

Drivers of political parties' climate policy preferences: lessons from Denmark and Ireland.

Robert Ladrech

School of Politics, Philosophy, International Relations and Environment, Keele University,
Staffordshire, UK

and

Conor Little

Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Limerick, Limerick,
Ireland.

Corresponding author: Conor Little

Email: Conor.little@ul.ie

Abstract

Political parties are important actors in domestic climate politics. What drives variation in parties' climate policy preferences? To contribute to a growing literature on the party politics of climate change, we focus on the roles of public opinion, party competition, and parties' traditional policy preferences in shaping parties' climate policy preferences in Denmark and Ireland. In case studies that draw on in-depth interviews with policy practitioners, we show how parties respond to public opinion, accommodate issue-owners, and are powerfully constrained and enabled by their existing preferences. This shows how parties respond to public opinion, accommodate issue-owners, and are powerfully constrained and enabled by their existing preferences. These mechanisms also help to explain different responses on climate policy across the left-right spectrum. Competition between mainstream parties is particularly powerful, but can constrain as much as it enables 'greener' climate policy preferences. While

climate change may be a distinctive problem, the party politics of climate change features similar incentives and constraints as other domains.

Keywords: climate policy, climate politics, political parties, Denmark, Ireland

Parties play an important role in structuring and channelling the politics of climate change (Båtstrand 2014, 2015, Marcinkiewicz and Tosun 2015, Carter *et al.* 2018, Farstad 2018). They influence public attitudes (Brulle *et al.* 2012, Guber 2013, Sohlberg 2016) and government policy outputs and outcomes (Jensen and Spoon 2011, Birchall 2014). Party polarization on climate change raises the stakes of political competition on climate policy; it influences threat perceptions and public behaviour, and it is generally understood to lead to greater climate policy delay and less effective, ambitious, or consistent climate policy (Christoff and Eckersley 2011, pp.442–443, Farstad 2016, p.35, Sohlberg 2016; see also Farstad 2019 – this volume).

What drives variation in parties' climate policy preferences? This study examines the party politics of climate change in Denmark and Ireland over the past two decades, focusing on the roles of public opinion on climate change, party competition, and intra-party factors, especially parties' other, pre-existing policy preferences. Further, it investigates their role in producing the relationship between left-right preferences and climate policy preferences that has been observed in several studies (e.g., De Blasio and Sorice 2013, Carter *et al.* 2018, p.736, Farstad 2018).

Using case study methods, including in-depth interviews with climate policy practitioners, it finds evidence that each of these three factors plays a role in parties' responses to climate change. Low public concern about climate change is viewed as a considerable constraint on the development of parties' climate policy preferences, while increased concern provides opportunities for parties to raise its salience and to take stronger climate policy positions. Electorally successful issue-owners provoke accommodative behaviour from other parties, especially those close to them in political space, while competition between larger parties on climate change seems to be a powerful driver of climate policy preferences, but not necessarily towards 'greener' preferences. Existing party policy preferences on traditional policy issues function as an important constraint on – and sometimes an enabler of – parties' climate policy

preferences. They have had a particularly constraining effect on the preferences of right-of-centre parties.

We proceed as follows. First, we clarify some key concepts and outline theory and existing knowledge in relation to the three causal factors of interest. In the second section, we discuss case selection and other methodological choices, followed by two country studies and an analytical discussion. The study contributes to the growing evidence base concerning the determinants of party preferences on climate change and its findings regarding the roles of traditional party preferences may have implications for other ‘new’ issues. It highlights that, notwithstanding climate policy’s distinctiveness, the drivers of party preferences on climate policy have much in common with party politics in other domains.

Drivers of parties’ climate policy preferences

A climate change mitigation policy is ‘a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases’ (IPCC 2014, p.4); it plausibly encompasses ‘anti-climate’ policies too, which increase greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or reduce GHG sinks (Compston and Bailey 2013). Climate policies include carbon pricing, framework climate legislation, national strategies, amongst many others.

Climate policy is a matter of environmental protection; in this respect, environmental policy is its ‘parent’ issue. However, not all environmental policies protect the climate: closing nuclear power stations, for example, protects aspects of the environment, but leads to increased GHG emissions in many contexts (Båtstrand 2014, p.933, Carter *et al.* 2018, p.734). Climate policies also encompass a wider set of subdomains than typical environmental policies. Thus, climate policy is both related to and distinct from environmental policy; this is also reflected in a recent

comparison of various measures of parties' environmental and climate policy preferences (Carter *et al.* 2018, pp.737–739).

Parties' preferences vary, both in the emphasis they place on the climate policy (*salience*) and the *position(s)* that they adopt. In some contexts, increased salience goes hand-in-hand with the development of 'greener' positions on climate policy, but this is not always the case (cf. Carter and Jacobs 2014, Marcinkiewicz and Tosun 2015). Indeed, climate policy is often a positional, partisan issue (Farstad 2018, p.705); this further distinguishes it from environmental policy, which is often a valence issue. Differences in parties' positions contribute to polarization on climate policy¹; parties also contribute to variation in the systemic salience of climate policy.

What drives variation in parties' climate policy preferences and, thus, system-level structures of climate politics? There is considerable evidence that climate policy preferences are associated with traditional left-right policy preferences on economic and social issues (De Blasio and Sorice 2013, Carter *et al.* 2018, p.736, Farstad 2018), albeit with some exceptions (e.g., Poland: Marcinkiewicz and Tosun 2015). This association is also present in the case of environmental policy (Rohrschneider 1993, Dalton 2009, Jensen and Spoon 2011, Tosun 2011, Carter 2013). However, further research is required to specify the mechanisms underpinning the relationship between climate policy and left-right preferences (Farstad 2016, pp.249–250). We propose that there are at least three routes through which these mechanisms might operate, and that these mechanisms also offer general explanations for the development of parties' climate policy preferences.

¹ Polarization is understood here as positional differences between parties. The opposite of partisan polarization is consensus (Dalton 2008, p. 909).

First, parties seek votes and therefore *public opinion* can create an environment that is conducive to developing certain policy preferences (e.g., Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016). Carter and Jacobs' (2014) account of British climate politics in the 2000s highlights the significance of increased public concern about climate change for the development of the main parties' climate policy preferences. Spoon et al. (2014) find that parties emphasize environmental issues when public concern about those issues is high. Other suggestive evidence comes from the study of environmental policy in Denmark, where public concern about the environment has led to changes in government policy (Seeberg 2016).

However, public opinion on climate change is unevenly distributed among voters: right-of-centre ideals are negatively associated with belief in human-induced climate change and climate policy support, while left-of-centre ideals are positively associated with these dispositions (Hornsey *et al.* 2016). Moreover, larger, mainstream parties may be better able to respond to shifting voter concerns (Wagner and Meyer 2014, Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016, p.396). However, our knowledge is limited about the role of public opinion in shaping parties' climate policy preferences (Marcinkiewicz and Tosun 2015, p.201) and in particular about the perceptions and motivations of party elites that produce them.

Second, in developing their climate policy preferences, parties must take into account the behaviour of other parties. Issue-owners are a potential source of *competition*, but findings on their role are contradictory. Spoon et al. (2014) find that the success of Green parties forces other parties, especially those that are ideologically proximate to them, to accommodate their environmental policies. However, Abou-Chadi (2016) finds that the stronger Green parties deter other parties from raising the salience of environmental policy. In either case – and as indicated by Spoon et al.'s (2014) findings – it is likely that competition from parties with strong preferences on climate change creates unequal incentives for parties of the left and right: Green parties are with few exceptions from the left-of-centre (Carter 2013), while some of the

parties that have been most sceptical of climate science and policies are of the far right (Gemenis *et al.* 2012, Båtstrand 2014).

Competition on climate policy may have a particularly strong effect when it comes from mainstream parties, although the evidence-base for this assumption is limited. The paradigmatic case of mainstream competition on climate policy is the UK's brief 'competitive consensus' in the mid-late 2000s, which illustrated the particular importance for a centre-left party of not being outflanked by its centre-right rival (Carter and Jacobs 2014).

Third, party preferences are proximately the product of *intra-party* factors and therefore we can expect preferences on a relatively new issue such as climate policy to be influenced by preferences on traditional issues (Meyer 2013). Broader preferences – on issues such as state intervention (e.g., public ownership, regulation, taxation), collectivism, changes to the policy status quo, and free markets – are often assumed to play a central role in explaining the relationship between left-right preferences and climate policy preferences (Båtstrand 2014, 2015, pp.540–542, Farstad 2018). This assumption is supported by some limited empirical evidence on left-right differences from Norwegian manifestos in 2009 (Båtstrand 2014) and from nine conservative parties, whose preferences are constrained by their support for fossil fuel-producing industries (Båtstrand 2015). However, intra-party politics is arguably among the least-well understood factors that shape parties' climate policy preferences.

Case selection and data

To examine the role of public opinion, party competition, and existing policy preferences in parties' climate policy responses, including their role in the relationship between left-right and climate policy preferences, we focus on Denmark and Ireland (see Andersen and Nielsen 2016, Little and Torney 2017 for reviews). We gather data on the period from the mid-1990s to 2016.

This is long enough to observe individual parties over several election cycles, governmental configurations, and a variety of economic and international conditions.

During this period, Ireland's climate politics has been characterised by low salience and broad consensus (Little 2017a), while Denmark's has been characterised by greater salience and polarization. Denmark has also seen fluctuations in polarization driven by abrupt changes in climate policy preferences on the centre-right (Eikeland and Inderberg 2016, Seeberg 2016). Applying Dalton's (2008, p.906) Polarization Index (PI)² to parties' positions on two expert-coded climate policy items from 2009 and 2014³ supports the observation that parties are more polarized on climate policy in Denmark (PI = 3.7 and 3.4 in 2009 and 2014, respectively) than in Ireland (2.9 and 3.2). It is also reflected over a longer period in Carter et al.'s (2018) manifesto-based data on climate policy positions for the two main parties in each country: in Denmark, the mean gap between the two main parties' positions from 1994 to 2015 was 2.3 times as large as in Ireland from 1997 to 2011.

Denmark and Ireland's general similarities have provided a basis for several comparative case studies of economic policies (e.g., Giavazzi and Pagano 1990, Kluth and Lynggaard 2013, Campbell and Hall 2015). They are also similar in ways that bear on parties' incentives and constraints in developing climate policy preferences. They are long-established parliamentary democracies with proportional representation electoral systems and few veto points; these systems and the parties in them are most likely to respond to the challenge of climate change mitigation (Christoff and Eckersley 2011, p.440, Lachapelle and Paterson 2013, p.549, Spoon

² $PI = \sqrt{\sum(\text{party vote share}_i * ([\text{party position}_i - \text{party system average position}] / 5)^2)}$ where i is a party (Dalton 2008).

³ The data were collected for two Europe-wide Voter Advice Applications (Trechsel and Mair 2011, Garzia et al. 2017). Responses ranged from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree' on the following statements: 'The promotion of public transport should be fostered through green taxes (e.g. road taxing)' and 'Renewable sources of energy (e.g. solar or wind energy) should be supported even if this means higher energy costs'. The Polarization Index values presented here are calculated using the aggregated values for these two items placed on a 0-10 scale.

et al. 2014). Both have been EU member states since 1973, accounting for an important set of supranational constraints and incentives for domestic climate policy actors.

In terms of problem-pressure, both countries have high per capita emissions but relatively low vulnerability to climate change impacts (e.g., Eckstein *et al.* 2017). They have open economies and both have large, export-oriented agriculture sectors, which account for significant proportions of their GHG emissions: typically more than 30% in Ireland and approximately 20% in Denmark. Nuclear energy has been off their respective political agendas for some time and both experienced a property market and banking crisis in the late 2000s, albeit only Ireland received a multilateral ‘bailout’ loan (Kluth and Lynggaard 2013, Campbell and Hall 2015).

Despite their similarities, Denmark and Ireland differ in some important respects for the purposes of this study. First, Denmark’s party system is centred primarily on the left-right dimension, while Ireland’s party system is structured by two centrist parties in which both the left and the far right are relatively underdeveloped. Applied to expert survey and manifesto data on left-right positions (Bakker *et al.* 2015, Volkens *et al.* 2017), Dalton’s (2008) PI supports these observations, with consistently greater left-right polarization evident in Denmark than Ireland.⁴ This has implications for both party competition and for the intra-party politics of climate policy in the context of existing policy commitments. Second, they differ in the ubiquity and strength of parties claiming issue ownership on climate policy, with implications for party competition. In Denmark, the Socialist People’s Party, the Social Liberals, the Red-Green Alliance, the Conservative People’s Party, and since 2013 the Alternative, have all laid claim to being ‘green’ (Kosiara-Pedersen and Little 2016), while in Ireland political environmentalism is represented by a small Green Party. Third, climate change has been the subject of relatively little public concern in Ireland, while public concern has been

⁴ Denmark’s party system is also more fragmented than Ireland’s, but fragmentation appears to be unrelated to polarization (Dalton 2008, p. 908).

greater in Denmark. Survey data show consistent gaps between the levels of concern in the two countries (

<<< See 'Figure 1 new.jpg', submitted with manuscript>>>

Figure 1).

As similar cases, Ireland and Denmark allow us to focus on the roles of this set of factors in driving party preferences and ultimately generating cross-national differences in system-level climate politics. Although the countries differ in the configuration of climate policy preferences in their party systems and are diverse in their values for key causal factors, they are both *typical* cases of the expected relationship between left-right polarization and climate policy polarization and as such they lend themselves to the examination of mechanisms that underpin the relationship between these factors (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

<<<*Insert*

<<< See 'Figure 1 new.jpg', submitted with manuscript>>>

Figure 1 *about here*>>>

Case study methods and in-depth interviews are appropriate for examining the mechanisms of interest. They potentially provide access to key actors' motivations and perceptions, which are central to understanding their responses to the incentives and constraints of interest. They allow us to follow preferences amidst a shifting policy agenda, and to examine how the causal factors of interest – which are potentially complementary and may interact – act in conjunction with one another.

We draw on a range of case study materials and the accounts of 22 individuals whom we interviewed between 2013 and 2016 (Table 1). Interviewees were selected because of their knowledge of individual parties (e.g., as elected representatives or advisers to ministers) or because of their knowledge of multiple parties on the climate policy issue (e.g., as representatives of NGOs or interest groups who lobbied the parties). The interviews focussed on the themes of office-, policy-, and vote-seeking incentives, and had a particular focus on

gathering information about the internal party politics of climate policy development. They were conducted on a non-attribution basis and were not recorded. Relative to the overall period of interest, the interview data were collected during a short period, so the information from these sources is biased towards the ten years immediately prior to the interviews. This imbalance is partly offset by the publication, after the passage of time, of scholarly and journalistic accounts of the earlier part of the period of interest.

<<<Insert Table 1 about here>>>

Case studies

Denmark, 1997-2016

Danish climate politics has typically been characterised by left-of-centre parties asserting issue ownership of climate policy and centre-right parties adopting a minimally accommodative policy stance (Interviews 16, 17, 21). This structure of partisan preferences has persisted, with the exception of the late-2000s when the centre-right aimed to outdo the left bloc on climate policy (Carter *et al.* 2018, pp.735–736). It consists less of a conflict over the need for climate policy than over the prominence of state involvement as well as the degree of international climate leadership Denmark should provide. These partisan differences have developed in spite of an underlying consensus on energy security, including leadership on renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency, which was forged in response to the Oil Crises of the 1970s and renewed in the development of subsequent policies, such as Energy 2000 (1990) (Andersen and Nielsen 2016, p.94, Eikeland and Inderberg 2016, p.166).

Although climate change has not been a top policy area for public concern or party competition, it is considered part of the next tier of public attention, after health, jobs, and immigration (Kosiara-Pedersen 2008, Kosiara-Pedersen and Little 2016; Interview 16). Party attachment to climate policy is a party identity factor on the left and therefore parties on the left are expected to have more ambitious climate policy than parties on the right, even though traditional issues lead their campaigns. In addition to high public concern and the variety of potential issue-owners, environmental NGOs have been active (Binderkrantz 2015, p.126, Andersen and Nielsen 2016, p.84), even providing the Social Liberal (SL) Minister for Climate and Energy from 2011 to 2015. Elements of Danish industry support ambitious Danish climate and energy policy, while traditional sectors such as agriculture have sided with the centre-right's less ambitious approach (Interviews 20, 22).

The Social Democrats' (SD) 'climate' identity was driven in part by activism of former party leader Svend Auken on the left of the party in the 1990s (Interviews 14-19) and was substantiated by government policies, including the adoption of an ambitious target for the first Kyoto commitment period. Under Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (SD) in 1993, the Environment and Energy ministries were merged, with Auken appointed its first minister; the integration of these two ministries 'created a synergy between the two policy fields which often have contradictory policy goals' (Dyrhauge 2017, p.91). Together with SL, the Nyrup Rasmussen government consolidated Denmark's position as a climate leader. While in opposition from 2001 to 2011, the parties of the centre-left, including the SLs, continued to maintain pressure on the Venstre-led government (Seeberg 2016). Following significant gains at the 2007 national election (+12 of the *Folketing's* 179 seats), the Socialist People's Party (SPP) signalled that it was ready to become a 'party of government', and together with SD developed a policy platform for the 2011 election in which climate and energy policy featured prominently (Interview 16). They aimed to outdo the government, including on its energy,

transport, taxation and ‘green growth’ policies, leading not only to increased salience, but also refusal to support some government policies on the grounds of insufficient ambition (Laub 2012). While transitory, this competitive dynamic between the two main parties on climate policy was a powerful driver of party preferences (Seeberg 2016, Carter *et al.* 2018). The bargaining position of the SPP vis-à-vis SD, enhanced by its increased seat share, consolidated an ambitious climate policy position for the centre-left bloc.

Under Anders Fogh Rasmussen from 1998 and in government with the Conservative People’s Party (CPP) from 2001 the centre-right Venstre prioritised industrial and agricultural interests and its climate policy was fitted into a neo-liberal framework; that is, the party promoted market-led developments rather than state-spending initiatives. In its first years in power, it highlighted conflict between climate policy and economic policy and its position entailed cutbacks on renewable energy projects, a retreat from leadership in the EU, and the appointment of the controversial Bjørn Lomborg to the new Environmental Assessment Institute (Andersen and Nielsen 2016, Eikeland and Inderberg 2016, Seeberg 2016). Fogh Rasmussen himself did not rank climate change as a priority issue, despite advice from his coalition partner to do so; he admitted as much at a 2008 party conference (Interview 14, 18).

Venstre changed orientation in the mid-2000s while in government, heralding a period of renewed convergence and higher-salience competition on climate policy between left and right. The high level of activity globally on climate policy influenced domestic politics and this period of salience was extended by the prospect of Denmark hosting the UN Climate Change Conference in 2009. Intra-bloc dynamics of party competition help explain this shift: the junior coalition partner (the CPP) maintained and slightly expanded its number of parliamentary seats at the 2005 election and kept them in 2007, whereas Venstre had lost seats in 2005 and 2007. These changes altered the weight of the CPP within the government coalition – where its party

leader had continuously argued for a stronger climate policy (Interview 14), and thereby influenced government policy in a more active direction. Fogh Rasmussen appointed the popular Connie Hedegaard (CPP) as Environment Minister and established the environment as a ‘top-five’ priority; this was followed by the launch of a new energy policy in January 2007 with broad political support, the establishment of a Ministry for Climate Change and Energy, and an energy policy agreement in 2008 (Andersen and Nielsen 2016, p.86, Eikeland and Inderberg 2016, Seeberg 2016, p.193). Developing Denmark’s export potential was a major plank in Hedegaard’s strategy and the about-turn in Venstre’s position was justified by Fogh Rasmussen as enhancing energy security. In addition, significant sections of Danish industry and local (including municipal and private) interests had applied pressure to return to supporting renewable and decentralised sources of energy; these interests had in turn been created by earlier energy policies (Interview 15; Eikeland and Inderberg 2016).

From 2011 to 2015, the centre-left coalition maintained much of its climate policy ambition in government. Nonetheless, in straitened economic conditions, the SD finance minister presented the most significant intra-party obstacle to more ambitious policy, weighing short-term financial costs against longer-term investments (Interview 17) and the government reduced green taxes in an effort to increase economic growth (Andersen and Nielsen 2016, p.92). Climate change was recognised as an issue ‘owned’ by the government parties, but the coalition also recognised that more traditional issues commanded the public’s attention (Interview 16). Anticipating a departure from government after the 2015 election, the left focused its efforts on passing framework climate legislation (Interview 19).

Venstre’s trajectory under Lars Løkke Rasmussen (from August 2009) was marked by retrenchment on climate policy and the prioritization of cost-cutting as a response to the economic crisis, leading to the re-establishment of clear differences between the parties. Both

Fogh Rasmussen and Hedegaard had departed Danish politics in 2009 for NATO and the European Commission, respectively, thereby removing the two main climate leaders of the late 2000s from the centre-right. While Venstre entered into an agreement with the government on energy policy in 2012, it resisted elements of the government's climate and energy plan during its formulation, and of the right-of-centre parties only the CPP supported proposed framework climate legislation in 2014 (Kosiara-Pedersen and Little 2016, p.558; Interview 18). Venstre maintained that sufficient progress had been made on climate policy to focus elsewhere, a position also supported by the agricultural lobby but not by the peak industry association (Interviews 20-22). When Venstre returned to office in 2015, it pursued a decidedly less ambitious climate and energy policy (Burck *et al.* 2017, p.19). The turnaround by Venstre is explained not only by the departure of Fogh Rasmussen and Hedegaard, but also by the electoral decline of the CPP, which suffered a significant loss of seats in the 2015 national election (-10), thereby easing the pressure on Venstre to maintain an ambitious climate mitigation policy. Venstre therefore depended all the more on parliamentary support from the Danish People's Party (DPP), which was unenthusiastic about climate policy and more attuned to agricultural interests.

Ireland, 1997-2016

Ireland's climate politics has been characterised by indistinct party preferences, especially between FF and FG (Interviews 2, 4, 7). The climate policy agenda has tended to focus on energy, on which there has been an absence of significant differences (Interview 8), and on agriculture, where a strong consensus has developed. This mainstream consensus was complemented by the absence of organised scepticism about climate science (Wagner and Payne 2017, p.23). Low public concern with climate change has led to perceptions among party elites that climate policy has very low electoral value, with one partial and brief exception in

2006-2007 (Interviews 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12). Further, environmental NGOs have been weak (Interviews 6, 10). Arguments concerning competitiveness have regularly been used to counter climate policy proposals, such as a carbon tax and quantitative GHG emissions targets (e.g., Coghlan 2007, Interview 4, 11). Ireland's small size and irrelevance to the global problem of climate change is a theme that politicians across Fianna Fáil (FF), Fine Gael (FG), and Labour have aired at times (Interviews 5, 9).

There was some low-salience competition on environmental policy at the 1997 election, but without a particular focus on climate change. FF government minister Noel Dempsey initiated a period of policy entrepreneurship and the government adopted a modest but higher-than-expected target for the first Kyoto commitment period. This episode ended in 2004 with a failure to change FF's position on the key issue of a carbon tax in the face of blocking coalitions between intra-party actors, ministries, the junior coalition partner (the small, economically liberal Progressive Democrats), and interest groups (Coghlan 2007, pp.138–140, Cunningham 2008, pp.97–103, pp.146-151; Interviews 2, 5, 6, 8). Energy security concerns led the government to reject converting to gas Ireland's coal-burning power station at Moneypoint and to justify continued subsidisation of peat-burning for electricity generation (Forfás 2006, Cunningham 2008).

For a period of approximately nine months ahead of the May 2007 general election, the FF leadership sought to put climate change and the environment higher on its agenda, albeit this was not matched by positional changes on key issues such as carbon taxation or their plan to rely heavily on the purchase of carbon credits to meet Kyoto targets. There were at least three motivations for raising the salience of climate policy: competition with the Greens, who were expected to perform strongly in 2007; public opinion (see

<<< See 'Figure 1 new.jpg', submitted with manuscript>>>

Figure 1), especially in key constituencies; and coalitional considerations, including increasing perceived compatibility with the Greens (Interview 5). Relatively high public concern was also recognised by candidates across several of the smaller, Dublin-centred parties who came to see it as a 'vote winner' (Interviews 2, 10, 11; Cunningham 2008, p.106). When FF and the PDs entered government with the Greens in 2007, they effectively delegated aspects of climate policy to them (Interview 6). However, they also delayed the implementation of some important measures such as a carbon tax until it became necessary for revenue-raising reasons during the economic crisis. Their reluctance was at least partly due to the public's low willingness to pay the proposed tax (Cunningham 2008, p.317; European Commission 2018: Special EB 300 and 322).

In opposition, FG did not make comparable efforts to emphasise climate policy. Internal policy entrepreneurship by Simon Coveney up to 2007 failed to convince the party of the merits of a carbon tax (Interviews 5, 6, 7). Although FG faced some of the same electoral incentives as FF, they had fewer reasons to improve their compatibility with the Greens, given the smaller party's clear preference for a FG-led coalition (Interviews 3, 5, 8). Labour also opposed a carbon tax due to concerns about costs for commuters and fuel poverty (Interview 11). With

the Green Party's entry into government in 2007, Labour quickly sought to increase its focus on climate policy as a means of criticising the government while competing with its small but significant rival for middle-class votes, and driven by policy entrepreneurship of individuals such as its energy spokesperson Liz McManus (Little 2017a).

From mid-2008, economic crisis sent climate policy tumbling down the public and political agendas (

<<< See 'Figure 1 new.jpg', submitted with manuscript>>>

Figure 1). The 2011 FF manifesto, published shortly after Ireland entered a multi-lateral 'bailout' programme, focused exclusively on jobs, growth and competitiveness, as did the FG agenda in government thereafter (Interview 5). Both main parties opposed the inclusion of binding GHG emissions targets in a new framework climate law (enacted in 2015) and important elements of climate policy were de-prioritized during the crisis (Little 2017b). In government, FG not only opposed unilateral targets for Ireland, but also effectively disowned its EU emissions targets for 2020, blaming Ireland's failure to meet them on the unrealistic ambition of the previous government and reduced investment during the crisis. With no Green

Party representation in parliament from 2011 to 2016, the junior coalition partner (Labour) helped to keep the issue of climate change on the political agenda (Interviews 9, 11).

The crisis increased the importance of economic sectors that could contribute to export-led growth and coincided with the strengthening and development of the cross-party consensus on agriculture, buttressed by industry-led national strategies for the sector. Although climate change was of particularly low salience among farmers in the 2000s, this changed in the 2010s (Interview 12), beginning with the activation of an IFA campaign against the Green Party's Climate Bill, which led to FF candidates fearing being 'outflanked' by FG on agriculture in rural constituencies (Interview 3). While in 2000, the FF-led government could envisage 'livestock reductions' as part of the first *National Climate Change Strategy* (NCCS 2000), by the 2011 general election the four main parties agreed that climate policy should not interfere with ambitious expansion plans for meat and dairy production, effectively putting this question outside the bounds of 'reasonable politics' (Interviews 9, 12). The decision of the Labour Party, notably, to cleave to this consensus was a tactical one motivated by electoral and intra-party considerations (Interview 11).

Against this backdrop, the adoption of climate change legislation proposed by the FG/Labour government in 2015 was driven in part by Labour Party supporters' expectations of achievements on climate policy and by Labour's need to make good on its criticisms of the Green Party in government (Little 2017a, Torney 2017, Interviews 5, 11). The party's values, such as social justice and global responsibility, also help to explain why several Labour politicians engaged actively with the issue (Interview 11, 12).

Ireland's electoral system and political culture place a premium on local issues which, after 2010, provided a context for increased public concern about the local impact of various climate policies. Energy infrastructure (wind turbines and pylons) became a very significant issue

across the main parties due to localized mobilization (Interviews 2, 6, 9, 11, 12), sometimes manifesting in intra-coalition and intra-party disputes (e.g., within the Labour Party on wind turbine setback distances and within both the coalition and FG on the North-South Interconnector) (Interviews 4, 9, 11). Another salient localised issue was the protection of peat bogs (which are important carbon sinks) at the expense of turf-cutting. Together with agriculture policy, these issues meant that parties' dependence on rural votes became increasingly associated with their positions on climate change. This dependence was greatest for the two main parties, but was also high for Sinn Féin and for Labour after its success in winning seats outside the main cities in 2011 (Interview 11).

Discussion

The causal factors of interest – public opinion, party competition, and existing policy commitments – frequently worked in conjunction with one another; nonetheless, in this section, we summarise and specify their roles. *Public opinion* was an important part of the context in which parties – especially mainstream parties – formed their policy preferences. In 2006-2008, the peak in public opinion in each country increased incentives for mainstream parties such as FF and Venstre to raise the salience of climate change and, in the case of Venstre, to develop 'greener' positions on climate policy, despite the second-order nature of climate policy as an issue. In the case of Ireland, low public concern was the reason interviewees most frequently cited to explain why politicians and their parties did not pay more attention to the issue.

The uneven distribution of public opinion across parties' potential support bases influenced their climate policy preferences and was in turn associated with left-right preferences. Party elites to the left-of-centre in both countries were aware that their supporters gave some priority to climate policy. Public opinion has also been mediated by institutions: in Ireland since

approximately 2010, *localised public opinion*, in conjunction with constituency-specific competition among the main parties, has increasingly been a constraint on those parties' climate policy preferences in relation to various rural climate policy issues. While this is not a feature of Danish climate politics, there are comparable instances elsewhere (Stokes 2016). The urban-rural divide that these conflicts trace helps to explain some of the left-right differences that exist on climate policy.

We observe the power of mainstream *party competition* on climate policy in both directions. When the left bloc in Denmark increased their challenge to the right-of-centre government in the late 2000s, in the presence of policy entrepreneurship by the CPP and with the prospect of the Copenhagen Summit, there was powerful and short-lived competition between the main parties on climate policy. This did not take off in Ireland, partly due to a lack of credibility in FF's attempts to 'green' its image in 2007. What we do observe, however, is powerful competition between mainstream parties to oppose localised climate policies.

While we cannot resolve contradictory findings arising from broader cross-national studies on the role of issue owners, we have detected party preference changes motivated by strategies of accommodation found by Spoon et al (2014). In Denmark, the SPP and CPP both influenced their respective blocs as they became larger in the 2000s; the Irish Greens most influenced other parties' preferences when they seemed likely to perform strongly in 2007. As expected, this competition has had uneven effects, with the greatest impact of competition from issue-owners on other left-of-centre parties. However, the Danish case also shows issue ownership and accommodation on the centre-right in the late 2000s when the CPP gained strength, as well as limited accommodation by FF of Green Party preferences in Ireland. Meanwhile, the DPP has acted as a competitive constraint on the Danish centre-right. Beyond electoral competition, concerns about coalitional considerations have also come into play when mainstream parties have perceived the need to develop their compatibility with issue-owners.

There is extensive evidence in our case studies that *existing policy preferences* influenced parties' climate policy preferences. These existing preferences were in turn rooted in members' expectations, which pushed parties of the left in particular to display a degree of ownership over the issue. In Denmark, state intervention was a major issue related to climate policy, while Venstre's neoliberal outlook in the late 1990s and early 2000s precluded certain climate policy positions. Likewise, the centre-right framed its turn to climate policy in the late 2000s in terms that resonated with its values, such as increasing exports and increasing energy security. For the centre-right parties in Ireland, competitiveness has been to the fore in arguments against climate policies, and energy security concerns have been used to justify both the continued use of fossil fuels and the development of renewable sources of energy. Economic policy preferences were prominent among the most influential existing policy preferences, suggesting that the 'economy vs climate' dimension remains relevant.

However, it is not simply the case that the left provided a context conducive to climate policy preference development while the right did not. In Denmark and Ireland, existing priorities of growth, financial stability, and social cohesion often trumped climate policy across the political spectrum, not least during the economic crisis. While the Irish Labour Party's support for climate policy was rooted in its broader values such as social justice and global responsibility, it also opposed the carbon tax due to concerns about fuel poverty and general consumer costs. The crisis also contributed to reshaping policy and party preferences on the left and right concerning Ireland's largest-emitting sector, agriculture, thus profoundly influencing climate politics. Indeed, evidence of the profound effects of the crisis on parties' preferences in both countries is striking (cf. Rohrschneider and Miles 2015).

The case studies also show that intra-party policy entrepreneurs sometimes have a key role in the formation of party preferences: Auken (SD), Hedegaard (CPP) and McManus (Labour). However, their success is not guaranteed, and these entrepreneurs had the greatest chance of

success in influencing their own parties' policies in a context in which their initiatives coincided with other party goals (Little 2017a).

One other factor arising empirically from the case studies is that interest groups have evidently played a key role in shaping party preferences. The preferences of ostensibly similar interest groups vary, however, and the cases of Denmark and Ireland illustrate this quite clearly: the degree of support for climate policy from the main business interests differed across these contexts. However, agricultural interests remain a constraint on climate policy in both countries, consistent with the idea that sectors with high costs of mitigation will be most opposed to climate policy (Michaelowa 2000, Christoff and Eckersley 2011, p.442, Wagner and Ylä-Anttila 2018).

Overall, it is striking that in Denmark, where there is higher public concern, more competition from issue-owners, and a greater share of parties with left-of-centre preferences, this has not led to a uniformly 'greener' set of parties; rather, it has led to polarization at times, further indicating the positional, contentious nature of climate policies (Farstad 2018, p.705). Curiously, the comparison of Denmark and Ireland does not fully support the widely-held view that partisan polarization of climate policy preferences is detrimental to climate policy: overall, Denmark has produced stronger climate leadership than Ireland over the period studied, despite being more polarized. This may be explained by an underlying consensus rooted in pre-existing policies: specifically, the aim of becoming a leader in energy technologies that developed after the Oil Crises, creating new constituencies of interest (Eikeland and Inderberg 2016). Nonetheless, when polarization has intensified in Denmark and the right has been in power, it has had an impact, as witnessed by its recent slide from a position of climate leadership (Burck *et al.* 2017).

Conclusion

Climate policy's characteristics make it an unusual and difficult issue for domestic political actors: it is cross-sectoral, it addresses a global problem, and it is associated with diffuse, distant benefits and concentrated costs. In the world of party politics, however, it also has much in common with other issues. When forming their climate policy preferences, parties respond to public opinion, they accommodate successful issue-owners, and they do not develop climate policies on a blank slate: they are constrained and facilitated by their existing policy preferences. The uneven effects of these factors across political parties help to explain differential responses observed across the left-right spectrum in many contexts. Given the centrality of political parties to policymaking, these findings have practical implications for climate policy practitioners.

While countries evidently vary in their climate politics, we might expect these mechanisms to be at work in other cases, at least in those typical of the relationship between left-right preferences and climate policy preferences. The strong role of pre-existing preferences may also be generalizable to party policies on other 'new' issues, as they are moulded to shape existing worldviews and policy commitments.

Our study has contributed to broadening and deepening the evidence-base on the drivers of parties' climate policy preferences. It has drawn on accounts of party elites' perceptions and motivations in responding to a set of factors that are important drivers of parties' climate policy preferences. It feeds into the growing body of knowledge on parties' climate policy preferences and comparative climate politics more generally, yet it also points to gaps in our knowledge.

The relationship between public opinion and party preferences still requires broad, crossnational studies that connect public opinion and parties, not least in Europe (Marcinkiewicz and Tosun 2015, p.201). Our analysis focuses on party competition and climate

policy preferences and in doing so it has highlighted the important role of mainstream party competition both as a catalyst for ‘greener’ climate policy preferences, but also as a constraint on party preferences. On intra-party factors, we show that existing preferences associated with traditional left-right politics matter for the policies that parties adopt and for the ways in which they frame them. Furthering the study of these lines of enquiry with broader, systematic comparative studies will require building on recent studies (e.g., Carter *et al.* 2018, Farstad 2018) to develop more comprehensive and widely-applied measures of parties’ climate policy preferences, especially of their *positions* on climate policy. Further, climate policy provides one cross-sectoral window through which relationships between party politics and interest groups can be viewed, expanding our knowledge of this key set of relationships (Binderkrantz 2014, p.535, 2015, p.121).

Finally, our study highlights common drivers of climate policy preferences across two national contexts, but also suggests considerable diversity in the climate politics of small states. Characteristics that can most directly be related to state smallness – for example, perceptions that small size makes a country irrelevant to the problem of climate change – appear not to be universal, confounding fixed expectations about small states’ climate politics.

References

- Abou-Chadi, T., 2016. Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts – How Green and Radical Right Parties Differ in Their Impact. *British Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 417–436.
- Andersen, M.S. and Nielsen, H.Ø., 2016. Denmark: Small state with big voice and bigger dilemmas. In: R. Wurzel, J. Connelly, and D. Liefferink, eds. *The European Union in international climate change politics: still taking a lead?* Abingdon: Routledge, 83–97.
- Bakker, R., de Vries, C. *et al.*, 2015. Measuring party positions in Europe The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999–2010. *Party Politics*, 21(1), 143–152.
- Båtstrand, S., 2014. Giving content to new politics From broad hypothesis to empirical analysis using Norwegian manifesto data on climate change. *Party Politics*, 20(6), 930–939.
- Båtstrand, S., 2015. More than Markets: A Comparative Study of Nine Conservative Parties on Climate Change. *Politics & Policy*, 43(4), 538–561.
- Binderkrantz, A.S., 2014. Legislatures, Lobbying, and Interest Groups. *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*. Oxford: OUP.
- Binderkrantz, A.S., 2015. Balancing gains and hazards: Interest groups in electoral politics. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 4(2), 120–140.
- Birchall, S.J., 2014. Termination Theory and National Climate Change Mitigation Programs: The Case of New Zealand. *Review of Policy Research*, 31(1), 38–59.
- Brulle, R.J., Carmichael, J., and Jenkins, J.C., 2012. Shifting public opinion on climate change: an empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the U.S., 2002–2010. *Climatic Change*, 114(2), 169–188.
- Burck, J., Marten, F., *et al.*, 2017. *The Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2018*. Bonn/Berlin/Brussels: Germanwatch/CAN Europe.
- Campbell, J.L. and Hall, J.A., 2015. Small States, Nationalism and Institutional Capacities: An Explanation of the Difference in Response of Ireland and Denmark to the Financial Crisis. *European Journal of Sociology*, 56(1), 143–174.
- Carter, N., 2013. Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), 73–94.
- Carter, N. and Jacobs, M., 2014. Explaining Radical Policy Change: The Case of Climate Change and Energy Policy Under the British Labour Government 2006–10. *Public Administration*, 92(1), 125–141.
- Carter, N., Ladrech, R. *et al.* 2018. Political parties and climate policy: A new approach to measuring parties' climate policy preferences. *Party Politics* 24(6), 731–742.
- Christoff, P. and Eckersley, R., 2011. Comparing State Responses. In: J.S. Dryzek, R.B. Norgaard, and D. Schlosberg, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*. Oxford: OUP, 431–448.
- Coghlan, O., 2007. Irish climate-change policy from Kyoto to the carbon tax: a two-level game analysis of the interplay of knowledge and power. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 18(1), 131–153.
- Compston, H. and Bailey, I., 2013. Climate Policies and Anti-Climate Policies. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 3(4), 146–157.
- Compston, H.W. and Bailey, I., 2008. Political Strategy and Climate Policy. In: H.W. Compston and I. Bailey, eds. *Turning Down the Heat: The Politics of Climate Policy in Affluent Democracies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 263–288.
- Cunningham, P., 2008. *Ireland's Burning*. Dublin: Poolbeg.
- Dalton, R.J., 2008. The Quantity and the Quality of Party Systems. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(7), 899–920.

- Dalton, R.J., 2009. Economics, environmentalism and party alignments: A note on partisan change in advanced industrial democracies. *European Journal of Political Research*, 48(2), 161–175.
- De Blasio, E. and Sorice, M., 2013. The framing of climate change in Italian politics and its impact on public opinion. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 9(1), 59–69.
- Dyrhaage, H., 2017. Denmark: a wind-powered forerunner. In: I. Solorio and H. Jørgens, eds. *A Guide to EU Renewable Energy Policy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 85–102.
- Eckstein, D., Künzel, V., and Schäfer, L., 2017. *Global Climate Risk Index 2018*. Bonn: Germanwatch.
- Eikeland, P.O. and Inderberg, T.H.J., 2016. Energy system transformation and long-term interest constellations in Denmark: can agency beat structure? *Energy Research & Social Science*, 11, 164–173.
- European Commission, 2018. *Various Eurobarometer Surveys*. Available from: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm> [Accessed 10/07/2018].
- Farstad, F.M., 2016. From consensus to polarization: What explains variation in party agreement on climate change? University of York, York.
- Farstad, F.M., 2018. What explains variation in parties' climate change salience? *Party Politics* 24(6), 698-707.
- Forfás, 2006. *A Baseline Assessment of Ireland's Oil Dependence*. Dublin: Forfás.
- Garzia, D., Trechsel, A., and Sio, L.D., 2017. Party placement in supranational elections: An introduction to the euandi 2014 dataset. *Party Politics*, 23(4), 333–341.
- Gemenis, K., Katsanidou, A., and Vasilopoulou, S., 2012. The politics of anti-environmentalism: positional issue framing by the European radical right. Paper prepared for the *MPSA Annual Conference, 12-15 April 2012, Chicago*.
- Giavazzi, F. and Pagano, M., 1990. *Can Severe Fiscal Contractions be Expansionary? Tales of Two Small European Countries*. NBER Working Paper No. 3372.
- Guber, D.L., 2013. A Cooling Climate for Change? Party Polarization and the Politics of Global Warming. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(1), 93–115.
- Hornsey, M.J., Harris, E.A. et al. 2016. Meta-analyses of the determinants and outcomes of belief in climate change. *Nature Climate Change* 6, 622–626.
- IPCC, 2014. *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Summary for Policymakers*.
- Jensen, C.B. and Spoon, J.-J., 2011. Testing the 'Party Matters' Thesis: Explaining Progress towards Kyoto Protocol Targets. *Political Studies*, 59(1), 99–115.
- Kluth, M. and Lynggaard, K., 2013. Explaining Policy Responses to Danish and Irish Banking Failures during the Financial Crisis. *West European Politics*, 36(4), 771–788.
- Klüver, H. and Sagarzazu, I., 2016. Setting the Agenda or Responding to Voters? Political Parties, Voters and Issue Attention. *West European Politics*, 39(2), 380–398.
- Kosiara-Pedersen, K., 2008. The 2007 Danish General Election: Generating a Fragile Majority. *West European Politics*, 31(5), 1040–1048.
- Kosiara-Pedersen, K. and Little, C., 2016. Environmental politics in the 2015 Danish general election. *Environmental Politics*, 25(3), 558–563.
- Lachapelle, E. and Paterson, M., 2013. Drivers of national climate policy. *Climate Policy*, 13(5), 547–571.
- Laub, L., 2012. The struggle for the climate agenda: a discourse analysis of the Danish climate policy negotiations. Copenhagen: CBS.
- Little, C., 2017a. Intra-party policy entrepreneurship and party goals: the case of political parties' climate policy preferences in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 199–223.

- Little, C., 2017b. Portrait of a laggard? Environmental politics and the Irish general election of February 2016. *Environmental Politics*, 26(1), 183–188.
- Little, C. and Torney, D., 2017. The politics of climate change in Ireland: symposium introduction. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 191–198.
- Marcinkiewicz, K. and Tosun, J., 2015. Contesting climate change: mapping the political debate in Poland. *East European Politics*, 31(2), 187–207.
- Meyer, T., 2013. *Constraints on Party Policy Change*. Colchester, Essex: ECPR Press.
- Michaelowa, A., 2000. The Relative Strength of Economic Interests in Shaping Eu Climate Policy: A Hypothesis. *Energy & Environment*, 11(3), 277–292.
- NCCS, 2000. *National Climate Change Strategy*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- Rohrschneider, R., 1993. New Party versus Old Left Realignments. *The Journal of Politics*, 55(3), 682–701.
- Rohrschneider, R. and Miles, M.R., 2015. Representation through parties? Environmental attitudes and party stances in Europe in 2013. *Environmental Politics*, 24(4), 617–640.
- Seawright, J. and Gerring, J., 2008. Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), 294–308.
- Seeberg, H.B., 2016. Opposition Policy Influence through Agenda-setting: The Environment in Denmark, 1993–2009. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 39(2), 185–206.
- Sohlberg, J., 2016. The Effect of Elite Polarization: A Comparative Perspective on How Party Elites Influence Attitudes and Behavior on Climate Change in the European Union. *Sustainability*, 9(1), 39.
- Spoon, J.-J., Hobolt, S.B., and de Vries, C.E., 2014. Going green: Explaining issue competition on the environment. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(2), 363–380.
- Stokes, L.C., 2016. Electoral Backlash against Climate Policy: A Natural Experiment on Retrospective Voting and Local Resistance to Public Policy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(4), 958–974.
- Torney, D., 2017. If at first you don't succeed: the development of climate change legislation in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 32(2), 247–267.
- Tosun, J., 2011. Political parties and marine pollution policy: Exploring the case of Germany. *Marine Policy*, 35(4), 536–541.
- Trechsel, A.H. and Mair, P., 2011. When Parties (Also) Position Themselves: An Introduction to the EU Profiler. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 8(1), 1–20.
- Volkens, A., Lehmann, P. et al. 2017. *The Manifesto Data Collection. Version 2017b*. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).
- Wagner, M. and Meyer, T.M., 2014. Which Issues do Parties Emphasise? Salience Strategies and Party Organisation in Multiparty Systems. *West European Politics*, 37(5), 1019–1045.
- Wagner, P. and Payne, D., 2017. Trends, frames and discourse networks: analysing the coverage of climate change in Irish newspapers. *Irish Journal of Sociology* 25(1), 5–28.
- Wagner, P. and Ylä-Anttila, T., 2018. Who got their way? Advocacy coalitions and the Irish climate change law. *Environmental Politics*, 27 (5), 872–891.

<<< See 'Figure 1 new.jpg', submitted with manuscript>>>

Figure 1. Public concern about climate change. (Source: European Commission 2018)

Table 1. Overview of interviews

Interview no.	Role	Month	Location	
Ireland	1	Think tank representative	November 2014	Dublin
	2	NGO representative	December 2014	Dublin
	3	Political adviser	December 2014	Dublin
	4	Interest group representative	January 2015	Dublin
	5	Political adviser	July 2015	Dublin
	6	Political adviser	July 2015	Dublin
	7	Elected representative	June 2016	Dublin
	8	Political adviser	June 2016	Dublin
	9	NGO representative	June 2016	Dublin
	10	Elected representative	June 2016	Dublin
	11	Political adviser	June 2016	Dublin
	12	Interest group representative	June 2016	Dublin
Denmark	13	Elected representative	October 2013	Brussels
	14	Party leader	October 2013	Brussels
	15	NGO representative	January 2014	Copenhagen
	16	Elected representative	January 2014	Copenhagen
	17	Elected representative	January 2014	Copenhagen
	18	Elected representative	January 2014	Copenhagen
	19	Cabinet minister	January 2014	Copenhagen
	20	Interest group representative	January 2014	Copenhagen
	21	Party staff	March 2014	Phone
	22	Interest group representative	May 2014	Email

* Where the interviewee has held multiple relevant roles, we highlight the role that was most relevant for the purpose of this study.