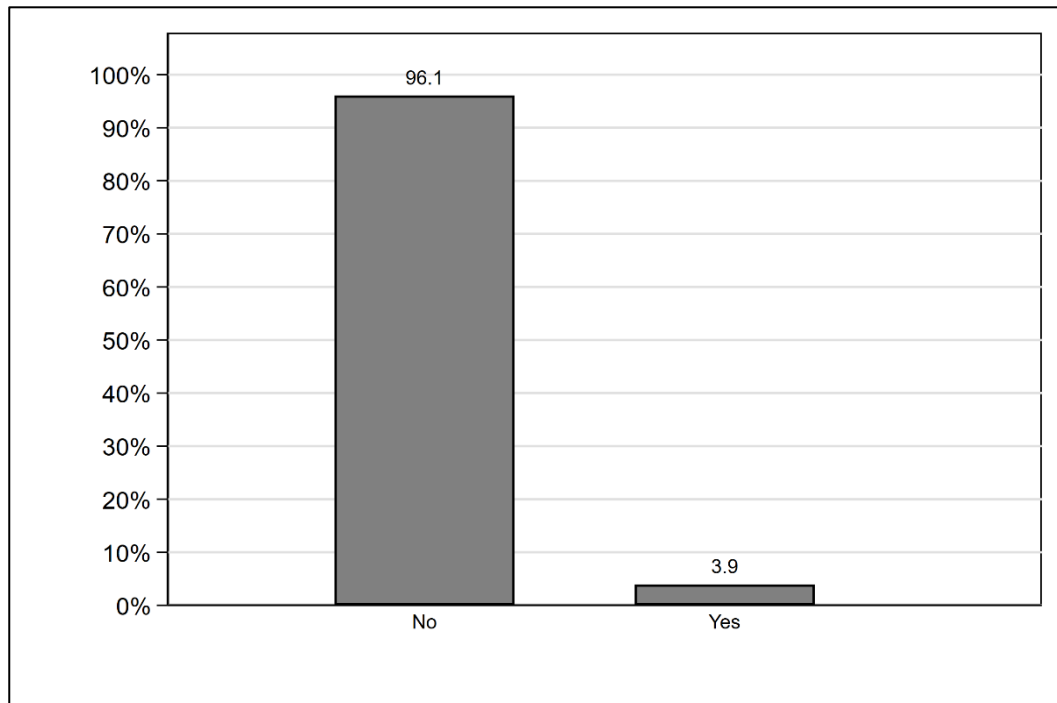
Figure A4.28: Is the policy about a change? (Future, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 713.

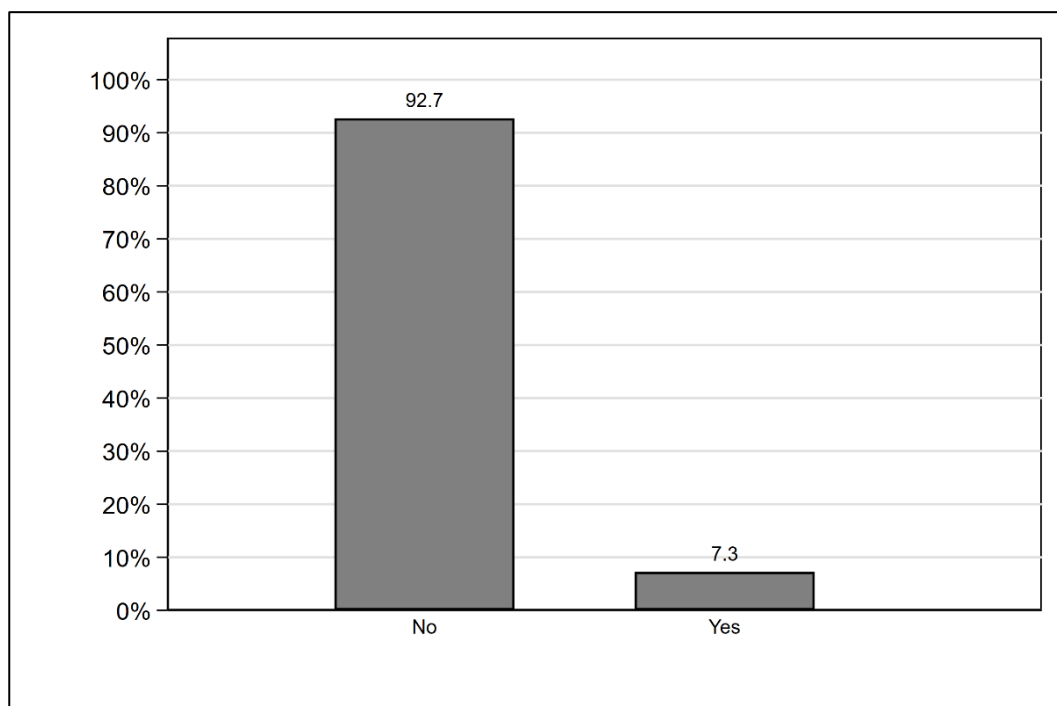
A4.3.5 Continuation

Figure A4.29: Is the policy about a continuation? (Past, Own responsibility)



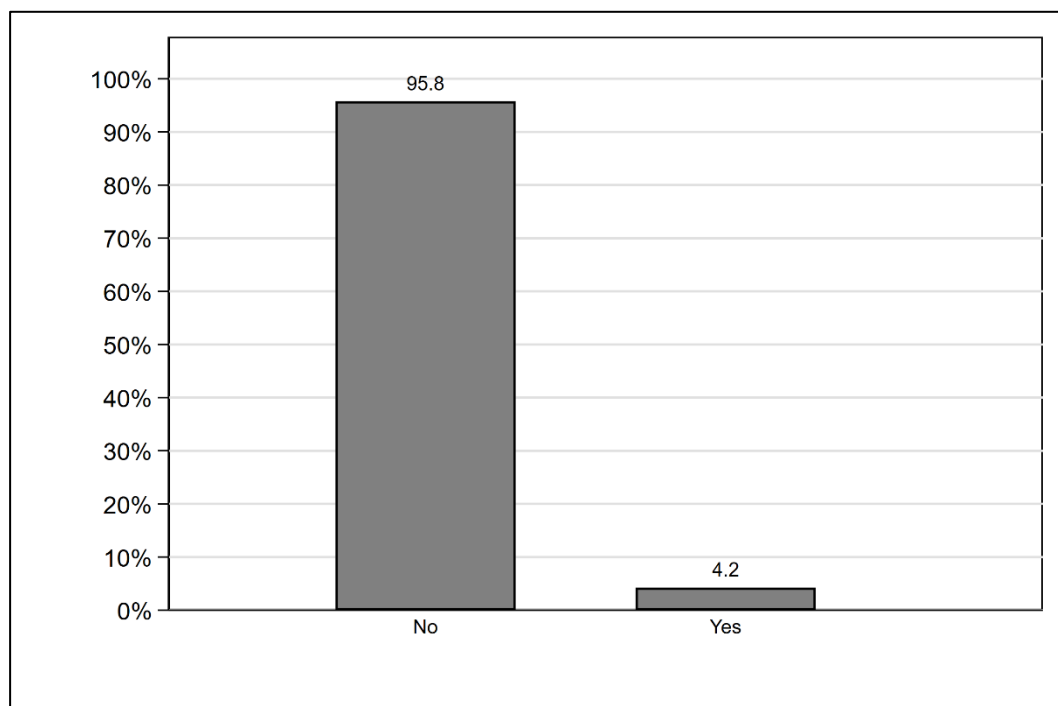
Notes: N = 3,719.

Figure A4.30: Is the policy about a continuation? (Future, Own responsibility)



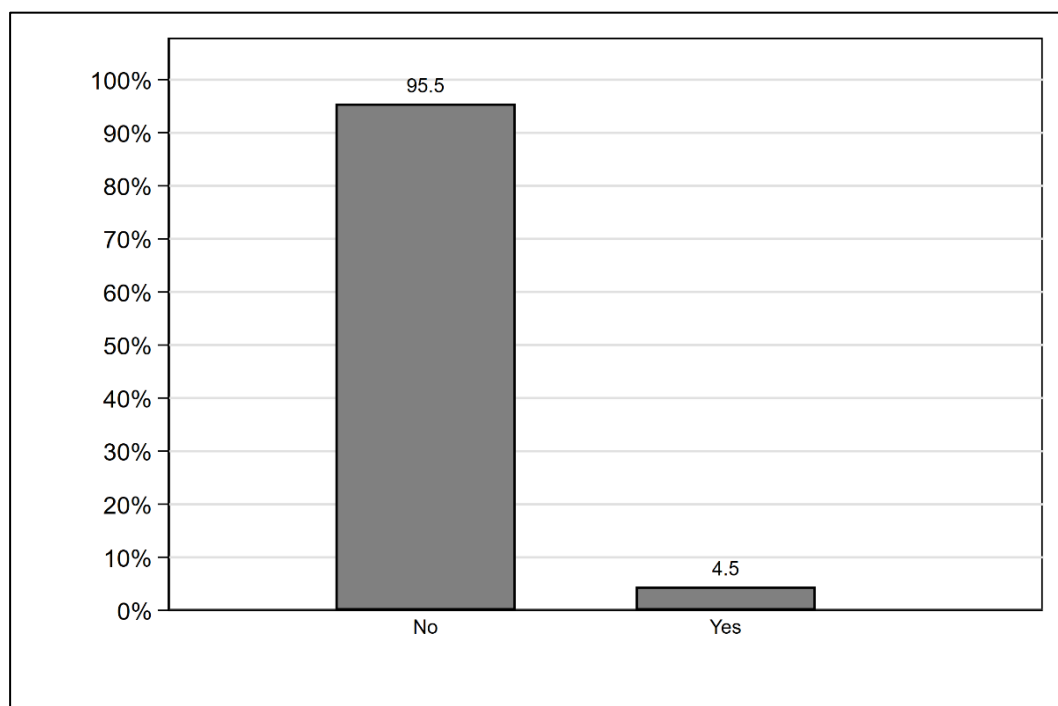
Notes: N = 35,933.

Figure A4.31: Is the policy about a continuation? (Past, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 1,819.

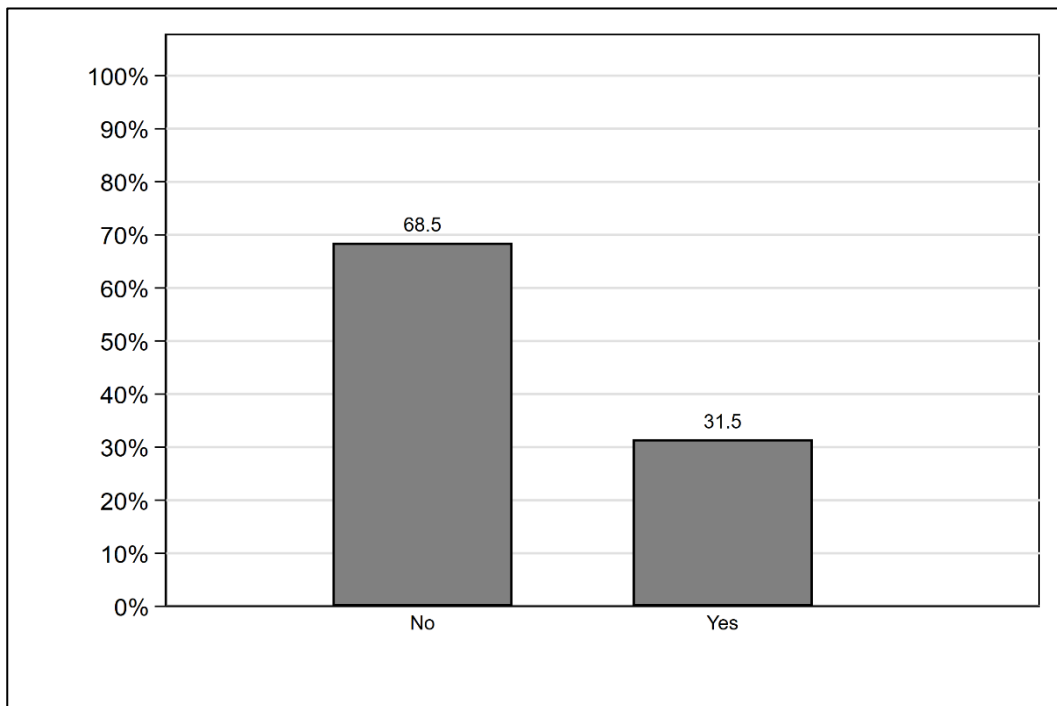
Figure A4.32: Is the policy about a continuation? (Future, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 713.

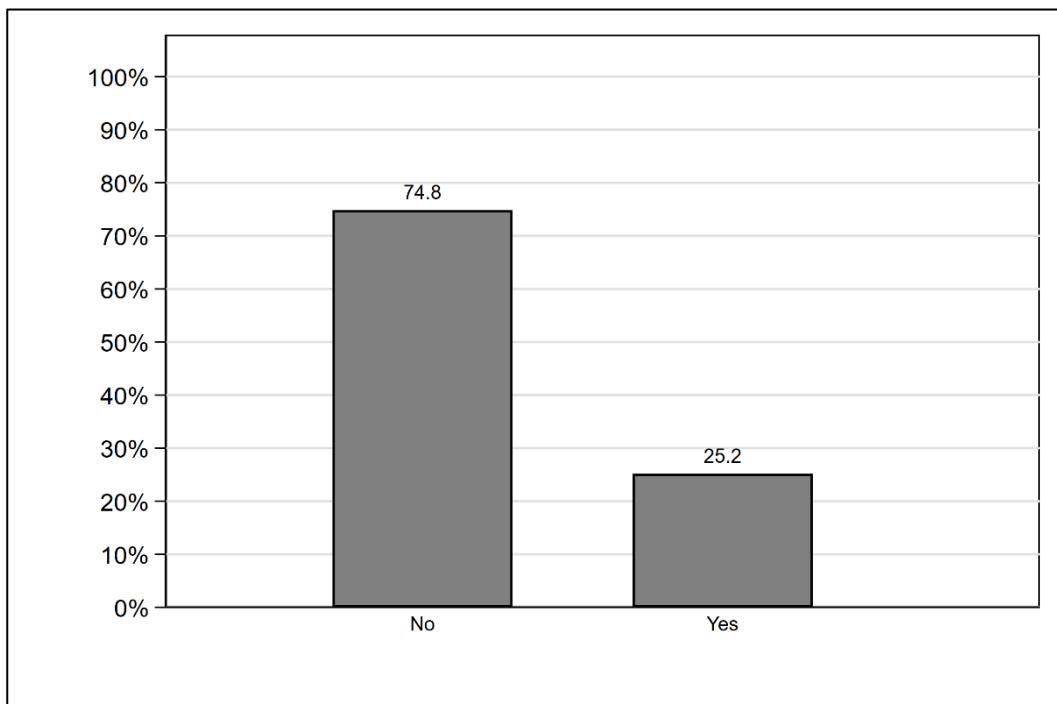
A4.3.6 Quantifiable

Figure A4.33: Is the policy quantifiable? (Past, Own responsibility)



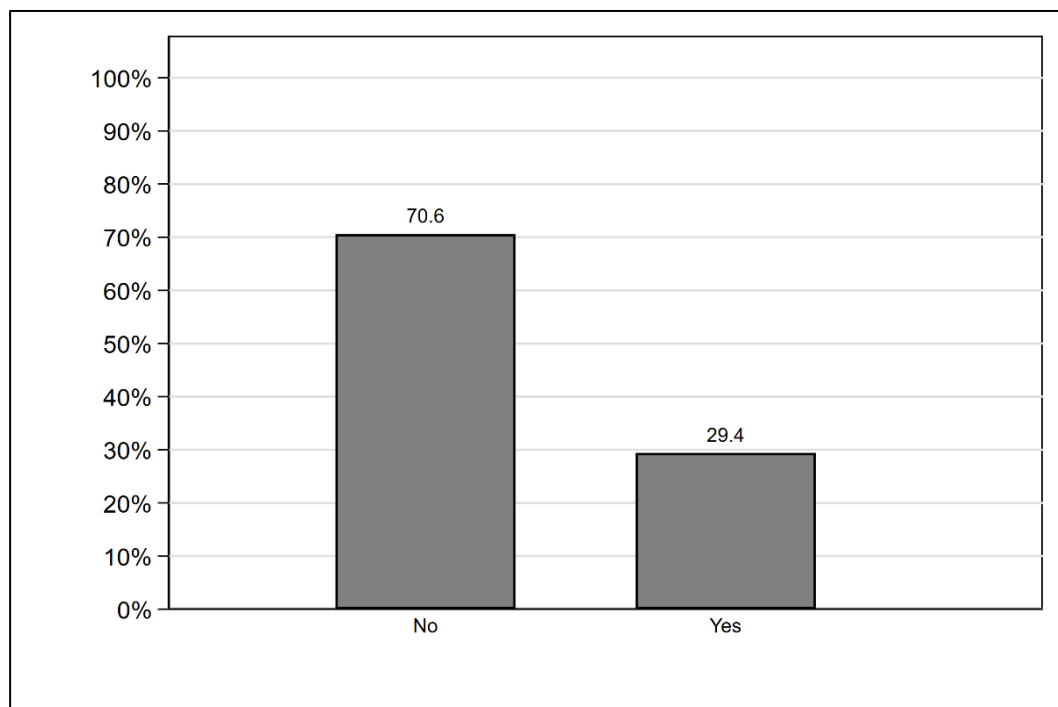
Notes: N = 3,719.

Figure A4.34: Is the policy quantifiable? (Future, Own responsibility)



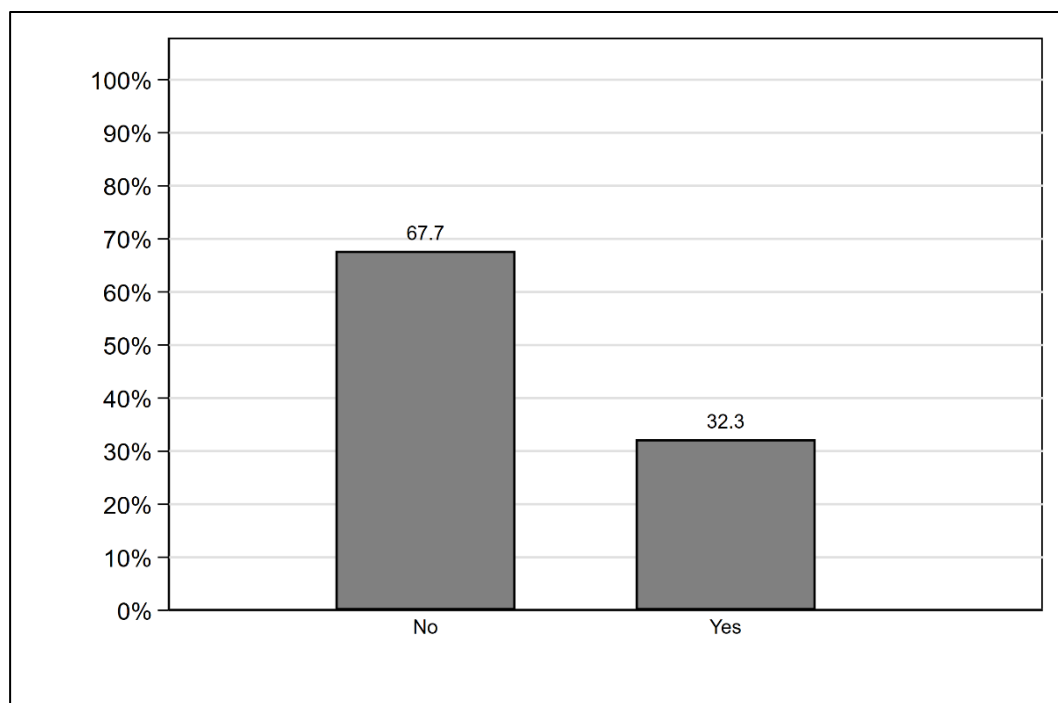
Notes: N = 35,933.

Figure A4.35: Is the policy quantifiable? (Past, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 1,819.

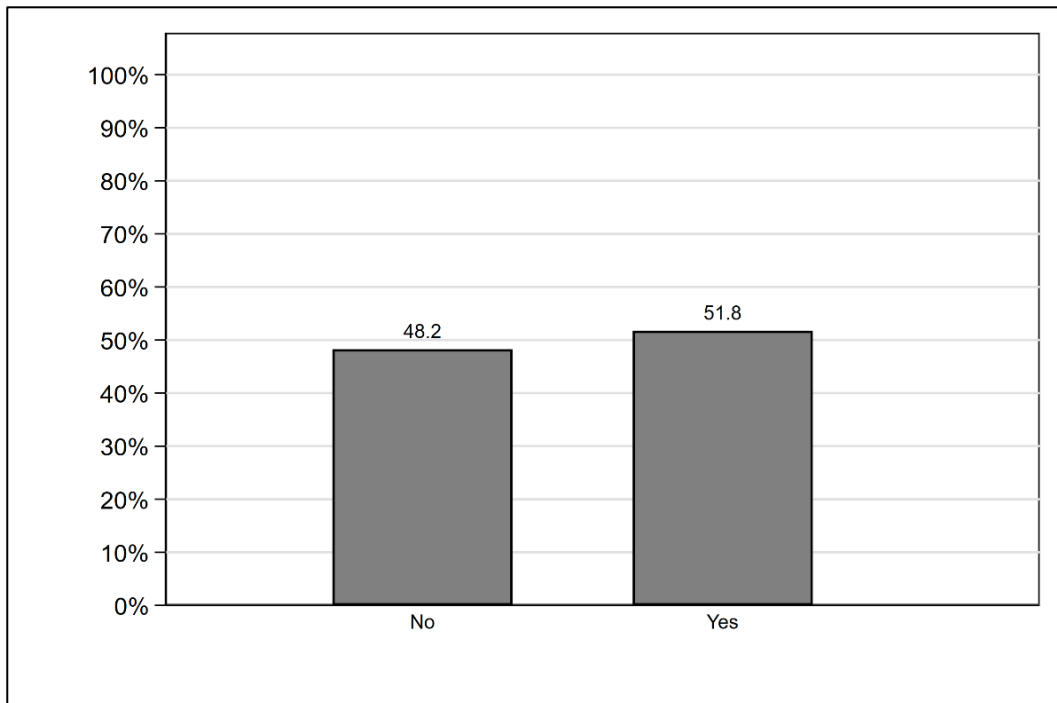
Figure A4.36: Is the policy quantifiable? (Future, Other responsibility)



Notes: N = 713.

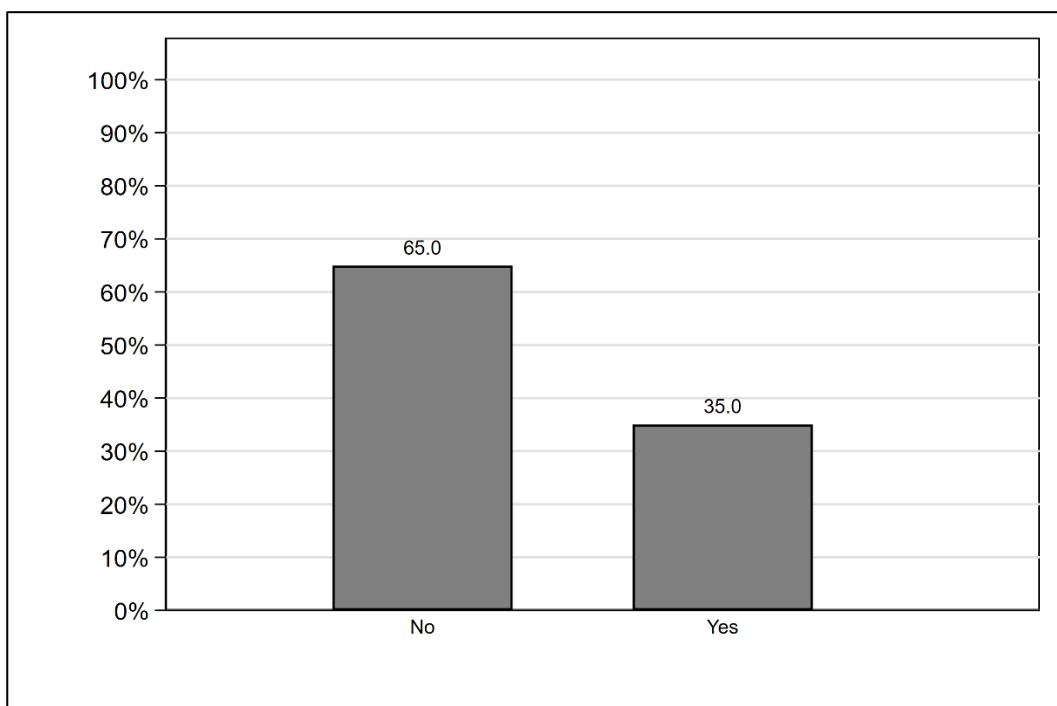
A4.3.7 Volume

**Figure A4.37: Is the quantifiable policy specific about the volume?
(Past, Own responsibility)**



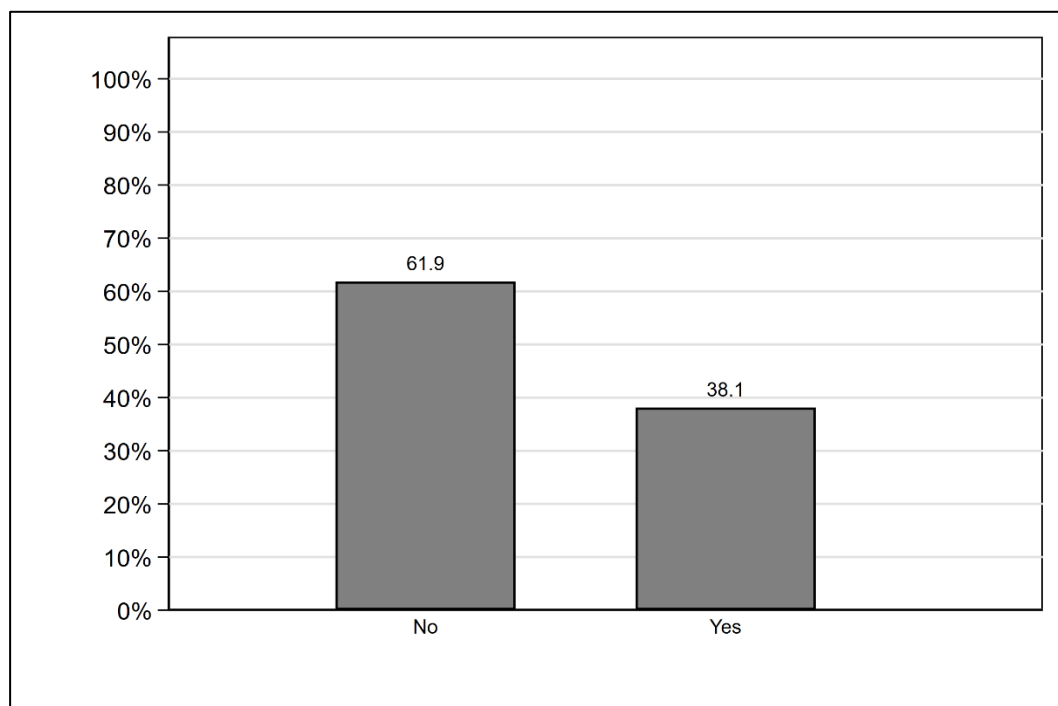
Notes: N = 1,171.

**Figure A4.38: Is the quantifiable policy specific about the volume?
(Future, Own responsibility)**



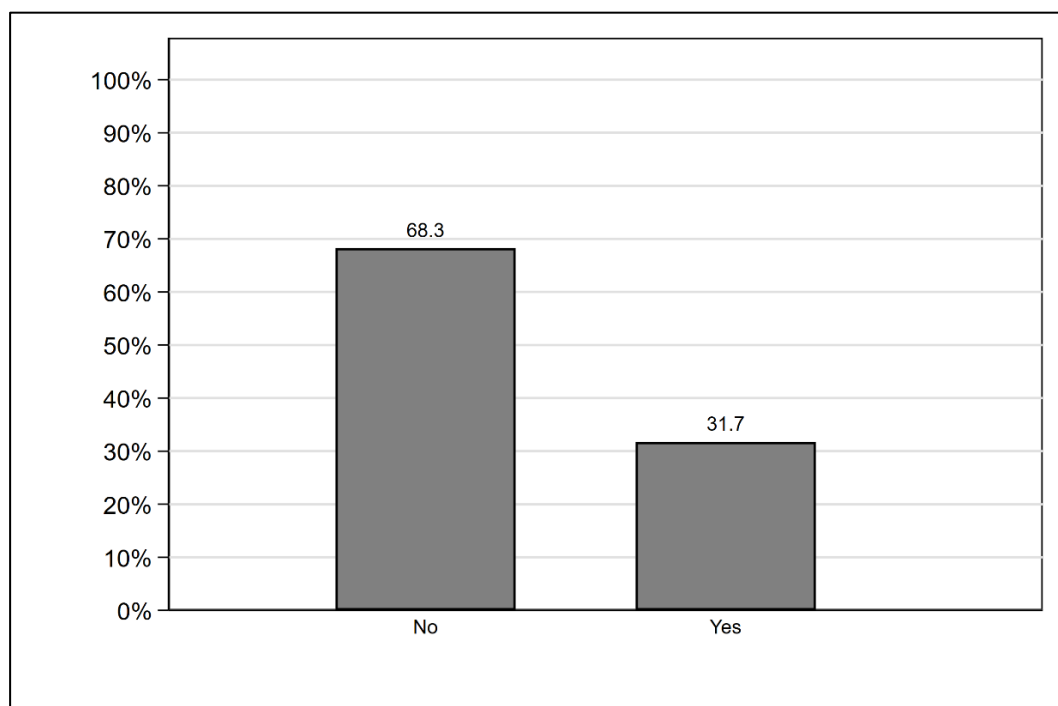
Notes: N = 9,041.

**Figure A4.39: Is the quantifiable policy specific about the volume?
(Past, Other responsibility)**



Notes: N = 535.

**Figure A4.40: Is the quantifiable policy specific about the volume?
(Future, Other responsibility)**



Notes: N = 230.

Appendix 5: Tables with findings

A5.1 Main results

Table A5.1: The effect of positional distance on share of commitments within issues

	I
Positional distance	-3.36*** (0.77)
Year	0.71*** (0.11)
Constant	-1411.2*** (231.0)
Observations	924
R-squared	0.073

Notes: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.001. Issue dummies not shown.

Table A5.2: The effect of positional change on share of commitments within issues

	I
Type of change	
- No change	Ref.
- Ideological crystallization	0.44 (2.08)
- Ideological dilution	7.49*** (2.20)
Year	0.29* (0.11)
Country	
- Denmark	Ref.
- United Kingdom	17.9*** (1.82)
- United States	-3.26 (2.66)
Government status	
- Opposition/outside parliament	Ref.
- Government	9.63*** (1.69)
Saliency	0.066 (0.85)
Constant	-578.9* (224.5)
Observations	764
R-squared	0.23

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Issue dummies not shown.

Table A5.3: The effect of increasing saliency on share of commitments within issues

	I
Saliency change	1.79** (0.61)
Issue engagement at previous election	
- Issue avoidance	Ref.
- Issue engagement	12.0*** (1.70)
Year	0.50*** (0.075)
Constant	-998.1*** (150.4)
Observations	1437
R-squared	0.097

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Issue dummies not shown.

English summary

Why do parties make commitments? This is the important research question of this dissertation. My main answer is that parties make commitments to try to gain credibility among voters. Commitments should increase a party's credibility because they both signal greater willingness from the party to pursue its stated policies and increase the costs of deviating from these policies after the election. Specifically, a party will need credibility in three situations: when its position is too similar to other parties' position; when it has diluted its position from one election to the next; and when it has increased its emphasis on an issue from one election to the next. Empirically, I show, in support of my main argument, that parties make more commitments in all three situations. These results are based on a huge data collection, in which I have hand-coded 65,630 so-called quasi-sentences in election manifestos from three countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, and Denmark) covering three decades (1992-2019). With this dissertation, I contribute to research on policy commitments (by revealing the origins of these statements), party competition (by showing the importance of the policy-committing strategy for the way parties communicate), and voters' decision-making (by theorizing about the importance of commitments to voters). The findings have strong implications for the linkage between parties and voters by illustrating that voters' ability to hold parties accountable after an election largely stems from parties' need for credibility during the election campaign.

Dansk resumé

Hvorfor laver partier valgløfter? Det er det centrale forskningsspørgsmål i denne afhandling. Mit overordnede svar er, at partier forpligter sig for at forsøge at opnå højere troværdighed blandt vælgerne. Valgløfter bør øge et partis troværdighed, fordi de både signalerer større villighed fra partiets side til at forfølge sine fremlagte politikker og samtidig øger omkostningerne ved, at partiet afviger fra disse politikker efter valget. Jeg forventer, at et parti særligt vil have behov for at øge sin troværdighed i tre situationer. For det første, når dets politiske holdninger ligner andre partiers holdninger. For det andet, når det har skiftet politisk standpunkt fra et valg til det næste. Og for det tredje, når det har øget sit fokus på et emne fra et valg til det næste. Empirisk finder jeg, i tråd med mit hovedargument, at partier forpligter sig mere i alle tre situationer. Disse resultater baserer sig på en stor dataindsamling, hvor jeg har klassificeret 65.630 såkaldte kvasisætninger i valgprogrammer fra tre lande (USA, Storbritannien og Danmark) over tre årtier (1992-2019). Med denne afhandling bidrager jeg til forskning i valgløfter (ved at afdække valgløfters oprindelse), partikonkurrence (ved at vise vigtigheden af valgløfter for den måde, partier kommunikerer) og vælgeres beslutningstagning (ved at argumentere for vigtigheden af valgløfter for vælgere). Resultaterne har store implikationer for forbindelsen mellem partier og vælgere, idet de illustrerer, at vælgeres evne til at holde partier ansvarlige efter et valg i høj grad stammer fra partiernes behov for troværdighed under valgkampen.

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