

Political parties with less interest in an issue more likely to take radical stance

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Political parties who care less about an issue will take more extreme stances on it when drawing up policies to appeal to the electorate—and it can pay off at the ballot box.

Research from Lancaster University and the University of Hagen, published in *European Economic Review*, shows parties can take radically different [policy](#) positions on an issue despite receiving the same information on which to base their stances. And it is those parties which have less of a stance on an issue initially which will take the more radical position when it comes to producing a platform, regardless of the information they have received.

Parties have access to information that the voters may not have, and when using this to shape their election pledges and subsequent policies, the research found that one will usually adopt a radical stance on an issue and the other a moderate policy position.

The researchers discovered that if both parties take a stance, then one will adopt a 'pandering' approach, offering a platform close to what it views as the optimal policy in terms of gaining votes, while the other party will take an 'anti-pandering' stance closer to its original ideals. However, if only one party is sufficiently motivated to take a stance, they will be the moderate party.

The researchers looked at positions of [political parties](#) in Western Europe on involvement in the 2003 Iraq War, on climate change and on

nuclear power in Germany. They found that, if both parties take a stance and take the same general side on an issue, it can be the party with the more radical approach which gains most support.

"Our research helps to explain why, even where parties are given identical signals with regards to a policy, they can diverge, with the emergence of moderate and radical parties," said co-author Dr. Renaud Foucart, of Lancaster University Management School.

"What we found with our model was that where two parties took a stance on an issue, there would be one more moderate and one more radical, but if only one did, this would be the one with the moderate stance. This implies that it is parties who care least about policies who will make the more audacious, radical proposals on issues while those who care most will not alter their positions.

"There is the possibility that the extreme party is taking this position in an attempt to win an election, rather than because they have any prior belief in their platform, as they pander to voters.

"Our model, when we looked at both the issues of the UK entering into the Iraq War in 2003 and with approaches to nuclear power in Germany, found that the extreme policy is chosen by the electorate when the moderate party goes in the same direction.

"In the Iraq war example, the UK went to war because both main parties—Labour and the Conservatives—were to some extent conveying the message that it makes sense to do so.

"In the nuclear power example, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Christian Democratic Party (CDU) dramatically changed their stance following the Fukushima disaster in Japan from supporting the continuation of atomic power to a quick phase-out. She was able close

all [nuclear power](#) plants at once because her political opponents the SPD took a more moderate stance on the same side of the argument and believed nuclear electricity should be phased out gradually. "

He added: "Even interested voters cannot be well informed about every conceivable policy. They have to rely on representatives and experts to provide information, and parties signal the information they have via their platforms—with the more attractive elected.

"Parties take the more moderate or extreme [position](#), but our model shows that voters are able to deduce which party is conveying the more credible message."

More information: Renaud Foucart et al, (Almost) efficient information transmission in elections, *European Economic Review* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.euroecorev.2019.07.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2019.07.005)

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