Negative campaign statements, coalition heterogeneity, and the support for government parties

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Abstract

European party systems have become increasingly complex in recent years, resulting in ideologically more heterogeneous coalition governments with far-reaching policy compromises. Consequently, an important goal of the parties' electoral campaign strategies is to present the voters a distinct policy profile on which the electorate can evaluate the competing parties. We argue that voters reward those coalition parties that attack their government partners in the election campaign and try to clarify their programmatic positions with the help of a more aggressive campaign strategy. Based on data from the CSES, the Comparative Manifesto Project database and a novel data base on party campaign statements in seven European countries from 2007 to 2018, we find that voters' support for coalition parties increases if the latter attack their partners in the last four weeks before election day. Yet, this relationship is only observable in contexts when the ideological diversity of the incumbent coalition government is rather low.

Introduction

European party systems have become increasingly complex in the last 20 years. Because of an increasing parliamentary representation of 'pariah parties' from the far left and far right (see, e.g., van Spanje and van der Brug 2007; De Lange 2012), ideologically moderate parties formed majority multi-party governments which are programmatically heterogeneous. Therefore, coalition partners had to agree often on more far-reaching policy compromises during the coalition negotiation talks and in the daily business of coalition governance (e.g., Bergman et al. 2021a), risking their supporters' disappointment from low degrees of implemented policy pledges (e.g., Thomson et al. 2017; Matthieß 2020). Recent studies on the coalition life cycle like the work by Fortunato (2019, 2021) argue and show that voters do not care for compromise and cooperation between coalition partners in the policymaking process and are therefore willing to punish the respective parties for such behaviours. This threat of punishment drives, according to Fortunato (2021), the cabinet partners toward conflict with one another, so that the coalition parties minimize the risk of electoral losses in the following elections. Along these lines, So (2023) finds support for her argument that voters tend to disapprove policy compromises by parties in office, so that cabinet terminations which are based on policy conflict do not electorally harm the cabinet parties responsible for the policy conflict that led to a termination of the coalition government.

Parties should therefore show a distinct policy profile to the voters, in particular when being a member of a coalition government. This sets incentives for coalition parties to distance themselves from their partners in government. While there are several possibilities for cabinet parties to gain profile against their coalition partners like, for instance, processes of legislative review on which Fortunato (2021) concentrates, we focus in this contribution on the parties' activities during the

last weeks before an election when an increasing number of citizens make up their minds and decide which party to vote for (e.g., Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller 2012; Dassonneville et al. 2017). The empirical focus is thus on a period during the electoral cycle – the last four weeks before election – when many voters make up their minds regarding their preferred party, so that vote-seeking political actors like the parties that form the current cabinet should adopt their campaign strategies accordingly. Consequently, the strategists of incumbent coalition parties should motivate their parties to send signals that help create some distance between them and their current coalition partners.

In line with Fortunato (2021), we argue that the internal differences and compromises between coalition partners affect voters' attitudes toward these parties. We develop this reasoning further by integrating information on the cabinet parties' campaign strategies in the final weeks before election day and argue that intra-coalition attacks are a helpful tool for the cabinet parties in terms of establishing a distinct profile, which should result in increasing support for the attacking party. However, this effect should decrease the more ideologically heterogeneous the coalition is. If the programmatic heterogeneity of a coalition government is very high and the coalition parties attack each other during the campaign, attacks are likely to remind citizens of the policy compromises the coalition parties had to implement during the outgoing legislative period, which should decrease the support for the parties that form the incumbent coalition government. We therefore expect not only that attacking the coalition partner in the last weeks before the election increases the support for the cabinet party that attacked its partner. Moreover, we argue that intra-coalition attacks and the degree of a coalition's programmatic heterogeneity should moderate each other: the expected positive effect of intra-coalition attacks on party support should diminish as the

programmatic diversity within a coalition increases, while the negative effect of intra-coalition heterogeneity on party support should increase with more intra-coalition attacks.

We test these expectations using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2020) and a novel data base on party campaign statements in seven European countries (Comparative Campaign Dynamics Project; Baumann and Gross 2016; Debus et al. 2016; Adendorf and Koch Florczak 2022). The findings show that voters' support for cabinet parties, operationalized by the voters' degree of sympathy they attach to the respective parties, depends on the interplay between the ideological heterogeneity of coalition governments and the number of attacks between the coalition parties. An increasing number of attacks between the coalition parties in the last four weeks of the campaign results in more support for the governing parties among voters if the respective multi-party government is ideologically rather homogenous, so that the degree of intra-cabinet conflict is rather low and, therefore, the coalition parties did not have to agree on that many far-reaching policy compromises.

Theoretical framework

We derive our hypotheses by referring to the literature on (1) the negative effect of intra-party and intra-coalitional conflict on the voters' perceptions of parties and coalitions, (2) the voters' knowledge about patterns of coalition politics, and (3) the increasing role of election campaigns for voting behaviour in modern democracies.

Ideological similarity is an important factor in explaining how, and which, coalition governments form after elections. Coalitions are more likely to form if the participating parties share a high

degree of policy positions on important policy dimensions (for an overview on standard theories of coalition formation, see Laver and Schofield 1998; Martin and Stevenson 2001). They are also easier to negotiate and to maintain and are therefore expected to last longer (Damgaard 2010; Ecker and Meyer 2020). Coalitions consisting of parties with similar policy profiles are more likely to successfully agree on policy compromises that come close to the coalition parties' ideal points, so that the supporters of these parties have fewer reasons to complain about compromises in the coalition agreement that do not mirror what the parties promised in their election manifestos (e.g., Klüver and Spoon 2020). Thinking of parties not only as office- and policy-seeking, but also as actors who want to maximize their share of votes in an upcoming election (Strøm and Müller 1999), forming coalitions between ideologically similar parties is likely to reduce the electoral risk for the cabinet parties since the policy outcomes of the coalition governments is more likely to reflect the preferences of their voters and supporters (Fortunato 2019). However, the increasing vote share for 'pariah parties' from the far-right or far-left or of populist parties who are often not considered as coalition partners increases the risk that parties with very different policy profiles have to form a coalition government.

Forming coalition governments between parties with a relatively different programmatic profile is thus a risky endeavour for vote-seeking political actors since parties who form coalition governments – even if they share a lot of policy views – always have to make compromises, formulate them in – more and more detailed – coalition agreements and implement these compromises during the legislative period (Strøm and Müller 2008; Bowler et al. 2016; Krauss 2018; Klüver and Bäck 2019). Agreeing on policy compromises and implementing them even in policy domains that are highly salient for a party increases the risk that the supporters of the

respective coalition party will be even more dissatisfied with its achievements (Plescia et al. 2021). This is likely to damage the government parties' performance in the next election, because voters have a high degree of knowledge about coalition politics in general and government formation in particular (Fortunato 2021: 40-60). For instance, voters prefer such coalitions that reflect standard office- and policy-seeking coalition formation theories (e.g., Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Debus and Müller 2014). In a recent study, Fortunato et al. (2021) show that voters' attributions of policy responsibility in multi-party cabinets are in line with the empirical findings on policy-making in coalition governments. Bowler, McElroy and Müller (2022) demonstrate that the information environment of voters is a crucial determinant of the capacity of voters to predict coalitions correctly. Therefore, voters tend to dislike party combinations with a high programmatic heterogeneity as a coalition government (Debus and Müller 2014; Bowler et al. 2022). A high degree of ideological heterogeneity within a multi-party cabinet may therefore be undesirable not only for the voters of the coalition partners, but also for wider parts of the electorate that could have supported the outgoing coalition parties.

Relevant for our argument is the study by Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) who demonstrate that voters perceive parties in coalition cabinets as more ideologically similar (see also Adams et al. 2014; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Reinermann and Faas 2020). This implies that when the programmatic discrepancy between coalition partners is rather small, they risk losing their distinct electoral profiles and are therefore likely to lose the support of voters (see Fortunato 2019, 2021). For instance, the vote share of the two German catch-all parties – Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), which formed the federal government from 2005 to 2009 and from 2013 until 2021 – declined significantly since 2005: while the CDU/CSU won 35% and the SPD

34% in 2005, their support decreased to 24% (CDU/CSU) and 26% (SPD) sixteen years later. One reason for the decline in the vote share for German Christian and Social Democrats during that time period and the success of parties from the far-left and far-right is the – indeed biased – perception among voters that CDU/CSU and SPD became programmatically similar during that time period (e.g., Pappi et al. 2019). In summary, parties in coalition governments face a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" problem: being too far apart necessitates compromises which may lead to voters' dissatisfaction. However, coalescing also makes voters perceive coalition parties as too similar.

Fortunato (2021) argues – by referring to studies that highlight the relevance of the legislative process itself for keeping tabs on coalition partners (e.g., Martin and Vanberg 2011, 2020) – that the period of legislative review during which bills are debated, scrutinized, and amended can be used by the coalition parties to gain profile against their partners. This is because "these processes of legislative review provide a temporary, and targeted, respite from collective responsibility in which cabinet partners are free to openly air their policy disagreements" (Fortunato 2021: 27). Fortunato further argues that coalition partners may even feel the necessity to show discord on areas where there is a relative high degree of agreement between each other, so that voters and party supporters can more easily differentiate the parties from one another. This allows the cabinet parties to tell their supporters that "they have not forgotten their campaign promises and that they are steadfast in the pursuit of promised outcomes" (Fortunato 2021: 27). Other studies mention and discuss further activities of cabinet partners, all presumably mediated later to the voters, that allow for gaining a distinct policy profile despite being part of a coalition government. These include no-confidence motions (Williams 2011), parliamentary questions (Otjes and Louwerse

2018), legislative voting (Tuttnauer 2018; Tuttnauer and Wegmann 2022) and legislation (Ganghof and Bräuninger 2006).

Given the increased number of voters who decide late in the campaign when the degree of legislative activity is normally low, we find it reasonable to assume that comments and signals made directly in the media during the electoral campaign are also such a valid vehicle of vote-seeking differentiation. We therefore consider one further vote-seeking strategy coalition parties may choose: governing parties could attack their coalition partners in the final weeks of the election campaign. This way to develop a more distinct profile does not require formulating more nuanced policy positions in the election manifestos – which are mostly published weeks if not months before election day (e.g., Dolezal et al. 2012; Däubler et al. 2022). Hence, it could signal independence of a party from its coalition partners without changing the party policy platforms and the policy positions the parties adopted therein. Such a strategy maintains greater campaign flexibility while, ideally, minimizes friction in coalition negotiations since the coalition policy agreement is based on the parties' election manifestos (see Bergman et al. 2021b: 705-709).

Attacking one party's own coalition partners during the election campaign could be a superior option over changing its manifesto or proclaimed policy positions for two reasons. First, several studies highlight the increasing relevance of the last (four) weeks of the election campaign for the decision-making process of voters. Studies that focus on voting behaviour find, for instance, that the share of the electorate that decides late is growing from less than ten percent in the 1960s up to almost 50% in the 2010s (e.g., Bengtsson et al. 2014; Schmitt-Beck and Partheymüller 2012). Because of this increasing share of late-deciders, parties have incentives not only to develop a

more distinctive profile in the last weeks before election day (e.g., Baumann et al. 2021), but also to differentiate themselves from their current coalition parties. One possibility to gain a more distinct profile is to attack the coalition partners publicly to maximize the chances to become visible as an independent party in the respective coalition government shortly before election day.

Second and as already indicated, coalition negotiations are mainly based on the election manifestos of parties (e.g., Eichorst 2014; Schermann and Ennser-Jedenastik 2014; Bergman et al. 2021b: 705-709), which are normally adopted by a majority of party convention delegates. Changing policy positions or pledges that were already published in party manifestos is therefore costly, because increasing intra-party conflicts resulting from the deviation of the originally negotiated party policy platform might irritate party supporters during the election campaign and could bring the party in a strategically less optimal bargaining position during the government formation process. Attacking the cabinet partners may be a less costly option, as long as it does not overly alienate them. Indeed, So (2023) demonstrates that cabinet terminations in European multi-party cabinets which follow intra-cabinet policy conflicts do not result in a weaker performance of the responsible coalition parties in an upcoming election. Finally, the parties' strategies during the final weeks of the election are likely to be discussed extensively in the media and therefore also among the public, in particular when comparing to the content of election manifestos (e.g., Dolezal et al. 2012). In times of a decreasing amount of loyal party supporters (e.g., Dejaeghere and Dassonneville 2017), strategic attacks covered by the media may therefore prove to be an effective tool. We therefore expect that *an increasing campaign focus on intra-coalition attacks by a government party will result in more support for that party among voters* (H1).

However, attacking the coalition partner(s) can be a risky strategy if the degree of programmatic heterogeneity of the incumbent coalition parties is high. Not only is it complicated and costly to agree on policy compromises in ideologically heterogeneous coalitions, so that the supporters of parties tend to be disappointed with the coalition negotiation outcomes (Fortunato 2021: 5). Attacking the coalition partners in case of programmatically very heterogeneous coalitions that had to agree on far-reaching compromises might also point voters directly to the programmatic differences within the incumbent coalition, so that the electoral prospects of the respective cabinet parties are likely to decrease. Greene and Haber (2015) show that voters consider parties as less competent the more the parties are perceived as internally divided. Plescia, Kritzinger and Eberl (2021) demonstrate that election campaigns and events that take place during the campaign influence voters' perceptions of intra-party conflict: "the greater the attention to the election campaign, the more the voter perceptions align with real-world developments" within parties (Plescia et al. 2021: 924). Similar processes might apply to coalition governments with coalition parties that are heterogeneous in terms of their policy profile and are attacking each other. For instance, Plescia and Kritzinger (2022) find that with an increasing policy conflict between the coalition parties, voters are significantly more able to allocate policy responsibilities to the respective parties in the coalition cabinet (see also Fortunato et al. 2021). Taking this mutual relationship of vote- and policy-seeking strategies into account, we expect that *the positive effect of intra-coalition attacks on coalition parties' support will diminish as intra-coalition heterogeneity increases* (H2).

Case selection, data and methods

Our case selection consists of 12 elections in seven European countries: the Czech Republic 2010 and 2013, Denmark 2007, Germany 2009, 2013 and 2017, the United Kingdom 2015, the Netherlands 2010 and 2017, Poland 2011, and Sweden 2014 and 2018. In a robustness test, as we report below, we include seven more elections in Denmark 2019, the United Kingdom 2005 and 2017, Poland 2007, Portugal 2009 and 2019, and Spain 2008, in which the outgoing government consisted of only one party, and therefore had no intra-coalition attacks. Our results hold even when including these cases as a kind of benchmark.

We analyse the answers of 15,984 respondents from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) surveys. Each respondent was asked about their degree of support towards each (major) party participating in the election, which we operationalize with the sympathy scores respondents allocate to the competing parties. We are interested in the support of the survey respondents for those parties that form the respective incumbent government, which results in a dataset of 38,527 responses covering 30 cabinet parties.[1] To assess the respondents' degree of support for governing parties, we refer to the CSES sympathy score for each party, ranging from zero (respondent strongly dislikes the party) to 10 (respondent strongly likes the party).

For measuring the parties' attacks during the election campaign, we use the Comparative Campaign Dynamics Dataset (CCDD) dataset (Debus et al. 2016) to calculate the frequency of attacks each government party made on its coalition partners in the last four weeks (in the case of

[1] Since the CSES surveys are post-electoral, we face a potential problem in that the respondents' sympathy scores may be affected by post-election developments such as the forming of a new coalition, that may be also correlated with the level of intra-coalition negative campaigning before the election. To account for this possible confounder, we control in robustness tests for whether the incoming government is different than the outgoing one (see Table A7 in the online appendix).

Portugal: three weeks) before election day. The CCDD includes manually coded news articles from two newspapers which vary in their ideological orientation for each election period, in which the statements of parties and their representatives are cited (see Baumann and Gross 2016 and Adendorf and Koch Florczak 2022 for a detailed overview).[2] We summed up the statements of each party that are related to other coalition partners or the whole government for each election under study. We concentrate on statements by parties or their representatives that were coded as 'negative' in terms of the respective party's attitude towards its coalition partner(s).[3] We then divided the number of a government party's negative attacks on its coalition partners by the overall number of the coded statements of the respective party. The resulting variable '*negative intra-coalition focus*' provides information on the degree to which a party's mediatized campaign statements were dedicated to attacking fellow government partners. The variable ranges from zero to 0.273, or 27.3%.

To evaluate the impact of the ideological heterogeneity of a government on the degree of support for the coalition parties, we need information on the ideological position of each party that forms the government. We rely on the Comparative Manifesto Project's database (MARPOR; Volkens

[2] To ensure intercoder reliability, three coders, who were trained in a two-day workshop, were assigned to analyse the same content of newspaper articles for a country under study. Coders had first to identify the basic information of articles, such as the newspaper title, the election year, and the title of the article, among others. Most importantly, the coders had to extract the subject of the article that was mentioned in the respective newspaper article, that is, the party (or the government, respectively), which they were going to code. In a second step, coders identified all party statements in the respective newspaper articles regarding whether a party talks about itself or about another party. Afterwards, the coders decided whether these statements were related to a party's position on various issues or to a discussion about valence characteristics, and what the tone of the statement was. All three coders marked their confidence for their several coding steps (full, medium, or little confidence), and the results of the coding process were discarded on which coders did not agree or were not fully confident.

[3] Besides coding a statement as 'negative', the coders could also identify a statement regarding the coalition partner as 'neutral' or 'positive'. The following two statements from the 2017 election campaigns in Germany and in the Czech Republic are examples for negative campaign statements by party representatives: "SPD top candidate Martin Schulz accused Chancellor Angela Merkel of Splitting the EU and suppressing the current problems" (Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 28.08.2017); "According to [CSSD leader] Zaorálek, the ANO leader has butter on his head because of the high prices of butter produced by his companies" (Pravo, 20.10.2017).

et al. 2020) and the general right-left scale covered in the data to estimate the veto player distance (Tsebelis 1995, 2002) within a government, that is, we calculate the absolute difference between the rightmost and the leftmost party in the respective (coalition) government. The resulting *coalition range* variable ranges from 4.03 to 27.02. In the robustness tests, we replace the MARPOR right-left scale with other intra-coalition range measures that are based on expert surveys' party placements and were taken from the ParlGov.org database (Döring and Manow 2021).

We control for several individual-level characteristics of the respondents. Most of these controls do not necessarily serve to solve potential omitted variable biases but rather to account for well-accepted individual traits connected with issues of political attitudes. The first control variable is vote choice, i.e., whether the respondent voted for the party in question, for another coalition partner or for an opposition party.[4] Second, and with regard to the Downsian proximity model of voting behaviour (Downs 1957; Adams et al. 2005), we control for the respondent's perceived ideological distance between themself and the respective party on a 0-10 left-right scale. Third, we consider that the respondent's general level of satisfaction with democracy is likely to influence the amount of sympathy that a respondent allocates to political parties in general and to government parties in particular. In addition, we control for key demographic characteristics of the respondents: age, gender, and education level, the latter serving as a proxy for political sophistication as knowledge and interested questions were not available for all surveys.

[4] Ideally, we would control for the respondent's vote choice *before* the relevant cabinet term and not *after* it. However, relying on vote recall questions introduces concerns of unreliability while also limiting the number of observations due to missing responses. Moreover, it is highly correlated with the last vote choice (gamma=0.74, p<.001). Therefore, we use the vote choice after the relevant cabinet term in the main analysis and use vote choice recall in a robustness test (see Table A4 in the online appendix).

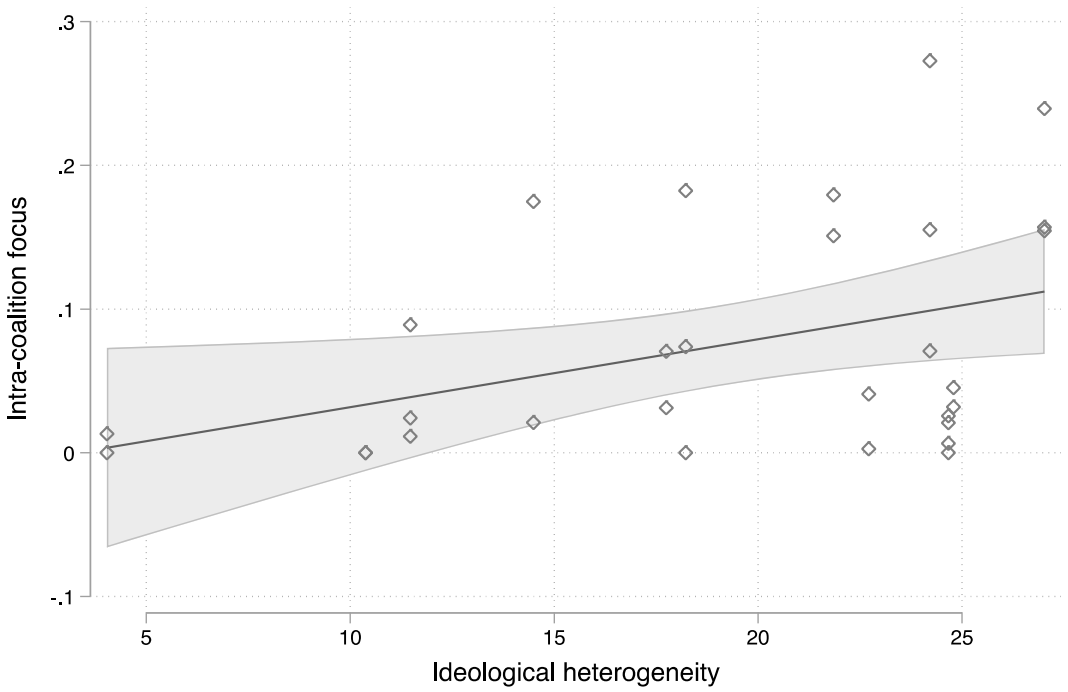
We also include several controls at the party and survey level. First, since voters tend to evaluate an incumbent government particularly based on the record of the Prime Minister and their party (Debus et al. 2014; Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck 2019; Berz 2020), and considering these parties also tend to attack their partners less than junior partners, we include a dummy variable in the regression models that identifies the respective prime minister's party. Second, we include a variable capturing the number of years the exact coalition constellation has been in power since 1945, especially to account for the possible effect of voters' surprise or disappointment with new governing coalition compositions. A binary control variable capturing cabinets based on pre-electoral pacts serves a similar purpose. Third, we include the GDP growth for the year of elections to capture the government's overall economic performance, which – if bad – may induce internal conflict and blame avoidance and also unfavourable sympathy scores. Finally, to put the level of intra-coalition attacks in the context of the whole electoral campaign, we control for each party's level of attacks directed at other parties (and not only coalition partners), as well as the level of attacks this party received from other parties.

The structure of the dataset is nested: respondent-party dyads are nested in respondents, and respondents are nested in elections. We accordingly estimate three-level multi-level linear models. In the robustness checks, we estimate also multi-level Tobit models to account for the fact that the dependent variable ranges from zero to 10.

Results

While we are mainly interested in the effect of the coalition parties' campaign behaviour on voters' attitudes toward them, there may also be a connection between that behaviour and the outgoing coalition's ideological diversity. Establishing a distinct profile is essential for any party, and in particular for any coalition party. We therefore begin with presenting the correlation between our two main independent variables, that is, the coalition's ideological range and the party's negative intra-coalition focus in its campaign statements. As Figure 1 shows, there is a positive but weak correlation between the two variables (r=0.4), suggesting that parties in heterogeneous coalitions slightly tend to attack their partners more frequently than those in more homogeneous cabinets. However, there are several cases in our sample in which the ideological heterogeneity of an incumbent multi-party cabinet is high, but the coalition parties do not or only few times attack each other in the final four weeks before election day. This indicates a more nuanced pattern in the relationship between the ideological range within a cabinet and the campaign behaviour of coalition parties, which could affect the voters' support for cabinet parties.

Figure 1. The relationship between intra-coalition ideological range and intra-coalition campaign attacks



Note. Each entry represents a party-specific value. The black solid line represents the fitted regression line; the grey area represents the 95% confidence interval.

Turning to the evaluation of our two hypotheses, table 1 presents the results of three multi-level linear models and thus evaluates the effects of intra-coalition attacks and coalition heterogeneity on the support for the cabinet parties. All models include the discussed set of control variables, but differ in the included explanatory variables. Model 1 covers the government parties' negative intra-coalition focus based on their campaign media statements, while Model 2 adds the government's ideological range. Model 3 introduces an interaction term between intra-coalition focus and government range. The results of Models 1 and 2 are consistent, showing that *negative intra-coalition focus* has the expected positive and significant effect. The more coalition government parties attack each other during the final weeks of the election campaign, the higher the support, measured by the sympathy scores, of the survey respondents for the parties that form the incumbent government, with a change from the minimum to maximum negative focus values predicted to

correlate with about a 0.26-point increase in party support. This finding supports our first hypothesis.

In terms of the control variables, vote choice is – unsurprisingly – a strong explanatory factor: compared with voting for the opposition as a baseline, voting for another coalition party is associated with a 0.75-unit increase in party support, while voting for the party in question is associated with an increase of almost three units in liking the respective party. The perceived ideological distance between respondents and parties and being male both have consistent negative effects on party support, while age and satisfaction with democracy have consistent positive effects. Among the party-level controls, it is notable that the Prime Minister's party receives consistently higher support than junior partners, indicating that it is indeed an advantage for parties to win control over the office of the Prime Minister (e.g., Duch et al. 2015; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Klüver and Spoon 2020). The level of received attacks has a positive effect on party support, in line with the literature on the risk of negative campaigning backfire (Somer-Topcu and Weitzel 2022).

Model 3 tests our second hypothesis by introducing an interaction term between the ideological range of the coalition and the governing parties' negative intra-coalition campaign focus. The estimated effect of the interaction term is statistically significant and shows the expected negative direction: the more the cabinet parties attack each other in the last three to four weeks before election day and the higher the programmatic distance between the coalition parties is, the lower the support of voters for the respective government parties. To further investigate the interactive relationship, we plot the average marginal effect of both variables, conditional on each other. As

Figure 2 shows, the marginal effect of the ideological range within the government starts off as positive in low values of negative campaign focus, but as the negative campaign focus increases the effect of ideological range becomes increasingly negative (see the left panel in Figure 2). At the minimum level of negative intra-coalition focus, a one standard deviation increase in range (7.63) is associated with roughly 0.51-unit increase in liking the party. In contrast, at the maximum level of negative intra-coalition focus, a similar change in coalition range is associated with 1.11-units *decrease* in party support.

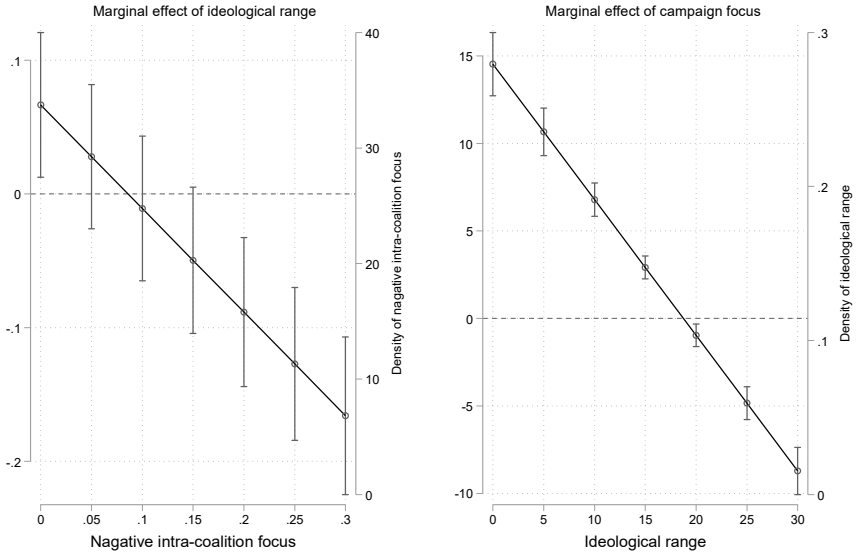
The effect of negative campaign focus starts off strongly positive in case of incumbent governments with a low degree of ideological range (see the right panel in Figure 2). This positive effect decreases as the intra-coalition range increases and becomes negative when the intra-coalition conflict variable reaches its maximum. In very low levels of coalition range, a one standard deviation increase in negative intra-coalition focus (0.08) – a mostly theoretical scenario since coalition partners rarely attack each other at that low level of range – is associated with about 0.91-unit increase in party support. When the range is at its 25^{th} to 30^{th} percentiles, a range where intra-coalition negative focus already shows a substantial variation, the same change in negative focus is associated with a 0.26- to 0.45-point change in party support. In contrast, in the maximum level of coalition range, a similar increase in negative intra-coalition focus is associated with a 0.51-unit *decrease* in party support.

Table 1. The effect of intra-coalition ideological range and intra-coalition campaign attacks on government party support

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Focal explanatory variables			
Negative intra-coalition focus	0.975**	0.944**	14.54***
	(0.308)	(0.309)	(0.922)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0241	0.0667*
		(0.0175)	(0.0276)
Coalition range * negative focus			-0.775***
			(0.0495)
Controls			
Vote = other coalition partner	0.746***	0.746***	0.746***
	(0.0303)	(0.0303)	(0.0303)
Vote = party in question	2.690***	2.690***	2.685***
	(0.0359)	(0.0359)	(0.0358)
Respondent-party distance	-0.495***	-0.495***	-0.493***
	(0.00495)	(0.00495)	(0.00494)
Age	0.00134	0.00135	0.00133
	(0.000778)	(0.000778)	(0.000778)
Gender = male	-0.203***	-0.203***	-0.204***
	(0.0258)	(0.0258)	(0.0258)
Education = primary	0.0377	0.0380	0.0394
	(0.289)	(0.289)	(0.289)
Education = higher secondary	0.167	0.168	0.168
	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)
Education = post-secondary	0.175	0.177	0.176
	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.291)
Education = university	0.233	0.234	0.234
	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.348***	0.348***	0.349***
	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)
Prime Minister's party	0.106***	0.107***	0.105***
	(0.0199)	(0.0199)	(0.0198)
Past coalition years	0.0352	0.0366	0.0742
	(0.0315)	(0.0293)	(0.0462)
Pre-electoral coalition	0.117	0.186	-0.277
	(0.446)	(0.418)	(0.659)
GDP growth	0.0872	0.0974*	0.0158
	(0.0447)	(0.0423)	(0.0667)
All negative focus	-0.378	-0.352	1.943***
	(0.258)	(0.259)	(0.297)
Received attacks	12.23***	12.19***	8.212***
	(0.505)	(0.506)	(0.564)
Constant	3.562***	3.082***	2.138**
	(0.333)	(0.479)	(0.661)
Observations	38527	38527	38527
Number of respondents	15,984	15,984	15,984
Number of cabinets	12	12	12

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Figure 2. Average marginal effects of intra-coalition ideological range and intra-coalition campaign attacks on government party support



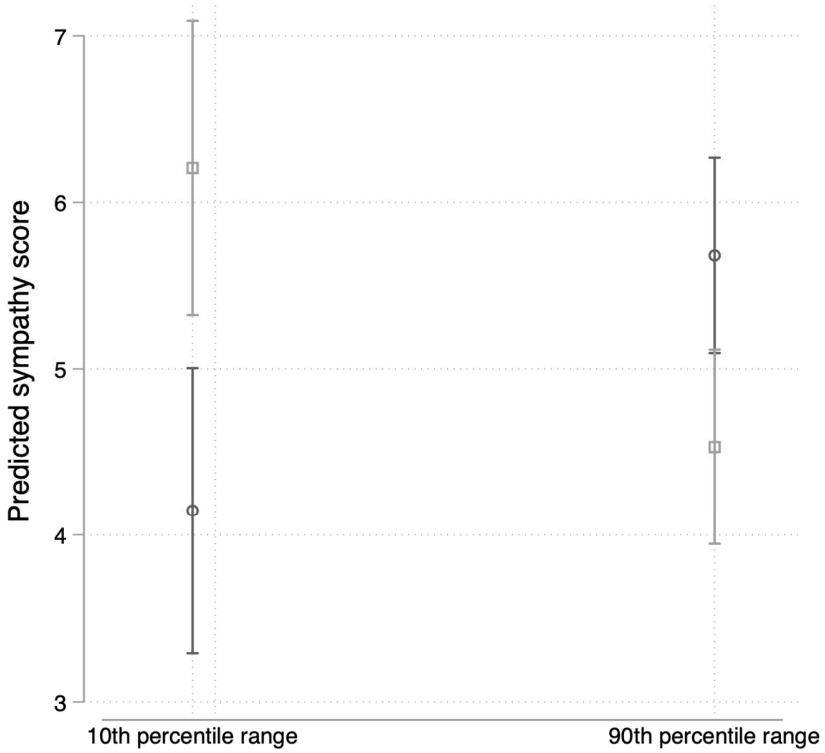
Note: Both graphs are based on Model 3 in Table 1. Capped vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Grey bars represent the density of the variable on the X-axis.

Another way to present the interactive effect of negative campaign attacks between cabinet parties and the intra-coalition range is shown in Figure 3, which presents the predicted values of sympathy across the 10th and 90th percentiles of both independent variables: when the intra-coalition range is at the 10th percentile, the difference between the 10th and 90th intra-coalition conflict percentiles is significant and substantial: the model predicts a party with the 90th percentile conflict will be associated with a sympathy score 2 points higher than a party with the 10th percentile conflict. If the coalition is at the 90th percentile of intra-coalition range, however, the direction of the effect is reversed, with higher sympathy given to the party that presents the 10th percentile conflict, although the confidence intervals slightly overlap. Moreover, if we compare the same intra-coalition conflict values across values of intra-coalition range, we see that the predicted sympathy

for a party with the 10th percentile conflict is higher when the range is at the 90th percentile compared to the 10th, while it is the other way around for a party with the 90th percentile conflict.

These results again support the second hypothesis and imply that the interplay of intra-coalition conflict and the number of attacks between the coalition parties before election day matter for the support for cabinet parties among voters. An increasing number of intra-coalition attacks could remind the voters of the amount of policy compromises the government parties had to make when they formed the current cabinet and when designing policies during the outgoing legislative period. These findings suggest that it is not only the ideological range between the cabinet parties and thus the need to agree on painful policy compromises within the coalition which result in a lower support for the government parties in the following elections (Fortunato 2021). Moreover, it is how cabinet parties deal with each other in the weeks before election day when a majority of citizens decide whom they vote for. If the cabinet parties attack each other in the final phase of the campaign and if the incumbent coalition is characterized by a high degree of ideological heterogeneity, then it is likely that the cabinet parties will suffer at the polls.

Figure 3. Predicted sympathy based on intra-coalition ideological range and intra-coalition campaign attacks



Note. Predictions based on Model 3 in Table 1. Black circles represent 10th percentile intra-coalition negativity; Gray rectangles represent 90th percentile negativity. Capped lined represent 95% confidence intervals.

Robustness tests

To further test the robustness of our findings, we estimated several alternative model specifications. First, we include single-party governments which all have values of zero in range and in intra-coalition attacks in the analysis (see Table A1 in the online appendix).[5] Second, we used alternative measures for the coalition governments' ideological range. In doing so, we refer to three intra-governmental heterogeneity variables: a) based on a general left-right placement derived from several expert surveys (Döring and Manow 2021), b) based on the economic policy

[5] This increases the number of observations to 21,110 respondents in 19 elections.

positions of government parties that differentiate between preferences for a strong role of the state in the economy and a fiscal conservative position, and c) a two-dimensional range measure that accounts both for the economic dimension and a societal policy dimension differentiating between progressive and traditionalist positions on the order of society (see Table A2 in the online appendix). We also used a four-point categorical measure based on our original intra-governmental heterogeneity to account for possible non-linear trends (see Figure A1 in the online appendix). Third, we estimated the full model using dependent variables that included only ideology-based attacks or only valence-based attacks (see Table A3 in the online appendix). Fourth, we estimated our models using vote recall instead of last elections vote choice, reducing the number of non-missing observations to 33,018 (see Table A4 in the online appendix). Fifth, we ran multi-level Tobit models to accommodate for the limited nature of our dependent variable – the degree of party support, measured by party sympathy scores – which ranges from zero to ten (see Table A5 in the online appendix). We also estimated fixed-effects linear models with country and year fixed effects and clustering by respondents (Table A6 in the online appendix).

Furthermore, we included various additional controls: a binary variable for cabinets that experienced severe internal conflict during the cabinet term (based on www.erdda.com; see Bergman et al. 2019; Bergman et al. 2021c; Hellström et al. 2021), a binary variable for having attachment to any party, inflation and unemployment as additional indicators for the government's performance, and a binary variable to capture whether the incoming government has a different composition than the outgoing one (see Table A7 in the online appendix). In addition, we substituted the respondents' education level with their political knowledge, reducing our country-year cases to nine because knowledge is absent from the CSES surveys after 2015 (see Table A8

in the online appendix). Our tests replicate the results presented in table 1 across all these alternative specifications: voters' support for coalition parties increases if they attack their partners, but only in contexts when the ideological diversity of the respective coalition government is low.

Conclusion

Governing in multi-party cabinets has become the norm in European democracies. Even political systems characterized by majority rule voting systems like the United Kingdom or countries like Spain with frequent single-party minority governments saw the formation of coalition governments in the last years. Forming a coalition government always implies negotiation processes and the agreement on compromises over key and/or conflictual policy issues. The latter also implies that the policy pledges the future government parties made in their election manifestos are less likely to be implemented; instead, coalition parties have to accept compromises which can be substantial, depending on the degree of intra-coalition programmatic heterogeneity and the differences between the parties on key policy dimensions. Given that voters often associate agreeing on policy compromises with incompetence and untrustworthiness, compromising parties are likely to get punished at the polls.

Based on previous studies that demonstrated that voters have a high degree of knowledge on government formation and on attributing policy influence in multi-party cabinets (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato et al. 2021; Plescia and Kritzinger 2022), we argued that government parties need to distance themselves from their fellow partners in the coalition to gain an independent profile, which should increase the chances of the respective parties to win more votes

in the upcoming election. Instead of distancing from the coalition partners in the election manifesto, which forms the basis for the coalition bargaining process, or by making use of the legislative process to signal disagreement with the respective partners, we argued that government parties could select attacking their cabinet partners as a strategy to gain a more distinct policy profile. The advantage of this strategy is that a majority of voters make up their mind which parties they should choose in the final weeks of the election campaign, so that signals that show an independent policy profile despite working together in a coalition agreement should have the desired goal of maximizing the support of voters on election day. The results of the analysis indicate that voters' support for coalition parties increases if they attack their partners, but only when the ideological diversity of the respective coalition government is low. Furthermore, the regression analyses suggest that it is not a high degree of intra-coalition heterogeneity *per se* that results in lower support for coalition cabinet parties. Instead, when coalition parties attack each other in the last few weeks before the election, that is, when information on political issues dominate the media and are therefore likely to be perceived by many voters so that they are more likely to learn about the differences between the government parties, the degree of programmatic diversity within a coalition government matters, as it is highlighted by the attacks. Put differently: in case of ideologically very diverse governments attacking the coalition partner seems not a suitable strategy for a party in terms of gaining support from the voters. If the government is ideologically rather homogeneous, however, attacking the coalition partner helps to gain support among the voters.

The present study contributes to the current understanding of both coalition heterogeneity and of negative campaigning, and their roles in affecting voters' attitudes. While coalition heterogeneity

has been thought to be a detrimental characteristic, we found that it affects voters negatively only in the presence of intra-coalition campaign attacks. Conversely, we show that campaign attacks between coalition partners are not universally beneficial or detrimental for the attacking parties. Their effect is contingent on the characteristics of the incumbent coalition government. Because our findings are based on data from seven European countries and a relatively short time frame from 2007 until 2018 only, the results have to be treated with some caution. Furthermore, experimental research designs could be helpful to underline and to test more directly the causal claims and assumptions that we made in the theoretical section.

In addition, an important aspect we could not consider in this contribution is the impact of intra-party conflict on the number of attacks of coalition parties on the other parties that form the cabinet (see, e.g., Plescia and Kritzinger 2022). An internally divided government party with (strong) factions might be more likely to distance itself from the other coalition parties by attacking them in the final weeks of the campaign to satisfy the supporters of the intra-party factions that reject the respective incumbent coalition government. Government parties with relevant internal factions might then be even more punished in the following election if they decide to attack their coalition partners. It does, yet, require more sophisticated data, in particular on intra-party conflict, to evaluate this reasoning. Furthermore, we could not take in detail into account if and to which amount cabinet parties attacked each other during the legislative period. Data from the Coalition Governments in Central, Eastern, and Western Europe dataset (www.erdda.com; see Bergman et al. 2019; Bergman et al. 2021c; Hellström et al. 2021), which we incorporated into our robustness tests, shows that only in two cabinets under study intra-coalition policy conflict existed. Parliamentary debates (e.g., Proksch and Slapin 2012; Bäck et al. 2021), press releases (e.g.,

Gessler and Hunger 2022) and (social) media statements (e.g., Sältzer 2022) in the time period between elections could also help the government parties to keep or to win back a distinct policy profile despite finding compromises with the partners in the cabinet.

Finally, the findings indicate that the party that controls the Prime Ministerial office receives higher sympathy scores. When differentiating between the party of the Prime Minister and junior coalition partners, the robustness tests presented in the online appendix suggest that junior coalition partners receive a significant boost when attacking their coalition partners in the final weeks of the election campaign. Taking into account that the power of the Prime Minister varies across political systems (e.g., Bergman et al. 2003) and that some cabinet posts like the ministry for finance can play an important role for a junior coalition party to gain a powerful role in the coalition (e.g., Duch and Falco-Gimeno 2022), future research should focus on this variation and could, for instance, study whether the control over key cabinet posts beyond the one of the Prime Minister influences – in combination with the programmatic heterogeneity of a coalition government and the attacks between coalition partners during the election campaign – the voters' attitudes toward incumbent government parties and their electoral chances.

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Negative campaign statements, coalition heterogeneity, and the support for government parties

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Table A1. Excluding Single Party Cabinets.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Negative intra-coalition focus	0.942**	0.922**	14.64***
	(0.309)	(0.309)	(0.922)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0675***	0.0783***
		(0.0191)	(0.0207)
Coalition range * negative focus			-0.779***
			(0.0494)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.899***	0.898***	0.899***
	(0.0290)	(0.0290)	(0.0290)
Vote = party in question	2.885***	2.885***	2.882***
	(0.0323)	(0.0323)	(0.0322)
Prime Minister's party	0.107***	0.107***	0.105***
	(0.0199)	(0.0199)	(0.0198)
Respondent-party distance	-0.484***	-0.484***	-0.482***
	(0.00466)	(0.00466)	(0.00465)
Age	0.00283***	0.00283***	0.00283***
	(0.000719)	(0.000719)	(0.000719)
Gender = male	-0.153***	-0.153***	-0.153***
	(0.0237)	(0.0237)	(0.0237)
Education = primary	-0.259	-0.259	-0.261
	(0.139)	(0.139)	(0.139)
Education = higher secondary	-0.226	-0.226	-0.230
	(0.140)	(0.140)	(0.140)
Education = post-secondary	-0.210	-0.210	-0.215
	(0.143)	(0.143)	(0.142)
Education = university	-0.182	-0.181	-0.185
	(0.141)	(0.141)	(0.141)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.337***	0.337***	0.338***
	(0.0113)	(0.0113)	(0.0113)
Past coalition years	-0.0275	0.00853	0.0154
	(0.0216)	(0.0196)	(0.0212)
Pre-electoral coalition	1.381**	1.235**	1.063*
	(0.519)	(0.406)	(0.439)
GDP growth	-0.0290	0.0379	-0.0260
	(0.0752)	(0.0614)	(0.0666)
All negative focus	-0.332	-0.323	1.934***
	(0.260)	(0.259)	(0.295)
Received attacks	11.99***	11.99***	8.084***
	(0.506)	(0.505)	(0.561)
Constant	3.418***	2.287***	2.052***
	(0.333)	(0.422)	(0.452)
Observations	43653	43653	43653
AIC	186000.2	185992.6	185747.3
BIC	186182.6	186183.6	185947.0

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A2. Alternative Ideological Range Measures.

	Parlgov.org		Economic dimension		Two-dimensional	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Negative intra-coalition focus	0.957**	11.74***	0.994**	-1.500	0.989**	12.54***
	(0.309)	(0.888)	(0.308)	(1.143)	(0.308)	(2.343)
Coalition's ideological range	0.0753	0.295*	-0.0709	-0.119	-0.0685	-0.0453
	(0.0919)	(0.117)	(0.0819)	(0.0891)	(0.0850)	(0.0792)
Coalition range * negative focus		-3.984***		0.992*		-2.106***
		(0.307)		(0.439)		(0.424)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.746***	0.752***	0.746***	0.744***	0.747***	0.748***
	(0.0303)	(0.0303)	(0.0303)	(0.0303)	(0.0303)	(0.0303)
Vote = party in question	2.690***	2.679***	2.690***	2.694***	2.690***	2.685***
	(0.0359)	(0.0359)	(0.0359)	(0.0359)	(0.0359)	(0.0359)
Prime Minister's party	0.107***	0.119***	0.106***	0.119***	0.106***	0.166***
	(0.0199)	(0.0198)	(0.0199)	(0.0206)	(0.0199)	(0.0232)
Respondent-party distance	-0.495***	-0.495***	-0.495***	-0.495***	-0.495***	-0.497***
	(0.00495)	(0.00494)	(0.00495)	(0.00495)	(0.00495)	(0.00496)
Age	0.00134	0.00132	0.00134	0.00134	0.00134	0.00135
	(0.000778)	(0.000777)	(0.000778)	(0.000778)	(0.000778)	(0.000778)
Gender = male	-0.203***	-0.203***	-0.203***	-0.203***	-0.203***	-0.203***
	(0.0258)	(0.0258)	(0.0258)	(0.0258)	(0.0258)	(0.0258)
Education = primary	0.0377	0.0404	0.0374	0.0369	0.0375	0.0379
	(0.289)	(0.289)	(0.289)	(0.289)	(0.289)	(0.289)
Education = higher secondary	0.167	0.170	0.166	0.165	0.166	0.167
	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)
Education = post-secondary	0.175	0.177	0.174	0.173	0.174	0.176
	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.291)
Education = university	0.233	0.236	0.233	0.232	0.233	0.233
	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)	(0.290)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.348***	0.347***	0.348***	0.348***	0.348***	0.347***
	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)	(0.0124)
Past coalition years	0.0307	0.0330	0.0356	0.0414	0.0405	0.0276
	(0.0312)	(0.0392)	(0.0305)	(0.0324)	(0.0314)	(0.0293)
Pre-electoral coalition	0.263	0.291	0.00477	-0.0545	0.0243	0.237
	(0.469)	(0.590)	(0.452)	(0.478)	(0.450)	(0.420)
GDP growth	0.0959*	0.0308	0.0879*	0.110*	0.0912*	0.116**
	(0.0448)	(0.0565)	(0.0434)	(0.0468)	(0.0439)	(0.0411)
All negative focus	-0.365	0.992***	-0.394	-0.358	-0.388	-0.835**
	(0.259)	(0.278)	(0.258)	(0.259)	(0.258)	(0.272)
Received attacks	12.21***	8.598***	12.26***	12.86***	12.25***	12.61***
	(0.506)	(0.576)	(0.505)	(0.573)	(0.505)	(0.509)
Constant	3.368***	2.867***	3.775***	3.787***	3.869***	3.734***
	(0.407)	(0.460)	(0.412)	(0.423)	(0.504)	(0.482)
Observations	38527	38527	38527	38527	38527	38527
AIC	163623.1	163458.8	163623.0	163620.0	163623.1	163600.5
BIC	163811.4	163655.6	163811.3	163816.8	163811.4	163797.4

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A3. Using Alternative Dependent Variables.

	(1) Only valence attacks	(2) Only issue attacks
Negative intra-coalition focus	14.94***	44.38***
	(1.008)	(4.913)
Coalition's ideological range	0.0624*	0.0337
	(0.0268)	(0.0195)
Coalition range * negative focus	-0.784***	-1.574***
	(0.0503)	(0.238)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.743***	0.741***
	(0.0303)	(0.0303)
Vote = party in question	2.692***	2.689***
	(0.0358)	(0.0358)
Prime Minister's party	0.0933***	0.172***
	(0.0197)	(0.0206)
Respondent-party distance	-0.492***	-0.495***
	(0.00494)	(0.00494)
Age	0.00133	0.00136
	(0.000778)	(0.000778)
Gender = male	-0.204***	-0.203***
	(0.0258)	(0.0258)
Education = primary	0.0381	0.0397
	(0.289)	(0.289)
Education = higher secondary	0.167	0.169
	(0.290)	(0.290)
Education = post-secondary	0.175	0.177
	(0.291)	(0.291)
Education = university	0.233	0.235
	(0.290)	(0.290)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.349***	0.348***
	(0.0124)	(0.0124)
Past coalition years	0.0750	0.0396
	(0.0449)	(0.0327)
Pre-electoral coalition	-0.270	0.124
	(0.640)	(0.467)
GDP growth	0.0284	0.0869
	(0.0647)	(0.0473)
All negative focus	2.106***	-0.138
	(0.308)	(0.188)
Received attacks	8.109***	10.10***
	(0.590)	(0.462)
Constant	2.141***	2.891***
	(0.647)	(0.512)
Observations	38527	38527
AIC	163394.3	163482.0
BIC	163591.2	163678.9

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A4. Using Vote Recall.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Negative intra-coalition focus	0.813*	0.768*	13.02***
	(0.333)	(0.335)	(1.000)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0185	0.0572*
		(0.0143)	(0.0242)
Coalition range * negative focus			-0.702***
			(0.0539)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.376***	0.375***	0.389***
	(0.0337)	(0.0337)	(0.0337)
Vote = party in question	1.956***	1.955***	1.947***
	(0.0374)	(0.0374)	(0.0374)
Prime Minister's party	0.0631**	0.0633**	0.0624**
	(0.0217)	(0.0217)	(0.0216)
Respondent-party distance	-0.526***	-0.526***	-0.524***
	(0.00548)	(0.00548)	(0.00547)
Age	0.00468***	0.00468***	0.00466***
	(0.000936)	(0.000936)	(0.000936)
Gender = male	-0.222***	-0.222***	-0.222***
	(0.0287)	(0.0287)	(0.0287)
Education = primary	-0.804*	-0.804*	-0.803*
	(0.391)	(0.391)	(0.391)
Education = higher secondary	-0.722	-0.721	-0.720
	(0.392)	(0.392)	(0.392)
Education = post-secondary	-0.681	-0.680	-0.680
	(0.393)	(0.393)	(0.393)
Education = university	-0.644	-0.643	-0.643
	(0.392)	(0.392)	(0.392)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.401***	0.401***	0.401***
	(0.0138)	(0.0138)	(0.0139)
Past coalition years	0.0386	0.0399	0.0743
	(0.0257)	(0.0241)	(0.0405)
Pre-electoral coalition	0.0917	0.142	-0.282
	(0.364)	(0.344)	(0.577)
GDP growth	0.0913*	0.0987**	0.0246
	(0.0366)	(0.0349)	(0.0585)
All negative focus	-0.696*	-0.659*	1.432***
	(0.280)	(0.282)	(0.324)
Received attacks	14.34***	14.29***	10.72***
	(0.549)	(0.550)	(0.615)
Constant	4.343***	3.973***	3.113***
	(0.418)	(0.506)	(0.655)
Observations	33018	33018	33018
AIC	141623.6	141624.1	141462.1
BIC	141800.1	141809.0	141655.4

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A5. Using Multilevel Tobit Regression.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Negative intra-coalition focus	1.188***	1.150***	16.44***
	(0.346)	(0.347)	(1.045)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0281	0.0759*
		(0.0188)	(0.0306)
Coalition range * negative focus			-0.871***
			(0.0562)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.800***	0.800***	0.799***
	(0.0346)	(0.0346)	(0.0345)
Vote = party in question	2.960***	2.959***	2.957***
	(0.0411)	(0.0411)	(0.0410)
Prime Minister's party	0.0960***	0.0961***	0.0930***
	(0.0225)	(0.0225)	(0.0224)
Respondent-party distance	-0.565***	-0.565***	-0.562***
	(0.00573)	(0.00573)	(0.00571)
Age	0.00183*	0.00183*	0.00183*
	(0.000893)	(0.000893)	(0.000893)
Gender = male	-0.240***	-0.241***	-0.241***
	(0.0296)	(0.0296)	(0.0296)
Education = primary	0.0171	0.0175	0.0191
	(0.334)	(0.334)	(0.334)
Education = higher secondary	0.170	0.171	0.171
	(0.334)	(0.334)	(0.334)
Education = post-secondary	0.165	0.167	0.166
	(0.336)	(0.336)	(0.336)
Education = university	0.244	0.246	0.245
	(0.335)	(0.335)	(0.335)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.423***	0.424***	0.424***
	(0.0143)	(0.0143)	(0.0143)
Past coalition years	0.0316	0.0333	0.0754
	(0.0344)	(0.0317)	(0.0511)
Pre-electoral coalition	0.235	0.316	-0.204
	(0.487)	(0.451)	(0.728)
GDP growth	0.0989*	0.111*	0.0192
	(0.0489)	(0.0456)	(0.0737)
All negative focus	-0.648*	-0.616*	1.939***
	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.334)
Received attacks	14.02***	13.97***	9.503***
	(0.570)	(0.571)	(0.638)
Constant	3.321***	2.761***	1.705*
	(0.380)	(0.531)	(0.738)
Observations	38527	38527	38527
AIC	159827.2	159827.2	159590.5
BIC	160007.0	160015.5	159787.4

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A6. Non-multilevel Regression Models.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Negative intra-coalition focus	0.851**	0.851**	14.81***
	(0.312)	(0.312)	(0.972)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0441***	0.0980***
		(0.00776)	(0.00845)
Coalition range * negative focus			-0.797***
			(0.0514)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.792***	0.792***	0.794***
	(0.0319)	(0.0319)	(0.0319)
Vote = party in question	2.673***	2.673***	2.668***
	(0.0337)	(0.0337)	(0.0337)
Prime Minister's party	0.107***	0.107***	0.106***
	(0.0180)	(0.0180)	(0.0180)
Respondent-party distance	-0.485***	-0.485***	-0.483***
	(0.00591)	(0.00591)	(0.00590)
Age	0.00126	0.00126	0.00126
	(0.000774)	(0.000774)	(0.000774)
Gender = male	-0.199***	-0.199***	-0.199***
	(0.0258)	(0.0258)	(0.0258)
Education = primary	0.0866	0.0866	0.0888
	(0.356)	(0.356)	(0.356)
Education = higher secondary	0.220	0.220	0.222
	(0.356)	(0.356)	(0.356)
Education = post-secondary	0.231	0.231	0.233
	(0.357)	(0.357)	(0.357)
Education = university	0.273	0.273	0.275
	(0.357)	(0.357)	(0.356)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.348***	0.348***	0.349***
	(0.0135)	(0.0135)	(0.0135)
Past coalition years	-0.161***	0.142**	0.177***
	(0.0223)	(0.0474)	(0.0475)
Pre-electoral coalition	1.652***	-1.437**	-2.500***
	(0.198)	(0.497)	(0.502)
GDP growth	-0.0278	0.132***	0.00113
	(0.0360)	(0.0219)	(0.0230)
All negative focus	-0.282	-0.282	2.086***
	(0.279)	(0.279)	(0.303)
Received attacks	12.28***	12.28***	8.177***
	(0.517)	(0.517)	(0.557)
Constant	3.015***	2.317***	0.796
	(0.374)	(0.403)	(0.413)
Country FEs	YES	YES	YES
Year FEs	YES	YES	YES
Observations	38527	38527	38527
R^2	0.465	0.465	0.468
Adjusted R^2	0.465	0.465	0.467

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A7. Using Additional Controls.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Negative intra-coalition focus	0.927**	0.843**	14.37***
	(0.310)	(0.312)	(0.932)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0402**	0.0977***
		(0.0129)	(0.0165)
Coalition range * negative focus			-0.770***
			(0.0500)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.735***	0.733***	0.734***
	(0.0306)	(0.0306)	(0.0306)
Vote = party in question	2.672***	2.670***	2.665***
	(0.0363)	(0.0363)	(0.0362)
Prime Minister's party	0.106***	0.106***	0.103***
	(0.0200)	(0.0200)	(0.0199)
Respondent-party distance	-0.499***	-0.499***	-0.496***
	(0.00502)	(0.00502)	(0.00500)
Age	0.000518	0.000543	0.000537
	(0.000794)	(0.000794)	(0.000793)
Gender = male	-0.207***	-0.207***	-0.207***
	(0.0260)	(0.0260)	(0.0260)
Education = primary	-0.0109	-0.00978	-0.00600
	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.291)
Education = higher secondary	0.110	0.114	0.116
	(0.292)	(0.292)	(0.292)
Education = post-secondary	0.106	0.110	0.113
	(0.293)	(0.293)	(0.293)
Education = university	0.176	0.180	0.182
	(0.292)	(0.292)	(0.292)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.345***	0.345***	0.346***
	(0.0125)	(0.0125)	(0.0125)
Past coalition years	0.0218	0.0207	0.0468
	(0.0284)	(0.0212)	(0.0266)
Pre-electoral coalition	0.372	0.572	0.395
	(0.404)	(0.308)	(0.386)
GDP growth	-0.0388	-0.0605	-0.242***
	(0.0713)	(0.0535)	(0.0681)
All negative focus	-0.363	-0.294	1.974***
	(0.260)	(0.262)	(0.299)
Received attacks	12.23***	12.16***	8.199***
	(0.509)	(0.509)	(0.568)
Unemployment	-0.437	-0.514**	-0.723**
	(0.239)	(0.179)	(0.225)
Inflation	0.0897	0.0860	0.120
	(0.236)	(0.176)	(0.220)
Internal conflict	1.129*	1.386***	1.983***
	(0.541)	(0.411)	(0.517)
Party attachment	0.221***	0.221***	0.221***
	0.927**	0.843**	14.37***
Incoming coalition different	-0.324	-0.579*	-1.311***
	(0.339)	(0.265)	(0.335)
Constant	3.212***	2.456***	0.969
	(0.465)	(0.549)	(0.795)
Observations	37753	37753	37753
AIC	160258.6	160256.5	160029.9
BIC	160472.1	160478.6	160260.5

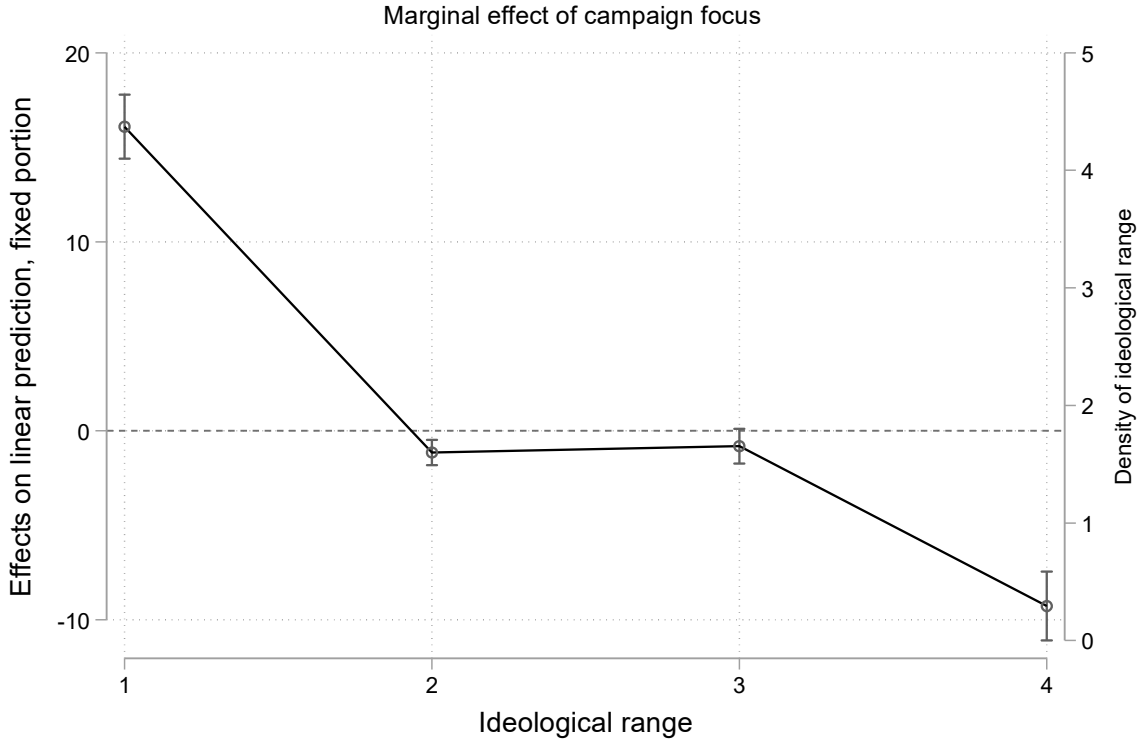
Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A8. Using knowledge instead of education

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Negative intra-coalition focus	1.166**	1.162**	24.74***
	(0.371)	(0.371)	(1.204)
Coalition's ideological range		0.0274	0.125*
		(0.0246)	(0.0567)
Coalition range * negative focus			-1.534***
			(0.0745)
Vote = other coalition partner	0.786***	0.786***	0.759***
	(0.0373)	(0.0373)	(0.0373)
Vote = party in question	2.870***	2.870***	2.878***
	(0.0465)	(0.0465)	(0.0463)
Prime Minister's party	0.254***	0.254***	0.180***
	(0.0292)	(0.0292)	(0.0290)
Respondent-party distance	-0.484***	-0.484***	-0.491***
	(0.00623)	(0.00623)	(0.00619)
Age	0.00252**	0.00252**	0.00263**
	(0.000971)	(0.000971)	(0.000972)
Gender = male	-0.102**	-0.102**	-0.103**
	(0.0328)	(0.0328)	(0.0328)
Knowledge	0.0123	0.0122	0.0122
	(0.0177)	(0.0177)	(0.0177)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.300***	0.300***	0.298***
	(0.0152)	(0.0152)	(0.0152)
Past coalition years	0.00228	0.0147	0.0496
	(0.0327)	(0.0326)	(0.0749)
Pre-electoral coalition	0.788	0.748	0.499
	(0.476)	(0.449)	(1.028)
GDP growth	0.0294	0.0462	-0.202*
	(0.0432)	(0.0433)	(0.0991)
All negative focus	-0.445	-0.442	4.490***
	(0.331)	(0.330)	(0.405)
Received attacks	9.531***	9.534***	3.280***
	(0.730)	(0.730)	(0.783)
Constant	3.554***	2.994***	0.867
	(0.172)	(0.531)	(1.204)
Observations	24859	24859	24859
AIC	105597.4	105598.3	105189.9
BIC	105743.6	105752.6	105352.4

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A1. Categorical Intra-coalition Heterogeneity.



Note: Graph based on a model similar to model 3 in Table 1, but with a 4-point ideological range based on quartiles. Capped vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Grey bars represent the density of the variable on the X-axis.