

# Reining in the Rascals: How Representation Mainstreams Extreme Parties

Frederik Hjorth\*    Jacob Nystrup†    Martin Vinæs Larsen‡

Prepared for presentation at the 2020 Annual Meeting  
of the American Political Science Association

This version: September 3, 2020

[Link to latest version](#)

Extreme parties, once challenging established political systems, have in recent years entered into governing coalitions. However, the process by which extreme parties gain access to power remains unclear. We focus on the role of prior political representation, hypothesizing that extreme parties with a record of representation are more likely to enter a government coalition. Compiling a dataset of more than 2,500 local elections and 15,000 committee assignments from local governments in Denmark, we show first that extreme parties are initially excluded from power, gaining access only gradually. We then use a regression discontinuity design to show that prior political representation increases extreme parties' access to government power. Lastly, we use text data from electoral platforms to investigate the mechanism underpinning this effect, showing that extreme parties with prior representation use more moderate language. Our findings shed new light on the process driving the mainstreaming of extreme parties.

---

\* Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Copenhagen

† DPhil Candidate in Politics, Nuffield College, University of Oxford

‡ Associate Professor of Political Science, Aarhus University

European party politics are changing. The past four decades have seen the gradual decline of establishment parties and the increasing electoral success of 'challenger' parties, often emerging as radical left or radical right parties (De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Mair 2013). Today, parties of the radical left and right, which we refer to jointly as 'extreme parties', are a staple of most European national party systems (Minkenberg 2013). In fact, extreme parties have in many cases gone beyond political representation to enter government as coalition partners (Akkerman 2012; Katsourides 2016; Twist 2019).

Yet whereas the phenomenon of extreme parties entering government is descriptively clear, our understanding of its causes is not. Existing research persuasively highlights the role of office- and policy-maximizing motives of mainstream parties: once governments including extreme parties become mathematically possible, mainstream parties are willing to include extreme parties as a means of forming government (De Lange 2012). However, coalition politics theories are only partially able to account for when extreme parties are included in government (Ibid.).

In this paper, we focus on a relatively overlooked factor: prior political representation. Beyond their size, leadership and the polity's political culture, we argue that parties gain access to power by familiarizing themselves with the day-to-day of holding elected office and making compromises. Political representation in itself readies extreme parties and their representatives for entering government, making them more likely to enter the governing coalition. We provide evidence for this using a regression discontinuity design, allowing us to isolate the causal effect of prior political representation on government participation, holding all other confounding factors constant. Relying on a novel data set covering more than 2,500 local elections and local government formation processes in Denmark, we document that a record of representation does indeed increase extreme parties' probability of entering government.

Our results contribute to the literature on extreme party mainstreaming, providing causally credible evidence on the mainstreaming effect of political representation, and, more broadly, to the literature on government formation processes.

# 1 Representation and Extreme Party Mainstreaming

Existing work on coalition formation processes generally does not assign a key role to prior representation in parliament when explaining why extreme parties are represented in government. As shown in this article, extreme parties with previous representation in parliament are more likely to be included in government. To contextualize our findings, we first present two prominent theoretical perspectives producing distinct predictions about coalition formation. Using these as a stepping stone, we discuss the role of prior representation in explaining why extreme parties are represented in government.

## 1.1 *Office-oriented theories*

First, we consider a class of theories commonly referred to as *office-oriented theories* of coalition formation. Going back to Von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944), these theories model the coalition formation process as a game in which parties have to divide the prize of holding office. This leads them to expect a “minimal winning coalition”, i.e. a coalition excluding any parties that do not contribute to the winning status of the coalition (Von Neumann and Morgenstern 1944, 436).

One theoretical weakness in this original version is that in most cases there are a substantial number of coalitions predicted by this theory. Later researchers developed office-oriented theories designed to limit the set of predictions. Riker’s (1962) “minimum seats” theory expects that coalitions will have the smallest number of seats over 50 percent and Leiserson’s (1968) “minimum parties” expects the smallest number of parties possible in a coalition.

Notably, these theories are policy-blind and assign no role to prior representation. They therefore expect that extreme parties will be as likely as non-extreme parties to be included in government, holding the number of seats constant, and that any exclusion of extreme parties can be explained in terms of their size. We now turn to a class of theories challenging this assumption.

## 1.2 *Party stigma theories*

A set of theories which we refer to here as *party stigma theories* highlight the distinct reputational costs to mainstream parties of including parties perceived to be ‘beyond the pale’ (Bale 2003;

De Lange 2012; Twist 2019; Van Spanje 2010). Party stigma theories predict that extreme parties will effectively be considered “unavailable” in the coalition formation process because mainstream parties consider their inclusion morally objectionable to include these extreme parties.

Party stigma theories contribute to explaining coalition formation processes in cases like Belgium, Germany and Sweden, where a ‘cordon sanitaire’ has effectively excluded parties like *Vlaams Belang*, *Alternative für Deutschland*, and *Sverigedemokraterna* from power (Akkerman and Rooduijn 2015; Downs 2002). However, because party stigma theories consider stigma to be an essentially fixed property of party brands, they struggle to explain why extreme parties are sometimes let into power (though see Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn 2016). At minimum, the concept of “unavailable” coalitions would need to be supplied with a theory of when extreme parties are no longer perceived as unavailable.

### *1.3 The role of prior representation*

We focus on the role of extreme parties’ prior representation. Because we compare extreme parties with and without prior representation, but of the same size and pivotality, office-oriented theories cannot explain the effect of prior representation. By the same token, because we consider the same parties in one country in the course of a few elections, neither can party national-level party stigma. This naturally raises the question of why prior representation is uniquely important in helping extreme parties access the government. We highlight two theoretically plausible mechanisms here.

First, representation may pave the way to government because local mainstream parties familiarize themselves with elected officials of extreme parties, who in the process become more palatable as governing partners. We refer to this mechanism as *desensitization*. Desensitization may in turn reflect a combination of personal acquaintance with elected officials of extreme parties and mere familiarity through repeated exposure. Crucially, the desensitization mechanism implies that representation helps extreme parties access government without changes in their policy positions.

To be sure, desensitization may in some sense be interpreted as simply reduced party stigma. However, existing theories emphasizing party stigma refer to parties’ national-level reputations,

policy positions, and organizational affiliation, all of which we hold constant by design. Moreover, desensitization may reflect learning about individual elected officials' government competence, entirely independent of party reputation. For this reason we consider desensitization a mechanism theoretically distinct from reduced party stigma.

Alternatively, representation may cause extreme parties themselves to shift toward the mainstream, a mechanism we refer to as *policy moderation*. Several classic theories of coalition formation predict that policy moderation will improve a party's chances of entering government. Axelrod's (1970) minimal connected winning coalition predicts that the parties will be ideologically 'connected' in the sense that all members will be adjacent to each other in the policy dimension. Another, but similar idea, is the theory of minimal range coalitions, which predicts that the coalition, which will form is the minimal winning coalition with the smallest range in the policy space (Swaan 1973). These policy-oriented theories of coalition formation share the assumption that actors desire to go into government are motivated by a desire to set their preferred policy once in office. This means that parties prefer to go into a coalition with ideologically similar parties.

Consistent with these policy-oriented theories, prior research has found that right wing parties are indeed likely to be included when they are ideologically proximate to the mainstream right (De Lange 2012; Twist 2019). However, prior work offers neither theory nor evidence suggesting that representation may itself drive policy moderation.

Though our design allows us to credibly estimate the effect of representation on government participation, our design is a 'black box' insofar as it does not reveal the mechanism driving the observed effect (Imai et al. 2011). As a consequence, we are not able to adjudicate the relative role of desensitization vis-à-vis policy moderation as causal mechanisms. However, in section 4.2 below we present evidence from party platforms showing that extreme parties with prior representation take more moderate positions compared to extreme parties without prior representation. This suggests that the observed effect of representation is at least in part driven by policy moderation.

## **2 Empirical setting: Extreme party entry in Danish local governments**

We study coalition formation processes in Danish local governments. The structure of local government in Denmark offers a number of advantages in terms of studying extreme party entry.

With respect to examining party politics at the local rather than national level, studying local government offers at least two advantages (Laver and Schofield 1998, 9). First, it increases the number of cases, which enables us to use statistical methods that are hard to use when analyzing coalition formation on the national level. Second, political culture and institutions – broadly speaking, the institutional context of the coalition process – are important for coalition formation outcomes (Laver 1989; Laver and Schofield 1998). By focusing on local governments within the same country, we are able to hold this institutional context constant by design.

We focus on Denmark, as the Danish local government system can be described as a “political system in miniature” (John 2001), where both the party system, the electoral system and the system for forming a government resembles the national political system. Furthermore, local politics are of high importance and the municipal council has significant leeway to conduct and implement policies, while there is a significant financial compensation for being a part of the governing coalition, meaning that both policy- and office gains are relevant. Thus, perhaps, Denmark has the ideal local political system to investigate the political representation of extreme parties.

Below, we lay out this context in more detail, laying out how local governments work in Denmark, the coalition formation process and which extreme parties we focus on.

### *2.1 Local Governments in Denmark*

Denmark is characterized by having the most decentralized public sector in Europe, and local public spending is 32 percent of GDP (Eurostat 2017; Sellers and Lidström 2007). Local governments are responsible for important public services such as schools, local infrastructure, some types of social benefits, elderly care, child care and cultural events. The municipalities are, within certain restrictions, free to set the local income tax rate and have wide discretion in most policy areas (Lassen and Serritzlew 2011).

The importance of local governments is manifest in the local elections, which take place every four years and are heavily contested. They receive much attention from national parties, the media and the voters. This is reflected in the turnout, which consistently has been high: in 2017, the most recent round of local elections, turnout was at 70.6 percent (Hansen 2017).

There are currently 98 municipalities in Denmark, each with their own elected city council. However, the number of municipalities have varied over the time. In 1970 a municipality reform was implemented, where the number of municipalities were reduced from around 1300 to 277, while another reform in 2005 reduced the number of municipalities further from to 98 (Blom-Hansen, Houlberg and Serritzlew 2014; Lassen and Serritzlew 2011). Following the latest reform the largest city council consists of 55 persons (Copenhagen), while the smallest consists of 9 persons (Læsø). It is highly competitive to be elected to the city council. In 2017, 9,558 candidates competed for 2,432 seats in the city council election, meaning that around 1 in 400 voters were running for election (Dahl and Nystrup 2020).

The election system is proportional and everyone can – as long as they have a limited number of signatures - run for the election. All local politicians run as a part of a party.<sup>1</sup> These can either be national parties, such as the Social Democrats and the Danish People's Party, or local parties that only run in one or a few municipalities. The national parties dominate the ballot and received more than 96 percent of all votes in the latest election in 2017.

## *2.2 Coalition formation in Danish local politics*

After the election the coalition formation process take place and the important posts are distributed between the governing coalition. The most important position is the mayor, who is the head of the local administration and chairman of the Finance committee (Berg and Kjær 2005). The mayor is normally the only full-time employed politician at the local level. The chairmen of the standing committees are in charge of the day-to-day administration in the municipalities, and are the functional equivalent to ministers in a government. Each chairman is in charge of a specific area such as day-care or primary education. They get a remuneration for being a chairman, which can be

---

<sup>1</sup>Although a few politicians run as a part of a party bearing their own names.

up to 40 percent of the salary of the mayor (Jyllandsposten 2017) and according to our data from 27 municipalities, on average, amounts to 200,000 DKK (27,000 EUR) annually. In addition, the elected members of the city council enjoy a sizeable salary for just being a part of the council.

There is a simple majority requirement in the investiture vote for all positions of power. The whole city council votes for the mayor, while it technically only are the members of the standing committee, who can vote for the chairman of their respective committee. However, in practice, the chairmen of the committees are found through a centrally organized agreement made between the parties represented in the city council. Apart from this and a deadline, which is around a month after the election, there are only few general rules governing the bargaining game, and no formateur is formally appointed to lead the negotiations (Skjæveland and Serritzlew 2010). The system is thereby a free-style system, and it is relatively open as to who gets the important positions. Furthermore, the process of government formation is not centrally controlled in Denmark. Every coalition is possible, and there are many examples of local coalitions that would be unthinkable at the national level. This is exemplified by the high amount of unique coalitions. In 2017, there were 53 different combinations of coalitions across the 98 municipalities.

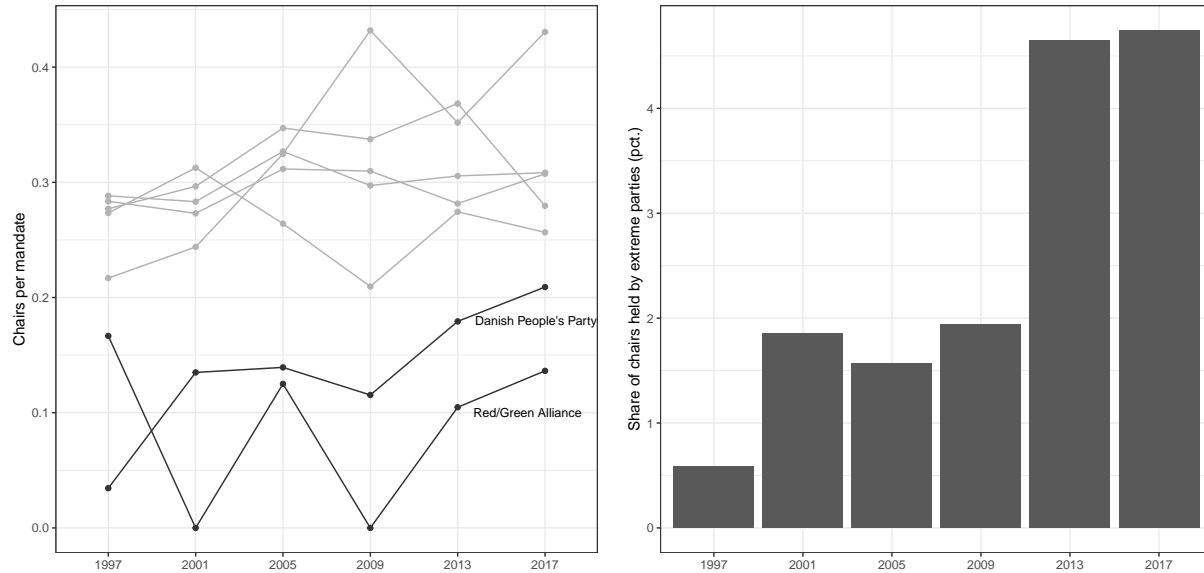
### *2.3 Extreme parties*

The various local governments in Denmark feature their share of extreme parties - everything from Nihilistic party to the Hemp party to Nazi parties. In this article, we focus on two larger extreme parties. One is the right wing populist Danish People's party founded in 1995 by a break out group from the Progress party. The other extreme party is on the other end of the political spectrum. The Red Green Alliance was formed as a collection of far left socialist and communist parties in 1989. Both parties have been represented in parliament throughout the period we examine here.

We compare these extreme parties to five mainstream parties - defined here as the parties which were part of the national government at least once since 1997. In particular, this is the Socialist People's party, The Social Democrats, The Social Liberal Party, The Liberal party and the Conservative party.

In Figure 1 we show that relative to the mainstream parties, extreme parties have been excluded





(a) Chair positions obtained per seat by mainstream parties (light gray) and extreme parties (black). (b) Share of all chair positions held by extreme parties across post-1995 elections.

**Figure 1:** After entering the electoral arena, extreme parties pay an ‘extreme party penalty’, obtaining fewer chair positions per seat (left panel), but eventually gain access to power (right panel).

form local government. As shown in panel a extreme parties persistently obtain markedly fewer chair positions per seat compared to the remaining mainstream parties. Panel b shows that the share of all chair positions obtained by extreme parties increases over time, suggesting that this ‘extreme party penalty’ is gradually diminishing.

### 3 Research Design and Data

We rely on data from more than 2,500 local elections and coalition formation processes in Denmark in the period 1971-2017. We mostly focus on data from the elections from 1997-2017, as these elections include both of the extreme parties we study in our paper. For each election period, we have recorded the complete vote totals for all parties and the electoral coalitions. We also collected data on who were appointed as chairmen following the election, recording the partisanship of each of the more than 15,000 chairmen in our data set. For details about the coding and data collection process, see Larsen et al. (2019).

The key dependent variable is whether a party obtains a chairmanship of a standing committee

at election  $t$ . As described above, obtaining a chairmanship effectively means that you get executive power in the local government, and can therefore be compared to getting a cabinet post in a national government. The key independent variable is whether a party obtained representation at  $t - 1$ .

### *3.1 Identifying the effect of prior representation*

We identify the effect of prior representation using a close elections regression discontinuity design (Caughey and Sekhon 2011; De la Cuesta and Imai 2016; Eggers and Hainmueller 2009). In particular, we estimate the probability of obtaining a chairmanship for extreme and mainstream parties for parties at the cut-off who got and for those who did not get represented at the last election. Assuming, that there are no discontinuities in the potential outcomes at the cut-off, this difference will reflect the causal effect of prior representation.

This approach effectively deals with many concerns that one might have when looking at the effect of prior representation. For example, that politicians who do not secure representation are less competent, have more extreme political views or that representation is easier to obtain in certain type of municipalities.

One concern in this regard is that any effect we find of prior representation is caused by incumbency effects, i.e. that prior representation only affects current coalition formation outcomes because it increases the number of seats the party has in the current election. However, as we lay out below, there is no evidence of such incumbency effects. Prior representation in the local legislature does not increase the probability of being represented or the number of seats obtained in the current legislature.

### *3.2 Identifying the cut-off*

The vast majority of earlier studies that use close election regression discontinuity designs take place in first past the post system. In these systems, the cut-off at which a party is represented is simply the difference in vote share between the party of interest and the largest parties of the other parties running.

Assignment of seats in Danish municipal election is based on a proportional divisor method

where parties can form electoral coalitions (Cox 1997). If parties decide to form an electoral coalition, which they often do, then seats are first assigned to this coalition, and then to the individual parties.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the number seats assigned to a party depends on the configuration of electoral coalitions, the votes cast for the different electoral coalitions, and the votes cast for the different parties within each coalition (Fiva, Folke and Sørensen 2018; Folke 2014; Freier and Odendahl 2015).

To our knowledge no prior studies have laid out a method that can calculate the representation cut-off us these electoral rules. Instead, previous research relies on bootstrap methods, where an alternative number of votes are assigned to parties until the outcome changes (Dahlgaard 2016; Kotakorpi, Poutvaara and Terviö 2017). We therefore developed a new method to calculate the exact threshold. A simple description of the method is laid out below. We we refer readers to Larsen et al. (2019) for a detailed description.

We first calculate the sum of votes each electoral alliance receives and calculate successive quotients for each electoral alliance using the formula:

$$quot = \frac{V_i}{s_m + 1}$$

, where  $V_i$  is the votes for party  $i$  and  $s_m$  is the number of the seats in the municipality. The party with the largest quotient wins one seat, and its quotient is then recalculated. We repeat this until the required number of seats is filled. Then we repeat the procedure within each electoral alliance, so the seats are distributed to each party. This gives us the actual allocation of seats in the municipality. We then calculate how many votes each electoral alliance would need to obtain an extra mandate from another electoral alliance by finding the distance to the nearest quotient, denoted by  $T_{eai}$ . Using this method, we also calculate how many votes extra a party would need to obtain a seat from another member of the electoral alliance,  $T_{pi}$ .

Using this, we can now derive the number of votes a party needs to get an extra mandate. If

---

<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that the electoral coalition is different from the governing coalition, and while there often are overlaps in the two, this is by no means guaranteed.

$T_{pi} > T_{eai}$  the party obtains a mandate from another party in its electoral alliance. The threshold is therefore equal to  $T_{pi}$ . However, if  $T_{pi} < T_{eai}$  the electoral alliance will receive an extra seat from another electoral alliance, and the party in question may not receive this extra seat. In this case we therefore create a fictional municipality, where the party in question receives a number of votes corresponding to  $V_i + T_{eai}$ .

We now repeat the whole procedure for this fictional municipality, and see whether the party would have obtained the extra seat. If this is the case the threshold is  $T_{eai}$ . If not, we evaluate whether  $T2_{pi} > T2_{eai}$  for the fictional municipality. If this is the case the threshold is equal to  $T_{eai} + T2_{pi}$ . If not, the procedure is repeated until the party gains an seat mandate. We use the same method to calculate how far a party is from losing a seat.

Having defined these thresholds, constructing a forcing variable that assigns prior representation is relatively straight forward. We simply subset on parties which received either one or zero seats at the last election, and record how many votes the party with one seat was from losing a seat, and how many votes the party with no seats was from obtaining one seat. To normalize the forcing variable we divide it by the size of the electorate in the municipality.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 The effect of prior representation

Do extreme parties benefit from previous representation in the city council in the coalition formation process? Tables 1 and 2 present results from RD models fit separately for extreme parties and mainstream parties post-1995.

**Table 1:** RD model statistics for extreme parties.

Estimator	Estimate	Std.error	p-value	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
Conventional	0.241	0.122	0.0488	0.00126	0.481
Bias-Corrected	0.257	0.122	0.0355	0.0175	0.497
Robust	0.257	0.144	0.0749	-0.0258	0.54

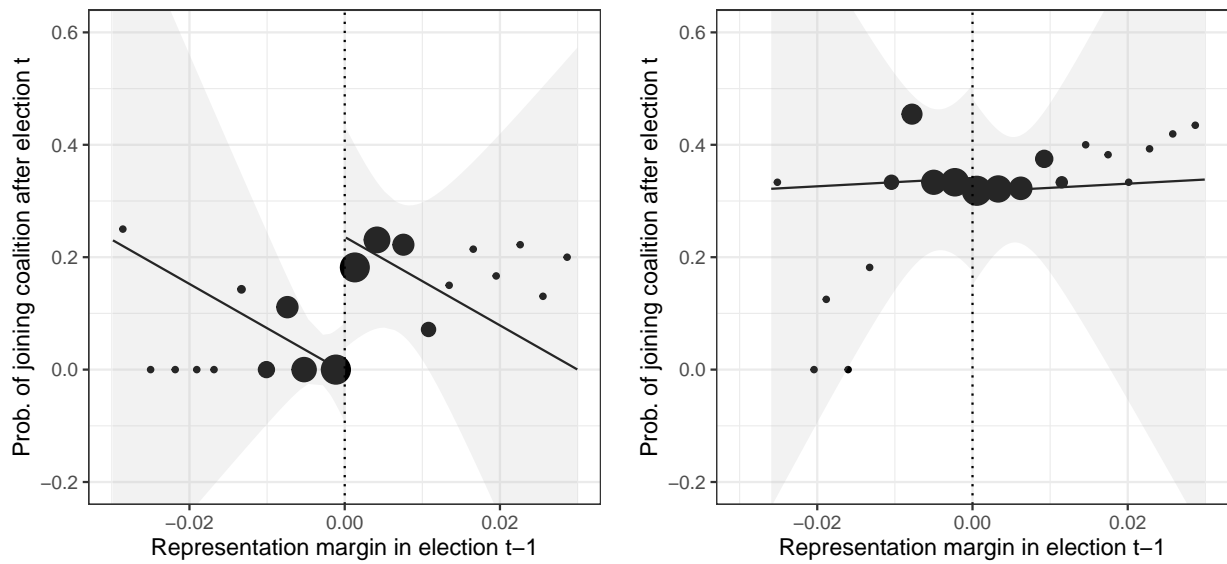
**Table 2:** RD model statistics for mainstream parties post-1995.

<b>Estimator</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Std.error</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>CI (lower)</b>	<b>CI (upper)</b>
Conventional	-0.0111	0.155	0.943	-0.314	0.292
Bias-Corrected	0.0221	0.155	0.886	-0.281	0.325
Robust	0.0221	0.184	0.904	-0.338	0.382

Figure 2a visualizes the effect of prior representation in the city council for extreme parties by comparing extreme parties that accurately got represented in the city council in the previous election with extreme parties that barely missed out. We see that newcomers (almost) always are completely excluded from the governing coalition. However, the hesitance towards including extreme parties in the governing coalition disappears, when the extreme party amass a record representation. An extreme party that just made it into the city council in the previous election is 25 percentage points more likely to be represented in the coalition compared to a similar party that was short of a few votes.

Next, we examine whether the same effect exists for mainstream parties. As argued above extreme parties face unique challenges when entering the governing coalition when they are first elected, and we would therefore only expect to find an effect of prior representation for extreme parties. In Figure 2b we find that mainstream parties without prior representation are as likely to be included in the governing coalition as mainstream parties with prior representation. This underscores that political representation is an important explanation for extreme parties' access to government.

The RD treatment effects for individual parties are shown in Appendix A. We see that only the Danish People's Party and the Unity List experience a large and positive effect of prior representation on the likelihood of entering a governing coalition. Furthermore, we also run the analysis including only municipalities where no party holds a majority. Single-party absolute majorities are not uncommon in Danish local politics, making the coalition formation process irrelevant in these



(a) Regression discontinuity plot for extreme parties (the Danish People’s Party and the Red/Green Alliance). (b) Regression discontinuity plot for mainstream parties (Social Liberals and Conservatives) post-1995.

**Figure 2:** Prior representation increases the probability of joining the governing coalition for extreme parties (left panel), but not for mainstream parties (right panel). Points represent binned means of the dependent variable, with point size determined by the weight the point has in the estimation of the effect.

cases. Removing these municipalities in Appendix B strengthens our result, and the effect is now 35 percentage points.

In the appendix, we present a number of additional robustness tests. In Appendix C, we estimate the discontinuities at placebo thresholds. As should be expected, the true effect stands out in magnitude from the placebo effects. In Appendix D, we show graphical balance checks, and find that extreme parties do not receive a boost to the vote share as a result of being represented in the previous election, ruling out that there is an incumbency effect in terms of vote share. Furthermore, we find that there is no difference in the election year between parties that are represented and not represented, which rules out that the results are driven by less party stigma at the national level. In Appendix E, we test for sorting, and find some evidence of sorting. This is because parties that gain representation are more likely to run in the next election compared to parties that do not gain representation. This is a potential violation of the continuity assumption, and to counter this, we run the analysis only with the subset of municipalities, where the given party ran in all elections in Appendix F. The findings in this subset are very similar to the main findings above.

#### *4.2 Evidence on mechanisms from electoral platforms*

To gain purchase on the mechanism driving the effect of prior representation, we obtain text data on local electoral platforms. These data are available as part of comprehensive candidate surveys for the 2013 and 2017 nationwide local elections. Fielded by the online political newspaper *Altinget*, these candidate surveys were developed as inputs to a voting advice application run by *Altinget*. Because only candidates with survey responses could be recommended in the voting advice application, candidates faced a strong incentive to complete the survey.

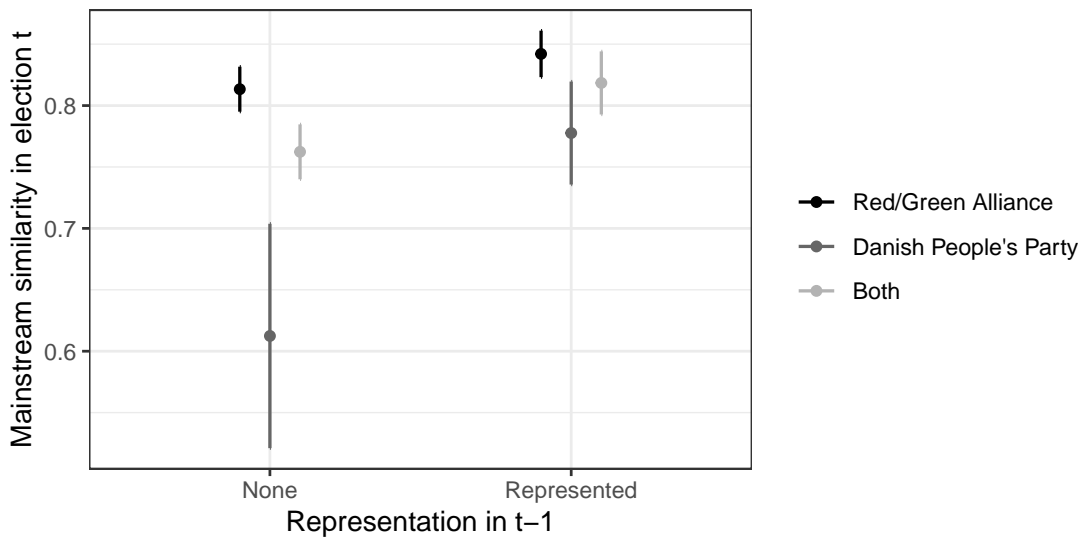
Crucially, the candidate survey included an open text field in which candidates could type in their electoral platforms. We rely on these open-ended responses from 2013 ( $N = 5,863$ ) and 2017 ( $N = 6,091$ ) here.

To assess extreme party moderation, we build on earlier work using word co-occurrence to measure the distance between political actors expressed in text (Blumenau 2019; Hager and Hilbig 2020). Specifically, given a vector of word frequencies in the electoral platform of an extreme

party  $\mathbf{E}$  and a vector for a set of mainstream parties  $\mathbf{M}$ , we define *mainstream similarity* using a cosine similarity measure:

$$\text{mainstream similarity} = \cos(\theta) = \frac{\mathbf{E} \cdot \mathbf{M}}{\|\mathbf{E}\| \|\mathbf{M}\|} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n E_i M_i}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n E_i^2} \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n M_i^2}}$$

We compare the mainstream similarity for extreme parties with and without prior representation of extreme parties. We consider the four oldest parties in Danish politics, the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals, the Liberal Party, and the Conservative Party, as ‘mainstream parties’. Within each municipality-year, we then calculate the mainstream similarity for the extreme parties jointly as well as each extreme party considered separately. The result is shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Cosine similarity between extreme parties and mainstream party platforms. All differences between parties with and without prior representation are pairwise statistically significant.

As shown, extreme parties with prior representation run on platforms significantly more similar to mainstream parties. This in turn suggests that the effect of prior representation on extreme party access to power is at least in part driven by policy moderation.



## 5 Conclusion

This article has investigated a hitherto overlooked factor for explaining extreme parties' access to the governing coalitions: prior political representation. To study this, we use data from local governments in Denmark, where local city councils function as miniature parliaments, with parties bargaining for inclusion in the local government.

Using a regression discontinuity design, we show that in contrast to mainstream parties, extreme parties are (almost) fully excluded from access to government the first time they enter the city council. However, this initial hesitance disappears once extreme parties amass a record of representation.

Once extreme parties obtain legislative representation, they are much more likely to eventually become part of government coalition. Next, we investigate the mechanisms, and find that extreme parties are mainstreamed by being represented in the city council.

From the perspective of democratic representation this could be good news, as our results suggest that democracies are quite flexible in including and mainstreaming new extreme voices. However, from the perspective of democratic stability, this could also be seen as worrisome, if the extreme parties attempt to subvert the democratic process after gaining access to power.

## References

- Akkerman, Tjitske. 2012. "Comparing radical right parties in government: Immigration and integration policies in nine countries (1996–2010)." *West European Politics* 35(3):511–529.
- Akkerman, Tjitske and Matthijs Rooduijn. 2015. "Pariahs or partners? Inclusion and exclusion of radical right parties and the effects on their policy positions." *Political Studies* 63(5):1140–1157.
- Akkerman, Tjitske, Sarah L de Lange and Matthijs Rooduijn. 2016. *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: Into the mainstream?* Routledge.
- Axelrod, Robert M. 1970. *Conflict of interest : a theory of divergent goals with applications to politics*. Markham political science series Chicago: Markham.
- Bale, Tim. 2003. "Cinderella and her ugly sisters: the mainstream and extreme right in Europe's bipolarising party systems." *West European Politics* 26(3):67–90.
- Berg, Rikke and Ulrik Kjær. 2005. *Den danske borgmester*. Syddansk Universitetsforlag.
- Blom-Hansen, Jens, Kurt Houllberg and Søren Serritzlew. 2014. "Size, democracy, and the economic costs of running the political system." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4):790–803.
- Blumenau, Jack. 2019. "The Effects of Female Leadership on Women's Voice in Political Debate." *British Journal of Political Science* pp. 1–22.
- Caughey, Devin and Jasjeet S Sekhon. 2011. "Elections and the regression discontinuity design: Lessons from close US house races, 1942–2008." *Political Analysis* 19(4):385–408.
- Cox, Gary W. 1997. *Making votes count: strategic coordination in the world's electoral systems*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dahl, Malte and Jacob Nystrup. 2020. "Confident and cautious candidates: Explaining underrepresentation of women in Danish municipal politics." *European Journal of Political Research* .
- Dahlgaard, Jens Olav. 2016. "You just made it: Individual incumbency advantage under proportional representation." *Electoral Studies* 44:319–328.
- De la Cuesta, Brandon and Kosuke Imai. 2016. "Misunderstandings about the regression discontinuity design in the study of close elections." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19:375–396.
- De Lange, Sarah L. 2012. "New alliances: why mainstream parties govern with radical right-wing populist parties." *Political Studies* 60(4):899–918.
- De Vries, Catherine E and Sara B Hobolt. 2020. *Political entrepreneurs: the rise of challenger parties in Europe*. Princeton University Press.
- Downs, William M. 2002. "How effective is the cordon sanitaire? Lessons from efforts to contain the far right in Belgium, France, Denmark and Norway." *Journal für Konflikt-und Gewaltforschung* 4(1):32–51.

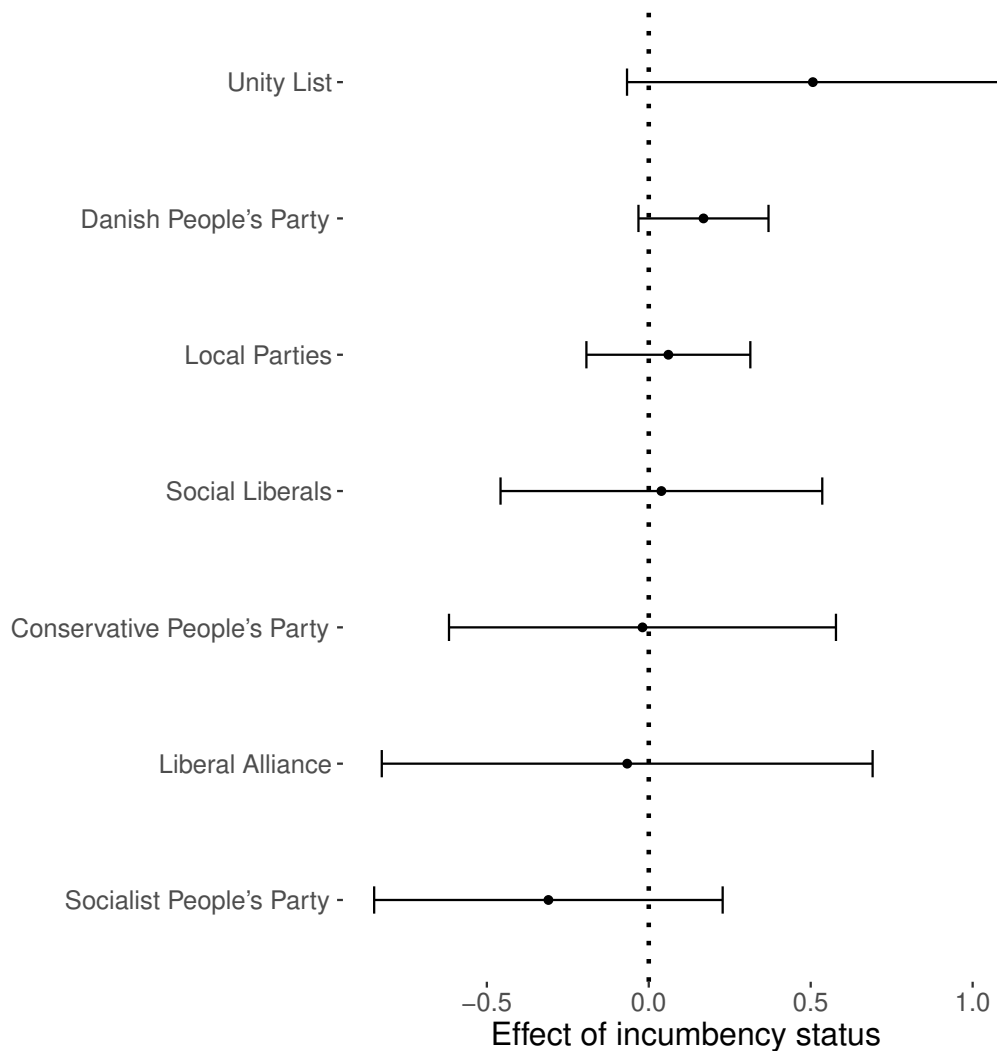
- Eggers, Andrew C and Jens Hainmueller. 2009. "MPs for sale? Returns to office in postwar British politics." *American Political Science Review* 103(4):513–533.
- Eurostat. 2017. "Total general government expenditure." data retrieved from Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tec00023&language=en>.
- Fiva, Jon H, Olle Folke and Rune J Sørensen. 2018. "The power of parties: evidence from close municipal elections in Norway." *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 120(1):3–30.
- Folke, Olle. 2014. "Shades of brown and green: party effects in proportional election systems." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 12(5):1361–1395.
- Freier, Ronny and Christian Odendahl. 2015. "Do parties matter? Estimating the effect of political power in multi-party systems." *European Economic Review* 80:310–328.
- Hager, Anselm and Hanno Hilbig. 2020. "Does Public Opinion Affect Political Speech?" *American Journal of Political Science* .
- Hansen, Kasper Møller. 2017. "Valgdeltagelsen ved kommunal-og regionsvalget 2017." *CVAP Working paper series* .
- Imai, Kosuke, Luke Keele, Dustin Tingley and Teppei Yamamoto. 2011. "Unpacking the black box of causality: Learning about causal mechanisms from experimental and observational studies." *American Political Science Review* pp. 765–789.
- John, Peter. 2001. *Local governance in western Europe*. Sage.
- Jyllandsposten. 2017. "Fakta: Så meget tjener kommunalpolitikere." **URL:** <https://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE10038063/fakta-saa-meget-tjener-kommunalpolitikere/>
- Katsourides, Yiannos. 2016. *Radical left parties in government: The cases of SYRIZA and AKEL*. Springer.
- Kotakorpi, Kaisa, Panu Poutvaara and Marko Terviö. 2017. "Returns to office in national and local politics: A bootstrap method and evidence from Finland." *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 33(3):413–442.
- Larsen, Martin Vinæs, Jacob Nystrup, Camilla Therkildsen and Winnie Faarvang. 2019. "Codebook for: The Causal Effect of Political Fragmentation." *Working paper* .
- Lassen, David Dreyer and Søren Serritzlew. 2011. "Jurisdiction size and local democracy: Evidence on internal political efficacy from large-scale municipal reform." *American Political Science Review* pp. 238–258.
- Laver, Michael. 1989. Theories of coalition formation and local government coalitions. In *Political parties and coalitions in European local government*. Routledge.

- Laver, Michael and Norman Schofield. 1998. *Multiparty government: The politics of coalition in Europe*. University of Michigan Press.
- Leiserson, Michael. 1968. "Factions and coalitions in one-party Japan: An interpretation based on the theory of games." *The American Political Science Review* 62(3):770–787.
- Mair, Peter. 2013. *Ruling the void: The hollowing of Western democracy*. Verso Trade.
- Minkenberg, Michael. 2013. "From pariah to policy-maker? The radical right in Europe, West and East: Between margin and mainstream." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 21(1):5–24.
- Riker, William H. 1962. *The theory of political coalitions*. Yale University Press.
- Sellers, Jefferey M and Anders Lidström. 2007. "Decentralization, local government, and the welfare state." *Governance* 20(4):609–632.
- Skjæveland, Asbjørn and Søren Serritzlew. 2010. "Which party gets the mayoralty? A multivariate statistical investigation of Danish local government formation." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 33(2):189–206.
- Swaan, Abram de. 1973. *Coalition theories and cabinet formations : a study of formal theories of coalition formation applied to nine European parliaments after 1918*. Jossey-Bass/Elsevier international series [1st ed.] ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Twist, Kimberly A. 2019. *Partnering with Extremists: Coalitions Between Mainstream and Far-right Parties in Western Europe*. University of Michigan Press.
- Van Spanje, Joost. 2010. "Parties beyond the pale: Why some political parties are ostracized by their competitors while others are not." *Comparative European Politics* 8(3):354–383.
- Von Neumann, John and Oskar Morgenstern. 1944. *Theory of games and economic behavior*. Princeton university press.
- Von Neumann, John, Oskar Morgenstern and Harold William Kuhn. 1953. *Theory of games and economic behavior*. Princeton university press.

## Appendix: For Online Publication

### A Effect by party

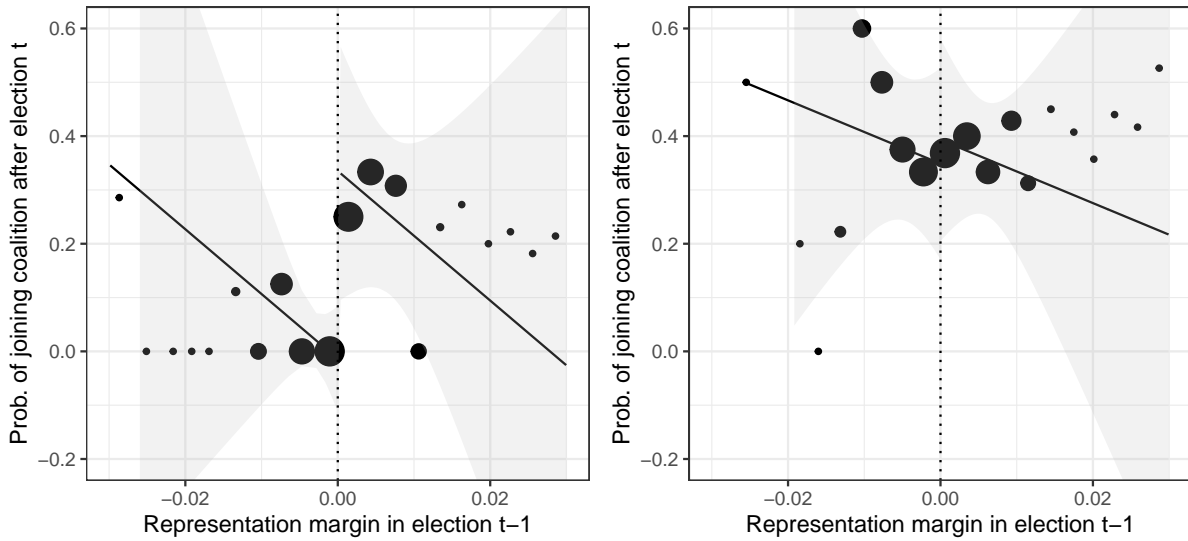
The table below shows the RD treatment effect for all parties (except for the two major parties, where there are not enough cases). We see that the Unity List and the Danish People's Party face a large incumbency advantage if they were elected in the last city council. There is no effect for all other group of parties.



**Figure 4:** Does experience matter for different parties? The RD treatment effect of incumbency status on entering a governing coalition for Danish parties. Local parties are parties, which do not run nationwide but only in one or a few regionally clustered municipalities.

## B Influential parties only

Below we only look at parties, which have a Shapley-Shubik Index (SSI) over 0. Building on Von Neumann, Morgenstern and Kuhn (1953), Shapley and Shubik developed a method of calculating how probable it was that a party is pivotal. The SSI reflects the proportion of all possible permutations of the parties in a council in which a specific party adds the votes necessary for a majority, when the parties contribute with their votes in turn. The SSI value is related to the size of the party, but the relationship is not strictly proportional. In other words, if a party has an SSI of 0 there are no theoretical coalitions where the party's votes are necessary to form a majority coalition.



**Figure 5:** Prior representation increases the probability of joining the governing coalition for extreme parties (left panel), but not for mainstream parties (right panel), including only parties with an SSI > 0. Points represent binned means of the dependent variable, with point size determined by the weight the point has in the estimation of the effect.

### C Placebo tests

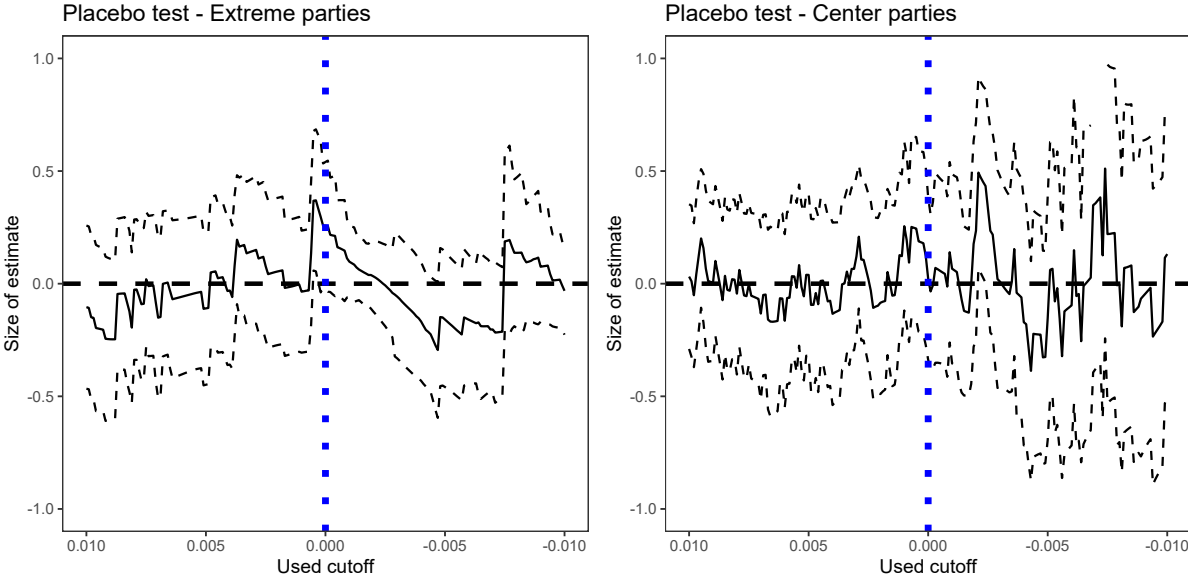
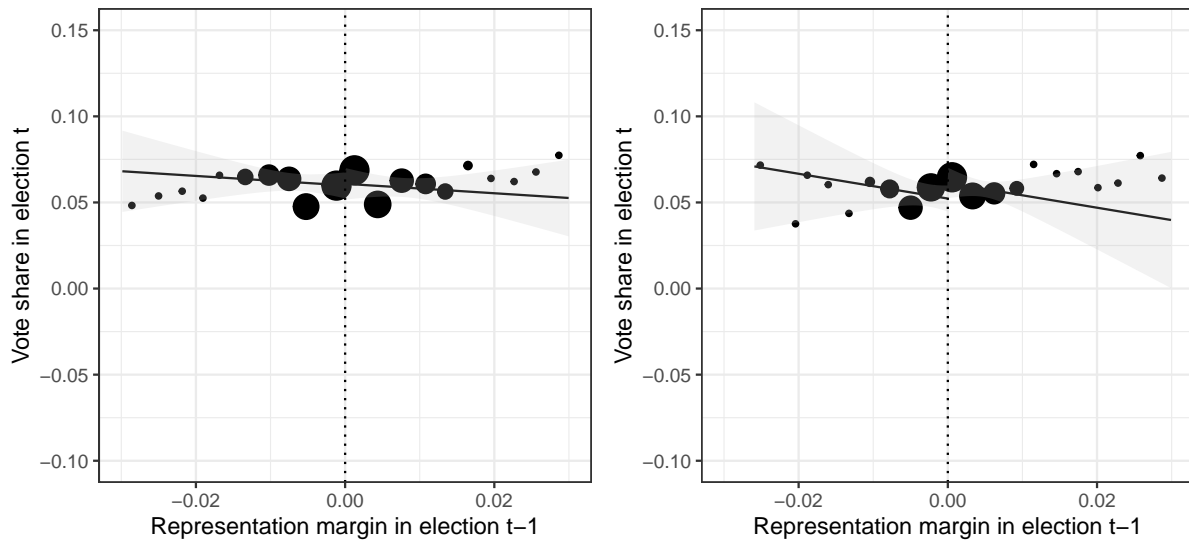


Figure 1: Placebo tests

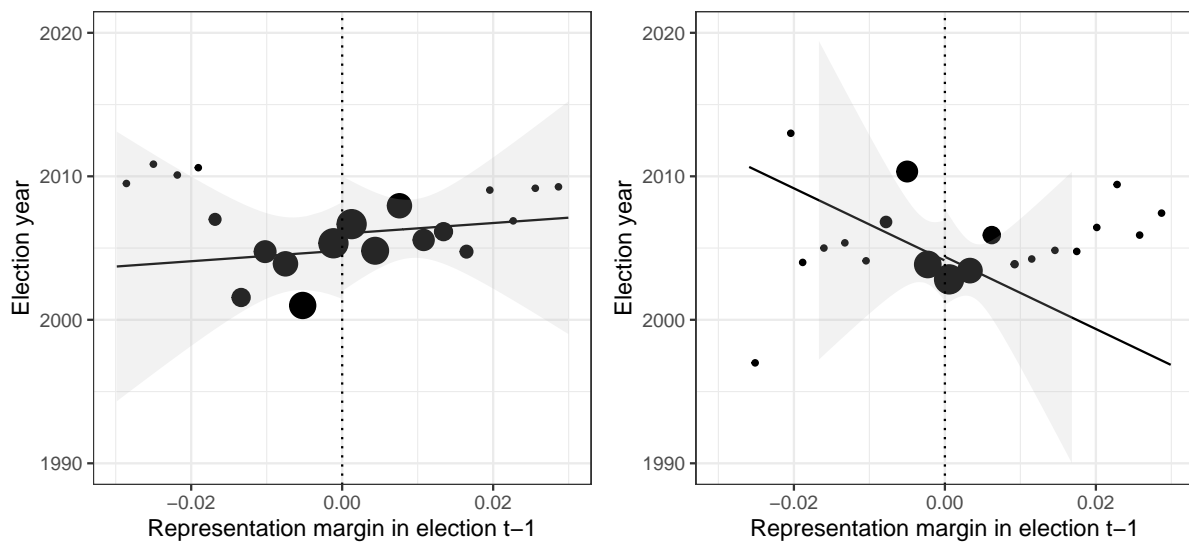
## D Graphical balance tests

### A Balance test: vote share



**Figure A1:** Balance test - Vote share

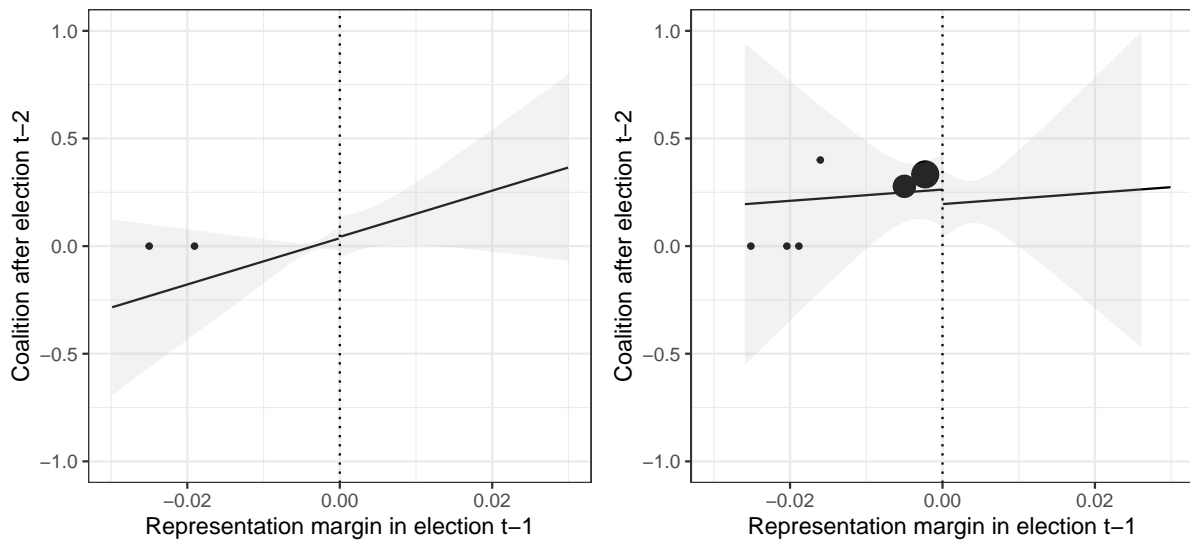
### B Balance test: election year



**Figure B2:** Balance test - election year

### C Balance test: coalition in previous election





**Figure C3:** Balance test - In coalition in previous election

# E Sorting

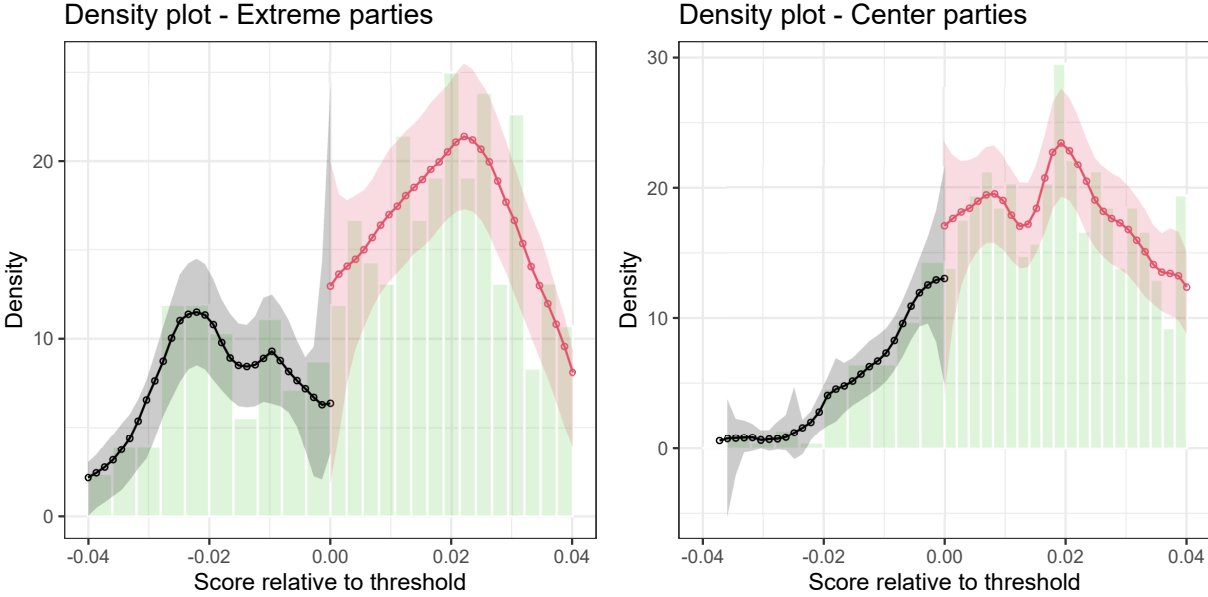
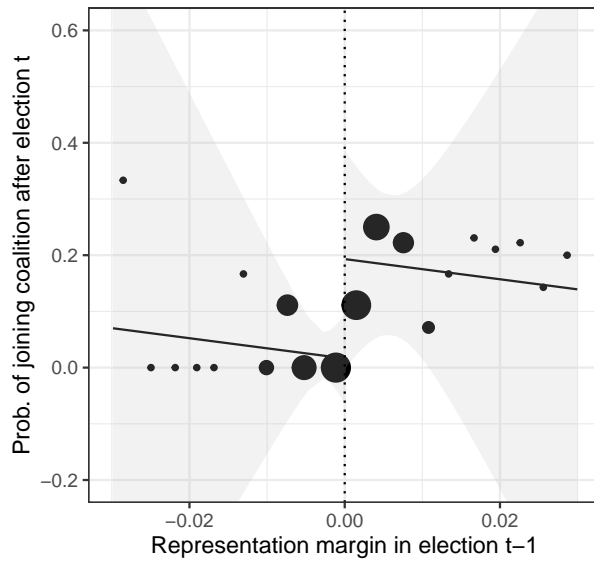
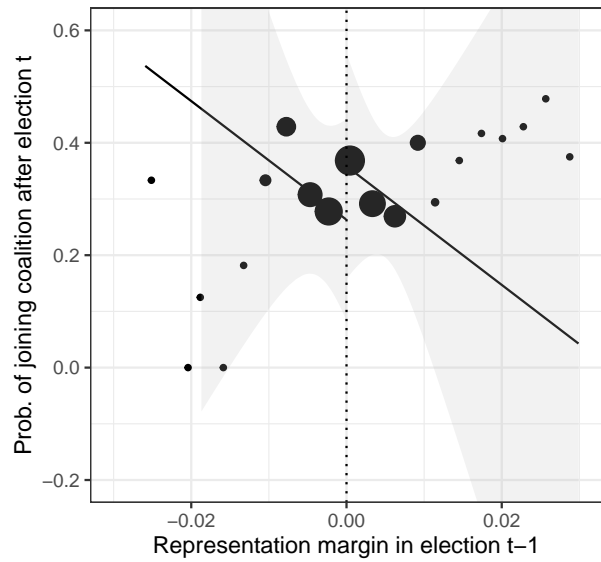


Figure 1: McCrary's density test for the forcing variable

## F Parties that ran in all elections



**(a)** Regression discontinuity plot for extreme parties (the Danish People's Party and the Red/Green Alliance). The plot only includes local parties that ran in all elections.



**(b)** Regression discontinuity plot for mainstream parties (Social Liberals and Conservatives) post-1995. The plot only includes local parties that ran in all elections.