


Environmental chauvinism? Explaining issue expansion among non-mainstream parties

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Abstract

Do non-mainstream parties respond to other non-mainstream parties' owned issues? Whereas a great deal of extant research has examined the owned issues of non-mainstream parties and when mainstream parties take on these issues, little research has been done to explore when non-mainstream parties expand their issue focus to include the owned issues of other non-mainstream parties. We argue that non-mainstream parties will expand their issue focus as the public salience on the issue increases, but that this expansion is conditioned by the type of issue. In particular, we posit that non-mainstream parties will expand on issues on which there is agreement among their supporters. To test our claims, we examine radical-left, radical right and green parties' issue expansion on the environment and immigration in 15 West and East European countries from 1980–2018 using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, national election studies, and the Comparative Manifestos Project. Our findings have important implications for non-mainstream parties' issue evolution and party competition more generally.

Keywords

Party responsiveness, Issue ownership, Issue expansion

Borders are the environment's greatest ally; it is through them that we will save the planet.

–Jordan Bardella, *Rassemblement National* Member of the European Parliament (Mazque 2019)

Non-mainstream parties, such as radical-right and green parties, arise within party systems and often act as issue entrepreneurs (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; 2020; Hobolt and De Vries 2015). That is, many non-mainstream parties attempt to politicize new issues that cross-cut existing cleavages to generate opportunities to form coalitions and avoid exclusion from government. In doing so, non-mainstream parties attempt to establish ownership (i.e. a connection in the minds of voters between a policy and an issue) over the issue they are seeking to politicize (see Walgrave et al., 2012, 2015).

When faced with these non-mainstream or niche parties, mainstream parties have three options (Meguid 2005). First, they can ignore the competition over the newly politicized issue and remain passive. Second, they can accommodate the non-mainstream party's position on its issue, moving closer to it, and attempting to rest

ownership away from the non-mainstream party. Third, they can take an adversarial stance, opposing the position of the non-mainstream party.

While a large literature has examined if and when mainstream parties accommodate non-mainstream party positions (e.g. Meijers 2017; Rooduijn, et al., 2014; van Spanje, 2010; Spoon and Klüver 2020), much less research has examined how non-mainstream parties respond to the issue entrepreneurship of other non-mainstream parties. By non-mainstream parties, we refer to those party families whose owned issue is not mainstream or whose position on a mainstream issue is extreme. This article seeks to fill this gap by working to understand when and why non-mainstream parties, such as green parties, radical-right, and radical-left parties, choose to emphasize the issues

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owned by other non-mainstream parties, as demonstrated by the quote above from a member of the European Parliament from the French far-right *Rassemblement National* (RN). In other words, when do radical-right parties become environmental chauvinists? More generally: we ask when do non-mainstream parties respond to other non-mainstream parties and expand their issue focus?

Developing this understanding is imperative as non-mainstream parties are now playing an increasingly important role in many advanced democratic systems. Green parties have participated in governing coalitions in Germany, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, and Italy. They have challenged socialist and social democratic parties to become the largest party on the left in several countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and France. On the right, we have seen enormous growth in radical-right party popularity in recent decades. Radical-right parties have not only gained seats in parliaments, but have placed second or third in overall election results, as we have seen in Germany and the Netherlands. In the 2022 French presidential election, moreover, the radical-right party, RN, won 41.5% of the vote in the second round of the election. Additionally, we have seen expanding support for radical-left parties, in countries such as France, the Netherlands and Spain. From 2015–2019, the far-left *SYRIZA* (Coalition of the Radical Left) led the Greek government.

With the increasing electoral strength of non-mainstream parties, and their participation in government in several countries, it is important to understand how they interact with one another rather than simply how they interact with established mainstream parties. This understanding provides us greater insight into the evolution of party systems and party competition in Europe.

We argue that as one non-mainstream party politicizes an issue and the salience of that issue increases, other non-mainstream parties, much like mainstream parties, respond to voter concerns by increasingly discussing the newly politicized issue (see Klüver and Spoon 2016 and Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016 for a discussion of party response to voters). However, we posit that this effect will not hold for all issues. Research indicates that parties seek to discuss issues that bridge their base of support and the public at large (see De Sio and Weber 2014) and non-mainstream or niche parties are known to be even more responsive to their supporters than mainstream parties (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011). Thus, we argue that a non-mainstream party will expand its issue emphasis, focusing on the owned issues of other non-mainstream parties, when that party's supporters are largely in agreement regarding how the issue should be addressed.

We focus on three non-mainstream party families: green, radical-right, and radical-left parties. We examine non-mainstream party discussion of the environment and immigration issues, which are owned by green parties and

radical-right parties, respectively.¹ Following our expectations regarding increasing issue salience and agreement on an issue among non-mainstream party supporters, we find that radical-right and radical-left parties increase their discussion of the environmental issue when it is more salient among the public. However, we do not find that radical-left and green parties discuss immigration to a greater degree when this issue is more salient.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we present our theoretical argument regarding when non-mainstream parties will emphasize issues owned by other non-mainstream parties. We argue that non-mainstream parties will increase the emphasis of issues owned by another non-mainstream party when the issue is salient among the public and when there is agreement among their supporters on the issue. We then discuss the data and methods and present the results of our empirical analysis. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings and areas for future research.

Non-mainstream parties and issue emphasis

For the purposes of this study, we define non-mainstream parties as those whose owned issue is not mainstream or whose position on a mainstream issue is extreme. We thus focus on non-mainstream parties which belong to the green, radical-right and radical-left party families (see Spoon and Klüver, 2019). In addition, we focus on these parties as many non-mainstream parties often act as issue entrepreneurs (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; 2020; Hobolt and De Vries 2015). The theory of issue entrepreneurship suggests that in order to attract voters, political parties that have been less electorally successful attempt to find issues that have not been previously politicized, focusing attention on these issues (see Carmines and Stimson 1986). While in two-party systems, an issue entrepreneur tends to be the party that has most recently lost. In the multi-party systems found in much of Europe, however, new parties arise, focusing on a single issue or related set of issues (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; 2020; Hobolt and De Vries 2015). This helps these parties to differentiate themselves from their mainstream party competitors (see Cox, 1990; Downs, 1957; Kitschelt 1994, 1995).

In multi-party systems, non-mainstream party issue entrepreneurship has led to electoral pressure being placed on mainstream parties. The entrepreneurial non-mainstream parties discuss issues that have not been previously politicized. By doing this, they establish ownership over that new issue. Additionally, these parties attempt to increase the salience of these new issues among the public, thus threatening to draw voters who are now concerned with the new issue away from mainstream parties. This results in

mainstream parties fearing a loss of voters to non-mainstream parties (Bischof 2017). In response, mainstream parties often move towards the positions of these non-mainstream parties on the newly politicized issues (Meijers 2017; Rooduijn, et al., 2014; van Spanje, 2010; Spoon and Klüver 2020). Importantly, the increased discussion by mainstream parties of these newly politicized issues increases their public salience even further (Williams and Hunger ND).

As the public salience of an issue increases within a system, we expect parties to address the issue (see Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Singer 2013; Williams et al., 2016; Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016). When public concern about an issue increases, parties attempt to “ride the wave” and signal to the public that they care about that issue (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994). Importantly, mainstream parties are often understood to be different from non-mainstream parties, as research has indicated that non-mainstream parties are more responsive to supporters than they are to the public at large (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Klüver and Spoon 2016).

However, additional research indicates that non-mainstream parties can also be responsive to the public at-large. Spoon (2011) demonstrated that green parties have attempted to position themselves on issues so as not to lose supporters by appearing too similar to other parties, mainly mainstream parties, but close enough to mainstream positions so as to vote-maximize. Henceroth and Jensen (2018) make a similar argument regarding regional parties and their mainstream rival in their respective regions. Further still, Spoon and Williams (2020) found that non-mainstream parties, such as greens, do engage in issue expansion strategies when they see opportunities to vote-maximize. As Spoon and Williams (2020; 3–4) write, “[non-mainstream] parties may both be able to, and seek to, expand the issue areas on which they focus so as to increase vote totals.”

Following this line of research, it follows that non-mainstream parties, similarly to mainstream parties, seek to maximize their votes (Downs 1957; Strøm 1990) and therefore, should attempt to “ride the wave” when issues are important to the electorate. Our first hypothesis is thus:

H1: When the public salience of an issue owned by a non-mainstream party increases, other non-mainstream parties will discuss that issue to a greater degree.

Of course, parties do not always respond to the increasing salience of new issues. Parties are far from unitary actors, and these intra-party divisions, moreover, can influence parties’ policy positions, coalition choices, and roll call votes (see e.g. Harmel and Tan 2003; Bäck 2008; Greene and Haber 2015; Ceron 2016). Thus, parties attempt

to avoid issues that divide their supporters (Van de Wardt et al., 2014; Steenbergen and Scott 2004).

In essence, emphasizing an issue over which a party’s supporters are divided threatens to wedge party supporters (for more on issue wedging see Hillygus and Shields 2008; Van de Wardt et al. 2014). This is why parties, in choosing which issues to emphasize, seek those that bridge their party base and the public at-large (De Sio and Weber 2014).

Given that non-mainstream party supporters are highly policy driven, and therefore less amenable to ideological compromise (see Kitschelt 1988, 1994; D’Alimonte 1999), it follows that these parties, while attempting to vote maximize, would be even more concerned than mainstream parties with the risks of increasing the discussion of issue areas that divide their supporters. Thus, we would expect non-mainstream parties to expand issue appeals into an issue area owned by another non-mainstream party only if the party’s supporters are relatively united on that issue. That is to say, a non-mainstream party will only increase discussion of another non-mainstream party’s owned issue if the supporters of the potentially expanding non-mainstream party are relatively unified on how the issue should be addressed.

This logic is similar to that of the issue yield theory (De Sio and Weber 2014, 2020; D’Alimonte et al., 2020), in which political parties attempt to find and emphasize issues that have broad appeal among the public at-large, while bridging the public at-large and a party’s base of support. The authors posit that if these bridge issues become salient enough, the parties that are viewed by the public as most credible on those issues will see increases in vote totals. Following the above research, our second hypothesis is thus:

H2: A non-mainstream party will expand into another non-mainstream party’s issue area if that issue is of greater public salience and the party’s supporters are united on the issue.

Data and methods

To test our hypotheses we examine two issue areas that are owned by non-mainstream parties: the environment and immigration. To do this, we rely on data from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP; Volkens et al. 2018) to measure party discussion of an issue. We also use public opinion data originally collected by Klüver and Spoon (2016) from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and various national election studies to measure the public salience of an issue.² This data originally ranged from 1972 to 2011; we updated the data using national election studies to include public salience measures through 2018.³

As we are interested in understanding when non-mainstream parties expand issue appeals into issue areas

owned by other non-mainstream parties, we restrict the data to instances in which an issue is, in fact, owned by a non-mainstream party. Following Meijers and Williams (2020) who argued that a party cannot be the issue owner until it has electoral success, we limit the data to instances in which the issue owning party received at least 5% of the vote in the previous election.⁴ After restricting the data, our analysis includes Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The data spans from 1980 through 2018.

In hypothesis 1, we expect that when the public salience of an issue owned by a non-mainstream party increases, other non-mainstream parties will discuss that issue to a greater degree. The unit of analysis is the party-issue-election; therefore, the dependent variable used is *non-mainstream party discussion of an issue owned by another non-mainstream party* in a given election.⁵ For radical-right parties, the dependent variable is discussion of the environment in an election. For green parties, the dependent variable is discussion of immigration in an election. Each radical-left party appears twice in the data; once for the environmental issue and once for immigration in each election.⁶ This data is derived from the CMP. Discussion of the environment is operationalized as the percentage of quasi-sentences in a party's manifesto that are positive about anti-growth economy (*per416*) and environmental protection (*per501*).⁷ Following existing research (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Vrânceanu and Lachat, 2021; Williams and Hunger, 2021; Williams and Meijers, 2021), discussion of immigration is operationalized as the sum of several issue categories: Statements regarding a "National way of life" (positive [*per601*] and negative [*per602*]) and "Multiculturalism" (positive [*per607*] and negative [*per608*]). Non-mainstream party discussion of an issue owned by another non-mainstream party ranges from 0 to 20.99 with a mean of 4.56 and a standard deviation of 4.98. The value of 20.99 is the Danish Socialist People's Party in 2005 discussing the environment. The highest value for immigration is 8.17, which belongs to the Social Democratic Party of Croatia in 2007.

The main independent variable used in testing this hypothesis is the *public salience* of the non-mainstream party issue being expanded into (i.e. the environment for radical-right and radical-left or immigration for radical-left and greens) at the previous election (*t-1*).⁸ These data are from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and various national election studies. For the issue of the environment, the variable is the percentage of the public who said some aspect of environmental protection was the most important problem/issue in their country.⁹ For the issue of immigration, the variable is the percentage of the public who said some aspect of immigration was the most important

problem/issue in their country. We only used open-ended questions. Lagged public salience of the expanded issue has a range of 0–33.36 (Sweden on the environment in 1991; the highest level of lagged public salience for immigration was in the United Kingdom in 2017), with a mean of 5.71, and a standard deviation of 7.04.

In hypothesis 2, we expect that when a non-issue owning non-mainstream party's supporters are divided on an issue that is owned by another non-mainstream party, that party will not expand its appeals into that issue area as it will lessen its ability to attract voters. To determine unity and division on the environment and immigration issues, we turn to data in Waves 2–5 of the European Values Survey (EVS, 2015, 2020), which covers the period 1990–2017. Questions on the EVS allow us to examine how unified voters of the radical-right and radical-left are on the environment, and the greens and racial-left on immigration. In response to a question which asks respondents if they would give part of their income to prevent environmental pollution, the majority of radical-left and radical-right supporters either strongly agreed or agreed, across the four survey waves. Looking at polarization among supporters, we find that the average scores are 0.63 and 0.59 for radical-right and radical-left votes, respectively, across the four waves (where 0 indicates perfect unity and 1.0 indicates pure polarization).¹⁰

Turning to the immigration issue, we look at a question which asks respondents if they agree that immigration should be restricted when jobs are scarce. Unlike the environment issue, we find a high degree of disagreement among supporters of the greens and radical-left on the issue. Furthermore, polarization is quite high for supporters of both party families, averaging 0.91 for green supporters and 0.87 for radical-left supporters (where 0 indicates perfect unity and 1.0 indicates pure polarization). In sum, these results indicate substantial unity among non-mainstream party supporters on the environment and significant division among non-mainstream party supporters on immigration. See Appendix Tables A1–A4 for the complete results of these diagnostics.

Following the above analysis, we expect that higher public salience of the environment should lead radical-right and radical-left parties to increase discussion of the environment, but higher public salience of immigration will not lead radical-right and radical-left parties to increase discussion of immigration. Importantly, radical-right and radical-left supporters are unified on the environment because the issue is complementary to their ideology. For the radical-right, protection of the environment fits into an ideology of protecting the nation and native population—an ideology that we term *environmental chauvinism*—as demonstrated in the RN's manifesto for the 2019 European Parliament elections, which focuses on the importance of borders for environmental protection. A further example is

the Austrian Freedom's Party's (FPÖ) support of a ban on glyphosate, a substance used in herbicides (Tosun and Debus, 2021, 13) to protect Austrian consumers. For the radical-left, protection of the environment is part of a broader ideology of eco-socialism, illustrated by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's *France Insoumise* (France Unbowed), which included a transition to 100% renewable energy and a constitutional reform to include a 'green rule' in its 2017 election manifesto. In addition, this issue expansion is further evidence that parties will support environmental protection when it provides an electoral opportunity (Spoon et al., 2014).

The unit of analysis remains the party-issue-election for hypothesis 2. The dependent variable is the same as the dependent variable used in testing hypothesis 1; non-mainstream party discussion of an issue owned by another non-mainstream party at a given election. The independent variable used in testing hypothesis 2 is an interaction between the public salience of the non-mainstream party expanded issue and a dummy variable indicating if the expanded issue is the environment (coded as 1) or immigration (coded as 0).¹¹

Beyond our main dependent and independent variables, we control for a number of factors. First, as research has shown that parties' issue appeals are linked to electoral performance (see Greene 2016, 2020), we control for the *vote share* in the last national election (t_{-1}) of the non-mainstream party that is seeking to expand. Second, following research that parties respond to the positions of other parties (van Spanje, 2010; Meijers 2017), we control for the *party system salience of the issue* (i.e. the environment and immigration). This variable further controls for any effect that mainstream party discussion of the issue may have, as we do not include the focal party or the issue owning party in this measure. Third, we include dummy variables indicating if the focal non-mainstream party is a *green party*, or if it is a *radical-right party*, with the radical-left serving as a baseline. Finally, we use a lagged dependent variable as current discussion of an issue should be influenced by past discussion of the issue. Table A6 in the Appendix includes descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analyses.

As the dependent variable used to test both above hypotheses is a continuous variable, OLS regression is most appropriate. Given that our dataset is hierarchically structured with each party nested in a country and each party nested in a year, we use a cross-classified multilevel linear regression model which allows intercepts to vary based on both country and year.¹²

Results

Model 1 (Table 1) presents the results of our test of hypothesis 1. The variable measuring public salience of a non-mainstream

party owned issue is positive but statistically insignificant. Thus, we cannot reject the null of hypothesis 1; there is no evidence that high public salience of a non-mainstream party owned issue will lead to other non-mainstream parties expanding into that issue area.

Model 2 (Table 1) presents the results of a test of hypothesis 2, which posits differentiated effects for issues that unite versus divide the base of a non-issue owning non-mainstream party.¹³ The main variable, an interaction between the public salience of a non-mainstream owned issue and a dummy variable indicating if that issue is the environment, is statistically significant and positive. This indicates that radical-right and radical-left parties are more responsive to public salience on the environment than are radical-left and green parties to public salience on immigration. This confirms hypothesis 2. Importantly, even when public salience is 0, non-mainstream parties are more likely to discuss the environment issue compared to the immigration issue.

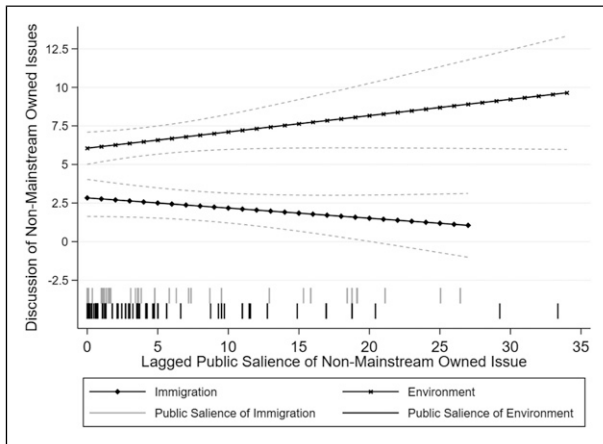
Figure 1 presents the substantive effects of the interaction between the public salience of a non-mainstream party owned issue and a variable indicating whether the issue is the environment on non-issue owning non-mainstream party discussion of that issue. The x-axis is the lagged public salience of the non-mainstream owned issue. The y-axis is non-issue owning non-mainstream party discussion of the issue. The solid black line with diamonds represents the effect of the lagged public salience of immigration, whereas the solid black line marked by an "x" is the effect of the lagged public salience of the environment. The dashed gray lines represent 95% confidence intervals around those effects. The gray vertical ticks along the x-axis represent the distribution of the public salience of immigration and the black vertical ticks along the x-axis represent the distribution of the public salience of the environment. The lines are truncated to the largest respective value of public salience of immigration and the environment in the dataset.

Holding all other variables at their means, when the public salience of immigration is 0, radical-left and green parties devote about 2.8% of their manifesto to immigration. When the public salience of the environment is 0, radical-right and radical-left parties devote about 6.1% of their manifesto to the issue. Importantly, the 95% confidence intervals of these findings do not overlap when public salience of the issues is 0. This indicates that even when the environmental issue is not salient, radical-left and radical-right parties are more likely to discuss the environment than are radical-left and green parties the immigration issue when its public salience is 0, indicating that non-mainstream parties are pre-disposed towards discussing the environmental issue. This may be due to the fact that the environmental issue entrepreneurs have been active across the countries in our sample for a longer period of time.

Table I. Effect of public salience of an issue on non-mainstream party discussion of that issue.

DV: Issue discussion	Model 1	Model 2
Public salience of issue (<i>t-1</i>)	0.001 (0.040)	-0.066 (0.049)
Environment issue	4.179*** (0.821)	3.221*** (0.911)
Public salience of issue*		0.171** (0.075)
Environment issue		
Vote share (<i>t-1</i>)	0.001 (0.043)	0.002 (0.043)
Party system issue salience	0.394*** (0.080)	0.415*** (0.080)
Green party	0.361 (0.741)	0.365 (0.729)
Radical-right party	-2.829*** (0.761)	-2.827*** (0.748)
Issue discussion (<i>t-1</i>)	0.257*** (0.063)	0.241*** (0.063)
Intercept	-0.215 (0.641)	0.168 (0.652)
N	164	164
Country groups	15	15
Year groups	65	65
BIC	902.004	902.048

*** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$.

**Figure 1.** Effect of public salience on discussion of issues by issue area.

Importantly, not only is there a marked substantive difference between discussion of the environment and immigration when the public salience of each of those issues is 0, the two results diverge quickly. The effect for the environmental issue increases substantially as the public salience of the environment increases. There is, however, a slightly negative slope for immigration as the public salience of that issue increases. This could be because as immigration becomes more salient, other parties want to distinguish themselves from the radical right, so they talk less about the issue. Alternatively, it could be that radical-left and green parties talk less about the issue to reduce the saliency of the radical-right's owned issue. When public salience of the environment is 34%, we can expect radical-right and radical-left parties to devote about 9.8% of their manifesto to the issue. This is an increase of 4 percentage

points from what is expected when public salience of the environment is 0. Conversely, when public salience of immigration is 27%, radical-left and green parties are only expected to devote about 1% of their manifestos to the issue. This is a decrease of 1.5 percentage points from the lowest level of public salience of immigration in the dataset to the highest.¹⁴ Importantly, the 95% confidence intervals around these two slopes diverge as lagged public salience of the non-mainstream owned issue increases, with the largest separation between the lower bound of the environmental issue and the upper bound of the immigration issue when lagged public salience of the issue is at about 10. This indicates that the expected discussion of the environment and immigration do take clearly different trajectories as public salience of the issues increases and that there is a substantive difference between these two issues.

To illustrate these relationships, we can turn to several examples in our dataset. On the radical-left, the Danish Socialist People's Party's discussion of the environmental issue in 1990 was nearly 15%. Interestingly, in the 1987 national election survey, roughly 13% of the public responded that the environment was the most important issue in the election. Between 1984 and 1987, the percentage of the public concerned with the environment increased from about 0.6% to nearly 13%, while the percentage of the Danish Socialist People's Party's manifesto dedicated to the environment rose from about 6% to nearly 15% from 1987 to 1990, an increase of about 9 percentage points. We see a similar pattern with the radical-right Norwegian Progress Party in 2013. At the previous election in 2009, public salience of the environment was relatively high at 11.5%. In its 2013 manifesto, the Norwegian Progress Party devoted about 6% of its manifesto to the environment. This represents an increase of about 3 percentage points in manifesto

statements dedicated to the environment and an increase of about 8 percentage points in the public salience of the environmental issue.

Turning to the issue of immigration, the Dutch Green Left devoted about 2.3% of its manifesto to the issue of immigration in 2010. The lagged public salience of immigration in that year was quite high, at 21.1%. Importantly, between 2006 and 2010, Green Left emphasis of immigration declined from 3.6% to 2.3%, a decrease of 1.3 percentage points, while the lagged public salience of the issue increased from 1.5% to 21.1%, an increase of nearly 20 percentage points.

It is important to note, however, the tests reported in Models 1 and 2 present conservative findings. Given the temporal sequencing of when election surveys are conducted (post-election) and manifestos are written (pre-election), we use public opinion at t_{-1} to predict party issue emphasis at t_0 . This means that public salience of an issue may be measured several years prior to when a manifesto is written. We expect that if public issue salience were measured closer to the time of a manifesto's writing, the effects found in Models 1 and 2 would be even greater.¹⁵

Several of our control variables are also statistically significant in all models. First, party system salience of an issue is positive and statistically significant. This demonstrates that when parties other than the issue owning non-mainstream party and the focal party increase their discussion of either the environment or immigration issue, non-mainstream parties that do not own those issues will also increase their discussion of them. Second, we also find that the dummy variable indicating if a party is radical-right is negative and significant in all models. This suggests that radical-right parties discuss the environment less than radical-left parties do. Finally, lagged discussion of a non-mainstream party owned issue by a non-issue owning non-mainstream party is positive and significant. This indicates that if a party discussed an issue to a greater degree in the previous election, it is likely to do so in the current election.

Conclusion

In this article, we have demonstrated that non-mainstream parties respond to the owned issues of other non-mainstream parties, specifically when public salience is high on an issue around which party supporters are unified. Importantly, this indicates that the type of non-mainstream issue matters for issue expansion. Green and radical-left parties will not discuss immigration more even when the public cares about the issue. Conversely, both the radical-left and radical-right will discuss the environment more as public salience increases. However, radical-left and radical-right parties do not necessarily discuss the environment in the same way, thus leading to the potential rise of

environmental chauvinism. This will be an important avenue to explore in future research.

These findings have several important implications for non-mainstream parties and party competition more generally. First, they demonstrate that non-mainstream parties are responsive to the electorate in general. On the one hand, these parties seek to simultaneously attract more voters while not alienating their existing supporters. This highlights the vote-maximizing nature (Downs 1957; Strøm 1990) of non-mainstream parties and arguably how these parties are mainstreaming (i.e. becoming more like mainstream parties). By seeking to attract more voters, they are demonstrating how they may be following more of a modified catch-all (Kirchheimer, 1966) or broad appeal (Somer-Topcu 2015) strategy. On the other hand, however, these findings are conditional on the type of non-mainstream issue. Thus, although the parties are vote-seeking, there is perhaps a limit to how far they will go in expanding their issue appeals. If party supporters are divided, party leaders then will not take the risk of expanding their issue focus; it is only when they are confident that this expansion will be positively received by their supporters that they will be willing to expand. This importantly demonstrates that non-mainstream parties are still balancing their vote- and policy-seeking preferences (Spoon 2011; Henceroth and Jensen 2018) and thus may be mainstreaming, but still remain somewhat different from their mainstream counterparts (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011). Moreover, given this desire to balance both appealing to existing voters and maintaining existing voters, if the issue expansion strategy does not yield the desired outcomes, as the party becomes more divided on an issue, for example, we would expect the party to back away from these issues.

Second, our findings suggest the challenge that remains for non-mainstream parties in overtaking mainstream parties as the dominant parties in their respective systems is not being held back by internal divisions within their own parties, as we saw with how radical-left and green parties were less responsive to public salience on immigration. It will thus be important to examine the manifestos of non-mainstream parties in recent elections in Germany, Netherlands and France, for example, to continue analyzing patterns of issue expansion and how they may differ across types of issues.

Finally, while our findings have broadened our understanding of non-mainstream party issue expansion, there are several areas for future research. First, while we have examined non-mainstream party issue expansion into other non-mainstream issues in this article, and Spoon and Williams (2020) looked at green party expansion into economic issues, what still eludes us is a broader theory of issue expansion (and contraction) for non-mainstream parties across all types of issues (mainstream and non-

mainstream alike). Thus, a fruitful expansion of this research agenda should include the development of such a broader theory. Second, to delve further into the mechanism behind this decision, it would be beneficial to conduct an elite survey to further understand both non-mainstream and mainstream party leaders' decision-making processes of when to expand into other issue areas beyond their owned issues. Do we see differences, for example, in what explains this decision among non-mainstream versus mainstream party leaders and for non-mainstream or mainstream issues? Third, it will be important to examine the effect of exogenous shocks on the increase in public salience and the subsequent effect on party emphasis. A causal analysis of such an exogenous effect, such as the Fukushima nuclear disaster, will be a fruitful expansion of our research agenda. Relatedly, it will be important to explore if there is any diffusion effect of an increase in public salience or party issue expansion across borders (see Böhmelt et al. 2016).

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Notes

1. We do not focus on the economy, which is the issue the radical-left is most associated with, as this issue is not a non-mainstream issue. Rather, the economy has been the main cleavage within most European political systems since the end of World War II and mainstream parties can claim ownership over various aspects of the economy. Seeberg (2017) in fact demonstrates that the issue of the economy is largely owned by a mainstream right party in most countries. For a discussion of non-mainstream party expansion into discussing the economy, see Spoon and Williams (2020), which shows that under certain circumstances, green parties will expand beyond the environmental issue and discuss the economy to a greater extent.
2. Public opinion data used beyond the work of Klüver and Spoon (2016) include the following CSES Module 4 and 5 for Germany; CSES Module 4 for Iceland and the 2016 Icelandic National Election Study; the 2013 and 2018 Italian National Election Studies; the 2012 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study; the 1981 through 2017 Norwegian National Election Studies; the 2014 Swedish National Election Study; the 1987 through 2015 Swiss Election Studies; and the 2015 and 2017 British Election Studies.
3. The data from Klüver and Spoon (2016) start in 1972. However, we begin our analysis in 1980 as there are very few non-mainstream parties prior to the mid-1980s and as early non-mainstream parties were attempting to politicize new issues (see de Vries and Hobolt 2012; 2020; Hobolt and de Vries 2015), very few of these parties discussed issues other than the specific issues that they were attempting to politicize. When we run robustness checks that do not restrict the data to year, public salience of an issue is similarly not significant; however, the direction of the effect is positive. The effect of the interaction term becomes more statistically and substantively significant.
4. As a robustness check, we ran all models in which we did not restrict the data to this 5% threshold and the results were similar.
5. One could argue that a party has four options: it could shift a) position but not salience; b) salience but not position; c) both position and salience; and d) neither position nor salience. We do not, however, expect party position shift without public position shift. If the public simply cares more about the issue, it does not necessarily mean that the party will shift position, but that it should talk more about its position on the issue.
6. For a list of radical-right, radical-left, and green parties included in the analysis, see Table A5 in the Appendix.
7. In robustness tests using only *per501* to measure discussion of the environment, the interaction between the environmental issue and public salience of the non-mainstream party issue remains positive; however, it loses statistical significance.
8. As the time between elections may vary in each country, and even within countries, we ran robustness checks in which we included a measure of time between two elections. The results are nearly identical. However, the BIC suggests that models excluding this variable are a better fit. Therefore, the main models of this study do not include this control.
9. We coded individuals as specifying immigration as the MIP if they mentioned words such as immigration, immigrant, foreigner or asylum. For example, in Germany, individuals who stated that the MIP was "asylantenpolitik" (*asylum policy*) were coded as viewing immigration as the MIP. We coded individuals as specifying the environment as the MIP if they mentioned issues such as climate change, protection of natural areas, and energy. As an example, in Norway, many respondents mentioned the Lofoten archipelago, which has been a topic of discussion because of

- disagreement on whether Norway should allow oil exploration or whether Norway should protect the natural environment of the archipelago.
10. Our polarization measure is derived from Dalton's (2008) measure of party polarization. The scale used to measure party position is a 0 to 10 left-right spectrum. The scale used to calculate individual position on the environment ranges from 0 to 3. Because of the difference in scale, we needed to alter the divisor to scale the measure from 0 to 1. In Dalton's original measure, the divisor is 5. Our divisor is 1.5. Our measure of position on immigration has 3 rather than 4 categories. Thus, rather than dividing the difference of the weighted average and the category value by 1.5 as with our measure of the environment, this difference was divided by 1. Dalton's original equation for polarization was as follows: $\text{Polarization} = \text{SQRT}\left\{\sum(\text{Party Vote Share}_i) * ([\text{Party L/R Score}_i - \text{Party System Average L/R Score}]/(5))^2\right\}$. Our measure for the environment is: $\text{Polarization} = \text{SQRT}\left\{\sum(\text{weighted proportion of respondents per category}_i) * ([\text{category value}_i - \text{mean value of respondents}]/(\text{range of positions}/1.5))^2\right\}$. Our measure for immigration is: $\text{Polarization} = \text{SQRT}\left\{\sum(\text{weighted proportion of respondents per category}_i) * ([\text{category value}_i - \text{mean value of respondents}]/(\text{range of positions}/1))^2\right\}$. See Tables A2 and A4 for the polarization measures by issue in each year of the survey.
 11. We cannot include an interaction between the degree of polarization in each specific party because for many parties, there were not enough individuals in each survey who indicated they are supporters of that party to develop a reliable measure of intra-party polarization on an issue. For example, in 1990, only two individuals indicated support for the Dutch Center Democrats. Even among a more sizable radical-right party, the French National Front in 1990, only 31 individuals indicated support for this part in the EVS.
 12. In an alternative analysis, we allowed the intercepts to vary only by country and included decade dummy variables. The results are similar to the main models of this study.
 13. We conducted a series of robustness tests in which we removed outliers from the data. In the tests in which we restricted observations of salience on immigration and environment to those less than 30 and less than 20, respectively, the direct effect of salience is statistically insignificant, while the interaction between salience and the environment issue remains positive and significant.
 14. On mainstream party responsiveness to these issues, Spoon et al (2014) find that parties do increase their emphasis on the environment issue when green parties are more of an electoral threat. Conversely, Abou-Chadi (2014) finds that mainstream parties respond to the electoral threat of radical right parties by increasing emphasis and shifting their position on the immigration issue, but not on the environment issue.
 15. As a robustness test, we replaced the measure of lagged public issue salience with a measure from after the election at t_0 . While this measure presents some problems in that party discussion may have influenced public issue salience after the election, it is likely that this measure is positively correlated with public issue salience (indeed, public issue salience is correlated at 0.49 with lagged public issue salience). When we use public issue salience at election t_0 as our independent variable, we find that public issue salience similarly has no independent effect on issue discussion; however, the effect of the interaction between public issue salience and whether the issue is the environment is statistically significant and the coefficient is similar to the coefficient using the election at $t-1$.

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