

The year of challenges?

Issues, public opinion, and elections
in Western Europe in 2017

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CISE – Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali

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ISBN (print): 978-88-98012-23-7
ISBN (online): 978-88-98012-24-4

Cover image: © Rocster | Dreamstime.com

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Introduction: Mapping public opinion on issues in elections across Europe in 2017¹

Lorenzo De Sio and Aldo Paparo

In the seven months going from mid-March to mid-October 2017, five major Western European democracies voted for their general elections. Chronologically, we had the Dutch legislative election in late March, the French presidential election between April and May, and the UK snap election immediately afterwards. Finally, after the summer, we had legislative elections in Germany (late September) and Austria (mid-October). This represented an exceptionally interesting opportunity to study the evolution of public opinion and party systems in the particularly turbulent environment we are currently facing ([Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2018](#)).

Indeed, party systems in established democracies are increasingly challenged. In the 1990s and 2000s the most common pattern was the prevalence of a two-bloc (or two-party) competition by mainstream parties having relatively similar, moderate policies, and adopting general valence appeals addressed towards the whole electorate. Conversely, in recent years we have experienced an unprecedented emergence of successful challenger parties (and leaders), with examples both on the right (Donald Trump, the UKIP, the Front National – to mention the most successful) and on the left (such as Bernie Sanders, SYRIZA, Podemos, and Jeremy Corbyn). Such new, challenger parties and leaders share instead a conflictual emphasis on a relatively small set of controversial policy issues that have proved electorally successful.

The emergence of such new developments in party competition has presented a challenge, not only to pundits, but even to scientific theories of party competition. We argue that existing theoretical frameworks have not been entirely successful in describing and explaining the competitive dynamics of

¹ This text is original for this volume.

recent years. We believe, then, that there is a compelling need for analysis driven by a fresh theoretical perspective, general enough to travel across different contexts, and supported by empirical evidence that is systematically and rigorously collected.

Building on these considerations and on the recent development of issue yield theory (De Sio 2010; De Sio and Weber 2014, De Sio, Franklin and Weber 2016), at CISE we decided to launch a comparative research aimed at collecting comparable cross-national data on issue competition, with innovative measurement approaches. We have collected individual-level data through CAWI surveys in the aforementioned five countries (with the involvement of scholars from each country) in view of the respective general election. Similar questionnaires have been designed in the five countries to include those issues actually relevant in the electoral campaign of each specific country. Except for the different issue selection, questionnaires were absolutely identical. They all asked respondents, along with a classic series of sociodemographic and voting survey items, specific issue-related items: respondents' positions on divisive policy issues, followed by respondent-reported priority and goal credibility of different parties on both shared, valence goals (Stokes 1963) and on those divisive goals selected by each respondent on positional issues (with issues covering several policy domains).

This survey design has allowed us to develop specific cross-nationally comparable and replicable indicators for the level of priority and popularity of the different policy goals, the level of credibility of different parties for achieving such policy goals, and finally, by relying on issue yield theory, for the specific *issue yield* configurations (i.e. the assessment of electoral risks and opportunities associated with each issue) for each party.

Such data was collected with the aim of providing the basis for a comparative analysis of issue competition in Western Europe directed to a scientific audience; such effort, which is now involving the CISE plus five additional country teams, will lead to separate scientific contribution (namely, a special issue of an international scientific journal, planned for early 2019). In this volume, we collect and discuss first empirical results from the project: in particular, the book collects all the research notes published on the CISE website (<http://cise.luiss.it>) at campaign time. Such notes were based on preliminary evidence from the above described dataset, and aimed at providing an external outreach for the project, directed to a non-scientific audience.

Contributions in this volume, organized by country, are both pre-electoral and post-electoral. In particular, before the elections we look at the state of public opinion in terms of issue priorities and preferences, highlighting the issues at the top of the various national agendas, and also the overall preferences of different national electorates on rival policy goals. Furthermore, we discuss the opportunity structures facing different parties in various coun-

tries, by interacting party credibility with opinion preference data. Post-electoral contributions present and discuss electoral results, by also analysing the issue compatibility among electorates of potential post-electoral governmental partners.

The general *Zeitgeist* emerging from our analyses appears to be quite similar among the observed countries. In general, voters appear to be favourable to cultural demarcation and to economic protection. With different emphasis and extent, this pattern is clearly visible in all the selected countries (which, by the way, show pretty different economic performance). What is then interesting to investigate is how different parties have reacted to this similar opinion setting; something we investigated with respect to a simple distinction between *conflict mobilization* and *problem solving* strategies, emerging from the reliance on positional vs. valence issues (De Sio and Paparo in this volume). Both on the left and the right, traditional mainstream parties appear quite strong on valence issues. However, quite often they are not anymore the most credible option to achieve specific policy goals. In particular, left parties appear losing their role on classic left-wing welfare and redistributive goals, while right-wing parties face the strong competition of radical right-wing parties on cultural demarcation goals (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008). This appears true in all countries of our study, but not in the United Kingdom, where on the contrary, traditional mainstream parties appear to have more adequately coped with the challenges of the current turbulent political environment; being able to maintain (or re-conquer) their role as credible parties for achieving not only shared valence goals, but also divisive policy choices (Paparo in this volume(a)).

The volume is structured as follows. There are five separate chapters, one per each of the five countries included in this research project, ordered on a chronological basis. National chapters are structured in a similar fashion. We first have one or more contributions presenting the most significant findings of the pre-electoral surveys in terms of opinion preferences and party opportunities. Then, chapters are concluded by a post-electoral contribution, which reports electoral results, interprets them also in the light of issue data, and discusses (in terms of their party constituency) the issue compatibility of potential governmental coalitions. The various chapters also include in-depth analyses on specific relevant topics, such as district-level competition in the United Kingdom (Emanuele and Marino in this volume), crucial to understand possible parliamentary outcomes; or electoral shifts in France (Paparo in this volume(b)) to understand where Macron's and new Le Pen's votes come from. Conclusions follow.

Finally – besides the book contributors – we wish to thank all the international colleagues that have already contributed to this research project: Nicholas Allen, Mark N. Franklin, Simon Franzmann, Heiko Giebler, Oliver Heath,

Romain Lachat, Thomas Poguntke, Kaat Smets, Joost van Spanje, Cristian Vaccari, Till Weber. This book is only a first, preliminary step in the development of the project; however, it is already an excellent occasion to express our gratefulness to such distinguished scholars that made this project possible.

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The Dutch Parliamentary election of 2017: a case study of issue competition

Lorenzo De Sio

March 11, 2017

Party systems across the Western world appear increasingly challenged. After the 1990s and 2000s saw the prevalence of a two-bloc (or two-party) competition by mainstream parties with relatively similar, moderate policies, recent years have seen an unprecedented emergence of successful *challenger* parties (and leaders), with examples both on the right-wing (e.g. Donald Trump, the UKIP, the Front National) and on the left wing (e.g. Bernie Sanders, SYRIZA, Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn and Benoît Hamon). Such new, challenger parties and leaders share instead a *conflictual* emphasis on a *relatively small set of controversial policy issues that have proved electorally successful*.

The emergence of this new age in party competition presents a challenge, not only to practitioners and commentators, but even to existing theories of party competition. In this regard, we believe that a specific focus on specific *issues*, and how they are strategically used for party competition, might be one of the keys for understanding the underlying dynamics of party competition in these turbulent times. In particular, what we hypothesize is that new, challenger actors might be successful simply because, unlike older *mainstream* parties, they refrain from developing all-encompassing, comprehensive ideological frameworks, but rather focus on a relatively narrow set of *issues* which can offer a relevant electoral potential, and carefully avoid taking positions on other issues which could alienate the sympathy of many potential voters.

This in short a position derived from *issue yield theory* ([De Sio 2010](#); [De Sio and Weber 2014](#)), which has recently been used for analysing the role of the EU integration issue in the 2014 EP elections ([De Sio, Franklin and Weber 2016](#)) – successfully explaining the apparent paradox of an enduring, relatively low importance of the EU issue, combined with the electoral success of anti-EU parties. In order to see to what extent such theory (and its focus on the specific, narrow “issue packages” proposed by parties) is able to cast a light on the evolution of party systems in Europe, we at CISE decided to em-

bark in a comparative study of issue competition in several countries that will hold general elections in 2017 and 2018. The planned list currently includes the Netherlands, France, the UK, Germany, Austria, and Italy, which already constitute a relevant sample of EU countries. In each country we plan to conduct a two-wave, pre- and post-electoral CAWI panel survey, coupled with a systematic Twitter monitoring and analysis of the official communication produced by political parties and leaders. The idea is to map both the issue opportunities available for party strategy, and the ability of such parties to exploit these opportunities by emphasizing the issues over which they have a high issue yield.

The CAWI survey has been conducted by Demetra SRL, Italy, on Web respondents recruited in the Netherlands. Interviews have been fielded between 27 February and 7 March 2017 on a quota sample (N=1,000) of Dutch citizens above 18. Quotas have been predetermined on: age/sex combinations, level of education, and geographical region. Some of the results shown are also based on an additional weighting by past vote recall.

As a result, ahead of the upcoming Dutch general election, to be held on the 15 March, we fielded a CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) survey over the Dutch voting age population, with the aim of reconstructing the Dutch public opinion configuration on a variety of aspects concerning the main issues discussed during the campaign. In particular, the questionnaire (beyond classic questions employed in voting behaviour research) asked respondents to choose among rival policy goals; to select which parties they would deem credible for achieving the selected goal; which parties they would deem credible for achieving general goals, shared by the whole population (e.g. protection from terrorism); and finally the level of priority they would assign to particular policy goals.

We now present in this volume the first results of analysing these data. Of course these analyses are not meant to capture the complexity of the political campaign in this Dutch election (which could hardly be expected from non-Dutch observers, although helped by Dutch country experts); rather, we want to test whether the analytical framework offered by issue yield theory is able to make sense (in a relatively parsimonious way) of the complex dynamics of party competition, especially in the difficult case of the intense multi-party competition of the Netherlands, and in an international context of radical challenges to previous party system equilibria. As a result, we present analyses exploring the following research questions:

1. What are the most electorally attractive issue opportunities according to the current state of the Dutch public opinion (and what parties are in the best position to exploit them)? is there any shared consensus over a general “Dutch agenda”? Does it correspond to a specific (perhaps right-wing) Zeitgeist, or there are rather also a number of (perhaps yet unexploited)

left-wing issue opportunities? These questions are explored in [Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars \(in this volume\)](#).

2. Dutch respondents were asked to assess the credibility of different parties in achieving specific goals. What are the patterns of such credibility assessments? Are they simply driven by party affiliations, or do respondents feel free to also deem other parties credible? Are there any parties that are *overall* perceived as more credible? This and other questions are explored in [Paparo, De Sio and van Ditmars \(in this volume\)](#).
3. Finally, perhaps the politically most relevant question: what is the optimal combination of issue opportunities for each party? What are the issues that can be expected to be emphasized (and which to be avoided) by each party? This final question is explored in [Maggini, De Sio and van Ditmars \(in this volume\)](#).

This is of course only the beginning, few days before the election, of the exploration and analysis of these data, which will also be developed in scientific publications, and – most importantly – in comparison with the results that will come from analogous surveys in France, the UK, Germany, Austria, and Italy.

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Towards the next Dutch general election: issues at stake, support and priority

Vincenzo Emanuele, Lorenzo De Sio and Mathilde van Ditmars

March 10, 2017

Falling in a Western European context of increasing electoral unpredictability and party system change ([Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2015](#)), the upcoming election in The Netherlands is receiving a lot of media attention in the international press, as it is the first of a range of upcoming European elections (before France and Germany) that are expected to mark the future of European politics. Consistently with an international context where right-wing populism is on the rise, with the election of Donald Trump and the candidature of Marine le Pen, in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' party (PVV) has taken a lead in the opinion polls and his strong position is gaining international attention. In this context, focusing on the main issues debated in the current electoral campaign is crucial to understand, on the one hand, the current state of Dutch public opinion and, on the other hand, whether it is possible to outline a 'Dutch agenda', namely a set of specific goals over which there is a general consensus that may represent the starting common ground for building the next governing coalition. Moreover, what is relevant here is to assess whether (or not) the Dutch public opinion is characterized by a specific *Zeitgeist*: is it dominated only by right-wing concerns (e.g. immigration), or are there other issues where there is a strong support for left-wing opinions? This relatively simple question relates to a fundamental issue of contemporary party politics: whether the success of 'populist' parties is due to some general 'right-wing wind' in the public opinion or, rather, whether this success is due to the better ability of such parties to exploit the available issue opportunities. For example, the presence of 'left-wing' issue opportunities would testify that, rather than the general 'wind' in public opinion, the real problem for mainstream left-wing parties lies in their inability to exploit their available opportunities. In the CAWI survey that we at CISE conducted few weeks before the election (see [De Sio in this volume](#)), respondents were asked to express their support on 15 positional issues (which are those divisive issues that refer to two rival

goals, e.g. like public spending vs. tax cuts). Specifically, each respondent was asked to position himself on a 6-point scale where the points 1 and 6 represented the two rival goals to be pursued by a given issue. Later, over those issues, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the selected goal. The questionnaire also included five valence issues, namely issues that refer to one shared, common goal over which a general agreement is assumed (e.g., protection from terrorism). On these issues, a support of 100% is set by design and respondents are only asked to attribute the level of priority. The selection of both positional and valence issues was made in cooperation with a team of Dutch researchers.

By examining the level of support for different goals (and, later, also the priority attributed to such goals), we are able to map the current state of Dutch public opinion, and also the potential structure of opportunity for Dutch parties in this campaign. For each goal, Table 1 reports: its level of support in public opinion (the percentage of people in favour – for positional issues – while for valence issues we assume that 100% of the sample supports the goal); the priority of that goal in the whole sample (the percentage of respondents attributing a high priority to that issue); the priority for those favouring the goal (the percentage of respondents choosing that goal that attribute a high priority to that issue); finally, the difference between priority for those favouring the goal and support.

A first interesting piece of evidence that emerges by looking at Table 1 is that, among the positional issues, a certain number of goals appears to be highly shared by the Dutch population. Specifically, there are two goals shared by 79% of the respondents: the ‘completed life’ issue, related to the possibility for elderly who think their life is finished to be assisted in ending their life, and the issue related to fixed term contract to be given to employees after two years of temporary contracts. Just below these two highly supported issues, other goals are shared by a substantial portion of Dutch voters. There is a wide agreement especially on some leftist issues: in particular, the requirement of fixed term contracts, the reduction in income differences, the abolishment of students’ loans, the reduction in pension age and eventually the abolishment of the deductible in health insurance. All of these can be generally conceived as economically leftist issues, and all of them show a support of 69% or higher in the population. Moreover, a culturally leftist goal emerges, the previously mentioned pro-euthanasia stance. Among these largely supported goals (i.e., those shared at least by two-thirds of respondents), only one traditionally rightist goal emerges, namely the requirement for foreigners to fully adapt to the Dutch culture.

The prevalence of leftist economic orientations among the most supported goals represents the first empirical finding of this analysis. It means that, in a way, there is not a one-directional right-wind *Zeitgeist* in the Dutch public

Table 1. Divisive and common goals by public opinion support and priority

Statement	% Support	% Priority in the whole sample	% Priority for those favouring the goal	Δ Priority for those in favour - Support
Keep growth	100%	79%	79%	-21
Reduce unemployment	100%	82%	82%	-18
Better care	100%	81%	81%	-19
Fight pollution	100%	70%	70%	-30
Protect from terrorism	100%	85%	85%	-15
Completed life assistance	79%	48%	61%	-18
Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	56%	72%	-7
No higher meat tax	73%	39%	53%	-20
Reduce income differences	73%	49%	67%	-5
Abolish student loans	73%	46%	64%	-9
Reduce pension age	69%	52%	75%	6
Foreigners should adapt	69%	52%	76%	7
Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	49%	73%	7
Stay in EU	62%	47%	76%	14
Introduce binding referendum	61%	30%	50%	-11
Less refugees	60%	48%	79%	18
Increase defence spending	60%	37%	62%	2
Don't close to immigrants	57%	36%	63%	6
Legalize weed	52%	28%	53%	1
No welfare chauvinism	50%	27%	53%	3
Welfare chauvinism	50%	33%	67%	17
Keep weed illegal	48%	24%	50%	2
Close to immigrants	43%	32%	74%	31
No more defence spending	40%	20%	51%	10
Keep refugees coming	40%	25%	64%	25
No binding referendum	39%	15%	40%	1
Leave EU	38%	24%	63%	25
Keep healthcare deductible	33%	20%	59%	26
Foreigners keep culture	31%	17%	54%	23
Keep pension age	31%	19%	63%	32
Keep student loans	27%	13%	47%	19
Don't reduce income differences	27%	14%	52%	24
Higher meat tax	27%	14%	52%	25
No fixed contract after 2 years	21%	11%	52%	30
No completed life assistance	21%	13%	61%	40

opinion but, instead, there are large issue opportunities for leftist parties (in some following analyses, we will see how these opportunities are actually exploited by the Dutch leftist parties). However, moving down in the list of issues presented in Table 1, and entering an area where goals become more divisive (albeit still supported by more than 50% of respondents) we see the emergence of conflict related to the European Union, immigration, and welfare chauvinism. All in all, the combination of these two aspects emerging from this first analysis of goal support shows a clear bipartition of the 15 selected positional issues: a prevalence of economically progressive issues among the most supported goals and a presence of conservative, culturally ‘demarcationist’ issues among the most divisive goals.

Yet, sheer *support* for a given goal tell us only part of the story. What is also of interest is to take into consideration the *priority* assigned to each goal. By doing this, our interpretation of the current state of Dutch public opinion becomes more articulated, and it is possible to outline a map of the issue opportunities potentially available for Dutch parties. Interestingly, valence issues (i.e. those goals we *ex ante* identified as shared goals) emerge as the goals with the highest priority assigned by Dutch citizens: all of them are considered as the top priorities to be pursued, with a percentage of people indicating a high priority around, or higher than, 80% for four valence issues: protecting the country from terrorist attacks, reducing unemployment, improving care for elderly and disabled people, and maintaining the current economic growth. Only the shared goal of fighting environmental pollution falls in a lower position, but still with 70% of people attributing a high priority to it. This evidence suggests that there indeed is a common priority pattern across different segments of the Dutch society, indicating the presence of a relatively homogeneous ‘Dutch agenda’ (for an interesting comparison with analogous data on France, see [Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)), despite the traditional (and, in part, newly emerging) presence of significant divisions in the Dutch society over multiple issues and cleavages.

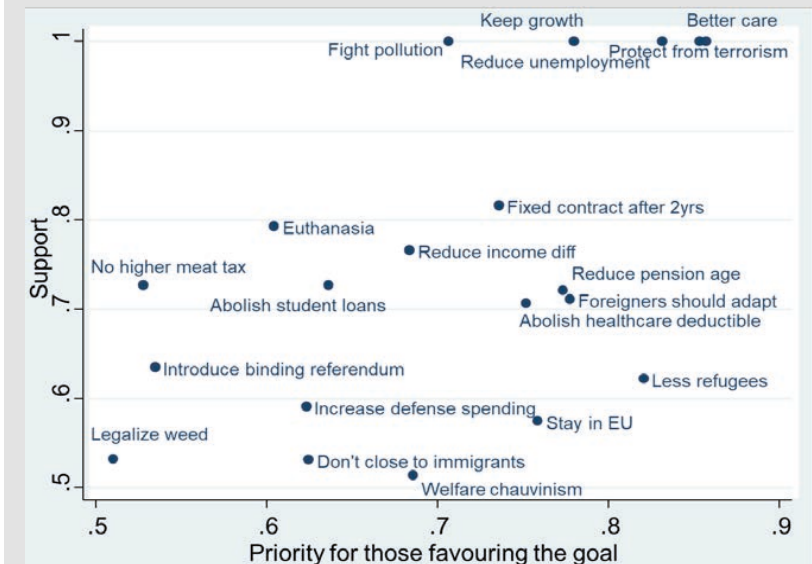
Moreover, something even more interesting emerges as we focus on the priorities assigned by Dutch citizens to the rival goals defined on positional issues. Here, in terms of broad ideological orientations, the situation seems to be reversed compared to the previous analysis of levels of support. Despite being highly supported, many economically leftist goals display in fact a lower priority with respect to cultural (especially ‘demarcationist’) goals. For instance, two largely supported goals such as the requirement to give a fixed term contract to employees and the abolishment of students loans are considered as a priority by, respectively, 72% and 64% of the respondents selecting those goals, while two goals that are less supported (and thus more controversial), such as the maintenance of the Netherlands in the EU and the need for the country to take in less refugees, are instead considered as a priority

by a higher share of respondents: respectively 76% and 79%. And perhaps the clearest example, above all, is the typical ‘demarcationist’ goal of completely closing the Dutch border to immigrants: although supported ‘only’ by 43% of respondents, it is considered a priority by 74% of those favouring the goal.

This seems to suggest that right-wing parties, although facing a worse structure of opportunity for the strategic exploitation of their favoured issues, are more able to promote them into the current political debate. As a result, voters assign a higher priority to those issues compared to traditionally leftist goals. Of course, this hypothesis needs to find empirical verification: this latter will be provided by the analysis of party strategy through the Twitter communication (by both leaders and parties) that we are currently monitoring (for a similar research design, see [De Sio, De Angelis and Emanuele 2017](#)).

This result can be better visualized in Figure 1, which plots the relative position of each issue according to their support (y-axis) and priority for those favouring the goal (x-axis). The figure provides a better understanding of the relation between support and priority. A closer look allows us to realize that, together with cultural-demarcationist issues, there are also some leftist issues that benefit from a higher priority for those favouring the goal than the sup-

Figure 1. Support (% selecting the goal – 100 by design for valence issues) and priority (% selecting high priority among those favouring the goal, with normal priority counted 0.5) for both shared and divisive goals. Only goals over 50% are reported



port assigned by respondents, such as the abolishment of the pension age and the abolishment of the deductible in healthcare. This corollary evidence allows to further refine what we have previously stated: among the leftist issues, those perceived as a priority by the population are those returning a more conservative vision of the welfare, particularly linked to ageing dynamics. The general – although absolutely preliminary – assessment we draw from this analysis is a retreat of the Dutch society that comes back to protection issues rather than promoting a different idea of welfare as an opportunity for new previously excluded citizens.

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Towards the next Dutch general election: party credibility on different issues

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March 10, 2017

As seen in the [Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#), the survey data we collected on Dutch public opinion includes information on agreement and priority about a series of important policy goals. By looking at those we were able to map the general state of Dutch public opinion and the structure of opportunity on various issue dimensions. However, the data we collected also include information concerning the *credibility* of each of the different parties. Basically, respondents were asked to indicate all parties that they considered credible to achieve a particular goal. In Table 1 we report this information. For each of the included goals, ranked in terms of the support they enjoy among the Dutch electorate, we also report the priority attributed by those favouring the goal and the list of the four parties considered most credible to achieve that goal, followed by the percentage of respondents (again in favour of that goal) who actually listed each of them as credible.

We start with the five valence issues (i.e. shared goals) included in our investigation, which by definition enjoy a 100% support ([Stokes 1963](#)). On those, the only party that ranks first on more than one shared goal is the right-wing liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), ranking first on economic growth and protection from terrorism. On both of them, more than a Dutch citizen out of three considers the VVD credible. However, on the latter, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) has a very similar credibility score. The Labour Party (PVDA) is considered the most credible on fighting unemployment. 50Plus (50P) and the Socialist Party (SP) are tied for most credible on elderly care. Finally, the green party GroenLinks (GL) is the most credible, as expectable, on environment protection. It has the largest lead on the second-most credible party (over 20 percentage points) of all valence issues, although this happens on the issue which is least salient – roughly a 10-point lower priority score.

From these initial pieces of evidence, it appears safe to say that mainstream parties appear to be quite strong on valence issues according to Dutch voters.

The main challenger (PVV) only appears once among the four most-credible parties (ranking second on protection from terrorism), out of the five overall valence goals. Moreover, more than one mainstream party shows pretty large credibility scores on the various shared goals.

Below shared goals, Table 1 also reports data on the 30 rival goals. On 15 positional issues we offered respondents two opposed goals to achieve, and we asked them to select their preferred goal. Then, as for valence goals, respondents were asked to indicate credible parties for the selected goal, and assign that goal a level of priority. We begin our discussion by looking at the fifteen goals that were chosen by a majority of Dutch voters (i.e. goals whose support exceeds 50%). On those, there are six different parties considered most credible, and none ranks first on more than three goals. These are the Socialist Party (SP), the PVV and the two current government partners – PVDA and VVD. The social-liberal party Democrats 66 (D66) is understandably considered the party of free choice, as they are the most credible on two related goals, namely extending euthanasia rights and marijuana legalization. Finally, and not surprisingly, 50Plus (50P) is the most credible on reducing pension age.

The SP appears particularly credible on welfare and inequality. It enjoys a double-digit lead on the second-most credible party (PVDA) on both reducing income differences and healthcare reform, on which over a third of Dutch voters considers it credible. The SP is also the most credible on student loans abolition, but here only a respondent out of six has selected the party among the list of credible and a bunch of other parties are basically just as credible. Still, it is worth noticing that these three issues are quite consensual and important among Dutch voters. They are supported by over two thirds of respondents and the priority scores range between 64 and 73%.

The PVDA appears as the party of social inclusion and job stability. It is the most credible party to maintain borders open and ensure social services for all residents. However, both these goals are now far from unanimous among Dutch voters. Actually they are among the ones that are more controversial: in both cases no more than 57% of respondents agreed. Among those issues where the PVDA is the most credible, the only one that is strongly supported in our sample concerns the law provision for a fixed contract after two years. This is actually the most consensual among all rival goals included in our investigation – equalling support for introducing completed file assistance. However, on all these issues seeing the PVDA first (thus including the job market regulation) the fraction of Dutch voters trusting the PVDA does not exceed one third, and the lead on the second-most credible party is just between 1 and 3 percentage points.

The VVD is the most credible party on keeping current foreign policy choices and not increasing taxes on meat. The latter is the most agreed of the three goals, with over 70% of respondents in favour. However, it is one of the

least important goals for Dutch respondents and only a sixth of the sample considered the VVD credible to achieve it. On the two foreign-policy related goals (staying in the EU and achieving NATO requirements for defence spending) there is a quite strong opposition: roughly 40% of the sample is against them. The VVD is perceived as credible by a large fraction of respondents who preferred those goals (37 and 43%), and staying in the EU is particularly important to them, but especially on that goal all mainstream parties are considered quite credible.

Finally, the PVV emerges as the party that stands for cultural demarcation and populism. On taking less refugees and requiring immigrants to adapt to the Dutch culture (goals that are shared by 60 and 69% of respondents respectively), the PVV shows by far the highest leads on the second-most credible party (the VVD). The latter is considered credible on both these goals by 19% of respondents, while the PVV is credible for 43% on cultural assimilation and 58% on refugees. And here comes one of the key findings of this analysis: this is the only instance in which a party is considered credible on a goal by over 50% of respondents. All that means that the leads in credibility on the VVD are 24 and 39 percentage points. To put these into context, no other party on no other issue has a lead exceeding 14 points. Furthermore, these two goals are the two most important in terms of priority of all those on positional issues – thus excluding valence issues, but including minority goals, which are selected by a smaller fraction of respondents, and thus could be more easily salient among them. The third goal on which the PVV is the most credible is related to giving more voice to the people – the introduction of binding referenda.

As mentioned above, Table 1 also includes data on the 15 minority goals (coloured in grey), those that received less support among Dutch respondents than their rival goal. One might argue that such goals are of no substantive interest, as they are shared by a minority of voters and, as such, will hardly become a government policy. However, we believe that in an intensely competitive multi-party system such as the one characterizing the Netherlands, and in particular in presence of a perfect proportional representation, minority goals do provide useful competition opportunities. As emphasized in issue yield theory ([De Sio 2010](#); [De Sio and Weber 2014](#); [De Sio, Franklin and Weber 2016](#)), for a small party enjoying 10% support, even a policy “only” supported by 30% of voters can be a very attractive opportunity for electoral expansion.

As a result, we take into account minority goals, and two additional party join the club of those that are the most credible on at least one goal, as predictable. These are the Christian Union (CU) and the Party for the Animals (PVDD). CU is the most credible party to not extend euthanasia rights, while the PVDD is the most credible on increasing the tax on meat. These goals are among the least agreed-upon, as only 21% of Dutch voters does not want to

introduce completed life assistance, and only a few more want to increase the meat tax. Still, they offer to these parties a level of support that is significantly higher than each party's current voter base: this is why, in line with issue yield theory, these issues provide a formidable campaign weapon for the two small parties.

Interestingly, on almost half of these minority goals (7) the most credible party is the one that has expressed the Prime Minister for the past six-and-a-half years– the VVD. They include job market regulation, health insurance deductibles, student loans, pension age, and others. However, this piece of evidence is less counterintuitive considered that all the seven goals have a clear connection to the status quo, most of the times in the statement itself (such as “keep the current...”, “maintain the current...”). The only two goals, out of the seven, that are shared by over a third of Dutch respondents (not introducing binding referenda and not fully legalizing marijuana), are also among the least salient and the ones on which the VVD, though first in credibility, is considered credible by the smallest fractions.

The PVDA is the most credible on two minority goals, both related (once again) to social inclusion: not reducing refugees and not imposing cultural assimilation, while the SP is the most credible party to not increase defence spending – though only 14% of respondents selected it, which indicates that Dutch voters appear pretty doubtful about the actual possibility not to increase defence spending.

Finally, the PVV is the most credible party on three of the minority goals, all concerning the protection of Dutch culture. Namely these are closing the borders, leaving the EU, and welfare chauvinism. It is worth underlying that, on the latter, almost 50% of Dutch voters agree, and roughly 40% on the other two. This is to say that these are not goals shared by a tiny minority: they are quite shared among the Dutch electorate. Furthermore, they are first, second, and fourth among minority goals in terms of priority – only the non-reduction of refugees is at that level. And, as observed on the majority goals, the PVV is most capable to differentiate itself from other parties: it has the largest, the second-largest and the fourth-largest lead on the second-most credible party. Only on welfare chauvinism the lead is inferior to 30 percentage points and to the one emerging for the PVDD on the meat tax.

Overall the picture that emerges from the data presented here shows the Dutch party system as complex and fragmented. However, our data also indicate that the system does not appear to be extremely polarized. The only significant segmentation that emerges separates the PVV from all other parties. On the contrary, the long-term tradition of elite cooperation (Lijphart 1968) appears to have strong roots in the Dutch society. Our findings clearly show that voters tend to assign the credibility patent not only to their own party, but also to other parties – that maybe have experienced concurrent or anyway

Table 1. Shared and divisive goals, by public opinion support, with most credible parties

Statement	% Support	% Priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Keep growth	100%	79%	VVD	CDA	D66	PVDA	20%
Reduce unemployment	100%	82%	PVDA	SP	VVD	D66	22%
Better care for elderly	100%	81%	50P	SP	CDA	PVDA	23%
Fight pollution	100%	70%	GL	PVDD	D66	PVDA	14%
Protect from terrorism	100%	85%	VVD	PVV	CDA	D66	26%
Completed life assistance	79%	61%	D66	VVD	PVDA	GL	15%
Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	72%	PVDA	SP	GL	CDA	16%
No higher meat tax	73%	53%	VVD	CDA	PVDA	PVV	8%
Reduce income differences	73%	67%	SP	PVDA	GL	D66	15%
Abolish student loans	73%	64%	SP	D66	PVDA	CDA	15%
Reduce pension age	69%	75%	50P	SP	PVV	PVDA	13%
Foreigners should adapt	69%	76%	PVV	VVD	CDA	VNL	9%
Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	73%	SP	PVDA	GL	PVV	14%
Stay in EU	62%	76%	VVD	D66	CDA	PVDA	36%
Introduce binding referendum	61%	50%	PVV	SP	D66	PVDA	11%
Less refugees	60%	79%	PVV	VVD	VNL	CDA	9%
Increase defence spending	60%	62%	VVD	CDA	D66	PVDA	13%
Don't close to immigrants	57%	63%	PVDA	GL	SP	D66	25%
Legalize weed	52%	53%	D66	PVDA	GL	SP	13%
No welfare chauvinism	50%	53%	PVDA	GL	SP	D66	18%

Statement	% Support	% Priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Welfare chauvinism	50%	67%	PVV	VVD	CDA	VNL	25%
Keep weed illegal	48%	50%	WD	CDA	PVDA	SP	2%
Close to immigrants	43%	74%	PVV	VVD	VNL	PVDA	37%
No more defence spending	40%	51%	SP	PVDA	GL	CDA	3%
Keep refugees coming	40%	64%	PVDA	GL	D66	SP	1%
No binding referendum	39%	40%	WD	CDA	PVDA	D66	5%
Leave EU	38%	63%	PVV	PVDA	SP	VNL	35%
Keep healthcare deductible	33%	59%	WD	CDA	D66	PVDA	12%
Foreigners keep culture	31%	54%	PVDA	GL	D66	SP	6%
Keep pension age	31%	63%	WD	CDA	D66	PVDA	8%
Keep student loans	27%	47%	WD	PVDA	CDA	D66	11%
Don't reduce income differences	27%	52%	WD	CDA	PVV	D66	21%
Higher meat tax	27%	52%	PVDD	GL	VVD	PVDA	29%
No fixed contract after 2 years	21%	52%	WD	CDA	D66	PVDA	13%
No completed life assistance	21%	61%	CU	CDA	SGP	PVDA	3%

repeated government responsibilities. To corroborate this claim we present Table 2, which reports for each party the vote intentions they received in our sample (as percentages on all respondents), the average credibility scores on valence and positional goals, and the ratio among those. We can see that, for all mainstream parties, the share of voters considering them credible is way larger than their own voters. The only relevant party for which this is not true is the PVV. This is particularly evident on shared goals. The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), PVDA, VVD, GL, and D66 all have credibility at least twice as large than vote share. Just consider the case of the CDA, the once-pivotal element of the Dutch party system, which since its foundation in the 1970s participated in almost all cabinets, holding the Prime Minister chair in most of them. Our evidence shows that it is never the most-credible party (not in a single one of the included 35 goals), but it is among the top-four most-credible parties on three of the five shared goals, with an average credibility of 23% among the whole electorate – while only 10% intend to vote for it.

In conclusion, our investigation shows that in the fragmented Dutch party system, the multi-dimensionality of policy issues provides a multiplicity of competition choices. In particular, we have shown that various parties have been able to develop their own area of issue ownership (Budge and Farlie 1983; [Petrocik 1996](#)), and that such credibility patterns resonate with the relatively narrow set of issues that these parties usually emphasize, in line with the predictions of issue yield theory. The PVV owns cultural demarcation, just as the PVDD owns animal protection, and GL environment protection. The D66 is the party of free choice on social issues, 50P is the party of the elderly, the SP is the party for welfare increase, the CU is the pro-life party, the PVDA is the party of social inclusion, while the VVD is associated with economic issues and, more in general, maintaining the status quo. But their ownerships appear much less strong, as a few parties are comparably credible.

Finally, our evidence shows that Dutch mainstream parties might have troubles in focusing on positional issues, as they are generally less credible than some more niche party which is particularly devoted to that specific goal. Furthermore, as remainder of once large catch-all parties (Kirchheimer 1966), they might alienate part of their electoral constituency by placing strong emphasis on divisive goals. On the contrary, they appeared better-equipped to campaign on valence issues. Our data clearly indicate that they enjoy higher credibility in achieving the related shared goals, and, moreover, that such goals are particularly important to Dutch voters.

Table 2. Party vote shares and credibility scores in the whole sample

	CDA	PVDA	VVD	GL	SP	D66	CU	SGP	PVV	PVDD	50P	DENK	FVD	VNL
Party vote intention	10%	7%	12%	10%	13%	11%	3%	2%	17%	4%	6%	1%	3%	1%
<i>Average credibility</i>														
Valence goals	23%	22%	23%	24%	21%	22%	12%	9%	14%	9%	11%	3%	4%	4%
Positional goals (all)	15%	17%	18%	13%	14%	15%	7%	6%	15%	5%	5%	3%	3%	4%
<i>Ratios (credibility/votes)</i>														
Shared goals	2.3	3.2	1.9	2.4	1.6	2.0	3.9	4.4	0.8	2.2	1.8	2.8	1.2	4.4
Divisive goals (all)	1.5	2.4	1.5	1.3	1.1	1.3	2.3	2.9	0.9	1.2	0.8	2.6	1.0	3.5

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Towards the next Dutch general election: the issue opportunity structure for parties

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March 10, 2017

Following on the tools provided by issue yield theory ([De Sio and Weber 2014](#)), this analysis provides a specific perspective on the data we at CISE collected through a CAWI survey few weeks before the Dutch election ([De Sio in this volume](#)). We rely here on an innovative measurement of positional issues, which allows to derive a common issue yield index for this kind of issues. *Positional* issues are, in general, defined by reference to *two rival goals* (e.g. progressive vs. traditional morality): the issue yield measure permits us to assess the presence of strategic issue opportunities for a party. The core dimensions originally developed (for positional issues) in the issue yield model are *support* (how much a policy is supported in the general public) and *within-party agreement* (how much it is supported within the party)¹. The two dimensions correspond to the ideal goal of any party: the ability to keep their existing voter base intact, but with the possibility of reaching out to a much larger potential electorate; this is ideally performed through an emphasis on those issues where the party is internally united, and perhaps many voters outside the party also agree.

The issue yield index allows then us to answer the core question: what is – in electoral terms – the ideal agenda of each party? What is the selection of issues that would provide the best electoral return to each party? What is important here is to observe the issue configuration that presents the best opportunity (and the lowest risk) to each party, and then compare it with the actual choice

¹ In the survey, respondents were asked to express their support on 15 positional issues. For positional issues, a first item requires respondents to choose over the two rival goals (it is a 6-point item, thus also allowing all techniques for classic positional items). Once the goal is selected (e.g. defending traditional morality), respondents are asked to mention (multiple choice) which parties they consider credible to achieve that goal.

of issues that parties stressed in their campaign, to determine how strategic was their campaigning (which relates to our initial research question). This comparison will first be made in anecdotal terms, while the coding of Twitter communication during the campaign will allow us to answer this question in quantitative terms in future analyses.

Applying this approach to the Netherlands, we are able to answer the above questions for this specific party system, which has been marked during the last years by decreasing support for mainstream parties, especially the Christian Democrats, and, to a lesser extent, the Labour party, and leading positions in the opinion polls for the right-wing liberal mainstream party VVD and the right-wing populist party PVV of Geert Wilders. In light of these developments, investigating the issue yield for all parties in the system may help to explain why certain parties are (potentially) more successful than others. Table 1 presents issues (and related parties) according to the issue yield index, moving from highest to lowest values. In this way, we can see which parties could take advantage by competing on specific issues. Looking only at very high issue yields (≥ 0.75), there are several positional issues which can provide a very good electoral return to several parties. Indeed, excluding small parties which are below 4% in the voting intentions (in italics), parties that present a very good issue yield on several issues are the following ones: PVV (10 issues), 50 Plus (7 issues), the animal party PVDD (7 issues), the Labour party PVDA (6 issues), the green party GroenLinks (6 issues), the Socialist Party (SP) (6 issues), social-liberal D66 (3 issues), VVD (2 issues), the Christian Democrats (CDA) (2 issues). These data tell us that PVV, 50 Plus, PVDD, PVDA, GL, and SP, may potentially exploit a considerable number of issues for electoral purposes, while for D66, VVD and CDA the structure of opportunities provided by positional issues is less favourable. That said, the issue yield for a party not only depends on its absolute value, but it should also be considered in relation to the issue yield for other parties. That is, we must look at the issue yield rank. This means that an issue can have a very high yield for a party; and despite this, other parties may have an even higher return on the same issue. Consequently, it can be difficult for that party to compete on that issue, because other parties might be better positioned. For example, the VVD potentially can easily take advantage of the “completed life assistance”² position, but there are other 7 parties that can have a better return on the same issue. Similarly, GroenLinks can exploit the “fixed contract after 2 years” issue, but there are other six parties that have a better issue yield on the same theme. Anyway, looking at the issue

Table 1. Issue yield for positional issues

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
<i>SGP</i>	<i>No completed life assistance</i>	21%	100%	1	1
<i>Voor Nederland (VNI)</i>	<i>Less refugees</i>	60%	100%	1	1
<i>DENK</i>	<i>Don't close to immigrants</i>	57%	100%	1	1
<i>Voor Nederland (VNI)</i>	<i>Reduce pension age</i>	69%	100%	1	1
PVDA	Don't close to immigrants	57%	94%	0.93	2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Less refugees	60%	94%	0.93	2
<i>ChristenUnie</i>	<i>Foreigners should adapt</i>	69%	92%	0.92	1
<i>SGP</i>	<i>No higher meat tax</i>	73%	89%	0.89	1
<i>Voor Nederland (VNI)</i>	<i>Close to immigrants</i>	43%	89%	0.89	1
<i>Voor Nederland (VNI)</i>	<i>Introduce binding referenda</i>	61%	89%	0.89	1
<i>Voor Nederland (VNI)</i>	<i>No higher meat tax</i>	73%	89%	0.89	2
50Plus	Completed life assistance	79%	89%	0.88	1
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Introduce binding referenda	61%	90%	0.88	2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Completed life assistance	79%	90%	0.88	2
GroenLinks	Don't close to immigrants	57%	88%	0.87	3
PVDA	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	88%	0.87	1
PVDA	Completed life assistance	79%	88%	0.87	3
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Reduce income differences	73%	87%	0.86	1
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Reduce pension age	69%	87%	0.86	2
SP	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	88%	0.86	2
SP	Reduce pension age	69%	88%	0.86	3
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	88%	0.86	3
SP	Completed life assistance	79%	87%	0.85	4
<i>Forum voor Democratie (FvD)</i>	<i>Foreigners should adapt</i>	69%	85%	0.85	2
PVDA	Reduce income differences	73%	85%	0.85	2
50Plus	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	85%	0.84	1
50Plus	Reduce pension age	69%	85%	0.84	4
<i>ChristenUnie</i>	<i>Fixed contract after 2 years</i>	79%	85%	0.84	4
<i>SGP</i>	<i>Reduce income differences</i>	73%	84%	0.84	3

² This issue in Dutch is labelled “voltooid level”. It is not part of the euthanasia law, but it regards additional legislation about ending life with assistance.

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Abolish student loans	73%	84%	0.84	1
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Completed life assistance	79%	84%	0.84	5
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	84%	0.84	5
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Foreigners should adapt	69%	87%	0.84	3
GroenLinks	Completed life assistance	79%	85%	0.84	6
GroenLinks	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	84%	0.82	2
50Plus	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	83%	0.82	6
D66	Completed life assistance	79%	83%	0.82	7
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Introduce binding referenda	61%	82%	0.81	3
GroenLinks	Stay in EU	62%	83%	0.81	1
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Reduce pension age	69%	85%	0.81	5
SP	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	83%	0.81	3
VVD	Completed life assistance	79%	82%	0.81	8
50Plus	Foreigners should adapt	69%	81%	0.8	4
PVDA	Stay in EU	62%	81%	0.8	2
SP	Reduce income differences	73%	83%	0.8	4
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	No higher meat tax	73%	84%	0.8	3
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	No higher meat tax	73%	80%	0.8	4
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Completed life assistance	79%	80%	0.8	9
GroenLinks	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	81%	0.79	7
CDA	No higher meat tax	73%	80%	0.79	5
SGP	Foreigners should adapt	69%	79%	0.79	5
50Plus	Reduce income differences	73%	80%	0.78	5
GroenLinks	Reduce income differences	73%	80%	0.78	6
Voor Nederland (VNI)	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	78%	0.78	4
DENK	No more defence spending	40%	78%	0.78	1
Voor Nederland (VNI)	Leave EU	38%	78%	0.78	1
DENK	No higher meat tax	73%	78%	0.78	6
CDA	Stay in EU	62%	78%	0.77	3

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Close to immigrants	43%	81%	0.76	2
ChristenUnie	Reduce income differences	73%	77%	0.76	7
D66	Don't close to immigrants	57%	78%	0.76	4
D66	Stay in EU	62%	78%	0.76	4
PVDA	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	77%	0.76	5
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Leave EU	38%	80%	0.76	2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Reduce income differences	73%	80%	0.76	8
SP	Abolish student loans	73%	79%	0.76	2
VVD	Stay in EU	62%	77%	0.75	5
50Plus	No higher meat tax	73%	76%	0.75	7

yield rank, it is confirmed that some mainstream parties like the CDA, the D66 and the VVD have to face a less favourable strategic issue opportunities than other parties, especially the PVV.

In addition to the issue yield rank, the final point that has to be addressed in order to understand the actual strategic issue opportunities for parties is the type and size of parties that have a similar competitive advantage on the same issue. Indeed, a party that on a specific issue has few and small size competitors is in a better strategic position with respect to a party that despite having a high issue yield, is forced to compete on the same issue with a high number of other parties of the same size (and possibly even of different political families).

Therefore, which is the issue configuration that presents the best opportunity (and the lowest risk) to each party in the Netherlands? The following tables (tables 2, 3 and 4) present the pair of rival goals for the 15 positional issues associated to the Dutch parties. Within each issue, the two rival goals are ordered by the issue yield rank. By doing this, it is possible to outline a map of the (positional) issue opportunities potentially available for Dutch parties. An interesting piece of evidence that emerges by looking at Table 2 is that, among the socio-economic issues, a large number of goals appears to be beneficial to the different parties. We note there is a huge (potential) competition especially on economically leftist issues: in particular, the goals related to the requirement of fixed term contracts, the reduction in income

Table 2. Socio-economic issues: rival goals by issue yield

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
50Plus	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	85%	0.84	1	5.4
GroenLinks	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	84%	0.82	2	9.4
SP	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	83%	0.81	3	13.2
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	78%	0.78	4	0.9
PVDA	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	77%	0.76	5	4.8
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	79%	0.74	6	18.8
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	71%	0.7	7	4.5
ChristenUnie	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	69%	0.68	8	2.6
DENK	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	67%	0.66	9	0.9
CDA	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	52%	0.49	10	6.5
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	50%	0.49	11	2.0
VVD	Keep healthcare deductible	33%	56%	0.53	1	7.3
SGP	Keep healthcare deductible	33%	53%	0.52	2	1.9
D66	Keep healthcare deductible	33%	51%	0.47	3	7.7
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Reduce pension age	69%	100%	1	1	0.9
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Reduce pension age	69%	87%	0.86	2	4.5
SP	Reduce pension age	69%	88%	0.86	3	13.2
50Plus	Reduce pension age	69%	85%	0.84	4	5.4
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Reduce pension age	69%	85%	0.81	5	18.8
SGP	Reduce pension age	69%	63%	0.62	6	1.9
ChristenUnie	Reduce pension age	69%	62%	0.61	7	2.6
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Reduce pension age	69%	60%	0.59	8	2.0

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
GroenLinks	Reduce pension age	69%	63%	0.59	9	9.4
DENK	Reduce pension age	69%	56%	0.55	10	0.9
D66	Reduce pension age	69%	57%	0.54	11	7.7
CDA	Reduce pension age	69%	54%	0.51	12	6.5
VVD	Reduce pension age	69%	51%	0.47	13	7.3
PVDA	Keep pension age	31%	60%	0.58	1	4.8
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Abolish student loans	73%	84%	0.84	1	4.5
SP	Abolish student loans	73%	79%	0.76	2	13.2
CDA	Abolish student loans	73%	74%	0.72	3	6.5
PVDA	Abolish student loans	73%	73%	0.72	4	4.8
GroenLinks	Abolish student loans	73%	73%	0.71	5	9.4
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Abolish student loans	73%	76%	0.7	6	18.8
ChristenUnie	Abolish student loans	73%	69%	0.68	7	2.6
D66	Abolish student loans	73%	70%	0.68	8	7.7
50Plus	Abolish student loans	73%	69%	0.67	9	5.4
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Abolish student loans	73%	67%	0.66	10	0.9
SGP	Abolish student loans	73%	63%	0.62	11	1.9
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Abolish student loans	73%	60%	0.59	12	2.0
VVD	Abolish student loans	73%	62%	0.59	13	7.3
DENK	Abolish student loans	73%	56%	0.55	14	0.9
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Reduce income differences	73%	87%	0.86	1	4.5
PVDA	Reduce income differences	73%	85%	0.85	2	4.8
SGP	Reduce income differences	73%	84%	0.84	3	1.9
SP	Reduce income differences	73%	83%	0.8	4	13.2
50Plus	Reduce income differences	73%	80%	0.78	5	5.4
GroenLinks	Reduce income differences	73%	80%	0.78	6	9.4
ChristenUnie	Reduce income differences	73%	77%	0.76	7	2.6
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Reduce income differences	73%	80%	0.76	8	18.8

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
DENK	Reduce income differences	73%	67%	0.66	9	0.9
D66	Reduce income differences	73%	69%	0.66	10	7.7
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Reduce income differences	73%	65%	0.64	11	2.0
CDA	Reduce income differences	73%	66%	0.64	12	6.5
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Reduce income differences	73%	56%	0.55	13	0.9
VVD	Don't reduce income differences	27%	53%	0.5	1	7.3
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Higher meat tax	27%	62%	0.6	1	4.5
SGP	No higher meat tax	73%	89%	0.89	1	1.9
Voor Nederland (VNL)	No higher meat tax	73%	89%	0.89	2	0.9
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	No higher meat tax	73%	84%	0.8	3	18.8
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	No higher meat tax	73%	80%	0.8	4	2.0
CDA	No higher meat tax	73%	80%	0.79	5	6.5
DENK	No higher meat tax	73%	78%	0.78	6	0.9
50Plus	No higher meat tax	73%	76%	0.75	7	5.4
VVD	No higher meat tax	73%	74%	0.72	8	7.3
SP	No higher meat tax	73%	75%	0.71	9	13.2
ChristenUnie	No higher meat tax	73%	65%	0.64	10	2.6
D66	No higher meat tax	73%	65%	0.62	11	7.7
PVDA	No higher meat tax	73%	56%	0.54	12	4.8
GroenLinks	No higher meat tax	73%	56%	0.52	13	9.4
PVDA	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	88%	0.87	1	4.8
SP	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	88%	0.86	2	13.2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	88%	0.86	3	18.8
ChristenUnie	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	85%	0.84	4	2.6
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	84%	0.84	5	4.5

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
50Plus	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	83%	0.82	6	5.4
GroenLinks	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	81%	0.79	7	9.4
SGP	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	74%	0.73	8	1.9
CDA	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	74%	0.72	9	6.5
D66	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	70%	0.68	10	7.7
DENK	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	67%	0.66	11	0.9
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	67%	0.66	11	0.9
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	65%	0.64	13	2.0
VVD	Fixed contract after 2 years	79%	62%	0.59	14	7.3

differences, the abolishment of student loans, the reduction in pension age and the abolishment of the deductible in health insurance. The interesting point is that on such issues not only traditional left-wing parties are competitive, but also right-wing populist parties like the two newcomers *Voor Nederland* (VNL) and *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD), and especially the PVV of Geert Wilders. Of course, left-wing (PVDA, SP) or environmentalist parties (*GroenLinks*), present usually the highest issue yields. Nonetheless, there is no monopoly of the left on 'leftist' economic issues. The same occurs for a culturally leftist/liberal issue as the 'completed life' stance (see Table 3). All the mainstream parties show a good issue yield on this stance and even the PVV presents a very high issue yield (0.88). Therefore, on the one hand leftist parties have several issues that can be beneficial to them in electoral terms; on the other hand, they have to face within their *core issue domain* competitive challengers from different political families. As regards some 'right-wing' economic goals, the story seems different. For instance, 'maintaining income differences' and 'keeping the healthcare deductible' are goals that provide a significant issue yield for the liberal-conservative VVD and the latter has no (or very few and small) rivals on such issues. As previously said, there are not so many positional issues that present a high issue yield

Table 3. Cultural issues: rival goals by issue yield

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
50Plus	Completed life assistance	79%	89%	0.88	1	5.4
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Completed life assistance	79%	90%	0.88	2	18.8
PVDA	Completed life assistance	79%	88%	0.87	3	4.8
SP	Completed life assistance	79%	87%	0.85	4	13.2
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Completed life assistance	79%	84%	0.84	5	4.5
GroenLinks	Completed life assistance	79%	85%	0.84	6	9.4
D66	Completed life assistance	79%	83%	0.82	7	7.7
VVD	Completed life assistance	79%	82%	0.81	8	7.3
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Completed life assistance	79%	80%	0.8	9	2
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Completed life assistance	79%	67%	0.66	10	0.9
CDA	Completed life assistance	79%	51%	0.47	11	6.5
SGP	No completed life assistance	21%	100%	1	1	1.9
ChristenUnie	No completed life assistance	21%	69%	0.68	2	2.6
DENK	No completed life assistance	21%	67%	0.66	3	0.9
SGP	Keep weed illegal	48%	74%	0.73	1	1.9
ChristenUnie	Keep weed illegal	48%	62%	0.61	2	2.6
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Keep weed illegal	48%	56%	0.55	3	0.9
50Plus	Keep weed illegal	48%	56%	0.53	4	5.4
VVD	Keep weed illegal	48%	56%	0.53	5	7.3
CDA	Keep weed illegal	48%	54%	0.51	6	6.5
DENK	Legalize weed	52%	67%	0.66	1	0.9
GroenLinks	Legalize weed	52%	65%	0.61	2	9.4
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Legalize weed	52%	60%	0.59	3	2
SP	Legalize weed	52%	64%	0.59	4	13.2

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
PVDA	Legalize weed	52%	60%	0.58	5	4.8
D66	Legalize weed	52%	58%	0.55	6	7.7
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Legalize weed	52%	56%	0.53	7	4.5
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Legalize weed	52%	54%	0.43	8	18.8

for the VVD. Nevertheless, the liberal-conservatives can easily exploit some economic issues pertaining to their *core issue domain*.

As expected, the Party for the Animals (PVDD) monopolizes the goal ‘higher meat tax’ with a good issue yield (0.62), whereas the opposite goal provides good issue yields to many parties of different ideological families.

As regards ‘demarcationist’ issues (Table 4), among the most supported goals according to [Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#) (i.e., those shared at least by two-thirds of respondents), only one traditionally rightist goal emerges, namely the requirement for foreigners to fully adapt to the Dutch culture. Here it is interesting to notice that such a goal provides not only very high issue yields to religious right-wing (*ChristenUnie*, SGP) or populist parties (PVV, FvD), but also good issue yields to mainstream (CDA, VVD) or radical-left parties (SP). The opposite goal is monopolized only by the (small) left-wing multiculturalist party DENK.

Finally, as regards the more divisive goals within the electorate – namely those related to the European Union (staying in the EU), introduction of binding referenda, immigration, and welfare chauvinism – it is noteworthy to notice that the goal ‘leaving the EU’ is *strategic* for the PVV, given that it provides a high issue yield without facing ‘dangerous’ rivals (just minor populist parties). Conversely, the opposite goal provides a good electoral yield to all mainstream parties, which have to ‘share’ the electoral opportunities. The same occurs as regards the issue related to ‘closing borders to immigrants’: the PVV is located in a strategic position in terms of issue yield and in terms of number and size of competing parties. As regards the introduction of binding referenda and the attitudes towards refugees, the PVV has to face a little bit more competition. Anyway, Geert Wilders’ party on the ‘less refugees goal’ shows a very high issue yield (0.93), much higher with respect to the issue yields of its main rivals on the right of the political spectrum like the VVD and the CDA. Conversely, the opposite goal (maintain current refugee policy) can be strategically exploited by

Table 4. 'Demarcationist' issues: rival goals by issue yield

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Introduce binding referenda	61%	89%	0.89	1	0.9
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Introduce binding referenda	61%	90%	0.88	2	18.8
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Introduce binding referenda	61%	82%	0.81	3	4.5
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Introduce binding referenda	61%	75%	0.74	4	2
50Plus	Introduce binding referenda	61%	74%	0.73	5	5.4
DENK	Introduce binding referenda	61%	67%	0.66	6	0.9
SP	Introduce binding referenda	61%	64%	0.58	7	13.2
D66	Introduce binding referenda	61%	53%	0.49	8	7.7
PVDA	No binding referenda	39%	69%	0.67	1	4.8
GroenLinks	No binding referenda	39%	62%	0.58	2	9.4
SGP	No binding referenda	39%	58%	0.57	3	1.9
ChristenUnie	No binding referenda	39%	54%	0.53	4	2.6
CDA	No binding referenda	39%	55%	0.52	5	6.5
VVD	No binding referenda	39%	51%	0.47	6	7.3
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Leave EU	38%	78%	0.78	1	0.9
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Leave EU	38%	80%	0.76	2	18.8
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Leave EU	38%	60%	0.59	3	2
50Plus	Leave EU	38%	57%	0.55	4	5.4
GroenLinks	Stay in EU	62%	83%	0.81	1	9.4
PVDA	Stay in EU	62%	81%	0.8	2	4.8
CDA	Stay in EU	62%	78%	0.77	3	6.5
D66	Stay in EU	62%	78%	0.76	4	7.7
VVD	Stay in EU	62%	77%	0.75	5	7.3
ChristenUnie	Stay in EU	62%	73%	0.72	6	2.6
SGP	Stay in EU	62%	68%	0.68	7	1.9
DENK	Stay in EU	62%	67%	0.66	8	0.9
SP	Stay in EU	62%	62%	0.56	9	13.2

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Stay in EU	62%	58%	0.56	10	4.5
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	No welfare chauvinism	50%	76%	0.74	1	4.5
DENK	No welfare chauvinism	50%	67%	0.66	2	0.9
PVDA	No welfare chauvinism	50%	67%	0.65	3	4.8
GroenLinks	No welfare chauvinism	50%	68%	0.65	4	9.4
D66	No welfare chauvinism	50%	56%	0.52	5	7.7
SP	No welfare chauvinism	50%	52%	0.44	6	13.2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Welfare chauvinism	50%	75%	0.69	1	18.8
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Welfare chauvinism	50%	67%	0.66	2	0.9
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Welfare chauvinism	50%	60%	0.59	3	2
SGP	Welfare chauvinism	50%	58%	0.57	4	1.9
50Plus	Welfare chauvinism	50%	57%	0.55	5	5.4
VVD	Welfare chauvinism	50%	56%	0.53	6	7.3
ChristenUnie	Welfare chauvinism	50%	54%	0.53	7	2.6
CDA	Welfare chauvinism	50%	51%	0.47	8	6.5
GroenLinks	Keep refugees coming	40%	71%	0.68	1	9.4
PVDA	Keep refugees coming	40%	67%	0.65	2	4.8
D66	Keep refugees coming	40%	61%	0.58	3	7.7
ChristenUnie	Keep refugees coming	40%	58%	0.57	4	2.6
DENK	Keep refugees coming	40%	56%	0.55	5	0.9
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Keep refugees coming	40%	56%	0.53	6	4.5
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Less refugees	60%	100%	1	1	0.9
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Less refugees	60%	94%	0.93	2	18.8
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Less refugees	60%	75%	0.74	3	2
50Plus	Less refugees	60%	74%	0.73	4	5.4
VVD	Less refugees	60%	68%	0.66	5	7.3
CDA	Less refugees	60%	62%	0.59	6	6.5

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
SGP	Less refugees	60%	58%	0.57	7	1.9
SP	Less refugees	60%	61%	0.55	8	13.2
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Close to immigrants	43%	89%	0.89	1	0.9
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Close to immigrants	43%	81%	0.76	2	18.8
50Plus	Close to immigrants	43%	63%	0.61	3	5.4
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Close to immigrants	43%	55%	0.54	4	2
DENK	Don't close to immigrants	57%	100%	1	1	0.9
PVDA	Don't close to immigrants	57%	94%	0.93	2	4.8
GroenLinks	Don't close to immigrants	57%	88%	0.87	3	9.4
D66	Don't close to immigrants	57%	78%	0.76	4	7.7
CDA	Don't close to immigrants	57%	69%	0.67	5	6.5
ChristenUnie	Don't close to immigrants	57%	65%	0.64	6	2.6
SGP	Don't close to immigrants	57%	63%	0.62	7	1.9
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Don't close to immigrants	57%	62%	0.6	8	4.5
SP	Don't close to immigrants	57%	58%	0.52	9	13.2
VVD	Don't close to immigrants	57%	51%	0.47	10	7.3
DENK	Foreigners keep culture	31%	56%	0.55	1	0.9
ChristenUnie	Foreigners should adapt	69%	92%	0.92	1	2.6
Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Foreigners should adapt	69%	85%	0.85	2	2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Foreigners should adapt	69%	87%	0.84	3	18.8
50Plus	Foreigners should adapt	69%	81%	0.8	4	5.4
SGP	Foreigners should adapt	69%	79%	0.79	5	1.9

party	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank	Party size
CDA	Foreigners should adapt	69%	71%	0.69	6	6.5
Voor Nederland (VNL)	Foreigners should adapt	69%	67%	0.66	7	0.9
SP	Foreigners should adapt	69%	69%	0.64	8	13.2
VVD	Foreigners should adapt	69%	66%	0.63	9	7.3
Partij voor de Dieren (PVDD)	Foreigners should adapt	69%	60%	0.58	10	4.5
D66	Foreigners should adapt	69%	58%	0.55	11	7.7
GroenLinks	Foreigners should adapt	69%	53%	0.48	12	9.4
PVDA	Foreigners should adapt	69%	50%	0.47	13	4.8

relatively few competitors: *GroenLinks*, PVDA and D66. Similarly, as regards the opposition to welfare chauvinism, the better issue yields are showed by DENK, PVDA, *GroenLinks*, D66. Conversely, as regards the pro-welfare chauvinism, the PVV has to face a certain competition in term of issue yield not only by small religious or populist parties, but also by other more relevant parties like the party for the elderly, 50Plus, and especially the VVD.

To sum up, the analysis of the strategic issue opportunity structure shows that an anti-establishment right-wing populist party like the PVV faces a peculiar cross-cutting issue configuration that can be remunerative in electoral terms: on the one hand, Wilders' party is (almost) a monopolist on 'demarcationist' issues related to immigration and especially to the European Union; on the other, it is competitive also as regards both traditional economic 'leftist' issues related to defence of social protection and leftist/liberal cultural issues related to the defence of individual freedoms like euthanasia. These results confirm that the quite different electoral strategy that the PVV takes seems indeed to be paying off. Their electoral campaign is different with respect to mainstream parties' strategies in several ways: they only take position on a few issues and stress them all the time through a harsh rhetoric, they do not usually participate in TV/media debates (in which they could be forced to take stances on issues) and they have an election manifesto of one page (<https://www.pvv.nl/visie.html>).

On the contrary, mainstream parties are ‘confined’ within their traditional issue domains. Furthermore, within such domains social-democratic or radical left parties have to face the competition of other political actors, including new challengers like the PVV.

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March 16, 2017

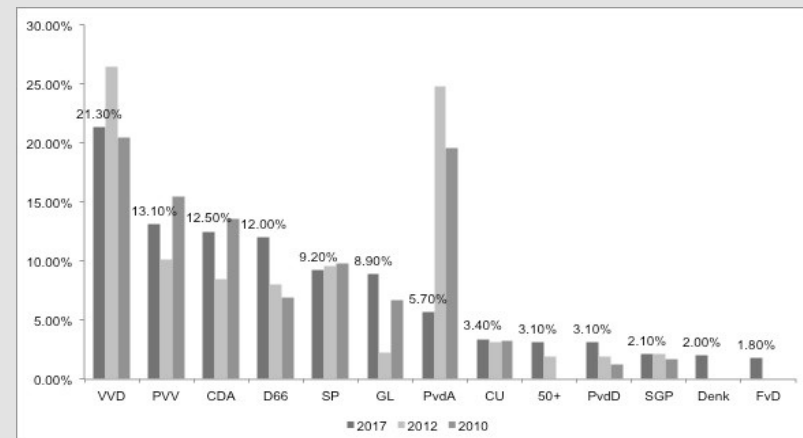
Although the mostly reported outcome of the Dutch Elections, held on 15 March 2017, is that Geert Wilders’ party PVV did not become the largest party, a lot of significant changes to other parties’ support have occurred as well. The most important outcomes of the elections are the historically large loss for Labour party PVDA, and large wins for cosmopolitan party D66 and the Green Left (GL). The picture that appears is an even more fragmented party system than is usual in The Netherlands.

However, our comparative study on issue competition, featuring an original data collection on the Netherlands (see below), drives us to specific considerations about issue politics. All parties that have gained seats, have extensively campaigned on cultural issues. However, when looking at the priorities of a range of policy goals among the electorate, socioeconomic issues rank quite highly. How can this apparent tension be explained? Furthermore, to what extent have the ‘winners’ in this election really exploited their issue opportunities, and have the losers’ failed to do so?

Election results in perspective

Before going into this question, the election results need to be placed in a perspective that goes beyond the previous election results. During the 2012 elections, horse race reporting has led to a competition between VVD and PVDA to become the largest party, and hence deliver the PM. Both parties ended up with very high percentages of votes (respectively 27 and 25%). This has partially led to a major loss for the green left, who went from 7% to 2% support. Moreover, the Christian Democrats (CDA) were in a crisis and severely punished for entering a government that was supported by the PVV. At the same time, Wilders’ decision to not support the austerity package of the

Figure 1. Dutch Parliamentary Election outcomes 2017-2010. 2017 percentages reported in numbers



government, which led to calling new elections, caused a loss of votes to the PVV as well.

The picture that emerges now is that most parties that have lost in 2012, have gained in these 2017 elections: this goes for PVV, GL, and CDA. PVV has become the second party (13,1%), the Christian democrats are on the road to recovery again (12,5%), and GL has a historically high support (9%). Another large win is for D66 (12%). Governing parties VVD and PVDA have lost, but VVD managed to remain the largest party (21,3%). PVDA however, was severely punished for having governed with the liberals from VVD.

Cultural cleavage vs. economic priorities and party credibility

Previous polls of PVV becoming the largest party have not become reality, and many Europeans have expressed their relief about this. However, as others (Rooduijn 2017; Mudde 2017 – both on Dutch and on English-speaking media) have pointed out: The Netherlands has not “said ‘stop’ to the wrong kind of populism”, as Mark Rutte (VVD) declared on election night. On the contrary, CDA and VVD have closer moved towards the discourse of Wilders, taking harsh stances regarding “the Dutch identity” and against Islam. Apparently, this strategy has paid off as Wilders’ win has turned out more moderate than expected, which CDA and VVD have surely benefited. The two

winners on the progressive side of the cultural cleavage, GL and D66, have extensively campaigned on their main issues, respectively the environment (GL), and education and a strong EU (D66), but not so much on the economy. Both parties take large distances from nationalist and Islamophobic sentiment, and occupy the political space on the more cosmopolitan side of the cosmopolitan-nationalist cultural divide (Charlemagne 2017). The major loser of the elections, PVDA, is mostly known for their socioeconomic positions and does not have a key cultural issue to distinguish them from the other parties. They are clearly taking position in favour of an inclusive society, but GL and D66 do so as well. The wins for GL and D66 have most likely come at the expense of PVDA. Can we therefore conclude that cultural issues are key to winning votes in these elections?

Earlier in March, in the context of a 6-country comparative study that will also cover France, the UK, Germany, Austria, and Italy (see a description of the project and data collection in De Sio in this volume), we asked Dutch voters to what extent they prioritized a set of divisive goals (after selecting one of two opposing goals) and shared goals (such as fighting pollution or decreasing unemployment), and which parties they deemed most credible for achieving these goals. The results show that the policy goals that rank highest are not solely cultural issues, but also classic socioeconomic issues.

Table 1. Divisive and shared goals: support, priority and most credible party. Goals ranked by priority

Statement	support (%)	priority (%)	most credible
Protect the Netherlands against terrorist attacks	100%	83%	VVD (34%)
Improve care for the elderly and the disabled	100%	81%	SP, 50+ (33%)
Further reduce unemployment	100%	78%	PVDA (29%)
Maintain the current economic growth	100%	75%	VVD (36%)
Fight environmental pollution	100%	66%	GL (44%)
Fixed term contract after 2 years	79%	56%	SP (29%)
Reduce income differences	73%	51%	SP (35%)
Reduce the pension age to 65	68%	49%	50+ (39%)
Require foreigners to fully adapt to Dutch culture	68%	48%	PVV (50%)
Abolish deductible in health insurance (even if means higher fees)	66%	48%	SP (35%)
The Netherlands should stay in the EU	65%	46%	VVD (47%)
Take in less refugees in The Netherlands	58%	44%	PVV (62%)
Completely close the Dutch borders to immigrants	46%	31%	PVV (54%)

In this table, all policy goals are listed that were given a high priority by at least 30% of the respondents (of whom have chosen to prefer that goal, for positional issues). What emerges is a quite diverse set of issues, ranging from protecting the country from terrorist attacks and taking in less refugees, to further reducing unemployment and income differences, and fighting environmental pollution. Of course, the percentages in agreement differ across these goals, although most socioeconomic issues listed here show relatively high levels of support. A much larger division is found among the cultural issues, especially those related to immigration and integration, and refugees.

Focussing on credibility, it is striking that SP seems to dominate issues related to income differences, health care, and employees' rights, and not the PVDA. However, PVDA is seen as the most credible party on the valence issue to further reduce unemployment. While PVV clearly owns the issues related to integration, immigration, and the intake of refugees, governing party VVD is seen as the most credible party to maintain economic growth, keep the country safe from terrorism, and remain in the EU. VVD has apparently benefited from delivering the PM in government, while PVV is not deemed most credible at any of the valence issues.

At the same time, PVDA has not been able to exploit the opportunities based on their government experience: even though voters deem the party most credible party on a key socioeconomic issue, this is not shown in the election results. The Socialist Party, deemed most credible on a high number of socioeconomic issues, has not been able to gain more votes than in the previous election. An explanation for voters either turning away from, or not being increasingly attracted by these two left-wing parties for whom socioeconomic issues are key, can be found in the combination of the salience of cultural issues in this election campaign, and clear position-taking of other parties on this dimension.

This leaves us with the question to what extent the winning parties have made indeed the most strategic choices regarding the type of issues they have emphasized in the campaign. Using issue yield theory ([De Sio and Weber 2014](#)) we can calculate the electoral potential that is offered to a party by each of the available conflict issues in the political debate. It is expected that parties select issues that have the highest *yield* for them and mainly campaign on these issues. The issue yield score is calculated based on voter support by party preference (within-party agreement) and the general support for an issue among the general public. The table below presents, for each party presented, the four "highest-yield" issues, showing indeed that the main winners in this election (GL, D66, PVV) strategically should have emphasized cultural issues related to immigrants, refugees, the "completed life" issue (extension of existing euthanasia legislation), the EU, as they have done. However, also so-

Table 2. Top four issues (ranked by highest issue yield): GroenLinks, D66 and PVV

	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield
GroenLinks	Don't close borders to immigrants	57%	88%	0.87
GroenLinks	"Completed life" assistance	79%	85%	0.84
GroenLinks	Abolish healthcare deductible	67%	84%	0.82
GroenLinks	Stay in EU	62%	83%	0.81
D66	"Completed life" assistance	79%	83%	0.82
D66	Don't close to immigrants	57%	78%	0.76
D66	Stay in EU	62%	78%	0.76
D66	Abolish student loans	73%	70%	0.68
PVV	Less refugees	60%	94%	0.93
PVV	Introduce binding referendum	61%	90%	0.88
PVV	"Completed life" assistance	79%	90%	0.88
PVV	Fixed contract after 2yrs	79%	88%	0.86

cioeconomic issues are found among these high-yield opportunities, relating to health care and student loans.

When looking at the issue yield of parties who either lost seats or did not win (VVD, SP, PVDA), we clearly see a purely socioeconomic issue yield for SP, while for VVD is it mostly cultural. For PVDA, it is mixed. VVD has indeed mostly campaigned on cultural issues, while at the same time presenting itself at the responsible governing party, being the credible alternative to Wilders' party. SP has been able to maintain the current electorate despite the prevalence of cultural issues, while this was not the case for PVDA. Even though their highest issue yield is found on the immigration issue, the PVDA has not been able to exploit this opportunity. In a way, this might be related to the intense multi-party competition of the Netherlands: in this case, we see that other parties (most notably GL) had an almost equally high yield on the same issue, meaning that the PVDA would hardly be the only one to benefit from emphasis on the issue, as shown by the electoral results. At the same time, they have not been able to turn their governing experience with VVD into something positive, and a recent party leadership change in December has been an important factor here as well.

In conclusion, our perspective based on the analysis of issue competition casts a slightly different light on the result of the Dutch election. Our data

Table 3. Top four issues (ranked by highest issue yield): VVD, PVDA and SP

	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield
VVD	"Completed life" assistance	79%	82%	0.81
VVD	Stay in EU	62%	77%	0.75
VVD	No higher meat tax	73%	74%	0.72
VVD	Less refugees	60%	68%	0.66
PVDA	Don't close borders to immigrants	57%	94%	0.93
PVDA	Fixed contract after 2yrs	79%	88%	0.87
PVDA	"Completed life" assistance	79%	88%	0.87
PVDA	Reduce income differences	73%	85%	0.85
SP	Reduce pension age	68%	86%	0.84
SP	Fixed contract after 2yrs	79%	85%	0.83
SP	Abolish healthcare deductible	66%	85%	0.83
SP	Abolish student loans	73%	84%	0.82

show that, when looking at public opinion data, the most salient goals and issues appear related to socio-economic questions, while campaign activity (albeit still on the grounds anecdotal evidence, until our systematic coding of parties' and leaders' Twitter activity will provide hard data) has been mostly focused on cultural issues. This in a way provides again evidence of the relevance of party strategy for electoral outcomes. Given the aforementioned data, one can hardly speak of a "right-wing wind" sweeping Europe, but rather of some parties that successfully emphasize cultural issues, while others (such as the PVDA) fail to mobilize voters on socio-economic issues. In little more than a month we'll see (again with CISE data) whether a similar story will unfold in France ([De Sio and Paparo in this volume](#)).

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A shared agenda, with a right-wing slant: public opinion priorities towards the French Presidential election

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April 18, 2017

As witnessed by the emphasis and the media coverage of pundits and journalists from all over Europe, the French Presidential election (first round on April 23rd) can potentially be crossroad in European history. Indeed, in an increasingly unpredictable international context, France's right-wing and left-wing anti-establishment and Eurosceptic forces are rising at the expense of traditional mainstream parties. Opinion polls have not only put Marine Le Pen in the first position of the first round since the beginning of the campaign, but for the first time the leader of the Front National seems to be competitive in the second round. Moreover, during the last weeks of the campaign, the radical left candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has gained momentum and has apparently surpassed its socialist rival, Benoît Hamon. Mélenchon has now credible chances of accessing to the second round. For the first time since the foundation of the Fifth Republic, neither a socialist nor a Gaullist candidate is expected to access to the second round in the Presidential election. Given these premises, it is clear that this election may produce not only a historic realignment within the French party system, but also a decisive turning point for the future of the European Union.

In this context, focusing on the main issues debated in the current electoral campaign is critical to understand the current state of French public opinion and, consequently:

- a) The existence of a 'French agenda', namely a set of goals on which – regardless of party preferences – there is a general agreement and the majority of French voters consider to be a priority;
- b) The existence of a specific *Zeitgeist* hovering on the French public opinion: is it, for instance, dominated mainly by right-wing concerns (e.g. immigration), or are there other issues where there is a strong support for left-wing

opinions? Moreover, we are interested in the possible gap between the support for certain issues and priorities that voters assign to it. In this regard, it is particularly relevant to address a crucial question of contemporary party politics: whether the success of ‘populist’ parties (and candidates) is due to some general ‘Populist *Zeitgeist*’ (Mudde 2004) in public opinion or, whether this success is rather due to the better ability of such parties to seize the available issue opportunities. Additionally, comparing voters’ support and priority on a set of debated issues could inform us on the potential unexploited issue opportunities for certain parties (or candidates).

In order to do that, the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) has conducted a CAWI survey on the adult French population. Similarly to what we have recently done in view of the Dutch parliamentary election last March (De Sio in this volume), French respondents were asked to express their support on 15 positional issues (divisive issues that refer to two rival goals, e.g. public spending vs. tax cuts). Specifically, each respondent was asked to position himself on a 6-point scale where the points 1 and 6 represented the two rival goals to be pursued on a given issue. Later, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the selected goal for each of these issues. The questionnaire also included nine valence issues (Stokes 1963), namely issues that refer to one shared goal, over which a general agreement is assumed (e.g., protection from terrorism). On these issues, a support of 100% is set by design and respondents are only asked to attribute the level of priority. The selection of both positional and valence issues was made in cooperation with a team of French researchers.

By examining the level of support for different goals (and the priority attributed to such goals), we are able to map the current state of French public opinion, and thus the potential structure of opportunity for candidates in the presidential campaign. For each goal, Table 1 reports the level of support in public opinion (the percentage of people in favour of positional issues— while valence issues are set by design as supported by 100% of the sample); the priority of that goal in the whole sample (the percentage of respondents attributing a high priority to that issue); the priority for those favouring the goal (the percentage of respondents supporting that goal who also attribute a high priority to that issue).

A first interesting piece of evidence emerges by looking at Table 1: a ‘French agenda’ actually exists (a). Indeed, out of the nine valence issues, six are considered as a priority by at least 75% of respondents. Two specific issues ‘Protect France from the terrorist threat’ and ‘Fighting against unemployment’ are considered a priority by 91% of the respondents. In other words, regardless of partisan affiliations, and despite the ongoing tough campaign opposing the different candidates and their policy proposals, the French public opinion is fundamentally united on many issues: people share some common problems

Table 1. Divisive and common goals by public opinion support and priority

Statement	% Support	% General priority	% Priority for those favouring the goal
Protect France from the terrorist threat	100%	91%	91%
Fight unemployment	100%	91%	91%
Fight corruption	100%	84%	84%
Improve the quality of education	100%	82%	82%
Support economic growth	100%	80%	80%
Protect the environment	100%	75%	75%
Make women’s role in society more important	100%	69%	69%
Make France count more in Europe	100%	66%	66%
Make EU more democratic	100%	64%	64%
Keep access to abortion	81%	53%	66%
Limit the number of refugees	79%	63%	80%
Legalise euthanasia	79%	48%	61%
Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	54%	70%
Reduce income differences	75%	58%	77%
Make immigration rules more restrictive	73%	60%	82%
Restrict welfare for immigrants	70%	55%	79%
Keep gay marriages	67%	33%	49%
Lower pension age	66%	48%	73%
Stay in the Euro	63%	48%	76%
Limit economic globalisation	63%	42%	67%
Stay in the EU	62%	45%	73%
Abandon nuclear energy	57%	37%	66%
Keep soft drugs illegal	55%	32%	58%
Deregulate the job market	52%	36%	70%
Keep current regulations in the job market	48%	35%	72%
Legalise soft drugs	45%	21%	46%
Keep using nuclear energy	43%	24%	56%
Leave the EU	38%	26%	69%
Leave the Euro	37%	25%	69%
Encourage economic globalisation	37%	21%	56%
Increase pension age	34%	20%	59%
Repeal gay marriages	33%	15%	46%
Keep welfare for immigrants	30%	17%	59%
Keep current immigration rules	27%	18%	67%
Don’t reduce income differences	25%	14%	55%
Authorise Islamic veil in public spaces	22%	10%	43%
Accept more refugees	21%	12%	56%
Keep euthanasia illegal	21%	10%	49%
Restrict access to abortion	19%	9%	47%

and expect the President to deal with them, whoever he/she will be. Moreover, some theoretically divisive issues are actually highly supported by a large majority of French voters. Indeed, out of the 15 positional issues, 5 display a support for one of the rival goals equal or higher than 75%, thus configuring a sort of ‘quasi-valence’ issues.

Comparing these results with those deriving from the Dutch survey (see [Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), French public opinion is clearly more united than the Dutch one. In the Netherlands, notwithstanding the presence of some shared goals, the overall priority for the valence issues was lower (the top priority was 85% for one issue against 91% for two issues in France), and only two rival goals resulted supported by 75% or more of the respondents (against five in France). All in all, the overall priority appears to be higher in France than in the Netherlands: the average priority, considering both valence and positional issues, is 43% in France against 37% in the Netherlands. This may attest to a greater restlessness of the French society, whose voters are conscious that a larger number of problems have to be put in the agenda, compared to the Dutch case.

Yet interestingly, voters in both countries share some common goals, such as the protection from terrorist attacks and the fight against unemployment, they are respectively the first and second top priorities in both countries. This is not surprising, given that, on the one hand, the threat of terrorist attacks has dramatically become a salient issue in all Western democracies since the assault to Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. On the other hand, since the end of 2008, the hit of the harshest economic crisis after WWII has spread the problem of unemployment (or at least the perception of it) across all over Europe, even if in France this issue has been on the agenda for a long time. Therefore, these two issues seem to configure the presence of a common ‘European agenda’. This is an important piece of evidence, which obviously needs to be confirmed by further analyses to be conducted during the upcoming elections in Europe (Germany in September 2017, Austria in October 2017, and Italy in February 2018 at the latest). The French and Dutch societies share another common feature: their fundamental secularization. Among the most supported divisive goals, we find social issues such as euthanasia (to be extended in the Netherlands and to be legalized in France) and access to abortion (only in France, not asked in the Netherlands), supported by 81% of French respondents.

If it is true that a French agenda is clearly identifiable, it is also true that right-wing issues tend to dominate the debate (b). In this respect, whether a specific *Zeitgeist* exists, it is clearly oriented towards right, and specifically towards immigration-related goals. This is a stark contrast compared to the Netherlands: in this latter country, there was a wide agreement especially on some leftist issues, while right-wing issues appeared as having a higher priori-

ty. As a result, there is no ‘Populist *Zeitgeist*’ in the Netherlands, but conversely right-wing parties have a greater opportunity to frame the debate where left-wing parties fail to exploit potentially profitable issue opportunities. Conversely, in France, following abortion and euthanasia, four goals related to immigrants feature support levels ranging from 70% to 79% of the electorate. All these goals are traditional ‘demarcation’ aspects ([Kriesi et al. 2006](#)): limit the number of refugees, forbid the Islamic veil in public spaces, make immigration rules more restrictive, and finally a typical policy of welfare chauvinism (‘Restrict welfare for immigrants’). These goals are not only highly supported, but they are also considered as a priority by a majority of respondents (between 54% and 63% in the whole electorate and even between 70% and 82% among those respondents favouring the goal). Therefore, beyond the undeniable importance of certain valence issues, immigration is certainly the other ‘big issue’ at stake in the campaign, and is likely to play an important role in the ballot box. On the contrary, despite being highly supported, social issues such as abortion and euthanasia are considered as a priority by a lower portion of respondents (53% and 48%, respectively).

Besides the dominance of immigrant-related issues, the other dimension that emerges as highly supported and salient is a traditionally left-wing goal, ‘Reduce income differences’. It is supported by 75% of voters and considered a priority by 58% of the overall respondents (the second absolute priority after ‘Limit the number of refugees’). Yet, this aspect is quite isolated, given that other ideologically related goals, such as ‘Keep current regulations in the job market’ are by far less supported and even outnumbered by the rival goal ‘Deregulate the job market’ (respectively supported by 48% and 52% of the respondents).

While we find evidence that immigrant-related issues constitute a fertile ground for the right-wing populist appeal (primarily for Marine Le Pen), Eurosceptic issues seem to stay in the background. They are supported by a minority of the population (38% for ‘Leave the EU’ and 37% for ‘Leave the Euro’) and the priority voters attribute to them is lower than the one for the rival pro-EU goals, (even by looking only at those selecting the goal, 76% and 73% respectively for pro-Euro and pro-EU positions, against 69% of both Eurosceptic goals). Interestingly, attitudes towards economic globalization show a different result: 63% of respondents favour limiting it. In other words, Kriesi’s demarcationist issues should not be a priori considered as a part of a common ground: immigrants, globalization and Euroscepticism show different levels of support and priority, and therefore we should expect a strategical unpacking of the ‘demarcationist menu’ by right-wing candidates. Consistently with these pieces of evidence, candidates should emphasize immigration-related issues and, to a lower extent, anti-globalization stances, while anti-EU consideration should remain in the background of the campaign.

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Who will solve France's problems? Candidate credibility on issues with top priority

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April 18, 2017

Next Sunday, French voters will be called to the polls for the first round of the Presidential elections. During the final days of the electoral campaign, we want to provide a meaningful overview and interpretation of the structure of issue competition in the French system. To this purpose, CISE has collected an original dataset through CAWI interviews on a representative sample of the French voting-age population.

In particular, in this article we focus on candidates' credibility on different issues. Our data includes a set of nine valence issues, on which there is by definition a consensual agreement ([Stokes 1963](#)). As we can see on the top of Table 1, three candidates are considered the most credible on achieving the related nine shared goals. Ordered by the highest number of issues they are the most-credible on, they are Emmanuel Macron, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and Marine Le Pen.

Specifically, Macron ranks first on four valence issues, but shows minimal leads on other credible candidates on most of them. Furthermore, he is first on EU-related goals, which rank lowest in terms of priority. Only on "supporting economic growth" the once minister of the economy has a double-digit lead in percentage points on the second-most credible candidate (François Fillon). Mélenchon is the most credible candidate on three issues: fighting corruption, unemployment, and pollution. These are among the highest in terms of priority, if we except proception of the environment. However, he again shows minimal leads on the second-most credible candidates – ranging between 3 and 7 percentage points. Marine Le Pen is the most credible on the two remaining shared goals, protecting France from terrorism and making women more relevant in French society. The former, in particular, is the most salient of all issues in the French electorate, and also, by far, the shared goal on which the most-credible candidate shows the largest lead on the second (16 percentage points).

It is worth noting that the two candidates supported by the political parties that competed in the second round of the Presidential elections five years ago (Benoît Hamon for the PS, Fillon for the LR) are not considered the most credible on achieving any of the nine shared goals included in our survey.

Our data also features a set of 15 positional issues, on which respondents were asked to state their preferred goal between two rival ones, as well as the candidates they deemed credible to achieve it, and its relevance. On the 15 majority goals (preferred by more than 50% of respondents) the same three candidates appear as the most-credible: Le Pen, Macron, and Mélenchon. The candidate from FN is first six times, Macron on five issues, and Mélenchon on four.

The strong advantage of Le Pen on this set of goals is clear when looking at all our indicators. She does not only rank first on a higher number of issues, she ranks first on four of the five issues with the highest priority, which are all related to immigrants and threats to the French culture. Only Mélenchon with reducing income differences is the most credible on an issue that features a similar level of priority. Moreover, these goals are among the most supported. Between 70 and 80% of the French electorate support forbidding the Islamic veil in public spaces, restricting welfare for immigrants, making immigration rules more restrictive, and limiting the number of refugees. Furthermore, she enjoys the largest leads on the second-most credible candidates on these four issues that are so highly agreed upon. Even more so, she has leads which are three times as large as the largest shown by any other candidate on any other issue. Basically 50% of the French electorate (or just a little less) supports each of the four anti-immigrant goals *and* consider her credible in achieving them, with the second-most credible candidate being only a little above 10% in credibility. No other candidate on any issue shows a pattern even remotely comparable to these four. She is also the most credible on keeping soft drugs illegal and limiting economic globalization; but these goals are much less supported, they have lower priority levels, and she is not the only credible candidate – as shown by the low leads on the second-most credible candidates.

Macron is the most credible on issues related to social rights (gay marriages and abortion), job market deregulation, and pro-EU goals. Is it worth pointing out that over 60% of the French electorate favour both staying in the EU and in the Euro. Furthermore, these issues are more important to them than leaving is for the smaller fractions of voters who prefer these goals. However, Macron enjoys only marginal leads on all these issues, just a little larger on the European issues, on which a respondent out of four deems him credible and wants to stay. These are the best credibility scores except the aforementioned four by Le Pen.

Mélenchon appears as the most credible on classic economic left issues, plus green energy and euthanasia. His lead margins are, on average, a bit larger than Macron's, but still not comparable to Le Pen's.

Now we turn our focus to the 15 minority rival goals, those that were selected by a smaller fraction than their opposite. Looking at these, we have the addition of two candidates in the club of those being considered the most credible on at least one issue. Namely, they are Fillon, first on four of these minority goals, and Hamon (2 goals). The Republican candidate is the most credible on keeping using nuclear energy, not reducing income differences, keeping euthanasia illegal, and increasing pension age. In any case, only on the latter he shows a non-insignificant lead on the second-most credible candidate. Hamon ranks first, with minimal margins, on legalizing soft drugs and not giving way to welfare chauvinism.

Macron is the most credible in achieving two minority goals both related to keeping France open to the world (encouraging globalization and not restricting immigration rules). Mélenchon is the most credible on three minority goals. Two of them are related to openness towards the Muslim community. These are not particularly relevant, as they are among the least shared in terms of agreement, as well as the least salient – even among the small minorities favouring such goals. Furthermore, Mélenchon is the most credible only by a minimal lead on both of them. However, the third minority issue on which he ranks first (“keeping the current regulations in the job market”) is probably the single most relevant one of all minority goals. This is the one with the highest support (48%) within the French electorate, the one with the highest level of priority (both in the whole electorate and within the portion favouring the goal) – so high that it is the only minority goal with an overall priority above some of the majority goals. On this goal Mélenchon has a lead on the second-most credible candidate (Le Pen), which, although being inferior to the average, ranks above the median value.

Once again, however, Le Pen appears to be in the best position also on minority goals. She is the most credible on a record-high of four instances (record shared with Fillon, as mentioned above). Furthermore, she is first on the two anti-European goal (leaving the EU and the Euro), which are shared by a little less than 40% of respondents (thus being among the most supported), and rank second and third in terms of level of priority. On these two issues we find that 21-24% of French voters agrees and considers Le Pen credible. These are by far the largest credibility scores by any candidates on any minority goal – no other reaches 15%. Moreover, her credibility gap on achieving such goals compared to the second-most credible candidate is not even comparable to the highest ones observed on minority goals by other candidates – five to six times larger. She is also first on repealing gay marriages and restricting access to abortion, although these goals are much less agreed upon, and definitely not as salient as the EU-related ones.

Table 1. Shared and divisive goals, by public opinion support, with most credible parties

Statement	% Support	% Priority for those favouring the goal	% General priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Protect France from the terrorist threat	100%	91%	91%	Le Pen	Fillon	Macron	17% Mélenchon	17% +16
Fight unemployment	100%	91%	91%	Mélenchon	Macron	Le Pen	20% Fillon	13% +3
Fight corruption	100%	84%	84%	Mélenchon	Le Pen	Macron	16% Hamon	13% +7
Improve the quality of education	100%	82%	82%	Macron	Mélenchon	Le Pen	16% Hamon	15% +2
Support economic growth	100%	80%	80%	Macron	Fillon	Mélenchon	17% Le Pen	17% +11
Protect the environment	100%	75%	75%	Mélenchon	Hamon	Macron	13% Arthaud	12% +3
Make women's role in society more important	100%	69%	69%	Le Pen	Arthaud	Macron	16% Mélenchon	15% +6
Make France count more in Europe	100%	66%	66%	Macron	Le Pen	Fillon	19% Mélenchon	15% +6
Make EU more democratic	100%	64%	64%	Macron	Mélenchon	Hamon	14% Fillon	14% +3
Limit the number of refugees	79%	80%	63%	Le Pen	Fillon	Dupont	7% Macron	7% +38
Make immigration rules more restrictive	73%	82%	60%	Le Pen	Fillon	Dupont	7% Macron	5% +35
Reduce income differences	75%	77%	58%	Mélenchon	Hamon	Le Pen	12% Macron	10% +12
Restrict welfare for immigrants	70%	79%	55%	Le Pen	Fillon	Dupont	5% Macron	4% +35
Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	70%	54%	Le Pen	Fillon	Macron	8% Dupont	6% +37
Keep access to abortion	81%	66%	53%	Macron	Hamon	Mélenchon	17% Le Pen	10% +3
Legalise euthanasia	79%	61%	48%	Mélenchon	Macron	Hamon	10% Le Pen	9% +2

Statement	% Support	% Priority for those favouring the goal	% General priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Lower pension age	66%	73%	48%	Mélenchon	Le Pen	Hamon	10% Poutou	7% +9
Stay in the Euro	63%	76%	48%	Macron	Fillon	Hamon	17% Mélenchon	11% +7
Stay in the EU	62%	73%	45%	Macron	Fillon	Hamon	16% Mélenchon	10% +7
Limit economic globalisation	63%	67%	42%	Le Pen	Mélenchon	Poutou	6% Hamon	5% +4
Abandon nuclear energy	57%	66%	37%	Mélenchon	Hamon	Le Pen	6% Macron	6% +6
Deregulate the job market	52%	70%	36%	Macron	Fillon	Le Pen	9% Mélenchon	8% +3
Keep current regulations in the job market	48%	72%	35%	Mélenchon	Le Pen	Macron	9% Hamon	9% +3
Keep gay marriages	67%	49%	33%	Macron	Hamon	Mélenchon	17% Arthaud	7% +3
Keep soft drugs illegal	55%	58%	32%	Le Pen	Fillon	Macron	8% Mélenchon	5% +1
Leave the EU	38%	69%	26%	Le Pen	Mélenchon	Dupont	3% Asselineau	2% +19
Leave the Euro	37%	69%	25%	Le Pen	Mélenchon	Macron	2% Fillon	2% +17
Keep using nuclear energy	43%	56%	24%	Fillon	Macron	Le Pen	8% Mélenchon	4% +3
Encourage economic globalisation	37%	56%	21%	Macron	Fillon	Hamon	4% Le Pen	3% +4
Legalise soft drugs	45%	46%	21%	Hamon	Mélenchon	Macron	5% Le Pen	3% +3
Increase pension age	34%	59%	20%	Fillon	Macron	Le Pen	4% Mélenchon	3% +7
Keep current immigration rules	27%	67%	18%	Macron	Mélenchon	Hamon	8% Le Pen	3% +0
Keep welfare for immigrants	30%	59%	17%	Hamon	Mélenchon	Macron	7% Arthaud	4% +0

Statement	% Support	% Priority for those favouring the goal	% General priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Repeal gay marriages	33%	46%	15%	Le Pen	Fillon	Dupont	1% Mélenchon	1% +4
Don't reduce income differences	25%	55%	14%	Fillon	Macron	Le Pen	4% Mélenchon	2% +0
Accept more refugees	21%	56%	12%	Mélenchon	Hamon	Macron	4% Poutou	2% +1
Keep euthanasia illegal	21%	49%	10%	Fillon	Le Pen	Macron	2% Hamon	2% +0
Authorise Islamic veil in public spaces	22%	43%	10%	Mélenchon	Hamon	Macron	4% Fillon	2% +0
Restrict access to abortion	19%	47%	9%	Le Pen	Fillon	Hamon	1% Macron	1% +2

To further investigate whether the credibility measures we have collected might shed some more light on the electoral prospects of the various candidates, we compare vote intentions and credibility scores for each of them. As we can see in Table 2, vote intentions are basically concentrated on five options, enjoying over 90% of valid vote intentions. For the five major candidates, if we compare their vote intention shares (as percentage of the overall electorate) with the average credibility they were assigned (again by the whole sample), we can see that only Hamon has ratios (slightly) above 1. Fillon is at 1 on valence goals, but below on positional goals (0.84). Mélenchon is close to 1 on valence goals, but at 0.67 on positional. Macron is even lower, at 0.8 on valence and at 0.56 on positional goals. As predictable, the most-polarizing candidate, Marine Le Pen, ranks last in terms of credibility on valence goals with a ratio of 0.72. However, and interestingly, she is the only candidate with a higher average credibility on positional goals, which means a higher ratio – 0.74, thus higher than both Mélenchon and Macron.

Overall, we can conclude that, despite the indication in our data of the presence of some kind of a “French agenda”, as indicated by the incredibly high priority scores reported by many valence issues and that a few divisive goals are supported by strong majorities (five of the fifteen positional issues split 3 to 1 or even less balanced than that), no candidate has been able to become credible on achieving these unifying goals beyond his or her own electorate. Clearly, the various candidates do sometimes show higher level of credibility on occasional issues, but none shows a similar pattern consistently. There appears to be significant social cohesion on a number of goals, some of which are in theory conflictual, but not so much in reality – as we observe empirically. However, there is no agreement on who should carry them out.

This picture is very different from what we have recently found in an analogous investigation of the Dutch case ([Paparo, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)). There, we found a much more fragmented vote intention distribution, significantly less agreement on divisive goals, but also credibility patents assigned by voters to parties other than their own. In short, we observe social fragmentation + political cooperation in the Netherlands compared to social homogeneity + political polarization in France.

The comparison with the analyses yields some additional interesting elements. In the Netherlands, we only had five valence issues, and four different parties emerged as the most credible in achieving the related shared goals. In France, we have nine valence goals, and only three candidates are the most credible on at least one of them. On the fifteen majority goals, the same three candidates rank first at least once, while in the Netherlands six different parties were first in credibility on at least one of the 15 majority goals. Finally, on the 15 minority goals, we have a total of five candidates with at least one goal they are the most credible on, while there are eight parties in this position in

Table 2. Party vote shares and credibility scores in the whole sample

	Arthaud	Poutou	Mélençon	Hamon	Macron	Dupont	Le Pen	Fillon	Cheminade	Asselineau	Lassalle
Candidate vote intention	1.8%	2.7%	15.5%	7.6%	18.4%	2.5%	21.4%	10.3%	0.1%	0.4%	0.6%
<i>Average credibility</i>											
Valence goals	5.6%	4.1%	14.7%	10.7%	15.3%	5.1%	15.4%	10.4%	1.6%	2.1%	2.8%
Positional goals (all)	2.8%	3.1%	10.3%	8.3%	10.8%	3.2%	15.8%	8.7%	1.1%	1.5%	1.5%
<i>Ratios (credibility/votes)</i>											
Shared goals	3.09	1.51	0.95	1.41	0.83	2.05	0.72	1.01	15.80	5.13	4.49
Divisive goals (all)	1.58	1.13	0.67	1.09	0.59	1.27	0.74	0.84	10.82	3.76	2.45

the Netherlands. Admittedly, we polled fourteen parties in the Dutch case, while we only have eleven candidates in our French study (all those running for the 2017 presidential elections). Nevertheless, this is clearly not the whole story. It appears that the Dutch parties have been more capable in cultivating their own areas of issue ownership (Budge and Farlie 1983; [Petrocik 1996](#)), even specializing on a single one of them to the extent of becoming single-issue parties in some cases.

In the French case, only Le Pen appears to have a clear area of issue ownership on demarcation policies. One that, by the way, provides her with a formidable competition weapon to attract voters in terms of the issue yield theory ([De Sio and Weber 2014](#); [De Sio, Franklin, and Weber 2016](#)). Even greater than the one emerged for Wilders's party in the Dutch case. This is evident by considering the higher support and priority rates enjoyed by these goals in the French electorate, and the higher credibility scores and leads on the second-most credible actor for Le Pen compared to the PVV. Yet no other French candidate can be seen to enjoy any issue ownership.

Clearly the Netherlands and France have very different institutional systems which might provide an explanation of such profound social and political differences observed between the two cases. The different electoral system plays a crucial role. In the Netherlands, the national proportional system virtually without any representation threshold provides a particularly favourable setting for parties – even small – to cultivate their own areas of issue ownership, and be electorally rewarded on them. On the other hand, French candidates run for the Presidency of the Republic. As such, they are compelled with proposing solutions to all relevant political problems, which makes it harder for them to develop ownership on specific issues. Furthermore, only the two receiving the most votes will participate in the second round, which makes small candidates much more vulnerable to strategic considerations by voters than in the Dutch case, and this can account for the concentration for the vote on fewer options observed in France.

A second element needs to be stressed in this discussion: the different national histories of government formation. In the Netherlands coalition government are the standard, so voters have seen multiple parties cooperate in ruling the country (to a quite satisfactory extent), either with or without their preferred one in the coalition. This seems to have a positive influence in the ability of Dutch voters to perceive more than simply their own party as able to achieve desirable political goals. In France, on the contrary, coalition governments are not highly regarded. The cohabitation cases have proved to be so extremely polarizing and low-efficiency that they have been made by law much more unlikely to occur thanks to the synchronization in the length of presidential and legislative offices. Most importantly, since 2002, the legislative elections have been scheduled just after the presidential elections. These

might be among the reasons why voters seem to desire a government by their candidate, with no other outcome considered acceptable.

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Ideology or 'cherry-picking'? The issue opportunity structure for candidates in France

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April 18, 2017

Building on the tools provided by issue yield theory ([De Sio and Weber 2014](#)), this analysis looks at the data collected by CISE through a CAWI survey launched a few weeks before the first round of the French presidential election. We rely here on an innovative measurement of positional issues, which provides a common issue yield index for this type of issues. Positional issues are, in general, defined by reference to two rival goals (e.g. progressive vs. traditional morality): the issue yield measure assesses the presence of related strategic issue opportunities for a party or a candidate. The core dimensions originally developed (for positional issues) in the issue yield model are support (how much a policy is supported in the general public) and within-party agreement (how much it is supported within the party)¹. The two dimensions correspond to the ideal goal of any party/candidate: the ability to keep their existing voter base intact, but with the possibility of reaching out to a much larger potential electorate. This goal is ideally achieved through an emphasis on the issues where the party is internally united, and perhaps many voters outside the party also agree.

Therefore, as regards the next French presidential election, the issue yield index allows to address the core question of presidential campaigns: what is the ideal agenda – in electoral terms – for each presidential candidate? What selection of issues would provide the best electoral outcome to each candidate? The issue configuration is the most relevant, it shows the best oppor-

¹ In the survey, respondents were asked to express their support on 15 positional issues. For positional issues, a first item requires respondents to choose over the two rival goals (it is a 6-point item, thus also allowing all techniques for classic positional items). Once the goal is selected (e.g. defending traditional morality), respondents are asked to mention (multiple choice) which parties they consider credible to achieve that goal.

tunity (and the lowest risk) for each candidate; we can then compare it with the actual choice of issues that candidates stressed in their campaign, and thus determine how strategic was their campaign (which relates to our initial research question). This comparison will first be made in anecdotal terms, while we will address the question in quantitative terms (through the coding of candidate's Twitter communication) in future analyses.

The French political system has been marked by the record low of decreasing rating approval for President Hollande over the last years, and consequently decreasing support for the Socialist Party. Conversely, the right-wing populist party *Front National* of Marine Le Pen has been consistently leading the polls. Hollande is the first incumbent president of the Fifth Republic not to run for a second term. This is also the first French presidential election in which nominees of both the main centre-left and centre-right parties were selected through open primaries. Benoit Hamon won the Socialist Party's primaries and François Fillon won the Republicans primaries. Additionally, this election is marked by the dramatic emergence of Emmanuel Macron, the youngest candidate in the race and a former economy minister who has never run for elected office. He decided to abandon the Socialist government and to found his new political movement '*En marche!*'. Finally, on the left-wing side, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, former candidate of Left Front in 2012, launched his own movement 'Unsubmissive France'. These five candidates make up for between 80 and 90% of vote intentions in polls, yet six other candidates are also running in the first round of the election.

The issue yield for all presidential candidates may help to explain why certain candidates are (potentially) more successful than others. For the purposes of this analysis, we have focused on the five main presidential candidates according to the opinion polls: Marine Le Pen for the *Front National*, François Fillon for the Republicans, Emmanuel Macron for his new political movement '*En marche!*', Benoit Hamon for the Socialist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon for 'Unsubmissive France'.

The following tables show issues (and related candidates) according to the issue yield index, moving from highest to lowest values. It shows which candidates could take advantage by competing on specific issues. Table 1 presents issue yield indices for Macron, Hamon and Mélenchon, specifically which issues may provide the best electoral returns for candidates competing on the political space from the far left (Mélenchon) to the liberal-democratic centre (Macron). Our results show similarities and differences of potential electoral return in the available conflict issues between the three candidates. First, Hamon and Mélenchon clearly share a similar issue area of competition: indeed, some libertarian social issues (keeping gay marriage and access to abortion, legalizing euthanasia) and some traditional left-wing economic issues (reducing income inequalities, lowering pension age) are all issues that could pro-

vide a very good electoral return, having high issue yields (≥ 0.69). On the other hand, Hamon and Mélenchon are divided by stances towards Europe: for Hamon issues like staying in the EU and in the Eurozone provide very high issue yields – 0.87 and 0.85, respectively (they are the second and the third issue with highest issue yield for Hamon, immediately after abortion at 0.88). Conversely, for Mélenchon, pro-Europe issues show a much lower issue yield, whereas the issue yield of anti-globalization stances ('limiting economic globalization') is good (0.67).

That said, we have to stress that the issue yield for a candidate is not just an absolute value, but it should also be considered in relation to the issue yield of other candidates. That is, we must look at the issue yield rank. Indeed, an issue can have a very high yield for a candidate, but other candidates may have an even higher return on the same issue. Consequently, it can be difficult for that candidate to compete on that issue, because other candidates might be better positioned. For example, Hamon is well positioned as regards pro-Europe and pro-gay marriage issues, ranking second in terms of issue yield, whereas on the same issues Mélenchon ranks sixth and eighth. Conversely, Mélenchon is better positioned in terms of issue yield as concerns euthanasia (ranking third, whereas Hamon on the same issue ranks seventh) and the traditional left-wing economic issue on the reduction of income differences (ranking second, whereas Hamon ranks third).

In fact, data tell us that Hamon is not in a favourable position. Indeed, he is facing a strong competitor on the left (Mélenchon) and at the same time, he faces a good competitor at the centre (Macron). Indeed, Hamon and Macron have very similar issue yields on pro-Europe issues and on social issues (abortion, gay, euthanasia). In particular, Macron has a better return on pro-abortion and especially on pro-euthanasia issue, whereas Hamon has a better return on pro-Europe issues. Nevertheless, these candidates show clear different patterns as concerns the economic policy: 15 points of difference in terms of issue yield as regards the goal of reducing income differences – with Hamon ranking third and Macron ninth. Differences are even larger if we look at the pension policies and, above all, at the labour market policies. As an example, for Hamon the goal 'keeping current regulation in the job market' has an issue yield of 0.64, whereas for Macron the opposite goal of deregulating the job market has an issue yield of 0.46.

Obviously, Macron plays a lot on valence issues, and certainly not on ideology.

Table 2 shows the results of issue yields for candidates on the right: Marine Le Pen and François Fillon. First, Le Pen scores very high in agreement within her electorate, greater than 90% on some issues. This congruence applies mostly to anti-immigration issues, on which Le Pen enjoys a higher issue yield than any of the other main candidates. Compared to results from

Table 1. Ideology or "cherry-picking"? The issue packages that characterize the electorate of each candidate (Mélenchon, Hamon, Macron) and the electoral potential of these packages

Candidate	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Reduce income differences	75%	87%	0.85	2
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Keep access to abortion	81%	85%	0.83	4
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Legalise euthanasia	79%	83%	0.81	3
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Lower pension age	66%	77%	0.74	3
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Keep gay marriages	67%	74%	0.69	7
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Limit economic globalisation	63%	72%	0.67	4
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	71%	0.67	9
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Abandon nuclear energy	57%	71%	0.66	4
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Limit the number of refugees	79%	67%	0.62	11
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Stay in the EU	62%	65%	0.60	6
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Stay in the Euro	63%	61%	0.55	8
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Make immigration rules more restrictive	73%	59%	0.53	10
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Legalise soft drugs	45%	59%	0.52	4
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Restrict welfare for immigrants	70%	57%	0.51	10
Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Keep current regulations in the job market	48%	53%	0.45	7
Benoit Hamon	Keep access to abortion	81%	89%	0.88	3
Benoit Hamon	Stay in the EU	62%	88%	0.87	2
Benoit Hamon	Stay in the Euro	63%	87%	0.85	2
Benoit Hamon	Keep gay marriages	67%	87%	0.85	2
Benoit Hamon	Reduce income differences	75%	85%	0.84	3
Benoit Hamon	Legalise euthanasia	79%	76%	0.75	7
Benoit Hamon	Lower pension age	66%	75%	0.73	4
Benoit Hamon	Abandon nuclear energy	57%	67%	0.65	5
Benoit Hamon	Keep current regulations in the job market	48%	66%	0.64	3
Benoit Hamon	Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	65%	0.62	11
Benoit Hamon	Keep welfare for immigrants	30%	64%	0.61	1
Benoit Hamon	Keep current immigration rules	27%	64%	0.61	1
Benoit Hamon	Legalise soft drugs	45%	62%	0.59	3
Benoit Hamon	Limit economic globalisation	63%	61%	0.58	6
Benoit Hamon	Limit the number of refugees	79%	54%	0.50	12

Candidate	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Emmanuel Macron	Keep access to abortion	81%	90%	0.88	2
Emmanuel Macron	Stay in the EU	62%	86%	0.83	3
Emmanuel Macron	Stay in the Euro	63%	84%	0.81	3
Emmanuel Macron	Legalise euthanasia	79%	83%	0.80	4
Emmanuel Macron	Keep gay marriages	67%	83%	0.79	3
Emmanuel Macron	Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	78%	0.73	7
Emmanuel Macron	Reduce income differences	75%	74%	0.69	9
Emmanuel Macron	Limit the number of refugees	79%	70%	0.64	10
Emmanuel Macron	Keep soft drugs illegal	55%	59%	0.50	6
Emmanuel Macron	Make immigration rules more restrictive	73%	59%	0.50	11
Emmanuel Macron	Restrict welfare for immigrants	70%	57%	0.48	12
Emmanuel Macron	Deregulate the job market	52%	56%	0.46	4
Emmanuel Macron	Lower pension age	66%	56%	0.46	11
Emmanuel Macron	Limit economic globalisation	63%	55%	0.45	12
Emmanuel Macron	Abandon nuclear energy	57%	53%	0.44	11

a recent similar analysis on Dutch general elections, the level of agreement within candidates' voters seems much higher in France: candidates reach 90% of internal consensus on various issues, whereas in the Dutch case, only the PVV of Geert Wilders achieved this level ([Maggini, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)). In general, the agreement on positional issues in France is larger than in the Netherlands. For instance, the Islamic veil ban in public offices does not seem to be such a controversial issue, and its yield is higher than 0.6 for all the candidates (even for Hamon is 0.62 and for Mélenchon is 0.67).

A second element of the strategic issue opportunities of Le Pen is that she can build an original package of issues with good electoral returns: hostility towards migrants, anti-Europe and anti-globalization stances, but also economic redistribution (on the reduction of income differences and of the pension age, her issue yield is higher than Macron's). Furthermore, on some social issues (abortion and euthanasia, but not gay marriage), the level of her voters' agreement is similar to that of the whole population.

Regarding Fillon, similarly to Le Pen, anti-immigration issues provide very high electoral returns, but he shows different patterns for other issues: pro-Europe stances, economic liberalism and support for nuclear energy. In this regard, Fillon is a classic conservative candidate. Yet, similarly to Hamon,

Table 2. Ideology or “cherry-picking”? The issue packages that characterize the electorate of each candidate (Le Pen, Fillon) and the electoral potential of these packages

Candidate	statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Marine Le Pen	Limit the number of refugees	79%	94%	0.92	2
Marine Le Pen	Restrict welfare for immigrants	70%	93%	0.91	3
Marine Le Pen	Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	92%	0.90	4
Marine Le Pen	Make immigration rules more restrictive	73%	92%	0.89	3
Marine Le Pen	Legalise euthanasia	79%	84%	0.79	5
Marine Le Pen	Limit economic globalisation	63%	81%	0.75	2
Marine Le Pen	Reduce income differences	75%	80%	0.73	7
Marine Le Pen	Leave the EU	38%	77%	0.69	2
Marine Le Pen	Keep access to abortion	81%	75%	0.66	11
Marine Le Pen	Lower pension age	66%	72%	0.63	6
Marine Le Pen	Leave the Euro	37%	69%	0.58	2
Marine Le Pen	Keep soft drugs illegal	55%	62%	0.49	8
Marine Le Pen	Repeal gay marriages	33%	52%	0.36	2
Marine Le Pen	Abandon nuclear energy	57%	51%	0.35	12
Marine Le Pen	Deregulate the job market	52%	50%	0.34	6
François Fillon	Limit the number of refugees	79%	90%	0.89	3
François Fillon	Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces	78%	88%	0.87	5
François Fillon	Restrict welfare for immigrants	70%	85%	0.84	4
François Fillon	Make immigration rules more restrictive	73%	85%	0.84	4
François Fillon	Keep access to abortion	81%	82%	0.80	5
François Fillon	Keep soft drugs illegal	55%	77%	0.74	2
François Fillon	Stay in the Euro	63%	77%	0.74	4
François Fillon	Stay in the EU	62%	75%	0.73	5
François Fillon	Keep using nuclear energy	43%	73%	0.70	1
François Fillon	Deregulate the job market	52%	71%	0.68	1
François Fillon	Increase pension age	34%	70%	0.67	2
François Fillon	Legalise euthanasia	79%	66%	0.62	13
François Fillon	Repeal gay marriages	33%	58%	0.54	1
François Fillon	Reduce income differences	75%	56%	0.52	12
François Fillon	Limit economic globalisation	63%	54%	0.49	11

he is not well positioned from a strategic point of view. Indeed, as regards his first four issues (in terms of yield) related to migration, he ranks always after the National Front’s leader who is also more credible on such issues (see [Paparo, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)). At the same time, the issue yield of pro-Europe goals is lower in comparison to Macron and Hamon’s issue yield.

To sum up, the analysis of the strategic issue opportunity structure shows that an anti-establishment right-wing candidate, like Marine Le Pen, faces a peculiar cross-cutting issue configuration that can be rewarding through an electoral strategy based on “cherry-picking” rather than on traditional left-right ideologies. On the one hand, Le Pen is very competitive on ‘demarcationist’ issues related to immigration and especially to the European Union; on the other, she is also competitive – to some extent – on both traditional economic ‘leftist’ issues related to defence of social protection.

Furthermore, Macron’s campaign based on a strong defence of Europe seem to be well suited from a strategic point of view, as well as his emphasis on valence issues.

Conversely, Fillon and Hamon are not in a favourable position, facing strong competitors on each issue area. In particular, the left turn of the Socialist Party’ candidate seem to have found a significant obstacle: Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

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French presidential election: An expected surprise

Elie Michel

April 24, 2017

The eventful and unconventional campaign for the French presidential elections (partly) came to an end on Sunday night. Centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron (24,0%) and Marine Le Pen (21,3%) of the radical right Front National have both qualified for the run-off of the presidential election. Even though polls had predicted this results in the months prior to the election, it still constitutes a surprise. The outcome is historically close, and 4 candidates have gathered around 20% of the electorate, yet both mainstream parties have been eliminated. After Macron and Le Pen, right-wing candidate François Fillon (20,0%) and radical left Jean-Luc Mélenchon (19,6%) came short of making it to the second round. 2017 is a historical election for the left: Mélenchon obtained a record result, while Benoît Hamon finished at one of the lowest scores of the Socialist Party of outgoing president François Hollande. The fact that the latter had renounced to compete for re-election (because of his very low approval ratings) had completely opened the presidential race, although the campaign had been mostly centred on political and financial scandals.

Macron's result is particularly impressive as the candidate was virtually unknown a few years before the election, and he led his campaign without the support of any established political party. He managed to gather individuals from the left and the right to create his own centrist movement: *En Marche*. The same strategy worked with voters. Macron's campaign was articulated around two types of issues. First, he embodied the idea of political renewal – and mostly renewal of the political personnel. This issue has been the core of the campaign, and although all his opponents have targeted Macron as the “candidate of the system” and the heir of François Hollande. Macron seems to have captured the call for renewal of the French voters because he was relatively unknown before the campaign, and because he sides with no traditional political party. Additionally, Macron mostly campaigned on valence issues (that is, issues that are mainly consensual) such as supporting economic

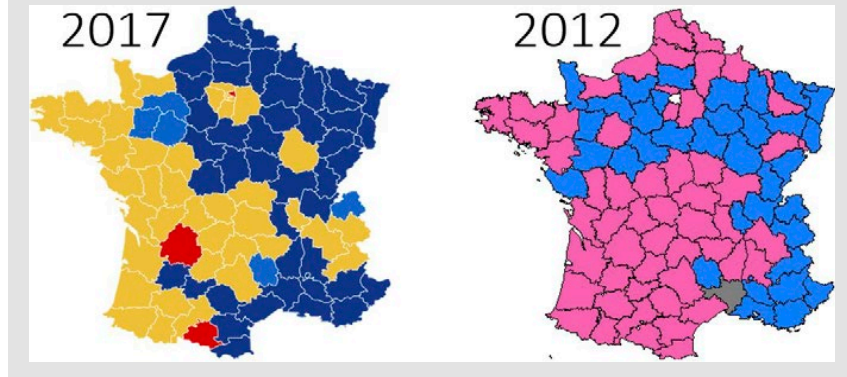
Table 1. Results in the first round of 2017 French presidential elections

	Total	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)
Registered voters	47,582,183		
Turnout	37,003,728	77.8	
Abstentions	10,578,455	22.2	
Valid votes	36,054,394	75.8	97.4
Blank votes	659,997	1.4	1.8
Null votes	289,337	0.6	0.8
Candidate	Votes	% (on registered voters)	% (on valid votes)
Macron (En Marche !)	8,656,346	18.2	24.0
Le Pen (Front National)	7,678,491	16.1	21.3
Fillon (Les Républicains)	7,212,995	15.2	20.0
Mélenchon (La France insoumise)	7,059,951	14.8	19.6
Hamon (Parti Socialiste)	2,291,288	4.8	6.4
Dupont-Aignan (Debout la France)	1,695,000	3.6	4.7
Lassalle (Résistons !)	435,301	0.9	1.2
Poutou (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste)	394,505	0.8	1.1
Asselineau (Union populaire républicaine)	332,547	0.7	0.9
Arthaud (Lutte ouvrière)	232,384	0.5	0.6
Cheminade (Solidarité et progrès)	65,586	0.1	0.2

growth, and improving education as his top campaign priority. Macron was also the most openly pro-European candidate, in a campaign which was influenced by Eurosceptic candidates (Le Pen, Mélenchon).

Marine Le Pen's result can be interpreted both as a success and a disappointment. The candidate of the Front National will compete in the second round of the election only for the second time of this party's history (after her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002). She articulated her campaign on issues where her positions clash the most clashing compared to other candidates: immigration and euro-scepticism. Particularly, Marine Le Pen was the only major candidate to support the abandon of the euro, and to support a referendum on the participation of France to the EU. Yet, Le Pen had been polling over 25% for several years and was expected to finish the race first. Finishing second with less than 22% of the vote will prove a challenge to gather a majority for the second round; especially since she is only supported by right-wing

Figure 1. Electoral map of French presidential elections, 2017 and 2012



candidate Dupont-Aignan (less than 5%) in the second round. Most candidates have rather called for the “Republican Front” and to support Macron in order to avoid the FN taking power.

Francois Fillon is the major loser of this election. As he won the primaries of the centre and the right in 2016, he appeared as the strongest contender for the presidency. After the extremely unpopular term of Hollande, Les Républicains, the mainstream conservative party considered this election to be “impossible to lose”. Yet, Fillon's campaign has been completely focused on the political and financial scandals in which he was involved. Fillon decided to carry on his campaign, and portray himself as the victim of a political conspiracy rather than stepping down (as many of his fellow party members were advising). Coming third is likely to have important consequences on the mainstream right party, as followers and voters will be divided between a centrist Macron-leaning option, and a more radical and conservative trend. Acknowledging his defeat, Fillon has called his supporter to vote for Macron in the second round.

The cumulated score of the Left (Mélenchon and Hamon) is over 25% of the vote, but in an unusual order. While Mélenchon managed to receive about 20% of the vote on a radical left platform which called for a transformation of the French political institutions through a constituent assembly drafting a new constitution, and the renegotiation of all European treaties (supporting a French withdrawal in case of failure), Benoit Hamon only managed to get 6.4% of the vote, which is the lowest score of the Socialist Party since 1969.

No other candidate has reached 5%, which is also the threshold for obtaining public reimbursement of campaign expenses.

Overall, the campaign for the presidential election has been mainly centred on the reject of traditional parties and the renewal of the political person-

nel. Indeed, the two mainstream parties are both out of the second round for the first time in modern French history. The two contenders of the first round are outsiders of the usual party landscape: Macron has launched his own movement, while Le Pen leads the “anti-system” party (Sartori 1976). Voters will be called to vote in the second round on May 7th, in an election that Macron seems very likely to win¹. The winner will then have to win a majority in the legislative elections of June (similar two-round system in single-member districts)². In that case, outsidership and having no support from traditional parties might prove to be less of an advantage than in the presidential election.

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¹ For specific analyses concerning the results of the second-round of the presidential elections, see [Paparo in this volume](#).

² For detailed reports of the electoral results observed in the two rounds of the legislative elections, see Michel in this volume ([a](#); [b](#)).

The hidden cleavage of the French election: Macron, Le Pen and the urban-rural conflict

Vincenzo Emanuele¹

May 7, 2017

Notwithstanding Macron’s victory, the result of the French Presidential election is the proof that an earthquake hit the political setting in France with the exclusion – for the very first time since 1958 – of both pillars of the Fifth Republic, the socialist and the Gaullist parties.

The second round between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen perfectly represents the increased relevance of a new dimension of competition, different from the left-right one that had prevailed so far. A dimension which is orthogonal with respect to the left-right axis, and for which the scientific research has not found a shared definition yet. We are talking of a conflict between ‘open society’ and ‘closed society’, where those in favour of globalization, multiculturalism and European integration are opposed to those standing for ‘demarcation’ ([Kriesi et al. 2006](#)), welfare chauvinism and the return to the nation-state. These are two sides of a conflict which involves (not always consistently, especially in the Southern Europe) cultural, economic, and institutional issues, and whose proud representatives are respectively Macron and Le Pen. Marine Le Pen launched a challenge to the French system and to the Gaullist right years ago; yet, these elections are still something new, since for the first time there is a political entrepreneur on the other side of this conflict too, and he was able to politicize the conflict over Europe and globalization (instead of avoiding them, as the mainstream socialist parties usually do), and to mobilize his electorate on these issues.

Yet, are we really faced with a new cleavage, as stated by part of the literature? Or is it just an old – apparently dormant – conflict which is being reactivated again?

My hypothesis – to be confirmed – is that at the basis of this hypothetical new cleavage there would be the reactivation of the old urban-rural cleav-

¹ English translation by Elisabetta Mannoni

age. According to the original formulation by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), the urban-rural conflict was about tariff barriers and commodity prices. The new-born class of industrial entrepreneurs fought for the abolition of tariff barriers, the openness of the market and the consequential decrease in prices for raw materials. The declining class of the landowners was opposing to them, and wanted to maintain the tariff barriers to protect the national agricultural production. We already had, so to speak, a conflict between those in favour of globalization and those in favour of protectionism. Is it possible that this conflict has been somehow reactivated by new political entrepreneurs², who are trying to take advantage of the electoral opportunity that this conflict creates?

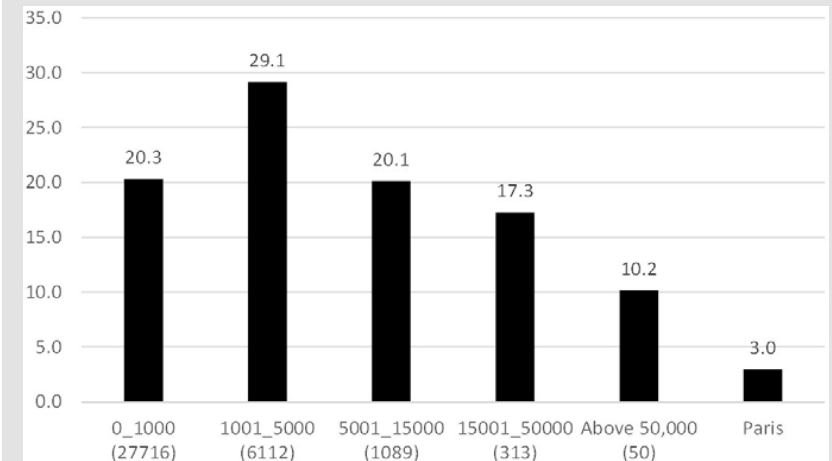
A first— definitely preliminary — test that can be performed to verify such hypothesis is about the analysis of the French vote by demographic size of towns. This latter is a variable that is usually neglected by scholars of elections and voting behaviour, yet it has proven to be an important determinant, for instance, of the vote in Italy (Emanuele 2011; 2013).

From a comparative perspective, we can safely affirm that Italy is ‘a country of small villages’ (Emanuele 2011, 118), with just 23% of the population living in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants; France, on the other hand, is the most rural European country. In fact, mainland France (l’*Hexagone*) has 35,281 cities (in Italy these are around 8,000), almost the 80% of which having less than 1000 electors (and 12.5% with less than 100 electors). This is a legacy of the post-revolutionary organizational model, that can be noticed in Piedmont too, to some extent. The most incredible aspect, as Figure 1 shows, is that almost 50% of electors live in villages with less than 5,000 electors, while just 13% of electors live in medium-big cities (that is, cities with more than 50,000 electors; in Italy this percentage rises to 35%). The city of Paris only represents the 3% of the electorate.

These data give an idea of how salient the urban-rural dimension is in France, as well as the potential differences (in socio-demographic, cultural, and political-ideological terms) between the electors living in the multitude of micro villages and those living in the Parisian metropolis. Since we do not have individual data to verify these differences, we can analyse at the aggregate level the vote for Macron and Le Pen for the six demographic categories that we saw in Figure 1 below (five categories plus Paris). The result, graphically represented in Figure 2, is remarkable and shows a first encouraging

² The rural parties that politicized the urban-rural cleavage have either disappeared or changed since the 1950s. For the conditions to the rise of agrarian parties, see Rokkan (1970). For the reasons why this cleavage did not give rise to an agrarian party in France, see Tarrow (1971). For an analysis of the vote in the French rural areas, see Dogan (1967).

Figure 1. Number of cities and percentage of the electorate by category of demographic size, France 2017

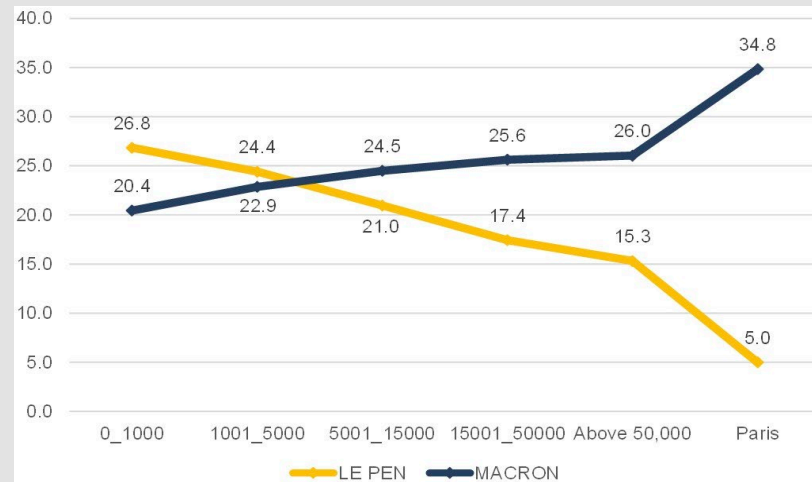


empirical evidence for our hypothesis. The two candidates show a specular profile for the demographic variable. The vote to Marine Le Pen is clearly rural-oriented. Her support is inversely proportional to the demographic size of towns: she is close to 27% in the small villages with less than 1000 voters, and her consensus gradually decrease to 15% in medium-big cities. In Paris it almost disappears around 5% (here she is fifth in voters’ preferences, even after the socialist Hamon). On the opposite side, Macron’s profile reveals his prevalent urban character: Hollande’s ex Minister’s support tends to increase proportionally to the demographic size of towns, from 20% in micro villages (in those with less than 100 electors he gets 18.5%), to 35% in Paris.

Data shows the presence of two crucially different realities, coexisting within the same country: there is a swing of 18.1 points between Paris and the villages with less than 1000 electors. There are in fact 6.4 points of advantage for Le Pen in micro villages and almost 30 in favour of Macron in the capital.

We do not know, without a proper individual-level analysis, if these marked differences between city and countryside are just the consequence of other variables that are at stake or if they witness, instead, the reactivation of the old urban-rural cleavage on a new basis. What is for sure, is that such differences between city and countryside have been found in the analysis about Brexit vote too, where the ‘Remain’ won in London and in many other urban areas, and the ‘Brexit’ won in rural England. In that case too, the referendum divided parties and the electorate clearly on a different conflict axis from the

Figure 2. Vote trends for Le Pen and Macron by demographic size of towns, French Presidential election 2017, first round



left-right one, with Conservatives and Labour taking different stands within their own parties, whereas UKIP on the one side, and LibDem and SNP on the other politicized the two sides of the conflict.

This is definitely a crucial issue to understand the XXI century politics, and it requires necessarily more in-depth analysis.

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Conflict mobilization for Le Pen, problem-solving for Macron: voting models reveal two opposite visions of France

Lorenzo De Sio and Aldo Paparo¹

April 25, 2017

So, Macron and Le Pen get to the second round. An historical result that – as almost all commentators highlighted – excludes both socialists and the neo-Gaullist right, who had dominated the French political life for decades ([Michel in this volume](#)).

However, what are the reasons and voting motivations behind this result? Where does Macron's success come from? What about his cross-cutting appeal? What about Mélenchon's exploit? Does it come from his controversial positions? Or is it an identification vote by the French left, disappointed with the Hamon candidacy? We can't answer to these questions only by looking at the candidates' profiles and their presence on the media; we do need *data*. Data collected at the individual level, possibly covering a wide range of political *issues*.

This is exactly the kind of data that CISE gathered few weeks before the election day, through a peculiar pre-electoral survey ([Paparo, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)). It's a distinctive investigation including a high number of real-world salient issues (more than 20 issues), within a comparative project that has already covered the Netherlands ([De Sio in this volume](#)) and is soon going to cover the UK, as well as Germany, Austria, and Italy.

The day after the first round, we analysed this data through specific statistical tools (technically speaking, we estimated, for vote intentions to each candidate, a set of binominal logistic regression block models), in order to understand to what extent different respondent characteristics and motivations determined the intention to vote for each candidate.

For simplicity reasons, we grouped several variables together in four fundamental classes:

¹ English translation by Elisabetta Mannoni.

Socio-demographic characteristics: sex, age, education;

Ideology: respondent's self-placement on the left-right axis;

Positions on divisive issues: respondent's position on a set of controversial topics, ranging from gay marriages to exit from the EU;

Candidates' credibility on achieving common goals (valence issues): whether the respondent attributes credibility to each candidate for solving some crucial problems in the country (protection from terrorist attacks, fight against unemployment, etc.).

It's quite clear that these four categories present huge differences in terms of vote motivation. Here the crucial question is related to the differences between candidates: is the motivation structure similar for all candidates, or does it change across candidates? In a nutshell: did Le Pen's voters apply a reasoning that is radically different from Macron's?

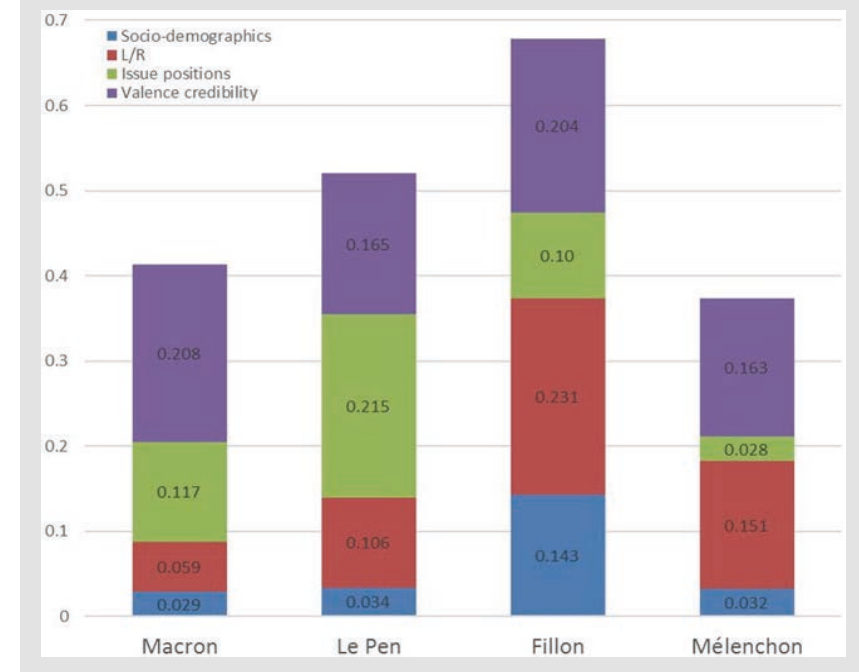
The graph in Figure 1 shows the answer to this first question. For every candidate, the coloured bars represent the ability of our model to predict – on the basis of the variables included in the model – the fact that the respondent expressed his/her intention to vote a certain candidate. This predicting ability can reach a maximum 1, in case of a perfect prediction for all respondents. Reaching 1 is clearly impossible: in voting behaviour research, values of 0.5 or above are considered very good. Each candidate's bar is divided into 4 blocks, corresponding to the four categories of explicative variables. It must be said that some candidates (especially Fillon) present vote intentions that are much more predictable than others, as visible in the graph.

A first surprising finding is related to socio-demographic variables. For three out of the four candidates taken into account, these have basically no impact: with an index of around 0.03, they account for just 3% of variance (i.e. differences among respondents in their intention to vote for the candidate). Yet, there is a remarkable exception: François Fillon. In his case there's a strong age component: the older sectors of the electorate tend to vote for him more than others – especially those who are over 65. It's an important effect, that explains around 14% of the differences in respondents' behaviour towards Fillon.

The two candidates going to the second round are those whose electorates are least characterized in traditional ideological terms.

Significant differences among candidates emerge also when taking into account *ideology*. Once again, it is an extremely relevant factor for Fillon (voters who place themselves on the right clearly vote for him more than others), contributing with a further 23% at explaining vote intentions towards him. But also Mélenchon seems to be a candidate for whom (left) ideology is extremely important (15% of variance explained). Marine Le Pen follows, yet with a definitely less ideological vote than the previous two (10% of variance explained), and then comes Macron. The latter is clearly the candidate who is least tied

Figure 1. Predictive power of binary logistic regression models (vote intention for the main candidates), by blocks of variables (Nagelkerke's pseudo R²)



to ideological feelings: respondent's left-right self-placement in the predictive model for voting for Macron improves the model of only 6%.

This is then the first important interpretation element: the two candidates going to the second round are those whose electorates are least characterized in traditional ideological terms. On this regard, Le Pen is extremely similar to Macron.

But similarities stop here. In fact, at this point we enter the realm of *positional issues*, that is how candidates use in a dynamic way the issues of the day (rather than ideology, which is static by definition), trying to attract voters across ideological lines.

Such issues are traditionally distinguished between two types: those related to *divisive goals* (controversial issues, on which candidates are identified by taking different *positions*) and those related to *shared goals* (also known as *valence issues*: problems to be solved, on which candidates distinguish one another on the basis of their own *competence* and *credibility*).

Here emerges an important difference among candidates, especially between Macron and Le Pen. Vote choice for Marine Le Pen seems to be clearly influenced by specific positions on controversial themes: when we add to the model the respondents' positions on different issues, the predictive ability of the model for Le Pen increases more than 20%. Other candidates are far behind: for both Macron and Fillon, these variables contribute for only 10%, whereas for Mélenchon such issues are almost irrelevant.

In other words: support for Le Pen, unlike support for other candidates, is significantly explained by positions on controversial issues (we'll see which ones in a moment).

While for Marine Le Pen the determinant factor lies in controversial issues, for Macron it is his competence and credibility on common problems

Finally, the last category (that is candidates' credibility, assessed by respondents, for solving several important problems common to all voters) reveals a level of importance which is similar among the candidates, with contributions of variance explained higher than 15%, although it is way more important for Macron (21%) and Fillon (20%), vis-à-vis 16% for Fillon and Mélenchon. It is something that should not surprise: when it comes to solving common problems of the country, two statesmen with significant experience in government (as Macron and Fillon are) are perceived as more credible, and this is part of their appeal. But the important element is that for Macron these are the main voting determinants, and these alone matters just as much as all the other ones combined. Therefore, we can say that, while for Marine Le Pen the determinant factor lies in controversial issues, for Macron it is his competence and credibility for confronting common problems facing France. Fillon and Mélenchon appear instead getting most of their support on the basis of ideology, although Fillon can boast in addition a significant personal credibility.

At this point, there's the curiosity of going into more detail on the role of divisive issues. Which ones in particular are relevant in explaining support for different candidates? Table 1 shows the effect of different issues (if present) in predicting vote intentions for different candidates. For each issue, there is a positive sign (if that position increases support for the candidate) or a negative sign (if that position decreases support); there is no sign if there is no statistically significant effect.

By looking at the table, one important element emerges: each candidate is in fact specialized on different policy issues. This is an increasingly widespread tendency in current electoral campaigns, where candidates tend to focus on few favourable issues, potentially capturing a cross-cutting electorate, without emphasis on other issues (which may lead to divisions, and loss of support).

As for the vote to Macron, Europeanism is crucial, while freedom of choice in the field of rights is quite important as well. There's a (negative) effect for lowering the retirement age, which tells us that those who want to raise retire-

Table 1. Significance and direction of the effects for policy positions on the vote for the main candidates

	Macron	Le Pen	Fillon	Mélenchon
Deregulate the job market			+	
Lower pension age	-		-	
Reduce income differences			-	++
Limit economic globalisation		+	-	
Stay in the EU	++	---	++	
Leave the Euro	--			
Abandon nuclear energy				+
Restrict access to abortion	-			
Legalise euthanasia	+			
Repeal gay marriages	--	+	++	
Legalise soft drugs				
Keep current immigration rules		--		
Restrict welfare for immigrants		+++	++	
Accept more refugees				
Forbid Islamic veil in public spaces		+		

ment age are statistically more likely to vote for Macron. As a consequence, Macron's profile seems to be strongly tied to Europe and to a vision in favour of civil rights, and only in a weaker way to economic reforms – which confirms Macron's ability to de-associate himself from extremely controversial issues like the *loi travail*.

As for the vote to Le Pen, what emerges is that controversial issues are more important for her than for other candidates, as shown by the greater number of issues having significant effects. Welfare chauvinism has a very strong effect, as well as leaving the EU. Leaving the Euro, though, doesn't seem to be significant. Quite strong is also the negative effect for the current norms regulating immigration, showing that those who want more restrictive laws tended to vote more for the candidate from the FN. There are then some (positive) – although smaller – effects: limiting globalization, repealing gay marriage, and banning Islamic headscarves in public spaces.

For Fillon, there are even more issues having significant coefficients, but these are on average way smaller than for Le Pen, and that's why the total increase in variance explained is lower. The strongest effects are on welfare chauvinism, gay marriage repeal, and *staying* in the EU – that's the big difference with Le Pen. His free-market profile in the field of economy is then clear:

positive effect for the liberalization of the job market and negative effect for lowering the retirement age or income differences.

Finally, Mélenchon is the candidate with the least issue-related vote (his strength, as we saw, lies in ideology). Just two issues are significant, and both of them are exclusive for him, i.e. they do not show any effect on vote models for other main candidates'. The two issues are reduction of income inequality and abandoning nuclear energy.

In this post-ideological time, some political parties ride on the great conflicts connected to contemporary transformations, whereas others hide them and present themselves simply as competent problem-solvers.

In conclusion, we have four different profiles for four different candidates. What can we learn from that? First, that the two finalists do have something in common: for both of them ideology and representation of specific social classes don't matter much. These candidates get their votes in a new and different way, that is by exploiting current issues and the various problems present in the French political agenda. But analogies stop here and a huge difference emerges. Le Pen's mobilization strength comes from the position she takes on controversial issues, while Macron's success is clearly due to people's perception of him as competent and credible to face the problems of the country. That's our second lesson: in this post-ideological time, neither all political parties nor all candidates are equal; we shall expect an increasingly asymmetric competition, where some political parties ride on the great conflicts connected to contemporary transformations, whereas others tend to hide them and present a consensual scenario, that only requires competent problem-solvers. That's why in the second-round vote, on May 7, we will not just see two candidates competing, but rather two different visions of France and – to some extent – two different visions of the great transformation of contemporary reality. We'll see².

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² For an analysis of second-round results, see [Paparo in this volume](#).

Where does Macron's success come from? A look at electoral shifts with an eye on the legislative elections

Aldo Paparo

May 24, 2017

Emmanuel Macron is therefore the new French President. The result of the second ballot against Marine Le Pen did not give any surprises, and the front-runner of the eve confirmed in the polls its advantage. The surprise, perhaps, was in the proportions of his victory. The latest opinion polls credited Macron with about 60% of the votes, possibly even some points over that threshold. But no one had predicted that he was going to be capable of basically doubling up the votes received by the challenger from the Front National.

The turnout, though close to 75%, was the lowest recorded in a second round of a presidential election since 1974. It is also the first case since 1969 in which the turnout was lower in the second than the first round. The series of seven presidential elections, which had seen a higher participation in the second round than the first, was then interrupted. As we shall see, this may be mainly attributed to the choices of Mélenchon voters who appear to have defected the electoral polls in a much more significant way than other electorates did. Moreover, it was also the only electorate who had not received a clear endorsement from their first-round candidate.

The traditional increase in electoral participation between first and second rounds emerges when looking at turnout, and not valid votes. Often the increase in the blank and null votes was higher than the one in turnout, so that there was a contraction in the valid votes even in presence of an increase in the number of voters – this has actually happened in four of the seven elections mentioned above. That being said, still it deserves to be underlined that, in the 2017 runoff, the increase in the blank and null votes compared to the first round has been extraordinarily higher than usual. In the last thirty years the difference between turnout and valid votes in presidential second rounds was between 3 and 5 percentage points. And before that it was even lower.

This year was 9 percentage points, while in the first round it was 2 points, absolutely in line with the previous elections. It means that over four million French went to the polls voters on May 7 but did not validly vote for either Macron or Le Pen.

The next, decisive, electoral moment in France will take place in less than a month – the legislative election. As for presidential elections, they will be

Table 1. Electoral results in the French presidential election, first and second rounds

	Second round			First round		
	Total	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)	Total	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)
Registered voters	47,568,693			47,582,183		
Turnout	35,467,327	74.6		37,003,728	77.8	
Abstentions	12,101,366	25.4		10,578,455	22.2	
Valid votes	31,381,603	66.0	88.5	36,054,394	75.8	97.4
Blank votes	3,021,499	6.4	8.5	659,997	1.4	1.8
Null votes	1,064,225	2.2	3.0	289,337	0.6	0.8
Candidate	Votes	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)	Votes	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)
Macron (En Marche !)	20,743,128	43.6	66.1	8,656,346	18.2	24.0
Le Pen (Front National)	10,638,475	22.4	33.9	7,678,491	16.1	21.3
Fillon (Les Républicains)				7,212,995	15.2	20.0
Mélenchon (La France insoumise)				7,059,951	14.8	19.6
Hamon (Parti Socialiste)				2,291,288	4.8	6.4
Dupont-Aignan (Debout la France)				1,695,000	3.6	4.7
Lassalle (Résistons !)				435,301	0.9	1.2
Poutou (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste)				394,505	0.8	1.1
Asselineau (Union populaire républicaine)				332,547	0.7	0.9
Arthaud (Lutte ouvrière)				232,384	0.5	0.6
Cheminade (Solidarité et progrès)				65,586	0.1	0.2

held under a two-rounds, single-member-district electoral system. With some differences. First, there will be 577 different competitions in the 577 districts each electing a member of the National Assembly. Then there will be only one week (and not two) between the two rounds. Finally, if no candidate immediately reaches the majority in the first round, they will not enter the ballot for the two most voted but all those who have collected at least 12.5% (of the overall district registered voters).

The legislative election will be crucial because now that Macron has conquered the Élysée, it remains to be seen whether he will have a parliamentary majority with him. How many seats will candidates from his movement (La République En Marche!) conquer? How many will be the elected Gaullist MPs? – Whom the new President seems willing to seek a coalitional agreement with, judging by the early appointments in the executive. How many MPs will the Socialist Party succeed in electing? – After the incredible debacle of the presidential election. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see whether the two-round French electoral system will be once again able to marginalize the extremes (Duverger 1954), represented by the parties of Mélenchon and Le Pen – as perfectly demonstrated by the presidential elections this year. Again, the voters' second preferences will be decisive.

For all these reasons, as well as, of course, to better understand the outcome of the presidential elections, we have estimated the electoral shifts between the first and second round of the presidential election. Let's start from Table 2, which shows how the first-round electorates of the various candidates spread up in the second round – between abstention and vote for the two contenders. We can first observe how both Macron and Le Pen have maintained virtually all of their first-round voters, without any direct passage to the rival. However, it should be pointed out that the latter has a slightly higher transition rate towards abstention (7%), and that the relative coefficient is significant (i.e. it represents more than 1% of the French electorate).

We then come to the second preferences of those voters who did not have in the second-round their favourite candidate running. It is clear how Macron was clearly preferred among these voters. Proceeding in order of size of the relative first-round electorates, we observe how among Fillon's voters there are more than three who voted for Macron for each one who choose Le Pen. The portion of Mélenchon's electorate who voted for Macron is exactly the same than the Gaullists (57%), but much fewer have voted than Le Pen – more than a third have actually abstained from voting, the highest transition rate towards non-voting being recorded by any first-round electorates. Therefore, the ratio between votes to Macron and votes to Le Pen among the Mélenchon voters is even more unbalanced in favour of the former – more than twice that of Fillon, reaching 7 votes for Macron for each vote for Le Pen.

Among the (few) socialist voters, Macron has dominated. Twenty votes for him for each vote for the Front National candidate. It should also be noted how this was the group (if we exclude the electorates of the two challengers facing each other on May 7) who less deserted the polls: only one out of six did so. Le Pen won only among the smallest of all first-round electorates, Dupont-Aignan's, and with a much narrower margin, four votes to her every three for Macron. The new President also had a clear advantage among the sixth of first-round abstainers who voted in the second round – almost three votes to him for each vote to Le Pen.

Table 2. Electoral shifts between first and second round of the 2017 French presidential election, destinations

Second-round vote	First-round vote							
	Mélenchon	Hamon	Macron	Fillon	Dupont	Le Pen	Others	No vote
Macron	57%	80%	97%	57%	30%	0%	39%	11%
Le Pen	8%	4%	0%	18%	41%	93%	30%	4%
No vote	35%	16%	3%	25%	30%	7%	32%	85%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In short, Macron had a slight advantage after the first round ([Michel in this volume \(a\)](#)), and was clearly favoured by the second preference of voters whose candidates had not reached the second round. This explains his great success. The cross-cutting nature of Macron's vote is clearly visible in Table 3, showing how Macron's and Le Pen's second-round electorates are formed in terms of first-round electorates. It can be noted that the Front National candidate obtains two-thirds of her second-round votes by voters who had already voted for her in the first round. An eighth comes from Fillon, half of that from Dupont-Aignan, and a twentieth from Mélenchon. These are her only significant entries (i.e. representing more than 1% of the electorate).

In contrast, Macron only obtained 40% of his (twice as many) votes from his first-round electorate. A fifth comes from Fillon's voters and a substantially identical portion from Mélenchon's. Almost a tenth comes from Hamon's first-round voters. Moreover, all other coefficients for incoming shifts are significant as well: the one from first-round abstainers, but also the ones from Dupont-Aignan and voters of minor candidates.

Macron's greater competitiveness in gaining second preferences is clearly visible in Figure 1, in which first-round electorates occupy the left half of the

Table 3. Electoral shifts between first and second round of the 2017 French presidential election, sources

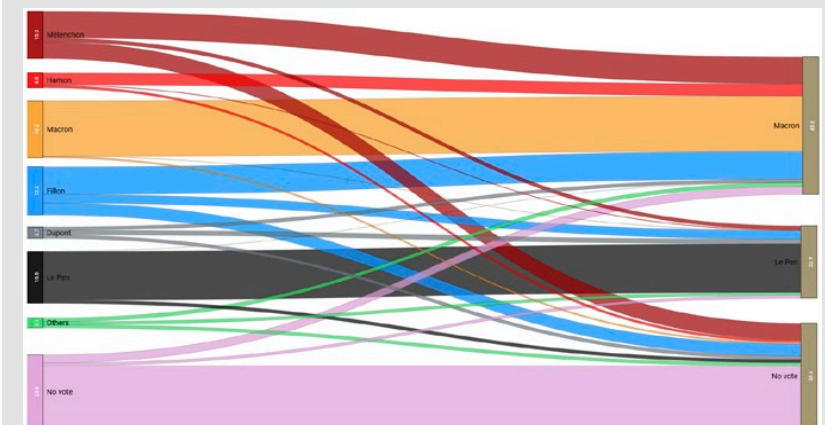
Second-round vote	First-round vote								Total
	Mélenchon	Hamon	Macron	Fillon	Dupont	Le Pen	Others	No vote	
Macron	19%	9%	40%	20%	2%	0%	3%	6%	100%
Le Pen	5%	1%	0%	12%	6%	67%	4%	4%	100%
No vote	16%	2%	1%	11%	3%	3%	3%	60%	100%

chart, and second-round electoral choices the right half. The different first-round electorates are represented by a colour, and each shift is shown through a strip, whose height represents its electoral size.

The figure shows how the only large entry for Le Pen (in black) is that her own first-round electorate; while for Macron (orange), in addition to the more or less same-sized entry from his first-round voters, there are significant incomings basically from all first-round electorates.

In short, our analyses seem to show that a certain Republican front against Le Pen operated. Although not entirely rejected by voters of other candidates, as also indicated by the particularly low electoral participation, the Front Na-

Figure 1. Electoral shifts between first and second round of the 2017 French presidential election



tional candidate has proved poorly able to compete for the second preferences. If in the legislative election *Republique En Marche!* candidates will prove capable of a transversal appeal similar to that of its founder, perhaps even exploiting the bandwagon effect streaming from the Élysée's take, no possibility appears impossible. Not even winning a majority of districts. The agreements and nested games that parties will put in place before the vote, or between first and second rounds, will be crucial. Now it's a few weeks and we'll have all the answers¹...

analysis electoral polls with less than 100 voters (in the first or in the second round), as well as those that show a variation rate above 20% in the number of registered voters (both in increase or in decrease). Finally, we excluded from the analysis those districts whose number of polls was too low to accurately estimate the desired coefficients (less than 48 polls). The average value of the VR index in the 554 overall analyses is 6.3.

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METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The shifts here reported were calculated applying the [Goodman](#) (1953) model to data from almost 70,000 French electoral polls. Specifically, we have estimated separate shifts matrices for each of the 577 single-member districts of the legislative election, then re-aggregated according to their relative populations into the national matrices shown here. We have removed from the

¹ Regarding the results of the first and second round of the legislative elections, see Michel in this volume ([b](#); [c](#)).

French parliamentary elections: Macron's successful bet

Elie Michel

June 12, 2017

La République En Marche (LREM), Emmanuel Macron's newly created political party has taken a decisive lead in the first round of the legislative elections with 32% of the votes on Sunday June 11. Les Républicains (LR, right) come second with 21%, followed by the Front National at 13% (FN, radical right), La France Insoumise at 11% (LFI, radical left), and Parti Socialiste (PS) with a bit less than 10% of the votes (including its traditional allies).

In a two-round single member district electoral system, the lead of LREM (despite being around 11%) could lead to a hegemonic domination in the lower house. Predications for the second round foresee that LREM will hold between 350 and 450 seats out of 577¹. This constitute an unprecedented result and a clear victory for Macron's party.

LREM's coming victory marks a further step in the presidentialisation of the regime. Indeed, since 2002, the legislative elections are held a few weeks after the presidential election. Even a new party like LREM, with many unknown candidates coming from "civil society" can secure a large victory in the legislative election once its leader has been elected president². In 2017, LREM may even have an absolute majority without the help of the Modem – its centrist ally. This victory needs to be qualified, since the first round of the legislative election 2017 sets a new record of abstention since 1958: 51.3% of registered French voters did not turn out to the polls. One consequence of that, is that in the second round, all districts but one will oppose two candi-

¹ Regarding the full results of the second round of the legislative elections, see [Michel in this volume \(a\)](#).

² For analyses concerning the Macron's victory in the second round, see [Paparo in this volume](#).

dates (every candidate that obtains more than 12.5% of registered voters in qualifies for the run-off; out of comparison there more than 2 candidates in 34 districts in 2012). In short, the citizens who turn out to vote have plebiscited political change and Macron's agenda, but the political recomposition of the political system remains undecided.

The notable political consequence of this election is the complete collapse of the PS: the record low result of the presidential election has been confirmed ([Michel in this volume \(b\)](#)), and the PS is likely to obtain between 20 and 30 MPs (compared to 292 in 2012). Notably, many of the leading figures of the party (former ministers, its secretary general, former presidential candidate Benoit Hamon) have not been able to qualify for the second round.

The Front National has also underperformed in this election. Although Marine Le Pen looks in position to enter parliament for the first time, her party may not obtain more than 5 to 10 MPs in total. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's LFI faces a similar situation, in which the leader is in good position to win, but the party will underperform compared to the results of the presidential election.

The mainstream right party, LR, will form the biggest opposition group in parliament, possibly getting around 100 to 150 MPs on June 18. All opposition parties will campaign up until next Sunday, but in view of their likely historically low results of next week, established parties will need to engage in profound reorganization. President Macron, on the other hand, is likely to be able to count on one of the most hegemonic chambers in history to undergo his agenda of reforms and political transformation.

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Macron with a comfortable majority undermined by record low turnout

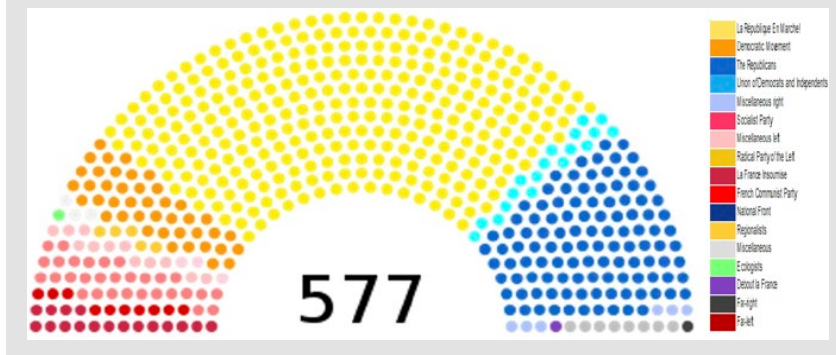
Elie Michel

June 22, 2017

Emmanuel Macron's presidential majority – consisting of his movement La République En Marche (LREM) and centrist party Modem – has largely won the second round of the legislative elections on June 18, although with a smaller margin than predicted after the first round (see [Michel in this volume](#)). LREM on its own has obtained the absolute majority in the lower house with 308 seats out of 577, while Modem has 47 MPs. Mainstream parties of the left and the right realized some of the worst electoral performances in parliamentary elections: the Parti Socialiste (PS) hits a record low, with only 30 MPs, and making a parliamentary group of a little over 40 MPs with its traditional allies. Conservatives (LR) and centre-right obtain 120 members of parliament, although the will seat divided in parliament, as a third of rightwing MPs announced their support to the government, whereas a majority of LF stands in the opposition. The radical left, under the lead of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, performs better than expected, with a total of 30 MPs, which have been unable to form a unitary group. The Front National achieves its best score under the two-round majoritarian electoral system, sending 8 representatives to parliament, including party leader Marine Le Pen.

In addition to this unprecedented composition of parliament with a hegemonic centrist majority, flanked by smaller opposition groups on the left and on the right, the low turnout constitutes the historical result of this election. 57.4% of registered voters did not turn out to the polling station for the second round of the election. This is 8% more non-voters than for the first round, and it sets a new historical record. Traditionally, participation is lower in the legislative elections than in the presidential elections, but the ongoing trend suggests that legislative elections are becoming "second order elections". Indeed, because they occur 6 weeks after, the legislative elections have become subordinated to the presidential election, which is the most salient. This trend has been steadily increasing since 2002, the first election with a "reversed calendar", in which legislative serve as a "confirmation election" or a "third round" after the elec-

Figure 1. Composition of the next National Assembly



tion of the president. The stake of the legislative election is now reduced to “giving a majority” to the freshly elected president. In such cases, the president’s party usually manages to obtain the support of a majority of its voters, while opposition parties are faced with largely demobilized voters. In the legislative elections, the most vocal opponents of Macron, la France Insoumise (LFI, radical left) and the Front National (FN) have only obtained between half and third of the votes they received in the presidential election.

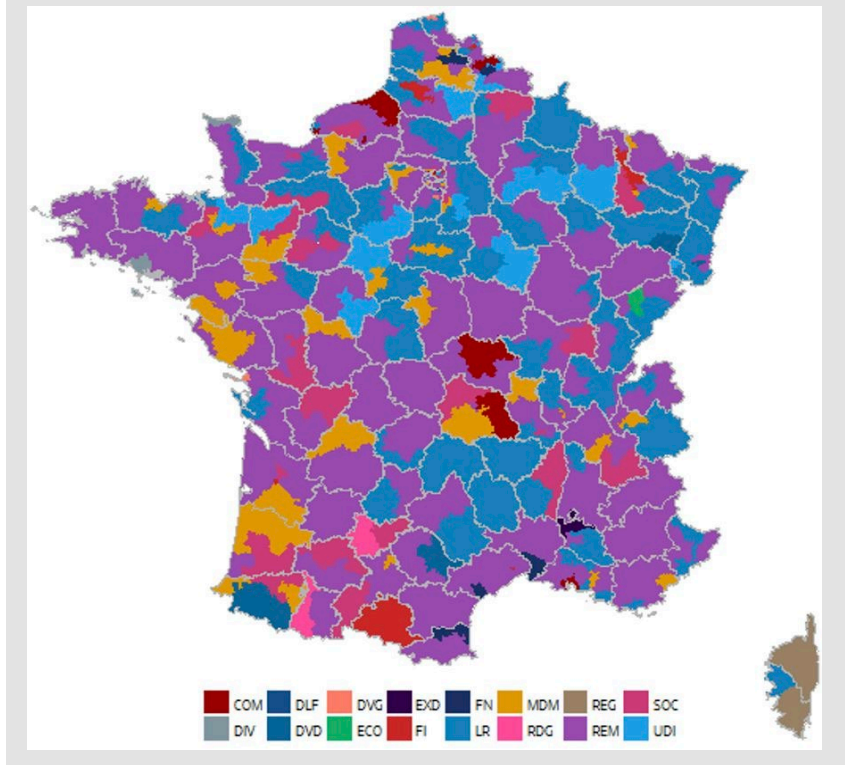
Particularly, each party’s electoral gains are geographically polarized. The radical left has obtained its biggest gain in the former socialist “banlieues” of Paris, while the mainstream right resisted in its traditional strongholds in the East of the country. 5 out of the 8 Front National MPs are elected in the former industrial districts of the North. LREM, as a new party, has gained MPs all over the country, but clearly establishes its electoral stronghold in the Western part of the country, and particularly in the Bretagne region, which elected 24 LREM MPs out of 27.

LREM’s majority in parliament gives Emmanuel Macron and its government a comfortable margin to lead the economic reforms promised during the campaign. But this political lead is certainly undermined by the high abstention, which appears to be both structural and political. In addition to the usual 15-20% of non-voters, 2017 seems to have been marked by a political abstention, a form of protest through non-voting. The call of some leaders of the left not to choose between Macron and Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election seems to have had consequences in the legislative elections. In addition to record abstention, blank or null votes also skyrocketed. In the second round of the legislative elections, 1.3 million voters cast a blank vote (about 7% of the votes). Strikingly, the blank votes increased by a million between the two-round, clearly showing that many voters intended to protest against the political offer

Table 1. Overall electoral results in 2017 French legislative elections

Parties and coalitions	First round			Second round			Total	
	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%	Seats	Seats	%
La République En Marche!	6,391,269	28.2	2	7,826,245	43.1	306	308	53.4
Democratic Movement	932,227	4.1	0	1,100,656	6.1	42	42	7.3
<i>Presidential majority (centre)</i>	7,323,496	32.3	2	8,926,901	49.1	348	350	60.7
The Republicans	3,573,427	15.8	0	4,040,203	22.2	112	112	19.4
Union of Democrats and Independents	687,225	3.0	1	551,784	3.0	17	18	3.1
Miscellaneous right	625,345	2.8	0	306,074	1.7	6	6	1.0
<i>Parliamentary right</i>	4,885,997	21.6	1	4,898,061	27.0	135	136	23.6
Socialist Party	1,685,677	7.4	0	1,032,842	5.7	30	30	5.2
Miscellaneous left	362,281	1.6	1	263,488	1.5	11	12	2.1
Radical Party of the Left	106,311	0.5	0	64,860	0.4	3	3	0.5
<i>Parliamentary left</i>	2,154,269	9.5	1	1,361,190	7.5	44	45	7.8
La France insoumise	2,497,622	11.0	0	883,573	4.9	17	17	3.0
French Communist Party	615,487	2.7	0	217,833	1.2	10	10	1.7
National Front	2,990,454	13.2	0	1,590,869	8.8	8	8	1.4
Regionalists	204,049	0.9	0	137,490	0.8	5	5	0.9
Miscellaneous	500,309	2.2	0	100,574	0.6	3	3	0.5
Ecologists	973,527	4.3	0	23,197	0.1	1	1	0.2
Debout la France	265,420	1.2	0	17,344	0.1	1	1	0.2
Far-right	68,320	0.3	0	19,034	0.1	1	1	0.2
Far-left	175,214	0.8	0	–	–	–	0	0.0
Total	22,654,164	100.0	4	18,176,066	100.0	573	577	100.0
Valid votes	22,654,164	97.8		18,176,066	90.1			
Blank ballots	357,018	1.5		1,409,784	7.0			
Null ballots	156,326	0.7		578,765	2.9			
Turnout	23,167,508	48.7		20,164,615	42.6			
Abstentions	24,403,480	51.3		27,128,488	57.4			
Registered voters	47,570,988			47,293,103				

Figure 2. Map of the district winner in 2017 French legislative elections



of the second round. Overall, the LREM's majority is large, and stable, but it will always face a legitimacy concern, because the combination of low turnout in a majoritarian system make it one of the most badly elected majority in Europe. Further, these results ask question about the equilibrium of the institutions, and the role of legislative elections. It is a democratic issue when the elections that determine the political majority in parliament are devaluated to this point.

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UK gives priority to problem solving, but leftist positions dominate economic issues

Vincenzo Emanuele

June 1, 2017

In view of the next general election in Britain, to be held next 8th June, the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) has conducted a CAWI survey on the adult British population. Similarly to what we have recently done before the Dutch parliamentary election last March and the French Presidential election last April, British respondents were asked to express their support on 18 positional issues (divisive issues that refer to two rival goals, e.g. public spending vs. tax cuts). Specifically, each respondent was asked to position himself/herself on a 6-point scale where the points 1 and 6 represent the two rival goals to be pursued on a given issue. Later, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the selected goal for each of these issues. The questionnaire also included 10 valence issues ([Stokes 1963](#)), namely issues that refer to one shared goal, over which a general agreement is assumed (e.g., protection from terrorism). On these issues, a support of 100% is set by design and respondents were only asked to attribute the level of priority. The selection of both positional and valence issues was made in cooperation with a team of British researchers.

By examining the level of priority attributed to different goals, we are able to map the current state of British public opinion, and also the potential structure of opportunity for parties in this campaign. Table 1 ranks the issues according to the priority attributed by all respondents. For the 18 positional issues, the percentage reported is nothing but the sum of the priorities assigned to both the two rival goals. By doing this, positional issues (where priority is asked to the respondent only for the goal previously selected) and valence issues (where instead priority is asked to all respondents given that a support of 100% to that goal is assumed by design) can be properly compared.

By comparing the priority attributed by voters to both types of goals (shared vs. divisive goals) this analysis clearly shows that shared goals are by far considered the most salient by British voters. Indeed, out of the top 8 pri-

Table 1. The current state of the British public debate: priority assigned to each issue among all respondents. For positional issues, the sum of both rival goals is considered. Percentages reported represent the share of respondents attributing a high priority to that issue. Issues in italics are the shared (valence) ones

Statement	% General priority
<i>Protect the UK from terrorist attacks</i>	90%
<i>Improve the NHS</i>	89%
<i>Fight crime and keep our communities safe</i>	84%
European Union	83%
<i>Boost economic growth</i>	81%
<i>Reduce unemployment</i>	80%
<i>Provide leadership for the country</i>	79%
<i>Improve the quality of schools</i>	77%
Access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%
<i>Protect pensions</i>	75%
European Single Market	74%
<i>Control immigration</i>	74%
Taxes and social services	74%
Freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	74%
Build affordable homes	69%
<i>Protect the environment</i>	66%
Minimum wage	65%
Zero hours contracts for workers	61%
Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	59%
Preservation of their own culture for foreigners in Britain	58%
Cost of university tuition fees	56%
Use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	56%
Reduce income differences	56%
Britain's railways	53%
Islamic veil in public spaces	51%
Scottish referendum on independence	49%
Law that allows gay marriages	47%
Provision of grammar schools	46%

orities for the next government, only one is a divisive goal against 7 shared goals (and, by extending the scope of the comparison, the divisive goals are only 3 out of the top 12 priorities). As expected, the only divisive goal emerging as very important for voters is related to the largely debated matter of the European Union. This latter shows an aggregated priority of 83%, composed

by a larger priority to 'Leave', 47% against a 36% for the 'Remain' option, as displayed in Table 2, where priority is reported for each side of the divisive goal. After all, Prime Minister Theresa May has called the early election to strengthen her pro-Brexit majority and increase her negotiating power *vis-à-vis* the European Union. Not by chance, other two EU-related issues, concerning the European Single Market and the freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain rank both third among the divisive issues, with a high priority attributed by 74% of the respondents.

By looking at Table 1, the presence of a relatively large group of issues considered as priorities by the 80% or more of the respondents reveals that there is a common priority pattern in the country, suggesting the presence of a relatively homogeneous 'British agenda'. In other words, regardless of partisan affiliations, and despite the ongoing tough campaign opposing the different parties and their policy proposals, the British people share some common problems and expect the next Prime Minister to deal with them, whoever he/she will be. This shared agenda includes the need to protect the country from terrorist attacks and from crime, improve the NHS, bring the country out of the European Union, boost economic growth, and fight unemployment.

Unsurprisingly, the most important issue to be addressed by the government is the protection against terrorist attacks, with a priority of 90%. This finding confirms how this goal has become crucial in the current Western European public debate. This result is indeed very similar to what emerged also from the Dutch and the French surveys. Also in these two countries, protection from terrorism was considered as the most important goal, with a priority of, respectively, 85% in the Netherlands and 91% in France (see [Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#); [Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)). Moreover, an interesting difference in comparative perspective is the relatively lower importance of 'reducing unemployment' in the United Kingdom. While in France and the Netherlands this issue was considered as the second top priority after fighting terrorism, in the UK it is only the sixth one, although with still the 80% of people attributing a high priority to it.

Finally, a general overview on the ranking of positional issues shows that British voters attribute a higher priority to economic issues than to cultural issues. Indeed, issues related to the classic economic left-right dimension (taxes vs. social services) or to other matters connected to economic protection (investments to build affordable homes, minimum wage, zero hours contract) are all considered a priority by more than 60% of the respondents, while cultural issues (the preservation of their own culture for foreigners, and the allowance of the Islamic veil in public spaces) stand in a lower position. Moreover, as reported in Table 2, is the 'leftist' goal of each economic issue to be perceived as a higher priority.

Table 2. The current state of the British public debate: priority assigned to each goal among all respondents. Percentages reported represent the share of respondents attributing a high priority to that goal. Goals in italics are the shared (valence) ones

Statement	% General priority
<i>Protect the UK from terrorist attacks</i>	90%
<i>Improve the NHS</i>	89%
<i>Fight crime and keep our communities safe</i>	84%
<i>Boost economic growth</i>	81%
<i>Reduce unemployment</i>	80%
<i>Provide leadership for the country</i>	79%
<i>Improve the quality of schools</i>	77%
<i>Protect pensions</i>	75%
<i>Control immigration</i>	74%
<i>Protect the environment</i>	66%
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	62%
Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	57%
Increase the minimum wage	56%
Invest more public money to build affordable homes	54%
Ban zero hours contracts for workers	53%
Leave the European Union	47%
Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	43%
Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	43%
Reduce income differences	43%
Keep Britain in the European Single Market	43%
End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	42%
Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	39%
Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	37%
Nationalize Britain's railways	36%
Keep Britain in the European Union	36%
Keep the law that allows gay marriages	33%
Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	31%
Leave the European Single Market	31%
Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	29%
Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	28%
Allow the expansion of fracking to produce more oil and gas	27%
Expand the provision of grammar schools	27%
Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	21%
Dismantle Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	20%
Limit the provision of grammar schools	18%

Statement	% General priority
Keep Britain's railways in private	17%
Cut taxes and spend less on health and social services	17%
Allow foreigners in Britain to preserve their own culture	15%
Rely on the private sector to build affordable homes	15%
Allow the Islamic veil in public spaces	15%
Repeal the law that allows gay marriages	14%
Maintain current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	14%
Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	13%
Do not reduce income differences	13%
Do not increase the minimum wage	9%
Maintain zero hours contracts for workers	8%

This result represents a clear difference with respect to France and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands. In France, cultural issues, especially those related to immigrants, held the lion's share (both in terms of support and priority). In the Dutch case, issues related to the 'demarcation/integration' dimension (Kriesi *et al.* 2006), despite being very divisive, displayed higher priority than the traditional economic issues. For instance, the question related to the Islamic veil is considered as a priority only by the 51% of the respondents, against the 64% in France, while the adaptation of foreigners to the national culture is considered as a priority by the 58% of voters in the UK against the 69% in the Netherlands.

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UK voters support leftist goals, but economic left-right is not the main dimension of competition

Vincenzo Emanuele

June 3, 2017

Beyond the study of the issues that are considered as a priority by British voters (see [Emanuele in this volume](#)), another interesting aspect of the survey conducted by the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) in view of the next UK general election, refers to the support accorded by voters to 18 positional issues, selected in cooperation with a team of British researchers. Specifically, each respondent was asked to position himself on a 6-point scale where the points 1 and 6 represent the two rival goals to be pursued on a given issue¹. Looking at the configuration of voters' support for the different issues will allow us to reach a clear understanding about what voters want and, consequently, about the structure of opportunity available for parties in this electoral campaign. Moreover, this analysis will also pursue another aim: investigating whether the support for the different goals can be aggregated to form one (or more) consistent dimension(s) of competition or, conversely, whether such support has an idiosyncratic shape. In other words, is the mind of voters ideologically consistent or not? Do voters still rely on the traditional left-right dimension of competition or do they simply support different positions on different goals without any reference to the 20th-century-style alignments?

Table 1 presents the 36 rival goals (each of the 18 positional issues has two alternative sides) ranked by their level of support. While in France there was a specific right-wing *Zeitgeist*, with four goals (negatively) related to immigrants supported by more than 70% of the electorate, in the United Kingdom an op-

¹ Additionally, the questionnaire also included ten valence issues ([Stokes 1963](#)), namely issues that refer to one shared goal, over which a general agreement is assumed (e.g., protection from terrorism). These issues have been excluded from this analysis, since a support of 100% was set by design.

posite left-wing orientation can be detected. With the only relevant exception of a largely supported welfare chauvinist goal ('Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants', supported by 76% of the respondents)², the other 7 out of the 8 most supported goals can be considered as belonging to a 'leftist agenda'. Specifically, traditional economic leftist goals dominate the top positions of Table 1. Indeed, the 80% of British voters would like to increase the minimum wage and the 79% would like to ban the zero hours contracts for workers. Moreover, more than 70% of voters would like to use the tax leverage to spend more money on health and public services, to build affordable homes, reduce income differences and the cost of university tuition fees. What is more, about two thirds of the voters would like to nationalize Britain's railways. Beyond the economic goals, another leftist, or liberal, goal ('Keep the law that allows gay marriages') is highly supported (73%), thus showing the fundamental secularism of the British society, consistently with the results previously shown in the Netherlands and France (see [Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#); [Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)). In other words, beyond the need to be protected from terrorist attacks and the other valence issues (not analysed here), a traditional pro-Labour agenda seems to be the favourite option for British voters in this electoral campaign. Nonetheless, we still need to see whether the Labour party will be able to exploit this favourable window of opportunity, or whether, instead, the Conservatives will be able to shift the public attention to other issues (i.e., the protection from terrorism or other shared goals on which they are considered as more credible).

The support accorded by voters to different goals tells only a part of the story. We also need to detect whether these goals are somewhat connected in a consistent way in voters' mind. In other words, we want to understand if a traditional left-right dimension of competition still exists, and if this dimension is still the most important one. Or, instead, whether the mind of the voters is no longer ideologically consistent, at least according to a 20th-century fashion.

In order to do that, we performed an exploratory factor analysis based on the 18 positional issues presented above.

Table 2 reports the results of the exploratory factor analysis. The two most important components are reported. They account for the 36% of the variance³. Respectively, the first component explains a variance (e.g., Eigenvalue)

Table 1. Divisive goals by public opinion support, UK 2017

Statement	% Support
Increase the minimum wage	80%
Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%
Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%
Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%
Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%
Reduce income differences	71%
Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%
Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%
Nationalize Britain's railways	65%
Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%
Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%
Keep Britain in the European Single Market	57%
End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	54%
Leave the European Union	54%
Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	54%
Expand the provision of grammar schools	53%
Allow the expansion of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%
Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%
Limit the provision of grammar schools	47%
Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	46%
Keep Britain in the European Union	46%
Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%
Leave the European Single Market	43%
Allow the Islamic veil in public spaces	37%
Dismantle Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	37%
Keep Britain's railways in private	35%
Allow foreigners in Britain to preserve their own culture	35%
Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	30%
Do not reduce income differences	29%
Rely on the private sector to build affordable homes	28%
Cut taxes and spend less on health and social services	28%
Repeal the law that allows gay marriages	27%
Maintain current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	24%
Maintain zero hours contracts for workers	21%
Do not increase the minimum wage	20%

² These results are consistent with what already seen in France, where the issue related to welfare chauvinism was supported by 70% of the respondents (while in the Netherlands only 50% of the voters supported this goal).

³ The analysis performed reported also a third and a fourth factor, later excluded since they added a very small contribution to the explained variance (respectively, 9.8% and 5.7%).

Table 2. The two main components and the most important rotated factor loadings

Factor 1	
Integration vs. demarcation	
Keep Britain in the European Union	++
Allow the Islamic veil in public spaces	++
Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	++
Keep Britain in the European Single Market	++
Maintain current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	+
Allow foreigners in Britain to preserve their own culture	+
Factor 2	
Economic left-right	
Rely on the private sector to build affordable homes	+
Do not increase the minimum wage	++
Do not reduce income differences	+
Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	+
Maintain zero hours contracts for workers	+
Keep Britain's railways in private	+
Note: + = 0.4-0.7; ++ =>0.7	

of 3.5, while the second component has an Eigenvalue equals to 2.97. Quite surprisingly, the first and most important component (in terms of explained variance) is not the economic left-right dimension, which instead comes second, by adding a 16.5% of explained variance. Conversely, with a 19.5% of explained variance, the most important detected dimension of competition puts together the three issues related to the European Union (Brexit, the Single Market, and the freedom of movement of people) and the three cultural issues related to immigrants (Islamic veil, welfare chauvinism, and preservation of foreigners' culture). This dimension can be clearly associated with the [Kriesi et al.](#)'s integration/demarcation dimension (2006). This is a relatively new dimension that is gaining increasing momentum. It creates new alignments and is strategically exploited by the challengers of the status quo (such as Wilders in the Netherlands and Le Pen in France)⁴ by pooling together issues related to

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the European Union, immigration, and (in France) globalization. This dimension blends institutional, cultural, and economic goals, thus going beyond the traditional left-right axis, now consistently represented by the second component of the factor analysis reported in Table 2. This second component is now deprived by its cultural aspects and is only made by economic goals. A further evidence that the political space, in the United Kingdom as in many other countries, has become (at least) two-dimensional.

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⁴ While usually silenced by mainstream, pro-global and pro-EU parties, in the French Presidential election of 2017, the other side of the conflict (the pro-European one) has been clearly politicized for the first time, thanks to the campaign led by Emmanuel Macron.

Tories and Labour: mainstream parties riding on conflict

Aldo Paparo

June 6, 2017

In the assessment of the current state of the British public debate presented by [Emanuele in this volume](#) based on the original data collected by the CISE as part of a broader comparative research project ([De Sio and Paparo in this volume \(a\)](#)), we have seen that British voters have a great deal of interest in shared goals, although divisive economic policies are quite relevant as well, with the traditional left-wing positions having the upper hand.

Here we look at political parties. Basically, what we have already seen in both France and the Netherlands is that two different strategies emerge ([De Sio and Paparo in this volume \(b\)](#)). On the one hand, they can present a consensual face, omitting conflicts and campaigning on their credibility to solve shared problems. This is the strategy recently adopted by both Macron and Rutte, and, more in general, by mainstream parties. On the other hand, a second strategy consists in emphasizing contemporary conflicts (such as the one emerging between winners and losers of globalization), choosing sides, and vigorously campaigning on them. This is the strategy used by Le Pen in France and Wilders in the Netherlands. Challenger, anti-establishment parties tend to choose this campaign strategy.

Turning now to the British case, the hypothesis we want to test is whether also in Britain mainstream parties have the most favourable campaign issues on shared goals and valence issues, on which their competence in solving problems can most be rewarded, while on the contrary challenger parties have more favourable prospects on divisive goals, those emerging on one of the two rival sides of conflictual, positional issues.

To verify whether this is the case, we report Table 1, which shows the most credible four parties on the different (shared or divisive) goals. The table also shows the fractions of the electorate deeming the various parties credible in achieving that specific goal, along with their level of support and priority.

We can clearly see that, with respect to shared goals (those having by definition 100% support, reported on the top of the table) the two mainstream

parties are most credible. Out of the ten overall shared goals Tories and Labour are ranked as the two most credible parties on eight of them – the eight having the highest level of priority, by the way. Only on controlling immigration the UKIP is (slightly) more credible than the Labour, which ranks third; and on protecting the environment the Greens are (by far) more credible than both Labour and Tories, basically tied in second place.

Before moving to the analysis of divisive goals, we need to underline the clear advantage emerging for the Conservative Party on valence issues. It is considered the most credible party in achieving seven out of the ten related shared goals, six over the seven with the highest priority, including law and order goals, economic goals, and even some welfare-related goals (such as school quality). Furthermore, Tories enjoy an average credibility lead of 14 points on the second-most credible party, with the gap often being even larger than that – for instance, it is 25 points on the most salient issues (protecting from terrorism). Only on improving the quality of schools and reducing unemployment Conservatives are virtually tied with the Labour; still, though, they rank first. The Labour is the most credible party only on protecting the pensions and the NHS, with a margin on the Tories that in both cases is a little above 10 points. The latter issue is particularly important, as is it almost as salient as terrorism among UK voters.

The pattern of higher credibility on valence, shared goals for mainstream parties is then clear in the UK as well. However, if we scroll down the table and look at divisive goals, we find a striking fact: mainstream parties are again the most credible. Focusing first on the 18 majority goals (those being indicated as preferred over their opposites by a majority of the electorate), we find that Labour is considered the most credible party 9 times, while Tories 8. Only on banning the Islamic veil from public spaces, supported by 63% of UK voters but with a quite low priority, the UKIP is the most credible party – and with a small margin on the Conservatives.

The Labour appears as a classic social-democratic party (job-market regulation, welfare, redistribution) with a pinch of civil rights (gay marriages). It needs to be stressed how all these goals are preferred by significant majorities of the electorate – among them, the nationalization of the railways, indicated by two third of the respondents. On the other hand, the Conservative Party is able to capture voters' credibility on demarcation issues: leaving the EU and Schengen (supported by 54% of the electorate), not allowing Scotland a second referendum of leaving the UK (again 54%), welfare chauvinism (76%), immigrants assimilation (65%).

Even if we look at minority goals, those selected by a smaller fraction than the one preferring its opposite, the picture does not change. The issue yield theory (De Sio and Weber 2014) suggests that small parties might cultivate their areas of issue ownership on such goals. This is exactly what we found

in France (Paparo, De Sio and Michel in this volume) and particularly in the Netherlands (Paparo, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume). But this is not the case in the UK. Here the two mainstream parties are the most credible on these goals as well. The Labour Party is the most credible on seven goals, including all the integration ones, which are less supported than the demarcation ones – on which, as we have seen above, Tories are the most credible. On the other hand, Tories are the most credible in achieving nine minority goals, including all the *laissez-faire* goals on economic matters, which are currently less popular than their opposites in the UK. Only the Greens appear as the most credible party on prohibiting fracking (which is actually supported by 49,6% of the electorate), although the Labour credibility is quite similar. Finally, the SNP is the most credible in allowing a new Independence referendum in the Northern British region.

As a final confirmation of the high credibility of mainstream parties on rival goals, let us provide an additional piece of evidence. As we have mentioned, out of the 36 rival goals, both Labour and Tories are the most credible 33 times. If we look at the second-most credible party, the two big parties occupy this place on 27 instances. The UKIP is more credible than the Labour on 5 demarcation goals, and the LibDems are more credible than the Tories on 3 integration ones – which is also the case for the Greens as to dismantling nuclear weapons.

From our investigation, the UK emerges as profoundly different from the cases we have previously analysed in our comparative project. In both France and the Netherlands mainstream parties suffered from the challenges both on the left and on the right. On the right, the demarcation issues rewarded populist right-wing parties (FN and PVV) at the expense of the mainstream options (Republicans and VVD, CDA). On the left, national representatives of the PES were not the most credible on classic economic left goals (as reducing income differences), on which they were beaten by less moderate actors (France Insoumise and SP). In the UK, on the contrary, Labour and Tories maintain their credibility in achieving divisive goals, as well as the shared ones.

Our findings indicate that the two traditional UK parties have coped with the challenges of contemporary transformations better than their continental counterparts, being able to successfully integrate (or reintegrate) in their platforms goals emerging as a consequence of those transformation – anxiety towards immigrants and foreigners on the one hand, and desire for redistribution and economic protection on the other. Basically, both Labour and Tories have embraced current conflicts, rather than denying them. The Labour appears as a classic social-democratic party from the Seventies (welfare, redistribution, even nationalizations), which has added integration and civil rights: in the current UK opinion, it wins on the economy but loses on integration. The Tories are a classic Anglo-Saxon right-wing party on the economy (free

Tab. 1 – Shared and divisive goals, by general priority, with most credible parties

Statement	% Support	% Priority for those favouring the goal	% General priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Protect the UK from terrorist attacks	100%	90%	90%	CONS 58%	LAB 33%	LIBDEM 20%	UKIP 18%	+25
Improve the NHS	100%	89%	89%	LAB 45%	CONS 32%	LIBDEM 20%	GREEN 9%	+13
Fight crime and keep our communities safe	100%	84%	84%	CONS 46%	LAB 35%	LIBDEM 18%	UKIP 13%	+11
Boost economic growth	100%	81%	81%	CONS 47%	LAB 29%	LIBDEM 13%	UKIP 8%	+19
Reduce unemployment	100%	80%	80%	CONS 41%	LAB 40%	LIBDEM 18%	UKIP 9%	+1
Provide leadership for the country	100%	79%	79%	CONS 49%	LAB 27%	LIBDEM 10%	SNP 8%	+23
Improve the quality of schools	100%	77%	77%	CONS 39%	LAB 36%	LIBDEM 19%	GREEN 8%	+3
Protect pensions	100%	75%	75%	LAB 41%	CONS 30%	LIBDEM 17%	SNP 8%	+11
Control immigration	100%	74%	74%	CONS 45%	UKIP 31%	LAB 24%	LIBDEM 9%	+14
Protect the environment	100%	66%	66%	GREEN 52%	LAB 25%	CONS 25%	LIBDEM 17%	+27
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	82%	62%	CONS 38%	UKIP 26%	LAB 13%	LIBDEM 6%	+12
Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	79%	57%	LAB 36%	CONS 25%	LIBDEM 12%	GREEN 7%	+10
Increase the minimum wage	80%	69%	56%	LAB 46%	CONS 23%	LIBDEM 16%	SNP 7%	+23
Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	74%	54%	LAB 37%	CONS 19%	LIBDEM 13%	GREEN 8%	+18
Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	67%	53%	LAB 42%	CONS 16%	LIBDEM 10%	GREEN 7%	+25
Leave the European Union	54%	86%	47%	CONS 32%	UKIP 17%	LAB 8%	LIBDEM 3%	+15

Statement	% Support	% Priority for those favouring the goal	% General priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	62%	43%	LAB 36%	CONS 12%	LIBDEM 11%	GREEN 7%	+24
Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	66%	43%	CONS 24%	UKIP 22%	LAB 12%	LIBDEM 6%	+3
Reduce income differences	71%	61%	43%	LAB 34%	CONS 11%	LIBDEM 11%	GREEN 7%	+23
Keep Britain in the European Single Market	57%	76%	43%	LAB 20%	CONS 15%	LIBDEM 15%	SNP 9%	+5
End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	54%	78%	42%	CONS 26%	UKIP 22%	LAB 9%	LIBDEM 3%	+5
Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	62%	39%	CONS 41%	LAB 11%	UKIP 8%	LIBDEM 6%	+30
Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	59%	37%	UKIP 26%	CONS 19%	LAB 8%	LIBDEM 4%	+7
Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	56%	36%	LAB 36%	CONS 11%	GREEN 5%	LIBDEM 5%	+25
Keep Britain in the European Union	46%	79%	36%	LAB 16%	LIBDEM 12%	CONS 10%	GREEN 8%	+4
Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	45%	33%	LAB 30%	CONS 28%	LIBDEM 21%	GREEN 13%	+2
Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%	69%	31%	LAB 20%	LIBDEM 15%	CONS 10%	GREEN 8%	+5
Leave the European Single Market	43%	72%	31%	CONS 24%	UKIP 13%	LAB 7%	LIBDEM 2%	+10
Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	58%	29%	GREEN 18%	LAB 14%	CONS 7%	LIBDEM 4%	+4
Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	54%	52%	28%	CONS 31%	LAB 12%	UKIP 7%	LIBDEM 5%	+20

Statement	% Support	% Priority for those favouring the goal	% General priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Δ 1st-2nd
Allow the expansion of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	54%	27%	CONS 25%	LAB 10%	UKIP 5%	LIBDEM 4%	+15
Expand the provision of grammar schools	53%	51%	27%	CONS 34%	LAB 9%	LIBDEM 7%	UKIP 4%	+24
Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	46%	45%	21%	SNP 20%	LAB 11%	CONS 10%	LIBDEM 6%	+9
Dismantle Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	37%	55%	20%	LAB 14%	GREEN 8%	CONS 5%	LIBDEM 4%	+6
Limit the provision of grammar schools	47%	40%	18%	LAB 24%	CONS 9%	LIBDEM 8%	GREEN 4%	+15
Keep Britain's railways in private	35%	47%	17%	CONS 21%	LAB 6%	LIBDEM 4%	UKIP 3%	+15
Cut taxes and spend less on health and social services	28%	60%	17%	CONS 11%	LAB 7%	LIBDEM 3%	UKIP 2%	+4
Allow foreigners in Britain to preserve their own culture	35%	44%	15%	LAB 14%	CONS 8%	LIBDEM 8%	GREEN 5%	+6
Rely on the private sector to build affordable homes	28%	53%	15%	CONS 13%	LAB 7%	LIBDEM 3%	UKIP 2%	+5
Allow the Islamic veil in public spaces	37%	39%	15%	LAB 16%	CONS 10%	LIBDEM 10%	GREEN 7%	+6
Repeal the law that allows gay marriages	27%	51%	14%	CONS 7%	LAB 5%	UKIP 4%	LIBDEM 3%	+2
Maintain current levels of access to welfare benefits for immigrants	24%	57%	14%	LAB 11%	LIBDEM 5%	CONS 5%	SNP 4%	+6
Maintain the present cost of university tuition fees	30%	43%	13%	CONS 19%	LAB 5%	LIBDEM 3%	UKIP 3%	+14
Do not reduce income differences	29%	45%	13%	CONS 15%	LAB 6%	LIBDEM 4%	UKIP 2%	+9
Do not increase the minimum wage	20%	46%	9%	CONS 10%	LAB 4%	LIBDEM 2%	UKIP 2%	+6
Maintain zero hours contracts for workers	21%	39%	8%	CONS 11%	LAB 5%	LIBDEM 2%	SNP 1%	+6

market, free market, free market) which has embedded demarcation to its platform. It loses on the economy, but wins on the second dimension (Kriesi et al. 2006) – and it is much more credible on shared goals.

Surely, the electoral system with its first-past-the-post districts has helped Tories and Labour in defending themselves from radical challenges in maintaining their crucial role within the system. However, that is not the all picture. The two parties have also taken clear steps to prevent the vulnerability to conflict shown by continental mainstream parties. In spite of the electoral system, the UKIP emerged as a strong actor, receiving over an eight of the general vote two years ago, though only winning one district – not to mention its results in the (proportional) European election the year before, when it was the first party with 27.5% of the vote. Our data indicates that the Conservative Party is now more credible than the UKIP for both demarcationist and anti-EU goals: that does not come from the electoral system. Rather, it is a consequence of specific choices made by the Tory leaders. Who knows how many seats would the UKIP win in this election hadn't the Brexit referendum been held? And same happened for the Labour. In 2015 the SNP won 56 of 59 Scottish seats definitely by campaigning on independence, but also exploiting the space left by Miliband's Labour on its left. If in the upcoming election the SNP will retreat, it won't be because of changes in the electoral system, but because the Labour has re-positioned itself on a classical social-democratic platform through the appointment of Corbyn as leader.

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The issue opportunity structure for UK parties: leftist economic agenda vs. British chauvinism

Nicola Maggini

June 4, 2017

Building on the tools provided by issue yield theory ([De Sio and Weber 2014](#)), this analysis looks at the data collected by CISE through a CAWI survey launched a few weeks before the British general election. Similarly to what we have recently done before the Dutch parliamentary election last March and the French Presidential election last April, we rely on an innovative measurement of positional issues, which provides a common issue yield index for this type of issues. Positional issues are in general, defined by reference to two rival goals (e.g. progressive vs. traditional morality): the issue yield measure assesses the presence of related strategic issue opportunities for a party. The core dimensions originally developed (for positional issues) in the issue yield model are support (how much a policy is supported in the general public) and within-party agreement (how much it is supported within the party)¹. The two dimensions correspond to the ideal goal of any party: the ability to keep their existing voter base intact, but with the possibility of reaching out to a much larger potential electorate. This goal is ideally achieved through an emphasis on the issues where the party is internally united, and perhaps many voters outside the party also agree.

Therefore, as regards the next British election, the issue yield index allows us to answer the core question: what is – in electoral terms – the ideal agenda of each party? What selection of issues would provide the best electoral outcome to each party? The issue configuration is the most relevant, it shows the

¹ In the survey, respondents were asked to express their support on 15 positional issues. For positional issues, a first item requires respondents to choose over the two rival goals (it is a 6-point item, thus also allowing all techniques for classic positional items). Once the goal is selected (e.g. defending traditional morality), respondents are asked to mention (multiple choice) which parties they consider credible to achieve that goal.

best opportunity (and the lowest risk) for each party; we can then compare it with the actual choice of issues that parties emphasized in their campaign, and thus evaluate how strategic was their campaign (which relates to our initial research question). This comparison will first be made in anecdotal terms, while we will address the question in quantitative terms (through the coding of candidate's Twitter communication) in future analyses.

The issue yield for all parties can explain why certain parties are (potentially) more successful than others. For the purposes of this analysis, we have focused on the seven main parties according to the opinion polls: Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Scottish National Party (SNP), Greens, Plaid Cymru.

The following tables show issues (and related parties) according to the issue yield index, moving from highest to lowest values. Results show how parties could take advantage by competing on specific issues.

Table 1 shows the results of issue yields for parties on the right: UKIP and Conservatives. First, UKIP scores very high in agreement within its electorate, around 90%, on two migrant-related issues: "restricting access to welfare benefits for immigrants" and "banning the Islamic veil in public spaces". In addition, the issue related to cultural xenophobia ("requiring foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture") shows a within-party agreement of 84%, similarly to anti-UE issues as "leaving the European Union" and "ending freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain" (85%). All these issues show a very high issue yield between 0.90 and 0.84. A second element of the strategic issue opportunities of UKIP is that it can build an original package of issues with good electoral returns: hostility towards migrant and anti-Europe stances, but also economic redistribution (on the reduction of income differences and on the ban of zero hours contracts for worker its issue yield is 0.84 and 0.83, respectively). This result is indeed very similar to what emerged also from the Dutch ([Maggini, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)) and the French surveys ([Maggini, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)). Also in these two countries, PVV of Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen faced a peculiar cross-cutting issue configuration that can be rewarding through an electoral strategy based on "cherry-picking" rather than on traditional left-right ideologies. On the one hand, UKIP is very competitive on 'demarcationist' issues ([Kriesi et al. 2006](#)) related to immigration and especially to the European Union; on the other, it is also competitive – to some extent – on traditional economic 'leftist' issues related to defence of social protection.

Finally, the maintenance of Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident) shows a good issue yield (0.77) for UKIP.

Regarding the Conservatives, similarly to UKIP, an anti-immigration issue ("restricting access to welfare benefits for immigrants") provides a very

high electoral return (0.82), but it ranks third and it is lower than the issue yield for UKIP on the same issue. Indeed, we have to stress that the issue yield for a party is not just an absolute value, but it should also be considered in relation to the issue yield of other parties. That is, we must look at the issue yield rank. In this regard, the other aforementioned anti-UE and anti-migration issues show high levels of within-party agreement (between 75% and 80%) and good issue yields (between 0.61 and 0.69), but the latter rank after UKIP's issue yields. The same applies to the maintenance of Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident). All this means that UKIP on such issues seems to be better positioned than Conservatives from a strategic standpoint. Nevertheless, party size should be taken into account, too: Conservatives can be still competitive because of the first-past-the-post electoral system, that is, voters with anti-immigrants and anti-UE attitudes might decide at the end to vote for them rather than for UKIP for strategic reasons. Finally, it is worth noting that no traditional economic liberal issue provides a good electoral return for Conservatives. Conversely (and surprisingly), an issue like "raising taxes and spending more on health and social services" shows an agreement within the party of 74% (and an issue yield of 0.60).

Table 2 presents issue yield indices for Liberal Democrats, Labour, Plaid Cymru, SNP, Greens and specifically which issues may provide the best electoral returns for parties competing on the political space from the left (SNP, Labour, Plaid Cymru) to the liberal-democratic centre.

First, all these parties clearly share a similar issue area of competition: indeed, traditional left-wing economic issues (reducing income inequalities, scrapping or reducing the cost of university tuition fees, banning zero hours contracts for workers, investing more public money to build affordable homes, raising taxes and spending more on health and social services, nationalizing Britain's railways, increasing minimum wage) are all issues that could provide a very good electoral return, having high issue yields (≥ 0.67). On the other hand, Greens, Liberal Democrats and SNP are united by stances towards Europe: for Lib-Dem issues like staying in the EU and in the European Single Market provide high issue yields: 0.76 and 0.79, respectively (ranking first and second). Similarly, for Greens staying in the EU and in the European Single Market provide issue yields of 0.70 (ranking second and third, respectively). Finally, for SNP staying in the EU and in the European Single Market provide issue yields of 0.66 and 0.79 (ranking first and third, respectively).

On such issues, Labour Party shows a much lower issue yield. Hence, it is reasonable from a strategic standpoint that Labour does not emphasize Brexit-related issues, focusing more on traditional left-wing issues on which it can have a good electoral return. Nevertheless, as we have seen, on left-wing economic issues it has to face a strong competition, with other parties (especially SNP and Plaid Cymru) ranking better than Labour in terms of issue yield.

Table 1. Traditional ideology or “cherry-picking”? The issue packages that characterize the electorate of each party (Conservatives, UKIP), and the electoral potential of these packages

Party	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Conservatives	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	88%	0.82	3
Conservatives	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	80%	0.69	2
Conservatives	Leave the European Union	54%	77%	0.65	2
Conservatives	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	77%	0.64	3
Conservatives	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	77%	0.64	2
Conservatives	End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	54%	75%	0.61	2
Conservatives	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	74%	0.60	9
Conservatives	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	74%	0.59	9
Conservatives	Increase the minimum wage	80%	73%	0.58	9
Conservatives	Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	54%	70%	0.54	4
Conservatives	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	67%	0.49	9
Conservatives	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	67%	0.49	9
Conservatives	Expand the provision of grammar schools	53%	66%	0.47	3
Conservatives	Leave the European Single Market	43%	63%	0.43	3
Conservatives	Allow the expansion of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	60%	0.38	2
Conservatives	Reduce income differences	71%	56%	0.33	9
Conservatives	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	52%	0.26	9
Conservatives	Keep Britain's railways in private	35%	51%	0.23	1
UKIP	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	90%	0.90	1
UKIP	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	89%	0.88	1
UKIP	Increase the minimum wage	80%	85%	0.84	3
UKIP	Leave the European Union	54%	85%	0.84	1
UKIP	End freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	54%	85%	0.84	1
UKIP	Reduce income differences	71%	85%	0.84	2
UKIP	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	84%	0.83	1

Party	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
UKIP	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	84%	0.83	4
UKIP	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	79%	0.77	1
UKIP	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	72%	0.70	2
UKIP	Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	70%	0.69	6
UKIP	Leave the European Single Market	43%	70%	0.69	1
UKIP	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	69%	0.67	7
UKIP	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	69%	0.67	8
UKIP	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	67%	0.65	8
UKIP	Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	54%	59%	0.56	3
UKIP	Expand the provision of grammar schools	53%	57%	0.55	1
UKIP	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	56%	0.53	5

Again, Labour could overcome these difficulties appealing to a strategic vote because of the first-past-the-post electoral system.

Regarding welfare chauvinism, Plaid Cymru and Lib-Dem show high issue yields, being more similar to right-wing parties than to centre-left parties in this regard.

As far as libertarian social issues are concerned, “keeping gay marriage” shows a high issue yield only for SNP (0.83, ranking first), Greens (0.75, ranking second) and Liberal-Democrats (0.68, ranking sixth).

Finally, as predictable, SNP and Greens shows high issue yields on their core issues, that is, for SNP “allowing another Referendum for Scotland’s independence” (0.79, ranking first) and for Greens “prohibiting the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas” (0.67, ranking second). It is worth noting that on this environmental issue the SNP is better positioned than the Greens, with an issue yield of 0.69.

To sum up, the analysis of the strategic issue opportunity structure shows that Labour is competitive only on traditional economic left-wing issues, which are all issues that can provide a good electoral return to several parties, whereas the same pattern does not occur as regards right-wing economic issues. In this regard, our data confirm the findings presented by [Emanuele in this volume](#): in the United Kingdom, an economic left-wing orientation can

Table 2. Traditional ideology or “cherry-picking”? The issue packages that characterize the electorate of each party (Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Greens, Plaid Cymru) and the electoral potential of these packages.

Party	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Greens	Reduce income differences	71%	89%	0.89	1
Greens	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	87%	0.86	2
Greens	Increase the minimum wage	80%	87%	0.86	2
Greens	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	84%	0.84	2
Greens	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	84%	0.84	2
Greens	Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	76%	0.75	2
Greens	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	76%	0.75	2
Greens	Keep Britain in the European Single Market	57%	71%	0.70	3
Greens	Keep Britain in the European Union	46%	71%	0.70	2
Greens	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	68%	0.67	6
Greens	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	68%	0.67	2
Greens	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%	61%	0.59	3
Greens	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	58%	0.56	7
Greens	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	58%	0.56	7
Greens	Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	46%	55%	0.53	2
Greens	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	55%	0.53	7
Greens	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	55%	0.53	7
Greens	Limit the provision of grammar schools	47%	53%	0.51	3
Labour	Increase the minimum wage	80%	85%	0.79	6
Labour	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	84%	0.77	3
Labour	Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	80%	0.73	3
Labour	Reduce income differences	71%	80%	0.72	6
Labour	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	79%	0.71	7
Labour	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	78%	0.69	6
Labour	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	78%	0.69	3

Party	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Labour	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	74%	0.63	8
Labour	Keep Britain in the European Single Market	57%	69%	0.57	5
Labour	Limit the provision of grammar schools	47%	62%	0.47	6
Labour	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	61%	0.46	9
Labour	Keep Britain in the European Union	46%	60%	0.45	4
Labour	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	59%	0.43	7
Labour	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%	59%	0.43	5
Labour	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	55%	0.37	9
Labour	Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	46%	52%	0.34	5
Labour	Allow the Islamic veil in public spaces	37%	51%	0.32	1
Labour	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	51%	0.32	8
Liberal Democrats	Increase the minimum wage	80%	82%	0.80	5
Liberal Democrats	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	82%	0.80	6
Liberal Democrats	Keep Britain in the European Single Market	57%	80%	0.79	2
Liberal Democrats	Reduce income differences	71%	77%	0.76	5
Liberal Democrats	Keep Britain in the European Union	46%	77%	0.76	1
Liberal Democrats	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	75%	0.73	5
Liberal Democrats	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	75%	0.73	5
Liberal Democrats	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	75%	0.73	5
Liberal Democrats	Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	73%	0.71	4
Liberal Democrats	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	72%	0.70	2
Liberal Democrats	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	70%	0.68	6
Liberal Democrats	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	70%	0.68	5

Party	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Liberal Democrats	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%	68%	0.65	2
Liberal Democrats	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	56%	0.53	8
Liberal Democrats	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	56%	0.53	8
Liberal Democrats	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	54%	0.50	6
Liberal Democrats	Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	46%	52%	0.48	4
Liberal Democrats	Limit the provision of grammar schools	47%	52%	0.48	5
Plaid Cymru	Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	100%	1.00	1
Plaid Cymru	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	91%	0.91	1
Plaid Cymru	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	91%	0.91	1
Plaid Cymru	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	91%	0.91	1
Plaid Cymru	Increase the minimum wage	80%	91%	0.91	1
Plaid Cymru	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	82%	0.82	1
Plaid Cymru	Reduce income differences	71%	82%	0.82	3
Plaid Cymru	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	82%	0.82	4
Plaid Cymru	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	73%	0.72	4
Plaid Cymru	Leave the European Union	54%	64%	0.63	3
Plaid Cymru	Maintain Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	63%	64%	0.63	4
Plaid Cymru	Do not allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	54%	64%	0.63	1
Plaid Cymru	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	64%	0.63	3
Plaid Cymru	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	55%	0.54	4
Plaid Cymru	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	55%	0.54	6

Party	Statement	General agreement	Agreement within party	Issue yield	Issue yield rank
Plaid Cymru	Expand the provision of grammar schools	53%	55%	0.54	2
Plaid Cymru	Leave the European Single Market	43%	55%	0.54	2
Plaid Cymru	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%	55%	0.54	4
SNP	Keep the law that allows gay marriages	73%	83%	0.83	1
SNP	Ban zero hours contracts for workers	79%	83%	0.83	3
SNP	Keep Britain in the European Single Market	57%	80%	0.79	1
SNP	Allow Scotland to vote in another referendum on independence	46%	80%	0.79	1
SNP	Reduce income differences	71%	77%	0.76	4
SNP	Increase the minimum wage	80%	77%	0.76	7
SNP	Scrap or reduce the cost of university tuition fees	70%	73%	0.73	6
SNP	Raise taxes and spend more on health and social services	72%	70%	0.69	4
SNP	Invest more public money to build affordable homes	72%	70%	0.69	7
SNP	Prohibit the use of fracking to produce more oil and gas	50%	70%	0.69	1
SNP	Nationalize Britain's railways	65%	70%	0.69	5
SNP	Keep Britain in the European Union	46%	67%	0.66	3
SNP	Allow freedom of movement of people from the EU into Britain	46%	67%	0.66	1
SNP	Ban the Islamic veil in public spaces	63%	60%	0.59	4
SNP	Dismantle Britain's nuclear weapons (Trident)	37%	60%	0.59	1
SNP	Limit the provision of grammar schools	47%	57%	0.55	1
SNP	Require foreigners in Britain to fully adapt to British culture	65%	57%	0.55	5
SNP	Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants	76%	57%	0.55	8

be detected, with the only relevant exception of a largely supported welfare chauvinist goal. On anti-migration and anti-UE issues, Conservatives can get a good electoral return, competing on the same issues with the UKIP. The latter, nevertheless, has a much smaller size according to the polls; hence, Conservatives can be strategically rewarded by voters with anti-immigrants and anti-UE attitudes because of the first-past-the-post electoral system.

At this point, it emerges clearly the most interesting result: the two main-stream British parties of the left and of the right (i.e. Labour and Conservatives) do not show a strategic issue opportunity structure based on the same dimension of competition. Indeed, Labour can be competitive on the economic left-right dimension, whereas Conservatives can be competitive on the integration/demarcation dimension. In other words, Labour and Conservatives have to play in different playing fields. The electoral outcome depends on whether the Labour party will be able to exploit this favourable window of opportunity for an economic leftist agenda, or whether, instead, the Conservatives will be able to shift the public attention to “demarcationist” issues.

Finally, the SNP is very well positioned from a strategic point of view: it is competitive on progressive issues related to the economic left-right dimension, on social libertarian and environmental issues, on pro-Europe stances and on its core issue related to the Scotland’s independence. The latter point is, of course, also its weakness, being SNP rooted only in Scotland.

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Towards a hung Parliament? The battleground of the 2017 UK general election

Vincenzo Emanuele and Bruno Marino

June 5, 2017

On the next 8th June, UK voters will be faced with a decisive election, which could have a profound impact not only on British internal affairs but also on the Brexit negotiations with the European Union. Beyond the analysis of the UK public opinion and political parties, derived from the original survey conducted by the CISE (see [Emanuele in this volume](#); [Paparo in this volume](#); [Maggini in this volume](#)), a matter that requires further investigation and has been gaining increasing attention by pundits and the media is undoubtedly the forecasting of the composition of the next House of Commons.

In the past few days, more and more experts have been underlying that the Labour party has allegedly reduced the gap with the Conservatives, and after having called a snap election to strengthen her parliamentary majority, the incumbent Prime Minister, Theresa May, risks falling short of a parliamentary majority. This is why we have focused on the possible outcomes of the election, starting from YouGov’s estimates¹ to examine the expected composition of the future Parliament and the marginal seats’ battleground.

Table 1 shows the composition of the outgoing parliament for Great Britain², the YouGov’s expectations for the 8th June, and the internal composition of seats according to the probability for each party to win the seats. The 2015 general election granted an absolute majority of 330 seats to the Tories,

¹ <https://yougov.co.uk/uk-general-election-2017/>. Our analysis is based on YouGov’s 1st June estimates. Notice that other polls show different estimates for the election, more favourable for the Conservative Party. Moreover, the last available prediction by YouGov (4th June) is even more favourable for the Labour Party (the Conservatives should obtain 308 seats against the 261 seats which should be won by Corbyn’s party).

² The 18 seats of Northern Ireland have been excluded from this analysis given they are not taken into account in YouGov’s estimates.

while only 232 seats were secured by the Labour party. Moreover, the Scottish National Party (SNP) obtained an unprecedented success, winning 56 out of the 59 constituencies in Scotland. Conversely, the Liberal Democrats suffered a catastrophic setback, getting only 8 MPs and the UKIP, notwithstanding a remarkable 12.7 of the seats, was severely damaged by the First-Past-the-Post electoral system, securing only 1 seat.

The first striking piece of evidence emerging from Table 1 is that the Conservative party, according to YouGov's estimates of the 1st June, would fall 5 seats short of an absolute majority. So, a hung Parliament seems to be the most likely outcome. Conversely, Corbyn's Labour party would increase its representation by more than 15 seats. Furthermore, the SNP should lose 6 seats compared to 2015³.

Beyond these overall numbers, the most interesting part of YouGov's estimates is the analysis of the probability, for each party, to win a seat. According to the British poll group, seats can be classified into four categories: safe seats (where a given party is predicted to comfortably win the election), likely seats (where there is a very high probability for a party to win), lean seats (where a higher level of competition between or among parties is expected), and, finally, tossup seats (where the race is too close to call).

To have a more fine-grained picture of the upcoming election, we have decided to analyse each of the 632 Great Britain's constituencies, and we have computed the composition of the expected seats for each party. Notice that, for the tossup seats, we have assigned to each party the predicted winner if YouGov has put it in the first position. As shown in Table 1, out of the 321 expected seats for the Conservatives, 210 can be considered as safe (approximately, the 65%). Then, 63 seats are likely, 32 are lean, and 16 are tossup ones. Turning our attention to the Labour party, 156 seats out of the predicted 249 ones are safe (approximately, the 63%), while 61 seats are likely, 26 lean, and just 6 are tossup ones. A very compelling forecast is that related to the SNP, whose 50 seats are made by only 8 safe seats, while 42 are not safe ones (even if 31 are likely and 10 lean ones). It seems that the Scottish seats, at least according to YouGov, have become more competitive than in 2015.

Indeed, a question that is worth asking ourselves is how the different categories of seats are distributed across Great Britain. Table 2 reports the total number of seats for the 11 Great Britain's regions, and also shows the distribution of safe, likely, lean, and tossup seats. Such regions are not equally com-

³ Notice that 1 seat (Buckingham) is that of the current Speaker of the House of Commons, and traditionally the three main parties do not contest the election in the Speaker's seat.

Table 1. Outgoing Parliament and YouGov's expectation for the 8th June

	Incumbent	Expected (YouGov 1st June)	Safe	Likely	Lean	Tossup
Conservative	330	321	210	63	32	16
Labour	232	249	156	61	26	6
Scottish National Party	56	50	8	31	10	1
Liberal Democrats	8	7	1	1	2	3
Plaid Cymru	3	3		2		1
UKIP	1					
Green	1	1	1			
Others (Speaker)	1	1	1			
Total Britain	632	632	377	158	70	27

petitive. Some of them have a very high proportion of safe and likely seats for a party, thus with an expected very low level of competition. More specifically, two regions clearly emerge as 'not competitive', the North East, a traditional Labour stronghold, and the South East, where, on the contrary, the Conservative party has always dominated the electoral races. On the other side, the two regions with the highest level of competition are two peripheral ones, Scotland and Wales, with, respectively, the 25% and the 20% of seats falling in the categories of lean or tossup. This is an unexpected conclusion, given that just in 2015 the SNP obtained a landslide in Scotland and Wales was a pro-Labour region.

Apart from the geographical distribution of seats, the decisive question of this British general election is to understand whether Theresa May could obtain the absolute majority of seats, or whether another outcome, like a hung parliament or even a Labour majority, can be expected.

As seen in Table 1, the Conservatives' starting point is made by 210 safe seats. This means that they need to gain at least 116 additional seats to get the absolute majority in the House of Commons. As shown in Table 3 below, the path towards a Conservative majority is at stake across 226 seats. This number is returned by summing the seats where the Conservatives are the likely, lean or tossup winners, or where they are likely, lean, or tossup runner-up. This means that the party should win in more than 50% of these seats (116 out of 226) to obtain the absolute majority in the House of Commons. Going more into detail, if the Conservatives win all such 226 races – a very favourable but not very probable outcome – they will obtain a super-majority or 436 seats. Conversely, if they lose all these competitions – a very unfavourable and

Table 2. Distribution of safe, likely, lean, and tossup seats in Britain (YouGov's expectation)

	Safe	Likely	Lean	Tossup	Total
North East	21	5	3		29
North West	44	17	9	5	75
Yorkshire and The Humber	33	13	6	2	54
East Midlands	29	9	7	1	46
West Midlands	34	19	3	3	59
East of England	41	10	6	1	58
London	47	14	8	4	73
South East	68	7	5	4	84
South West	36	12	5	2	55
Wales	15	17	6	2	40
Scotland	9	35	12	3	59
Total Britain	377	158	70	27	632

not at all likely result – the party would go down to 210 seats, undoubtedly a mediocre result. Nonetheless, the real interesting take from Table 3 is that, to obtain the absolute majority, and following the estimates of YouGov, the party should not merely win all the safe, likely, and lean races where a Conservative candidate tops the polls. It should also conquer all the tossup seats where they are currently ranked first and also at least 5 tossup seats where they are expected to be the runner-up. This means the path towards the Tory majority should not be taken for granted. Nonetheless, we should consider that Conservatives could also win some challenging races, like the ones in the 95 likely or lean seats where they are expected to be runner-up.

Notwithstanding the remarkable comeback of the Labour party in the last days of the campaign, the path for Jeremy Corbyn to become the next Prime Minister is a more complicated one. Indeed, the Labour party could count only on 156 safe seats, and, as shown in Table 4 below, it could successfully compete in further 199 seats. 170 of these seats (the 85%) are required to reach an absolute majority for the Labour party in the House of Commons. Out of these 199 seats, the party is expected to rank first in 93 ones (of which 61 are likely ones), and they rank second in 106 (of which 13 are tossup). So, Labour candidates should win all the races where they top the polls and also almost all the races where they are predicted to arrive in the second place. As we were arguing before, this is a very complicated path. To add more, in the most favourable scenario– i.e. if the Labour party won all these races - it would

Table 3. Conservative path to majority (YouGov's expectation)

Conservative path to majority		Unsafe seats					
		1st			2nd		
		Likely	Lean	Tossup	Tossup	Lean	Likely
Majority	326						
Safe seats	210						
Unsafe seats	226	63	32	16	10	32	73
Left to the majority	116						
% seats to win	51%						
Worst outcome	201						
Expected outcome	321						
Best outcome	436						

reach an absolute majority of seats (355). On the contrary, losing all such seats would end up in a Labour parliamentary party reduced to 156 MPs, a very unsatisfactory result. Surely, both scenarios are not very likely. All in all, many different outcomes are possible for the Labour party, but reaching an absolute majority in the House of Commons seems quite complicated.

Nonetheless, there is another possibility which should be considered: a coalition government. Among which parties? The Conservatives' Hard Brexit stance makes it difficult to imagine a coalition between them and the SNP or the Liberal Democrats, two parties that, for different reasons, are not in favour of a disastrous divorce from the European Union. Then, what about the Labour party? Its manifesto, though respecting the results of the Brexit referendum, signals the willingness to reach a comprehensive and middle-of-the-road agreement with Brussels. It means that, maybe, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats could agree to enter a coalition government with Corbyn's party, assuming it reaches the relative majority of seats. Is it a foreseeable scenario? YouGov's estimates are not optimistic: a three-party coalition (Labour, SNP, and Liberal Democrats) would fall short of the absolute majority of seats (306 seats vs 326 seats)⁴. So, to reach 10 Downing Street by leading a coalition

⁴ The situation would only slightly change if also Plaid Cymru and Greens would enter the Labour-led coalition: in this case the five-party coalition would fall short of a majority by 16 seats (310 out of 326).

Table 4. Labour path to majority

Labour path to majority		Unsafe seats					
		1st			2nd		
		Likely	Lean	Tossup	Tossup	Lean	Likely
Majority	326						
Safe seats	156						
Unsafe seats	199	61	26	6	13	25	68
Left to the majority	170						
% seats to win	85%						
Potential allies (Libdem+SNP+Greens+PLCY)	61						
Labour safe + Allies	217						
Left to the majority	109						
% seats to win	55%						
Worst outcome	156						
Expected outcome	249						
Best outcome	355						

government, Corbyn must hope his party performs reasonably well on the 8th June, winning many toss-up and lean races where it is currently in the second position. To make things worse, this last scenario starts from the assumption that the SNP and the Liberal Democrats will win all the races, including the lean and tossup ones where there is not a safe winning margin with the most dangerous opponents. If some of these more uncertain races finished with a victory by – say – the Conservatives, it follows the Labour party, to obtain the relative majority in the House of Commons and be able to form a coalition government, should perform even better.

Beyond all the speculations about inter-party post-electoral agreements, it could be useful to look at the marginal seats⁵, where the Conservatives and the Labour are likely to focus their efforts in these very last days of the campaign. Indeed, such seats may be decisive in assigning the victory to either one or

⁵ For further information about UK's marginal seats over time, see [Johnston, Pattie and Manley \(2017\)](#).

Table 5. Focus: the 97 marginal seats (YouGov's expectation)

	Incumbent	Lean+Tossup		
		1st	2nd	%
Conservative	57	48	41	92%
Labour	19	32	38	72%
Scottish National Party	14	5	11	16%
Liberal Democrats	6	11	4	15%
Plaid Cymru	1	1	1	2%
Green			1	1%
Others (Speaker)			1	1%
Total	97	97	97	

the other party or, conversely, in producing a hung Parliament. Table 5 below summarises the outgoing situation of the 97 seats where the closest races are likely to be held, and also the forecast result for such races. Almost the 60% of these 97 seats are held by Conservative MPs, and this means that Theresa May's party starts from a favourable setting. At the same time, this also signals that the party needs to retain such seats, while the Labour party can play the somewhat easier role of the underdog (starting from just 19 seats won in 2015). Not surprisingly, the Conservatives contest the 92% of such seats, but what is of interest here is the fact that the Labour party, being the incumbent in less than 20% of these marginal seats, now fights to win in the 72% of the 97 seats.

Which is the competition pattern in these 97 marginal seats? Table 6 above disentangles the 97 races according to the first and the second expected party. Specifically, the table shows that the lion's share of this group of seats will be a matter between the Labour and the Conservatives, with the other parties playing a significant role only in a small number of seats. Indeed, it is likely that the outcome of the election will be decided in the 66 seats where there should be a race between a Conservative and a Labour candidate. More into detail, winning a marginal seat in a direct challenge with the other major party in the competition has a double value: not only winning a seat, but taking it away from your direct opponent.

In a nutshell, what should we look for during the electoral night? Our impression is that a decisive push for or against the Conservatives will come from Scotland, where it seems that the Tories might take some seats away from the SNP, and from London, in whose seats the Labour party could outperform the

Table 6. Focus: first and second expected party in the 97 marginal seats (YouGov's expectation)

1st	2nd							Total
	CON	LAB	LIBDEM	SNP	PLCY	GREEN	OTH	
CON		37	7	3			1	48
LAB	29		2		1			32
LIBDEM	4			1				5
SNP	8		2			1		11
PLCY		1						1
Total	41	38	11	4	1	1	1	97

Conservative party. On Friday, quoting a popular hashtag on Twitter, we will see whether the British people will “make June the end of May”.

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The ‘sure bet’ by Theresa May ends up in a hung Parliament

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June 9, 2017

The decision by the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, to call a snap election to reinforce her parliamentary majority has been a boomerang: not only has not she strengthened her parliamentary party, but the Conservatives have also lost the absolute majority of seats in the House of Commons. Table 1 reports the results, in terms of votes and seats, of this 2017 British general election compared to those of the 2015 general election. Despite a notable increase in its share of votes (the best result since Margaret Thatcher’s years), the Conservative party has lost 12 seats, dropping to 317 MPs.

The Labour party has obtained a remarkable and unexpected result, by increasing its share of votes (from the 30.5% to the 40%) and its parliamentary seats (from 232 to 262 MPs). For Jeremy Corbyn, considered at the beginning of the campaign nothing more than a weak and unviable leader, this election has been a resounding success, since it has brought the Labour Party to the best result in terms of share of votes since 2001 and in terms of seats since 2005.

It is notable, from the increase in the share of votes for the two main parties, that the format of the party system has substantially come back to a two-party system. Indeed, the aggregate share of votes of Conservatives and Labour is 82.4%, the highest result since 1970. Since then on, the increasing competitiveness of the Liberal Party– and then of the Liberal Democrats – and also, more recently, of the UKIP and the Scottish National Party (SNP) contributed to a rise in the British party system’s fragmentation, thus progressively departing from the two-party model which dominated British politics from the mid-1940s onwards.

This outcome was possible mainly due to the collapse of the UKIP, which emerged as the third largest party in 2015 by advocating the exit of the UK from the European Union. The party has fallen to 1.8% in this last British general election. Interestingly, UKIP’s losses might have been caused by the Brex-

Table 1. Results of the 2017 UK general election and comparison with 2015

Party	2015		2017		Diff. 2017-2015	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Conservative	36.8	330	42.4	317	5.6	-13
Labour	30.5	232	40	262	9.6	30
Scottish National Party	4.7	56	3	35	-1.7	-21
Liberal Democrats	7.9	8	7.4	12	-0.5	4
Plaid Cymru	0.6	3	0.5	4	-0.1	1
UKIP	12.7	1	1.8	0	-10.9	-1
Green	3.8	1	1.6	1	-2.2	0
Others (Speaker)	1	1	1	1	0	0
Total Britain		632		632		
Democratic Unionist Party	0.6	8	0.9	10	0.3	2
Sinn Fein	0.6	4	0.7	7	0.1	3
SDLP	0.3	3	0.3	0	0	-3
Ulster Unionist Party	0.4	2	0.3	0	-0.1	-2
Independent	0.1	1	0.1	1	0	0
Total UK	100	650	100	650	0	0

it referendum, meaning that, after having reached this objective, the party has somewhat lost its main political goal. Yet, it could have been expected that the biggest gainer from the UKIP demise would have been the Conservative party, also given the Hard Brexit stances carried on by many of its prominent politicians. Conversely, and still waiting to obtain a more fine-grained picture thanks to the analysis of electoral shifts, it is also the Labour Party that seems to have benefitted from the UKIP decline. This might have been related to Corbyn's leftist positions, which could have allowed the party to attract working-class voters who had supported the UKIP in the recent past.

While after the 2015 general election many pundits were commenting about the irresistible rise of the SNP, this election has partly debunked this narration. Despite maintaining the first rank both regarding seats and votes in Scotland, the party led by Nicola Sturgeon has lost 21 MPs. Moreover, after the 2015 catastrophe, the Liberal Democrats have managed to slightly increase their representation in the House of Commons, despite a further decrease in their share of votes, possibly also thanks to a stronger concentration of their support in some crucial constituencies, especially in Scotland. Also, the Green Party has

been severally damaged by the increased concentration of votes into the hands of the two main parties, and has only managed to hold the seat of its leader at Brighton Pavilion. Finally, and this is a crucial piece of information for this contribution, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has gained 10 seats in the House of Commons, its largest result ever. These seats are likely to become a fundamental support for the Conservative government in Westminster.

Table 2 reports the seats obtained by parties in Great Britain (Northern Ireland is excluded), disaggregated by region, and the difference with 2015¹. The first striking piece of evidence is the Conservatives' breakthrough in Scotland, where the party has moved from 1 to 13 seats, at the expenses of the SNP, thus becoming the second largest party in the region, outperforming the Labour. More generally, Theresa May's party has lost seats in the rest of the country, especially in London (-7 seats) and in the southern part of Great Britain (-10). Conversely, the Labour Party has reinforced its Scottish representation (+ 6 seats), but has gained positions throughout the entire Great Britain.

Overall, the number of seats having changed hands is 66², basically the 10% of the seats in the House of Commons, and a third of these changes have occurred in Scotland, the most volatile region from this viewpoint. Indeed, the SNP has lost 12 seats in favour of the Conservatives, 6 to the Labour, and 3 to the Liberal Democrats. From a more general viewpoint, the Labour Party has obtained a net gain of 22 seats against the Conservatives, winning 28 seats where the incumbent was a Tory and losing 6 seats where they were the party of the incumbent MP.

As the reader may recall, some days ago we wrote an article based on the YouGov's estimates for all Great Britain's seats, excluding Northern Ireland ([Emanuele and Marino in this volume](#)). Some of those seats – 97 – were categorised as lean and tossup ones (where a clear winner was not evident in the polls). What has been the result of the races in such seats? Out of 65 marginal seats with an expected close race between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, Corbyn's party has performed slightly better, securing 34 seats against the 31 ones won by the Conservatives. As highlighted before, the Conservative Party has instead gained ground in Scotland by winning 11 out of 12 marginal seats, at the expenses of the SNP. Moreover, the Liberal Democrats have performed pretty well in the marginal challenges against the Conservatives: they have won 7 races out of 11.

¹ More information on the British electoral map after the 2017 general election, see [Johnston et al.](#) (2017)

² We do not consider as a switching seat the result of the 2016 by-election in Richmond Park.

Table 2. Seats by region in Great Britain and differences with 2015

	Seats	CON	LAB	LIBDEM	SNP	PL_CY	UKIP	GREEN	OTHERS
North East	29	3	26						
North West	75	20 (+2)	54 (+3)	1 (-1)					
Yorkshire and The Humber	54	17 (+2)	37 (+4)	0 (-2)					
East Midlands	46	31 (-1)	15 (+1)						
West Midlands	59	35 (+1)	24 (-1)						
East of England	58	50 (+2)	7 (+3)	1			0 (-1)		
London	73	21 (-6)	48 (+3)	3 (+2)					
South East	84	72 (-6)	8 (+4)	2 (+2)				1	1
South West	55	47 (-4)	7 (+3)	1 (+1)					
Wales	40	8 (-3)	28 (+3)	0 (-1)		4 (+1)			
Scotland	59	13 (+12)	7 (+6)	4 (+3)	35 (-21)				
Total Britain	632	317	261	12	35	4	0	1	1

What are the prospects for British politics after this general election? The gamble by Theresa May has clearly failed. According to the latest news, she should be leading a minority government backed by the right-wing Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). It is unclear whether this solution would allow her to stay at 10 Downing Street for the upcoming legislature. For the first time since 1974, and despite the presence of the First-Past-the-Post electoral system, the UK will cope with instability, allegedly resembling what has happened or might happen in many Mediterranean countries³. Therefore, despite the Brexit, the United Kingdom is closer to its Southern European counterparts than ever, at least from the political uncertainty viewpoint.

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³ On Southern European instability, especially in the past few years, see for instance [Bosco and Verney](#) (2016)

Pro-UE and welfare, anti-immigrants: the German agenda towards the elections

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September 22, 2017

Next Sunday German voters are called to the polls to elect the new members of the Bundestag. It will be the fourth legislative elections in an important UE country this year, following the Netherlands ([De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), France ([Elie in this volume](#); [Paparo in this volume](#)) and the United Kingdom ([Emanuele and Marino in this volume](#)). Unlike in the aforementioned cases, in Germany the electoral outcome appears to be quite certain. According to recent opinion polls, the CDU-CSU (the party led by Chancellor Merkel) should receive roughly 36% of votes, a 5-point decrease compared to the extraordinary result achieved in 2013. The SPD, led by Mr. Schultz, should get a little over 20%. Not enough to challenge Mrs. Merkel's fourth term. However, although the winner of elections is not uncertain, a completely different story concerns the governmental arrangement that will emerge as a consequence of the elections. The German law provides for a proportional representation, which makes it impossible for Merkel to get the majority of the MPs. She will have to form a coalition government. The elections will be crucial in defining the set of possible winning coalitions. Will there be a feasible alternative to the experienced Grand Coalition formula? In addition to the two major parties, a record of four parties should be able to meet the 5% national threshold and get seats in the Bundestag: the Linke (radical left), the FDP (liberal), the Greens, and the AfD (populist right). For the first time, then, there will be six parties in the Bundestag; a scenario which should provide possible alternative coalitional paths to Mrs. Merkel.

To assess the preferences and priorities of German voters, as well as the campaign opportunity structure on issues for different parties, the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) has conducted a CAWI survey on the adult German population in the context of a broader comparative research project (see [De Sio and Paparo in this volume](#)). Similarly to what we have recently done for the Dutch ([Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)),

French (Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume) and the British elections (Emanuele in this volume (a)), respondents in Germany were asked to express their support on a wide set of positional issues (divisive issues that refer to two rival goals, e.g. public spending vs. tax cuts). Specifically, each respondent was asked to position himself/herself on a 6-point scale where the points 1 and 6 represent the two rival goals to be pursued on a given issue. Later, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the selected goal for each of these issues. The questionnaire also included 10 valence issues (Stokes 1963), namely issues that refer to one shared goal, over which a general agreement is assumed (e.g., protection from terrorism). On these issues, a support of 100% is set by design and respondents were only asked to attribute the level of priority. The selection of both positional and valence issues was made in cooperation with a team of German researchers.

Table 1 summarizes the main findings from the survey, reporting, for each issue, the relative level of priority among the overall German electorate, the nature of the issue (whether valence or positional), and its policy dimensions (economic vs. cultural). In the fourth and fifth columns, for positional issues, we report the side, the goal which received the highest support (between the two rival ones), and the magnitude of such support. In the far-right column we indicate the party with the highest generalized issue yield score on that issue. This is an index based on issue yield theory (De Sio and Weber 2014), explicitly designed to be fruitfully employed for both valence and positional issues, indicating the favourability for the party of campaigning on that issue.

Starting from priority, we observe that, as in the other countries included in our investigation, the most salient issues are valence. In fact, all five issues with the highest priority are valence. Among them, fighting poverty for elderly and terrorism stand out (85% priority), although the latter is here slightly less salient than in France (91%, see Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume) and the UK (90%, see Emanuele in this volume (b)). Compared to these two countries, Germany has so far suffered fewer terrorist attacks, just as the Dutch case, in which the priority for the fight to terrorism was at 85% (Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume). This may be part of the reason why in Germany respondents' priorities are more spread on a variety of issues, including economic ones – such as providing affordable homes and fighting unemployment. It is surprising, however, that economic growth, an issue that emerged as crucial in the other countries, is indicated as a priority by less than two thirds of German respondents (64%) – particularly low compared to the priority observed in the UK (81%), France (80%), and the Netherlands (79%).

The only divisive issues showing a high priority are those related to the EU and immigration, which are considered a priority by three quarters of respondents. More in general, looking at the third column of the table, among positional issues those belonging to the cultural dimension (EU, immigration,

Table 1. Issues and goals in Germany by priority and support

Issue	Priority	Type	Dimension	Most supported goal	Support	Highest issue yield party
Fighting poverty of elderly	85.6%	Valence				SPD
Protect from terrorism	85.4%	Valence				CDU-CSU
Providing affordable homes	79.5%	Valence				SPD
Fighting crime	79.1%	Valence				CDU-CSU
Fight unemployment	77.0%	Valence				SPD
Stay in the EU or leave it	75.8%	Positional	CUIT	Stay in the EU	80.6%	CDU-CSU
Providing social justice	75.8%	Valence				SPD
Make immigration rules more restrictive or not	75.0%	Positional	CUIT	Make immigration rules more restrictive	76.8%	AFD
Use the current budget surplus for reducing taxes or for infrastructure and education	72.4%	Positional	ECON	The current budget surplus should be used in infrastructure and education	56.5%	SPD
Limit the number of refugees or accept more of them	71.9%	Positional	CUIT	Limit the number of refugees	74.6%	AFD
The EU has to enforce refugee quotas or each country should decide by its own	71.5%	Positional	CUIT	The EU has to enforce refugee quotas in all member states	71.3%	CDU-CSU
Protect the environment	71.3%	Valence				Greens
Keep the decision of nuclear power phase-out or withdraw from it	70.8%	Positional	CUIT	Keep the decision of nuclear power phase-out	80.6%	Greens
Minimal wages should be increased to 10 EUR or they should be abolished	69.6%	Positional	ECON	Minimal wages should be increased to a minimum of 10 EUR	84.4%	SPD
Increase pension age or keep it at current levels	69.5%	Positional	ECON	Keep current pension age	78.4%	Linke
Support for families and children	68.9%	Valence				SPD

Issue	Priority	Type	Dimension	Most supported goal	Support	Highest issue yield party
Foreigners should adapt to national culture or not	64.5%	Positional	CUIT	Require foreigners in Germany to fully adapt to national culture	73.3%	AFD
Maintaining infrastructure	64.3%	Valence				CDU-CSU
Reduce income differences or not	64.0%	Positional	ECON	Reduce income differences	74.1%	Linke
Support economic growth	63.7%	Valence				CDU-CSU
Deregulate the job market or keep current regulations	61.9%	Positional	ECON	Keep current regulations in the job market	81.0%	SPD
Diesel cars should be banned or not	61.2%	Positional	CUIT	No cars should be banned	58.0%	CDU-CSU
Building more wind turbines or not	55.1%	Positional	CUIT	Building more wind turbines	64.4%	Greens
Introduce possibilities for binding referenda or not	53.5%	Positional	CUIT	Introduce possibilities for binding referenda	77.3%	Linke
In order to maintain the EURO, Germany should transfer money to poorer countries or not	52.5%	Positional	ECON	Germany should not pay any money to poorer countries within the EURO zone	50.4%	AFD
Repeal gay marriages or keep them	42.7%	Positional	CUIT	Keep gay marriages	73.7%	Greens
Politics should implement gender quotas or not	40.4%	Positional	CUIT	Politics should implement gender quotas	57.5%	Greens

but also nuclear energy) appear to be more salient. The only salient economic issue concerns the choice over the current budget surplus, whether it should be used to cut taxes or to improve services. Finally, civil and social right issues (gay marriages, gender quotas, referenda) appear to have a low priority with the Germans, along with some environmental issues– such as wind turbines and the ban on diesel cars.

Moving now to the central section of the table, we are able to assess the preferences of German voters on positional issues. Specifically, beyond the priority assigned to the overall policy issue, we can verify which of the two relative rival goals is preferred, and by how much. In other words, we are able to appreciate where German voters stand on the various positional issues. The first element which clearly emerges is the presence of a significant number of issues on which one side is preferred by an overwhelming majority. In particular, seven goals have been indicated by more than 75% of the sample, which makes them “quasi-valence” issues. This is something unexperienced in the previously analysed countries, where the number of so-supported positional goals was much lower – 2 in the Netherlands, 3 in the UK; a little higher, but still lower than in Germany, in France (5). In Germany, then, more than in the other countries, it is appropriate to speak about a “German agenda” shared by the overwhelming majority of the electorate. Another piece of evidence to support this claim: among the 17 tested positional issues, only on 5 of them we observe the less supported rival goal being supported by more than 30% of the sample.

The scenario we have just outlined appears particularly favourable to the formation of a post-electoral coalition including different parties. What should be the political platform? From our data a surprising mix emerges, once again indicating that the *Zeitgeist* of this season is hardly understandable in the terms of the classical analytical dimensions of the 20th century politics. The German electorate seems to prefer a combination of economic protection, closure to immigrants, and staying in the EU. In other words, we note a peculiar combination of an economic left agenda (raising minimum wage, not increasing pension age, not deregulate the job market, and reducing income difference just below the 75% support threshold), with the demarcationist position on the cultural dimension ([Kriesi et al. 2006](#)) – making immigration rules more restrictive, limit the number of refugees, requiring foreigners to adapt to German culture. A picture pretty similar to the other countries, with a crucial difference, which makes the German case unique. While in France and in the Netherlands staying in the EU was a deeply divisive issue, supported in both cases by 62% of respondents (and even more so in the UK where only a minority supported it), in Germany more than four respondents out of five want to stay in the EU. The cultural objection to immigrants does not translate in a Euro-sceptical position, thus breaking

the demarcation-integration dimension. This is an extremely interesting finding, which proves that the schemes developed so far to study politics and its conflicts have become basically unable to represent the characteristics of the political competition of our time.

Among the (few) issues on which the German electorate is actually divided, we only find a single item with a high priority. This is the issue regarding the destination of the budget surplus, on which the 58% of respondents want to allocate to improve infrastructures and education—coherently with the general tendency of prevalence for left-wing economic goals. The remaining issues on which the two rival goals are supported by similar portion of the sample show a very low saliency: as such, they should be disregarded in strategic terms by parties intending to agree on a shared governmental policy platform.

Finally, let's have a look at the right column in Table 1, indicating the party with the highest generalized issue yield score on that issue. In other words, that is the party that should emphasize the issue more than any other during the electoral campaign to maximize its votes. It is not surprising that, on valence issues, the two mainstream parties (CDU-CSU and SPD) have the best yields: this is actually in line with the other countries in which we have conducted the study. The Chancellor's party is in the best position on fighting terrorism, crime, supporting economic growth, infrastructures; social-democrats have the edge on shared goals concerning social justice, unemployment, poverty, housing, and family and children. The only exception to the mainstream prevalence on valence issues is represented by the protection of the environment, on which (unsurprisingly) the Greens have the highest issue yield. Among positional goals a more relevant variation emerges. The CDU-CSU is the most apt party to emphasize its Europhilia, even more than the SPD which is led by the former President of the EU Parliament. On the second salient divisive issue (immigration), the right-wing populist party named Alternative for Germany (AFD) has the competitive advantage. It shows the highest yield on three items related to this domain – making immigration rules more restrictive, limit refugees, and requiring foreigners to culturally adapt. Looking at remaining parties, the Greens emerge as the party in the best position to talk about environment and social rights (nuclear energy, wind turbines, gay marriages and gender quotas); the Linke is the strongest party on redistribution issues (income inequality and pensions), but also on referenda; while the liberals of the FDP have the highest yield on no issue: whatever they decide to speak about, they favour some other party more than they help themselves.

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German elections, towards the Jamaica coalition?

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September 26, 2017

On Sunday, September 24, German voters went to the polls to elect the Bundestag. It was the fourth 2017 general election in an important country of the European Union, after the Netherlands ([De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), France ([Elie in this volume](#); [Paparo in this volume](#)) and the United Kingdom ([Emanuele and Marino in this volume](#)). The outcome of the German election was in line with opinion polls, though with some small surprises in the percentages gathered by the various parties. The CDU-CSU led by Chancellor Angela Merkel was clearly the most voted party as it was stated in the eve polls, but receiving a slightly lower vote percentage than the estimated one, while the radical-right euro-sceptic party Alternative for Germany (AFD) gained a bit more than expected. Table 1 reports the election results, both in terms of votes and seats, and the variations compared to the previous federal elections, held in 2013. Results (in both absolute numbers and in percentage terms) are separately reported for both the majoritarian, single-member-district arena and the proportional, party-vote arena. In fact, the German electoral system is a proportional electoral system with a majority-correction mechanism. The distribution of seats, and thus the determination of party relative strength in the Lower House (Bundestag), takes place on the basis of the proportion of votes received by parties at national level. There is also another vote, to choose a candidate in the single-member district that selects half of MPs creating a stronger relationship between voters and their representatives. Furthermore, there is a 5% threshold to access the proportional allocation of seats, that alters pure proportionality excluding small parties, which may still be represented in parliament by candidates who won their single-member district. In order to understand the strengths of the parties, therefore, we must look at votes to parties in the proportional arena. The CDU-CSU obtained roughly 33% of the vote, with a loss of 8.6 percentage points and 65 seats overall compared to the 2013 federal elections. The second party was the SPD of

the candidate Chancellor Martin Schulz, who on 20.5% achieved the worst result ever in a general election, dropping by 5.2 points and 40 overall seats compared to 2013. The third party was AFD achieving in turn a “historical” result – with 12.6% – and entering the Bundestag for the first time with a remarkable share of 94 seats. AFD was able to exploit the political space that had opened to the right of the CDU by taking strong anti-immigrants stances and sharply criticizing Merkel’s policy of welcoming refugees. This confirms the results of the analysis presented before the vote ([Emanuele and Paparo in this volume](#)), which showed that there was a widespread consensus in the German electorate for cultural ‘demarcation’ positions ([Kriesi et al. 2006](#)), such as making immigration rules more restrictive, limiting the number of refugees and requiring foreigners to adapt to German culture. The agenda on this dimension is quite similar to those already observed in the other countries where we conducted the survey – the Netherlands ([Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), France ([Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)) and the United Kingdom ([Emanuele in this volume](#)).

With regard to the results of the other parties that have obtained seats, the liberals of FDP have also done pretty well. They have more than doubled their vote percentage, from 4.7% in 2013 to 10.7% in 2017, with an increase of 80 overall seats – in 2013 they were out of the Bundestag having failed to meet the 5% threshold. Finally, the Radical Left Party (*Die Linke*) and the Greens obtained percentages similar to those of four years earlier (9.2% and 8.9% respectively), with a slight increase for both parties both in percentage and in terms of seats. In addition to the two major parties, then, (a record of) four additional political forces were able to overcome the 5% threshold and gain parliamentary representation. A further record is represented by the total number of MPs elected in this election. Thanks to the correction mechanism which, ensuring district winners with their seat, makes parliamentary groups representative of the party proportional vote nationwide, the number of members of the Bundestag is not fixed, but it must grow when the original 299 proportional seats are not sufficient to restore the necessary proportionality. In 2013, the additional seats were 33. This year, as many as 111, with an increase of 78. As a consequence, there will be a total of 709 MPs in the new legislature.

While Merkel’s party has lost many votes from 2013, scoring the worst electoral performance since 1949, it is also true that the second party (SPD) detachment has been remarkable (12.4 percentage points) and there is (almost) no doubt that Merkel will again lead the federal government. It will be her fourth consecutive term, which could take her to a total of 16 years in power, equalling the record held by Helmut Kohl. If it is clear then who the next Chancellor will be, it is unclear what the coalition formula that will support Frau Merkel will be. The electoral outcome tells us that there are two options to form the government: a repeat of the consolidated formula of the

Table 1. 2017 German legislative electoral results, variations from 2013

	Single-member districts						Party list						Total seats		
	Valid votes	%	+/-	Seats	+/-	%	Valid votes	%	+/-	Seats	+/-	%	N	+/-	%
CDU-CSU	17,283,408	37.3	-8.1	231	-5	77.3	15,315,576	32.9	-8.6	15	-60	3.7	246	-65	34.7
SPD	11,426,613	24.6	-4.8	59	1	19.7	9,538,367	20.5	-5.2	94	-41	23.0	153	-40	21.6
AFD	5,316,095	11.5	9.6	3	3	1.0	5,877,094	12.6	7.9	91	91	22.2	94	94	13.3
FDP	3,248,745	7.0	4.6	0	0	0.0	4,997,178	10.7	6.0	80	80	19.6	80	80	11.3
Linke	3,966,035	8.6	0.3	5	1	1.7	4,296,762	9.2	0.6	64	4	15.6	69	5	9.7
Greens	3,717,436	8.0	0.7	1	0	0.3	4,157,564	8.9	0.5	66	4	16.1	67	4	9.4
Others	1,422,306	3.1	-2.4	0	0	0.0	2,324,316	5.0	-1.2	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Total	46,380,638	100	0	299	0	100	46,506,857	100	0	410	78	100	709	78	100

‘*Große Koalition*’ with the SPD, or a ‘Jamaica’ coalition (for the colours of parties that would be part of it) with Greens and Liberals. At this time, the first option seems unlikely because of SPD unwillingness. Schulz, after eight years of grand coalitions in the last twelve, and several electoral defeats, would want to go to the opposition to rebuild and to not leave to AfD the monopoly of parliamentary opposition. In the Merkel years, minority partners of government coalitions have all been penalized in electoral terms, especially compared to the main government party expressing the head of the cabinet. Suffice it to mention that the FDP, which in the legislature from 2009 to 2013 had been the coalition partner of the Christian Democrats, in 2013 did not get any seats in the Bundestag for the first time in its history, while CDU obtained its best results since 1990, verging the majority of seats.

At this point, unless the SPD changes its mind, the most likely option at the moment is a ‘Jamaica’ coalition. But how politically viable is such a government formula? In other words, how compatible are the parties that would form it from the point of view of priorities and preferences their voters hold about those issues that are crucial in the German public debate? To answer this interesting research question, we can look at the data CISE collected in the days preceding the election through a CAWI survey on the German voting-age population within a larger comparative study (see [De Sio and Paparo in this volume](#)). As has already been the case for the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom, respondents have been asked to express their preference on a series of positional issues that refer to two rival goals, such as public services vs. taxes. Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the chosen goal. The questionnaire also included 10 valence issues ([Stokes 1963](#)), that is themes that refer to a shared objective, on which there is a general consensus (such as protection from terrorism). On these topics respondents are only asked to indicate priority, since a 100% consensus is assumed.

Table 2 summarizes the main results of the survey, indicating for each goal the type of issue it belongs to (whether it is positional or valence), its policy dimension (economic or cultural), and, for positional goals, also its direction (whether progressive or conservative). In addition, for each issue, the priority level assigned by voters of the different parties of a possible Jamaica coalition (CDU-CSU, FDP and Greens) is reported; and, for each positional issue, support among the party voters mentioned above is also reported for the specified goal. Finally, the last column on the right of the table lists the values of a priority index for a government supported by CDU-CSU, FDP and Greens, calculated as the weighted average of the priorities of the three different electorates – where priorities of the three electorate are weighed by the fraction of the parliamentary majority that each of the three parties have.

Starting from the priorities, we note that, as already noted for the German electorate as a whole ([Emanuele and Paparo in this volume](#)), the most impor-

tant themes are valence. In the first five places on the agenda of a possible ‘Jamaica’ government, there are as many valence issues – among which the need to fight the poverty of the elderly and terrorism. In general, there are no big differences between the electorates of the three parties with regard to the priority assigned to the various valence issues, if we except a greater attention on security issues for CDU-CSU and FDP voters than the voters of the Greens, which, on the contrary, show greater care (as expectable) for environmental protection and less attention to economic growth. But these can be described as nuances. Just consider that economic growth is not among the valence issues with the highest priority even among liberal and Christian-democratic voters.

Among positional issues, those characterized mainly by the cultural dimension (such as Europe and immigration, but also nuclear energy) show greater priority levels. In particular, the goal of staying in the EU has a level of priority among the three electorates which is even greater than the one shown by several valence issues and, above all, there is a high consensus (83% to 92%) in three electorates. Europeanism is therefore a goal that unifies voters of parties of a possible ‘Jamaica’ coalition, as it is also shown by the high priority and agreement levels received by the goal of the EU imposing a system of refugee quotas to member states. The agreement on solidarity between EU countries disappears when it comes to transferring money from Germany to poor countries in order to keep the euro. The majority of liberal voters opposes it, contrary to voters of the other two parties, in particular the Greens. However, it should be pointed out that this issue shows very low priority levels in the three electorates, as low (31%) is also the priority assigned by liberal voters to the opposite goal – of not financing the poorest countries in the Eurozone, on which, as anticipated, most agree (54%). Moreover, the opposition of the Liberals does not concern Europe in itself, but a more general attitude unfavourable to broadening public spending, in line with the party’s pro-market tradition, as shown by other issues that we will discuss later.

Among the most salient issues we have mentioned those related to nuclear power and immigrants. While the goal of maintaining the decision to abandon nuclear power is, like Europeanism, strongly supported by voters of all three parties (from 80% among liberals, up to 87% for Greens), and is therefore a factor making the birth a ‘Jamaica’ coalition possible, on goals such as “making immigration rules more restrictive”, “limiting the number of refugees”, “requiring foreigners to fully adapt to national culture”, it is more difficult to find a compromise. In fact, while the overwhelming majority of the CDU-CSU voters, and even more so, of the FDP take demarcationist stances, the majority of Greens voters disagree, having a more favourable attitude towards immigrants. Surely this is a potential friction point, especially if one considers that CDU-CSU has suffered the AfD competition on its right on

these issues. However, it should be considered that pro-immigrants goals, while being majoritarian among the Greens voters, are far from being unanimously supported or being considered as high priorities – with priority levels ranging from 27 to 33%, depending on the goal.

Economic issues show lower priority levels than cultural issues, with the exception of the goal of raising the minimum wage, among which there is a high agreement among the three electorates (it ranges from 77% of the Liberals to 87% of the Greens voters). In general, it is interesting to note that the electoral basis of the three parties are sufficiently compatible on economic issues, with a generalized agreement on progressive positions even among the CDU-CSU and FDP voters. The only economic issue that is divisive is the goal of using the current budget surplus to invest in infrastructure and education. While the vast majority of liberal voters are opposed (preferring to allocate this money to tax reduction instead), the vast majority of Greens voters (77%) agree, with CDU-CSU voters in an intermediate position (53% for public investments). Once again, FDP voters' negative attitude towards increasing public spending is confirmed, and this may be a friction, especially with the Greens. However, it should be said that this issue is not among those with the highest priority for voters of the FDP (34%).

Among the least important issues, there are some environmental issues (the construction of wind turbines and the use of diesel-fuelled vehicles), as well as civil rights (gay marriage and gender quotas) and the introduction of binding referendums. On these issues, however, there is a strong convergence between voters of the three parties, progressives on civil rights and direct democracy and careful to the environmental issue, with the exception of the possibility of using the cars powered by diesel. While nearly two-thirds of CDU-CSU and FDP voters agree not to ban diesel cars, the overwhelming majority of Greens voters are in favour of the ban (with a priority of 43%).

In conclusion, our analysis shows that building a 'Jamaica' coalition is not an impossible task, if we look at the compatibility of CDU-CSU, Greens and FDP electorates on a broad range of issues. Certainly, there are difficulties, which concern in particular the distinction between the Greens' voters and the voters of the other two parties on immigration issues and a specific environmental theme, as well as the distinction of liberal voters on certain economic issues related to public spending. However, there are many themes on which the different electorates are unified: not only valence issues (such as fighting poverty of the elderly, etc.), but also various positional issues, and in policy areas (such as the economy or civil rights) where you could expect greater compatibility problems. Above all, the main unifying factor is Europeanism, which is also considered a very salient topic. Furthermore, it should be noted that the electorate of the largest party, the CDU-CSU, always has at least one party (between the Greens and the Liberals) which they are com-

Table 2. Issues for the agenda of a possible Jamaica coalition government by priority and support

Goal	Type	Prog/ Cons	Dimen- sion	CDU-CSU		FDP		Greens		Governmental priority index
				Priority	Support	Priority	Support	Priority	Support	
Protect from terrorism	Valence			90%		94%		74%		88%
Fighting poverty of elderly	Valence			85%		84%		79%		84%
Fighting crime	Valence			81%		90%		68%		81%
Fight unemployment	Valence			81%		75%		68%		78%
Providing affordable homes	Valence			80%		74%		71%		77%
Stay in the EU	Positional	P	CULT P	77%	92%	75%	88%	68%	84%	75%
Protect the environment	Valence			69%		75%		86%		73%
Support for families and children	Valence			73%		72%		63%		71%
Providing social justice	Valence			70%		68%		76%		71%
Support economic growth	Valence			74%		70%		54%		70%
Maintaining infrastructure	Valence			66%		70%		65%		66%
Keep the decision of nuclear power phase-out	Positional	P	CULT P	63%	83%	59%	80%	70%	87%	63%
The EU has to enforce refugee quotas in all member states	Positional	P	CULT P	61%	83%	58%	78%	55%	83%	59%
Make immigration rules more restrictive	Positional	C	CULT C	62%	77%	72%	88%	27%	49%	58%
Minimal wages should be increased to a minimum of 10 EUR	Positional	P	ECON P	55%	79%	60%	77%	61%	87%	57%
Limit the number of refugees	Positional	C	CULT C	55%	78%	73%	86%	29%	48%	54%
Require foreigners in Germany to fully adapt to national culture	Positional	C	CULT C	53%	81%	67%	83%	29%	46%	52%

Goal	Type	Prog/ Cons	Dimen- sion	CDU-CSU			FDP			Greens			Governmental priority index
				Priority	Support	Priority	Support	Priority	Support	Priority	Support		
Keep current pension age	Positional	P	ECON P	51%	70%	48%	71%	52%	77%			51%	
Keep current regulations in the job market	Positional	P	ECON P	49%	80%	41%	68%	48%	84%			47%	
The current budget surplus should be used in infra-structure and education	Positional	P	ECON P	40%	53%	34%	48%	60%	71%			42%	
Reduce income differences	Positional	P	ECON P	40%	64%	45%	71%	48%	66%			42%	
Introduce possibilities for binding referendums	Positional	P	CULT P	35%	71%	57%	87%	40%	79%			40%	
Building more wind turbines	Positional	P	CULT P	32%	60%	39%	68%	54%	79%			37%	
No cars should be banned	Positional	C	CULT C	41%	63%	41%	64%	13%	29%			36%	
Keep gay marriages	Positional	P	CULT P	29%	73%	23%	64%	56%	87%			33%	
To maintain the EURO, Germany should transfer money to poorer countries	Positional	P	ECON P	28%	57%	19%	46%	32%	76%			27%	
Politics should implement gender quotas	Positional	P	CULT P	25%	57%	31%	54%	26%	65%			27%	

patible with, meaning that Merkel's party is never isolated against the other two. Finally, for the issues on which there is disagreement between the three electorates, preferences of the CDU-CSU voters are always in an intermediate position. The latter are certainly factors that can facilitate the search for possible compromises, art in which, among others, Angela Merkel famously excels.

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Austria 2017: conflict mobilization in a reconstructing political landscape

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October 9, 2017

On the 15th of October 2017, Austrian voters are called to the polls to elect a new parliament (*Nationalrat*). The snap elections were called immediately after Sebastian Kurz, the 31-year-old minister of foreign affairs succeeded Reinhold Mitterlehner as leader of the Christian democratic People's Party (ÖVP) in May 2017. Kurz's leadership and a new party brand ("The new People's party") lead to an enormous ascent in the polls for the party.¹ As of today, less than a week before the election, Kurz's way to the Austrian chancellorship appears to be rather sure.

Sebastian Kurz was successful in establishing himself in the eyes of media and many voters as representing a fresh approach to politics – even though he has been minister for Foreign Affairs and Integration since 2013 – with tough stances towards immigration. During the large inflow of migrants in 2015-16, the immigration issue was a strong driver of support for the radical-right Freedom party (FPÖ), which has had the lead in the polls since then. In recent months however, Kurz was able to take ownership of the immigration issue by conveying a clear anti-immigration position, thus eclipsing the FPÖ. The Social Democrats (SPÖ), the current chancellor party, is largely expected to fare in third place. The SPÖ had hoped that the appeal of its new leader, Christian Kern – until May 2016 manager of the public railway with little political experience – would grow as the campaign intensified. However, due to a series of missteps in the election campaign and given the strong focus of the campaign on immigration, issues clearly owned by Kurz and the FPÖ, the support for the SPÖ has deteriorated and remained behind the other two main parties.

¹ Source: neuwat.com

An online CAWI survey study conducted by the Department of Government at the University of Vienna in the context of a broader comparative research project (see [De Sio and Paparo in this volume](#)) of the Italian Centre for Electoral Studies (CISE) provides a snapshot of the preferences and priorities of the Austrian electorate (Kritzinger and Plescia 2017). Similarly, to what has recently been done for Dutch ([Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume](#)), French ([Emanuele, De Sio and Michel in this volume](#)), British ([Emanuele in this volume](#)), and German elections ([Emanuele and Paparo in this volume](#)), respondents in Austria were asked to express their support on a wide set of positional issues (these are divisive issues that refer to two rival goals, e.g. public spending vs. tax cuts). Specifically, each respondent was asked to position herself on a 6-point scale where the respective poles represent the two rival goals to be pursued on a given issue. Later, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the selected goal for each of these issues. The questionnaire also included ten valence issues, namely issues that refer to one shared goal (e.g., fight unemployment, fight against corruption). On these issues, respondents were asked to attribute their level of priority.

Table 1 summarizes the main findings from the CAWI survey, reporting the ten most salient issues among the overall Austrian electorate, the party that “owns” the issue, and the party with the highest generalized issue yield score on that issue. Issue ownership refers to the idea that parties have long-standing reputations for competence and the ability of handling certain issues ([Petrocik 1996](#)); the issue yield score, based on the issue yield theory ([De Sio and Weber 2014](#)), measures the favourability for the party of campaigning on that issue.

Table 1 unsurprisingly shows that, as in much of the rest of the countries included in the comparative project, valence issues such as fighting unemployment, crime and protecting from terrorism receive the top levels of priority in Austria. These valence issues tap both immigration and welfare issue and score equally well. Interestingly, the issue of terrorism is very salient although Austria has not been subject to terrorist attacks directly. Various court cases and police operations against IS warriors from Austria may be responsible for this high issue importance. Turning to the positional issues, those related to immigration score high, including asylum rules and refugee quotas as well as issues related to social welfare connected to immigrants (i.e. restricting access welfare benefits for immigrants).

The issue ownership column in Table 1 lists the party the electorate thinks is the most competent in handling a specific issue. We clearly see that the three main parties, SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ control almost all salient issues. The only exception is the issue of corruption that is controlled by Liste Pilz. Peter Pilz – a long-standing MP for the Greens with a well-known reputation as “corruption fighter” – has formed its own party in June 2016 after intra-party conflicts within the Greens.

Table 1. List of issues with the highest priority included in the survey

Issue	Type	Priority	Ownership	Issue yield
Fight unemployment	Valence	84%	SPÖ	SPÖ
Fight crime	Valence	83%	FPÖ	FPÖ
Protect from terrorism	Valence	82%	FPÖ	ÖVP
Make current asylum rules more restrictive (or keep them)	Positional	82%	ÖVP	FPÖ
Control immigration	Valence	82%	FPÖ	FPÖ
Fighting poverty of elderly	Valence	81%	SPÖ	SPÖ
The EU has to enforce refugee quotas to member states (or not)	Positional	81%	FPÖ	NEOS
Providing affordable homes	Valence	80%	SPÖ	SPÖ
Fight corruption	Valence	80%	PILZ	PILZ
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants (or not)	Positional	79%	FPÖ	FPÖ

Data from a CAWI survey conducted in Austria in September 2017, probability sample with N=853.

The most-right column in Table 1 indicates the party with the highest generalized issue yield score on that issue. In other words, this is the party, which should emphasize that specific issue the most during the electoral campaign to maximize its votes. It is not surprising to observe that the three largest parties (SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ) have the best yields: this is in line with the other countries in the project. In particular, Table 1 shows that the ÖVP and FPÖ have the highest yield on most of the issues that have priority for the electorate – all related to immigration issues. Importantly, so far, the ÖVP and FPÖ have been successful in keeping the election campaign focused on precisely these topics. On the other hand, the SPÖ has been unable to raise interest on the issues with its highest yield like unemployment and affordable homes: this explains why the FPÖ and the ÖVP are currently in the lead in the polls while the SPÖ is struggling to increase its support. One exception to the mainstream prevalence on salient issues is represented by the fight on corruption, on which the Liste Pilz has the highest issue yield. On the issue of refugee quotas, the liberal NEOS have the best yield. While this party attribution may seem surprising, it in fact reflects the strong advocacy by the NEOS for a European-wide solution to solve the immigration issue. Apart from these two exceptions, the three smaller parties, i.e. Liste Pilz, the Greens and the NEOS, never show the highest yield: this means that whatever they decide to

talk about during the election campaign, they may favour some other party more than they help themselves. Overall, the various ways of analysing issues show that the issues dominating the Austrian electoral campaign are clearly helping the two parties on the right of the ideological spectrum – the ÖVP and FPÖ – reflected on their current lead of the opinion polls.

The proportional system in Austria makes a coalition agreement a necessary step in the formation of the government. Giving the unwillingness of the ÖVP and the SPÖ to form a grand coalition again, and given that the ÖVP and the FPÖ remain closer to each other in terms of policy platforms, a result in line with current polls would be a coalition consisting of the ÖVP and the FPÖ, with Sebastian Kurz taking up the position of chancellor. Austria would then have the youngest head of government in Europe ruling together with one of the most successful far-right populist party in Europe mostly focused on the various issues related to immigration. Which repercussions this will have on the old conflict line including economic and social welfare issues remains to be seen.

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2017 Austrian election: A move to the right

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November 3, 2017

The major winners of the 2017 Austrian election held on October 15 were the parties on the right of the ideological spectrum. The Christian democratic People's Party (ÖVP) obtained 31.5 per cent of votes, coming in first place and increasing its vote share by more than 7 percentage points and obtaining 15 parliamentary seats more compared to the last general election held in 2013. Despite being unable to secure the second position and to equal the all-time high election results of 1999, the populist far right Freedom party (FPÖ) increased its vote share since 2013 by 5.5 points to 26 per cent. Hence, combined, the two parties on the right of the ideological spectrum reached a total of 57.5 per cent of the votes (see Table 1). The incumbent chancellor party, the Social Democrats (SPÖ), gained 26.9 per cent in a head-on-head race against the FPÖ.

The biggest surprise of the election night was the debacle of the Greens. One of the most successful Green parties of Europe (Dolezal 2016), the Greens were unable to make it into the Parliament– the first time since they first entered the Parliament in 1986. In the end, the Greens received 3.8 per cent of the vote, 8.6 percentage points less than in the previous elections and below the 4 per cent electoral threshold. The relatively new party NEOS who campaigned for the first time in 2013 managed to slightly increase its vote share securing one additional mandate to the 9 won in 2013. The spinoff of the Greens, Liste Peter Pilz, in its first appearance in a general election managed to enter the Parliament. Turnout was 80 per cent which represents a substantial increase of about 5 percentage points from 2013 (see Table 1) hence halting and even reversing the downturn tendency observed in recent elections in Austria (Kritzinger et al. 2013).

As discussed before the elections in [Plescia, Kritzinger and Oberluggauer in this volume](#), the new and young leader of the ÖVP, Sebastian Kurz, has been successful during the election campaign in establishing himself in the eyes of media and many voters as representing a fresh approach to politics with tough stances towards immigration. Just before the elections, Kurz was able to “steal” ownership of the immigration issue by conveying a clear anti-immigra-

Table 1. Results Austrian National Council (15 October 2017)

	2017		Change from 2013	
	Seats (N)	Votes (%)	Seats (N)	Votes (%)
Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	62	31.5	+15	+7.5
Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ)	52	26.9	0	+0.1
Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)	51	26.0	+11	+5.5
NEOS – The New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS)	10	5.3	+1	+0.3
Peter Pilz List	8	4.4	new	new
The Greens – The Green Alternative (GRÜNE)	0	3.8	-24	-8.6
My Vote Counts! (Gilt!)	0	1.0	new	new
Communist Party of Austria Plus (KPÖ)	0	0.8	0	-0.2
Others	0	0.5	0	-9.8
Total	183	100%		
Turnout (%)		80		+5.1

Source: Federal Ministry of the Interior.

tion position, thus eclipsing the FPÖ. Furthermore, Kurz worked hard during the election campaign in showing his competence and credibility in dealing with the immigration issue, credibility he gained during the refugee crisis in 2015 when he led a cross-country alliance, which allowed the closure of the so-called Balkan route and thereby holding back a further influx of refugees. The election campaign has been dominated by issues related to the immigration, both in terms of containing the number of refugees and restricting the access to welfare benefits for immigrants (Bodlos and Plescia 2018). The strong attention to the immigration issues eclipsed other themes such as social welfare and unemployment on which the SPÖ had historically the highest competence.

As soon as the election results have become official on October 20, the Austrian president Alexander Van der Bellen instructed Sebastian Kurz to form a new government. A few days after, Kurz started formal talks with all party leaders including chancellor Kern from the SPÖ. However, a renewal of a SPÖ-ÖVP coalition government was very unlikely due to the increased tension between the two former coalition partners that has led to an increasingly fractious outgoing administration. Kern in fact announced on Monday, 23 October, that his party, the SPÖ, would prepare for opposition. On October 24, official coalition talks started with the FPÖ. Though coalition negotiations only started very recently, an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition looks like the likeliest outcome of the hard-fought 2017 Austrian election campaign.

Table 2. List of issues with the highest priority included in the survey¹

Issue	Type	Priority (%)			
		All voters	ÖVP	FPÖ	GOV ^a
Fight unemployment	Valence	84	86	85	86
Fight crime	Valence	83	87	94	91
Protect from terrorism	Valence	82	84	97	91
Keep current asylum rules or make them more restrictive	Positional	82	85	96	91
Control immigration	Valence	82	91	97	94
Fighting poverty of elderly	Valence	81	80	87	84
The EU has to enforce refugee quotas or each country should decide by its own	Positional	81	53	51	52
Providing affordable homes	Valence	80	76	80	78
Fighting corruption	Valence	80	78	82	80
Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants or not	Positional	79	83	95	89
Stay in the EU or leave it	Positional	78	81	41	61
Providing social justice	Valence	78	78	80	79
Foreigners should fully adapt to Austrian culture or not	Positional	77	77	92	85
Protect the environment	Valence	76	76	69	73
Support economic growth	Valence	74	82	79	81

^a GOV: Government, as mean for the ÖVP and FPÖ electorates.

¹ Data from a CAWI survey conducted in Austria in September 2017; probability sample with N=853.

Table 2 summarizes the main findings from an online CAWI survey study conducted during the election campaign by the Department of Government at the University of Vienna in the context of a broader comparative research project (see [De Sio and Paparo in this volume](#)) of the Italian Centre for Electoral Studies (CISE) (Kritzinger and Plescia 2017). The table reports the fifteen issues with the highest priority for the overall Austrian electorate and for the electorates of the respective parties, the ÖVP and the FPÖ. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate the priority they assign to the selected goal for each of these issues. The issues classified as valence issues refer to one shared goal (e.g., fight unemployment, fight against corruption). Positional issues represent divisive issues that refer to two rival goals, e.g. public spending vs. tax cuts. Two important remarks can be derived from Table 2.

First, in terms of priorities, the ÖVP and the FPÖ electorates are very much in line with one another. The only issue on which the two electorates diverge is the issue of leaving or staying in the EU since the FPÖ electorate has a much lower priority compared to that of the ÖVP. Second, the mean priority of the two electorates bundled in the column “GOV” in Table 2 shows that the priorities of government voters are not off from those of the Austrian voters on several issues including fighting unemployment, crime and corruption. The priority of the government electorate is higher however, than that of the entire electorate on issues more closely connected to immigration such as control for immigration and foreigners’ adaptation to Austrian culture. Thus, if the two likely parties in government aim at following closely the priorities of those who voted for them, then a new government between the ÖVP and FPÖ will mostly focus on the various issues related to immigration. Which repercussions this will have on the old conflict line including economic and social welfare issues as well as on how pleased the overall electorate will be remains to be seen.

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Conclusion: The rise of (not all) challengers? Similar public opinion, different party strategies¹

Lorenzo De Sio and Aldo Paparo

In this volume we have collected the contributions published on the CISE website (<http://cise.luiss.it>) belonging to the comparative issue competition project we launched in early 2017, which has covered five major Western European democracies holding their general elections in 2017 – the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria.

Building on issue yield theory and its most recent developments (De Sio 2010; De Sio and Weber 2014; De Sio, Franklin and Weber 2016; De Sio, De Angelis and Emanuele 2017), we developed a comparative research design investigating public opinion preferences on positional and valence issues, as well as party opportunity structures on the same issues. This data will constitute the basis for a systematic scientific investigation of party competition patterns in Western Europe (see the Introduction). However, preliminary evidence already provides meaningful insights to the discussion of electoral prospects before the elections, and of electoral outcomes after them.

In short, we collected individual-level data through CAWI surveys in the different aforementioned five countries. Similar questionnaires have been designed in each country to include those issues actually relevant in its electoral campaign. Except for the different issue selection, surveys were absolutely identical. They all asked respondents, along with a classic series of sociodemographic and voting survey questions, to indicate the priority for a list of valence issues, concerning the achievement of shared goals (Stokes 1963); and to specify parties deemed credible to achieve each goal. Furthermore, all surveys

¹ This text is original for this volume.

included a series of positional issues as well, on which respondents had to state their preferred goal out of two rival ones, and then, just as for valence goals, indicate the goal priority and the parties deemed credible for the selected goal. Although with wording variations, due to the specific national issue framing and content, all surveys included batteries of items investigating the same policy domains, such as the economy, immigration, the EU, the environment, cultural and social issues.

Interestingly, the general public opinion orientations emerging from our analyses appear to be quite similar across the observed countries. First of all, we noticed that valence issues are at the top of the agenda in all national cases. Only seldom we find positional issues being so salient to reach high quarters of issue priority rankings, replacing the least salient valence issues. All of these particularly prominent positional issues were related to immigrants or the EU.

Here comes another interesting piece of evidence shared by the different countries: the general anti-immigrant wind blowing across Europe. Of course, there are national variations in the intensity of this hostility. Nevertheless, in all countries strong majorities of the electorate prefer cultural demarcation goals to those of cultural integration, in the terms developed by Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008). This is true looking at the number of immigrants or refugees who should be allowed to enter; looking to the rules regulating their access and presence; and finally even when looking at issues of cultural assimilation. Voters want less immigrants and that those who do migrate adapt to the national culture. And such preference is frequently quite large: in different countries, between two-thirds and four-fifths of the electorate believe that foreigners should adapt; while roughly three-quarters want more restrictive immigration rules. Furthermore, they also desire a restriction in welfare benefits for immigrants: between 70 and 82% in different countries, with the mere exception of the Dutch case where ‘only’ 50% supports welfare chauvinism (Emanuele, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume).

Interestingly, a further common trait across the selected countries is the prevalence, on economic matters, of social-democratic choices. For instance, consistently across all five countries, between 71 and 75% of respondents favoured reducing income differences. A reduction of pension age is desired by two thirds of French and Dutch voters, while in Germany and Austria three quarters of the sample prefer keeping current pension age over its increase. Just to provide an understanding of how deep this leaning towards left-wing economic proposals, we shall mention that two thirds of British voters favour nationalizing the railways (Emanuele in this volume), or that 57% of German voters prefer to spend the budget surplus to increase services rather than cutting taxes (Emanuele and Paparo in this volume).

These are only first empirical elements that deserve further investigation. However, it is hard not to see both orientation as political consequences of

contemporary, large-scale transformation processes which can be seen by citizens as cultural or economic threats. These voter preferences appear to be particularly challenging for mainstream parties, on both the left and the right, which are – perhaps inevitably – mostly supportive of such transformations. It is worth mentioning that our data clearly show what has been (in recent decades, and still is) the strategy pursued by mainstream parties: that of leveraging their superior credibility on valence issues. As mentioned, valence goals are the most salient, and mainstream parties do manage to still be considered the most credible on reaching them. However, this strategy opens up large political spaces for challenger political entrepreneurs exploiting the gaps between voters’ preferences and mainstream parties’ stances on positional, divisive issues. Looking outside the borders of our investigation, even the whole Trump phenomenon could be seen as a manifestation of this pattern.

In a way, such gaps are already testified by the quantitative evidence emerging from our analyses. Our data clearly show the loss of credibility for social-democratic mainstream parties in achieving classical social-democratic goals on the economy, on which challenger left parties emerged as way more credible. Symmetrically, on the right, mainstream parties have not emerged as the most credible option to achieve demarcation goals, overtaken by radical right-wing alternatives.

For instance, we highlighted, *before* the elections, the particularly problematic prospects for the French Socialist Party (Paparo, De Sio and Michel in this volume), and the Dutch Labour Party (Paparo, De Sio and van Ditmars in this volume), whose poor electoral results became, in perspective, not completely surprising, in light of their low credibility rates on classical left-wing policy goals. However, we were also able to spot exceptions to this general pattern. Particularly in the United Kingdom, where the two mainstream parties appear to have more adequately reacted to the challenges to party system stability, emerging as a consequence of contemporary transformations. Thanks to May’s stance on the hard Brexit and Corbyn’s platform on the economy, Tories and Labour have defended their credibility from challengers on cultural demarcation and economic redistribution goals respectively, and are today the only mainstream parties perceived as credible not only on shared goals, but also on the positional goals supported by the majority of Britons (Paparo in this volume(a)).

We should also mention the different strategic choices selected by conservative mainstream actors in continental Europe. Mark Rutte in the Netherlands and Sebastian Kurz in Austria have implemented an imitative strategy, incorporating cultural demarcation goals in their electoral platforms, and have been quite successful in containing the feared *exploit* by radical right-wing parties – Geert Wilders and his PVV in the Netherlands, and Heinz-Christian Strache and his FPÖ in Austria. On the contrary, in France

and Germany, François Fillon and Angela Merkel made a different choice. The chancellor maintained a 'Christian' approach to the refugee issue, and immigration more in general. Macron assumed instead a profile much more centred on economic *laissez-faire*, in addition to his support for European integration (De Sio and Paparo in this volume). It is probably not a coincidence, then, that the electoral advances for radical right-wing parties have been more relevant in these two countries.

Of course, these are just some highlights of the vast amount of preliminary empirical results collected in this volume, which includes some more detailed analyses on specific aspects of particular interest, such as the origin of Macron voters' in France (Paparo in this volume(b)) or the details of district-level competition in the UK (Emanuele and Marino in this volume). Here, we have tried to summarize some common indications, which might be useful reference points in approaching future elections in Western Europe, starting with the imminent Italian legislative elections. While the data collected in this project (including the Italian elections) will be fully exploited in a still forthcoming collective contribution, we definitely believe that this volume already contributes to a better understanding of the changing issue competition landscape in Western Europe, as testified by the electoral developments of these five countries in 2017.

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The year of challengers?

Issues, public opinion, and elections in Western Europe in 2017

edited by Lorenzo De Sio and Aldo Paparo

Within the seven-month period going from mid-March to mid-October of 2017, five Western-European democracies held their general elections: the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria. This provided an exceptional opportunity to study public opinion structures in these countries in the particularly turbulent context that followed disruptive electoral developments such as the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump. To exploit this opportunity, the CISE launched an innovative comparative research project to empirically assess before the elections the preferences of different national electorates on a variety of policy issues; to map issue opportunity structures available to political parties; and to interpret electoral results and potential government coalitional prospects in the lenses of these freshly collected data.

While deep national differences emerge, our investigation also highlights common traits. All across Europe, public opinion seems to share a general consensus over a few key orientations. First of all, attitudes unfavorable to immigration. In each country, strong majorities support positions of cultural demarcation, when confronted with binary choices. Secondly, voters appear to desire a certain degree of socio-economic protection from the negative consequences of contemporary economic transformations. This is a general picture, which mainstream parties have often failed to recognize, or, at the very least, to rationally react to. In particular, classical social-democratic parties no longer appear the first option for voters interested in economic redistribution; while traditional conservative parties have lost credibility on cultural demarcation. However, there are remarkable exceptions to this pattern. In particular in the UK, where both mainstream parties have been able to maintain their credibility as capable of delivering traditional social-democratic and conservative goals – such as economic protection and cultural homogeneity, respectively. Clearly, the first-past-the-post electoral system has helped British major parties to protect their votes from challenger raids. Nevertheless, similar cases are also present in continental Europe, in pure proportional systems. Namely, Mark Rutte in the Netherlands and Sebastian Kurz in Austria; who have proved electorally successful for their center-right parties by incorporating cultural demarcation in their platforms, thus limiting the expansion of radical right-wing alternatives (such as those of Geert Wilders' and Heinz-Christian Strache's parties). These are just a few highlights of a much larger amount of research collected in this volume, which also presents post-electoral notes for each of the included countries, as well as some specific in-depth contributions on electoral forecasting or result analysis.