

Context, Clarity and Signals: Economic Voting for Political Parties

Lucy Goodhart
Columbia University
lmg2005@columbia.edu

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of economic voting under coalition governments and in multi-party settings is challenged because of the difficulties voters face in attributing responsibility to individual parties. It is in these same settings, though, that parties have incentives to differentiate themselves via the signals they send about economic competence. Parties can signal a comparative advantage in macro-economic policy through the salience that they place on economic issues in their manifestos. In this paper, I test whether the weight that a party places on the economy affects the strength of the economic vote. I find that signaling is an effective strategy in low-clarity settings. Individual vote intention for parties that place a high weight on economic issues is positively and significantly associated with economic perceptions and this result is robust to controls for alternative explanations.

I. INTRODUCTION

A recent review of the literature on what we call “economic voting” clearly states the impetus for studying how the macro-economy affects votes for incumbents. Anderson (2007) starts his review by noting, “The predominant normative justification for research on economic voting has been its essential role in shaping democratic accountability.”

Indeed, the *prima facie* importance of economic voting is that it is via the electoral connection that voters can discipline policy makers, remove those that are incompetent, and generate incentives for effort among those who would occupy policy making positions.¹ Absent such an accountability mechanism, incumbents should invest less time and effort in achieving prosperity with predictable results for aggregate welfare. The consequences of the failure of democratic elections to discipline incumbents have been noted by scholars working with formal models (Lohmann, 1998) and in empirical analysis (Kiewiet, 2000).

Immediately after bringing our attention to the central normative concerns that inspire the study of economic voting, however, Anderson (2007) emphasizes the obstacles that appear to inhibit the smooth functioning of the feedback mechanism from economy to votes:

“A systematic examination of the literature reveals, however, that economic voting is highly contingent on two critical moderating factors: the voters themselves and the political context in which they make judgments.”

Anderson labels these factors, and the instability that they produce in empirical analysis, “contingency dilemmas” in that economic voting turns out to be contingent on individual characteristics and features of the social and institutional context that the voter inhabits.²

I do not highlight the role of individual characteristics in this paper – including cognition and information processing -- although they are important part of any appraisal of the role that economic voting can play in incentivizing incumbent performance. Rather, I focus on what Anderson calls “the structural features of politics” that condition the context in which voters make judgments. The focus on

¹ There is a lively debate in the literature over whether economic voting is retrospective or prospective in nature, serving to sanction incumbents for past performance or to retain incumbents who have demonstrated their competence (see Fearon in Przeworski et al, 1999). While the role of signaling is justified in terms of a sanctioning model, it is not the goal of this paper to adjudicate between these two representations of the voting mechanism. Rather, the aim is to examine whether the mechanism, in either case, is applied selectively depending on the signals that parties send on their policy priorities.

² The concept is similar to the “instability dilemma” posited by Martin Paldam in Lewis-Beck and Paldam (2000) and refers to the factors that inhibit economic voting and may account for unstable findings in empirical tests of economic voting depending on the selection of sample periods or countries. See also Dorussen and Taylor (2002).

“institutional context” is not new. Lewis-Beck’s comparative work in 1988 was one of the first to highlight the apparent weakness of economic voting in countries characterized by multiple parties in the legislature, weak party discipline and frequent coalition governments.³ Powell and Whitten (1993) followed with a seminal article that examined the economic voting nexus separately for two groups of countries and compared findings between the two. The two groups were defined on the basis of institutional features that are believed to contribute to “clarity of responsibility” so that in high clarity countries voters are able to connect economic outcomes with incumbent performance while in low-clarity contexts responsibility is more diffuse. Powell and Whitten (1993) found that the economic voting nexus was stronger and more significant in countries that were defined as having high clarity of responsibility. Since then, a slew of articles have tested whether economic voting is substantively more important and statistically more significant in different institutional settings.

Because of the weight placed on attributions of responsibility it is worth recalling the institutional features that Powell and Whitten used to measure clarity and examining how they contribute to attributions of responsibility. For three of the five indicators used by Powell and Whitten (opposition control of committee chairs, bicameral opposition and minority government) the diffusion of responsibility refers to shared policy-making authority with opposition parties. In these instances, and because the opposition participates in policy-making, responsibility for outcomes cannot be neatly parceled out to the incumbent. Thus, for example, Powell and Whitten say that in cases of bicameral opposition, policy responsibility “and hence the penalties (and rewards) of incumbency” should be more blurred. The last indicator used by Powell and Whitten, the existence or not of coalition government, was not expected to promote the diffusion of responsibility to non-governing parties. The parties participating in a coalition cabinet can have full command over policy, so that there is no question of incumbent control. Rather, “coalition governments would seem both to blur the responsibility of individual parties for whom the voter must vote and to offer the possibility of vote switching within the government.”⁴ (p. 402)

The two factors that complicate the voting nexus under coalition government are highlighted because they point to different and separate reasons for a lack of observed economic voting under coalition government. First, when incumbent governments are made up of a team of different political parties, voters face a greater inference problem in extracting information on the competence of individual

³ Lewis-Beck also refers to earlier work by Powell (1987) on the clarity of responsibility.

⁴ The effect of low party cohesion is similar to that of coalition government in that voters who seek to condition their vote on perceived economic competence must consider which faction in a coalition is responsible for economic conditions and how their vote will alter the likely make-up of factions within the party.

parties from economic outcomes.⁵ It is, however, individual parties for whom voters must vote. Second, even if voters are able to distinguish between different incumbent parties, and make inferences about competence, they may switch their ballot between different parties in the incumbent coalition. An intra-coalition ballot switch is particularly likely because coalitions often contain “connecting” parties of similar ideological tendencies.⁶ Ballot switching among governing parties, however, will not be observed if we use total votes for governing parties as our dependent variable. Thus, the choice of specification can obscure real instances of the phenomenon of economic voting when we look at coalition governments.

The difference in the two mechanisms is stressed because it points to different normative conclusions with regard to institutions and different agendas for research. If voters in low clarity settings face fundamental problems inferring the competence of policy makers from economic outcomes, then economic voting can never work as effectively as it appears to in high-clarity contexts. The appropriate role for scholarship, if the inference problem is large, is to determine the consequences that follow for incentives and outcomes and to determine if there are compensating mechanisms by which voters can reward good macro-economic policy. If, on the other hand, voters *can* infer party competence, but react to that inference in ways that are obscured by our research specification, the challenge for scholarship is reveal and delineate the nature and extent of economic voting in those settings.

Scholars have already started on this process by examining whether, under coalition government, voters condition their votes on the economy selectively, holding some parties more responsible than others. Using individual level survey data, Anderson (2000) finds that economic voting is stronger for the Prime Minister’s party than it is for votes for the government in low clarity contexts and, indeed, that there is no discernible statistical difference in the economic voting relationship across high and low clarity contexts if we look solely at votes for the Prime Minister’s party. The conditioning of votes on the economy was even stronger for the party of the Prime Minister if that party commanded either many seats in parliament or many cabinet posts. That finding is supported by the work of Duch and Stevenson (2008, p 267) who show higher and more significant coefficients in models of economic voting applied to individual data when looking at votes for the Prime Minister’s party than for partner parties.

The selective and enhanced attribution of responsibility to the party of the Prime Minister suggests that voters are using objective features of cabinet government to guide their assessments. Parties are

⁵ Duch and Stevenson (2008, pp 224-227) make a related argument. In their model, voters understand the division of administrative responsibility in cabinet, but the presence of multiple parties reduces the strength of the competence signal for individual parties and lowers the weight placed on party-specific factors in calculations of expected utility. The inference of party-specific competence is most difficult when party weights in cabinet are most equal.

⁶ This point was also made by Lewis-Beck (1988, p.108) and Royed, Leyden and Borrelli (2000).

hardly passive bystanders in this process of forming attributions – indeed political parties would not survive long in the electoral marketplace if they did *not* think about the ways that attributions of responsibility could affect their re-election chances. The research undertaking that I describe here attempts to revive our understanding of parties as strategic players, even in contexts that are not conducive to economic voting. Those parties that consider themselves expert on economic issues may want to signal that attribute to voters, particularly if they will influence macro-economic policy. In particular, parties may use their statements, press releases, interviews and campaign material to stress the importance of the economy to their voters and the weight that they place on economic outcomes. In addition, parties may engage *more* in strategic signaling to voters in contexts that do not provide ready-made information about policy responsibility. As one indicator of this signaling behavior, I examine the salience that parties place on the macro-economy in their manifestos. I do not assume that voters read manifestos, but that these documents provide a focal point for party members in their public discussions so that manifestos give an accurate assessment of the weight given to the macro-economy when politicians make public statements. A literature on party responsiveness supports the assumption that manifestos are reliable indicators of the policies that parties pursue once in office and of overall party leanings (Klingemann et al, 1994, Huber and Gabel, 2000).⁷ In response to the signals sent by parties, voters can then distinguish which parties have a comparative advantage in economic policy. Those parties that advertize themselves as specializing in macro-economic policy should subsequently be held more accountable for economic outcomes. In addition, this selective attribution of responsibility should be more pronounced in low-clarity settings in which, in the absence of party signals, assessments of party responsibility are most obscured.⁸ It is this selective application of the economic voting relationship that I test for European nations for which vote intention and manifesto data is available.

II. GAME THEORETIC ANALYSIS OF SIGNALING IN LOW-CLARITY CONTEXTS

In the absence of reliable and consistent findings on economic voting, it is essential to provide strong theoretical priors for the empirical tests we conduct. The use of party signals to guide attributions of

⁷ To accept the manifesto as a reliable proxy for party signals, we would also have to believe that manifesto output conforms with public perception of party positions, so that in some sense the public “hears” what the party has to say. In recent scholarship, seeking to cross-validate indicators of party position based on human coding of manifestos, researchers have tested whether party statements align with public perceptions and expert surveys. Using the salience that political parties place on the European Union as a case study, Netjes and Beinnema (2007) find that salience scores derived from manifestos are correlated with public perceptions of salience as well as with salience scores derived from expert surveys. In each case there is a positive, albeit moderate, correlation between salience measures, implying that manifestos are connected with public perception of party position, even when the underlying dimension, the salience of EU integration to parties, is not the main dimension of political conflict.

⁸ In the empirical tests that follow, I estimate vote intention models separately for voters and parties in low clarity settings and under coalition government. I focus on coalition governments because of the potential noted by earlier authors for selective judgments of responsibility and vote switching among coalition partners.

responsibility is an idea that flows directly from a game theoretic literature on production in teams originating with a seminal article by Alchian and Demsetz (1972). Fundamentally, workers who are organized to produce a joint output in teams may shirk on effort because their remuneration is based on overall production and not on individual input. The example was used to help explain the structure of the firm. Workers in teams would have an interest in hiring bosses who could monitor their individual inputs in order to overcome the moral hazard problem, generating greater overall output and pay. The use of a boss as monitor improves the overall outcome, but as other theorists pointed out, in many cases it is simply not possible to observe individual inputs (as the boss is expected to do) as well as overall production outcomes. In the analogous case of coalition government, for instance, voters can observe overall economic outcomes, but not the individual policy inputs that came from each party.

In the next theoretical advance, Holmstrom (1982) indicated the existence of a response to the moral hazard problem, even when monitoring was impossible. Workers in teams can be incentivized to produce close to the level that is achieved with full information using a contract that punishes each team member arbitrarily severely whenever team output falls below a target level. In the coalition government case, this would mean that voters would, for instance, abandon all incumbent political parties if and when economic outcomes were unsatisfactory. As later readers noted, however, the group punishments seemed an unrealistically drastic way of solving the moral hazard problem. In addition, the solution would allow some parties to shirk on policy-making effort, forcing other parties in a coalition to work harder in their attempts to avoid electoral disaster.

In their 1991 article, McAfee and McMillan provide a solution to the problem of team production in cases that are subject to both adverse selection (because abilities of team members differ and those abilities are private knowledge) and moral hazard. The focus on adverse selection is immediately relevant to coalition management of the economy, because the economic competence of coalition parties is likely to vary and one of the key roles of voting is to select incumbents that are more competent. The solution for the principal is elegant – it produces an equivalent level of output to that obtainable with full information and motivates sincere revelation of abilities. The principal offers a two part contract with a fixed and variable component (the fixed component may be negative). The variable element, as the name implies, is calculated according to overall team output. The insight is that more able team members will accept contracts with a higher variable component and lower fixed portion because it costs them less effort to produce a given amount of output. Thus, the type of contract a worker accepts indicates his or her ability. Moreover, the contracts that they pick provide the incentives necessary for them to produce as much as they would in the full information environment.

In the case of coalition government, there is no one principal who can offer a menu of different contracts to coalition parties. Rather, there are numerous voters who are the political principals in a game of delegation to government. The analysis of McAfee and McMillan, though, when applied to coalition government, implies that parties with a higher level of macro-economic competence could signal to voters that they would accept an implicit “voting contract” with a greater variable component that moved up or down according to the state of the economy. If the weight placed on the economy in manifestos can serve as a reliable proxy of the signals that parties send to voters, then we would expect to see a higher marginal effect of economic outcomes on votes for parties that stress the economy more. In addition, we would expect to see less variation in economic voting dependent on economic salience in high clarity contexts, because in those instances voters know who to blame for the economy. As a result, the weight placed by a party on the economy in its manifesto is less important as a guide to party competence.

In what follows, I focus on the signaling mechanisms by which parties can indicate an expertise in economic policy-making and I test how these signals affect the appearance and decisiveness of economic voting. Prior to the analysis of voting behavior, I explore the factors that drive levels of economic salience. Next, and in order to test whether salience mediates the economic voting relationship, I estimate models of individual vote intention using data on voting preferences from Eurobarometer surveys and data on party manifestos from the Manifestos Research Group. I examine how this variation in economic salience affected the strength of the economic voting relationships and whether the mediating effect of party signals is greater in contexts of low institutional clarity.

III. ECONOMIC SALIENCE: MEASURES AND LEVELS

In this section, I describe in more detail the data used to measure the economic signals that parties send and describe levels of salience between and within high- and low-clarity contexts. For data on party manifestos, I look to the coding project undertaken by the Manifesto Research Group (henceforth MRG) from 1979 to 1998 (see Budge et al, 2001, and Klingemann et al, 2006). The major outcome of that effort, which has involved human coding of almost 2000 manifestos in 25 countries, has been the creation of a comparative over-time index of party ideological position on a right-left index. The right-left index (described in greater detail in Budge et al, 2001) has been widely used in comparative politics (see Iversen, 2006) and is based on the percentage of sentences in the manifesto that are associated with a right-wing emphasis minus the percentage of sentences in the manifesto that is given over to items seen as the particular emphasis of left-wing parties. Rather than use this index, I examine the percentage of

sentences in the manifesto that a party devotes to economic issues.⁹ The percentage of the manifesto that a party “spent” on the macro-economy is defined in two ways. First, I simply use the percentage of sentences in the manifesto that fall under items in Domain Four (“Economy”) to create a dependent variable that covers all explicitly economic items.¹⁰ This is termed *Narrow Economic Saliency*. In addition, because more left-wing parties may associate their economic policy with support for the welfare state and for unions, with right-wing parties taking a counter-position, I also created a variable that captured the percentage of sentences in the manifesto given over to the Economy plus the percentage given over to items 504 and 505 (Welfare State Expansion and Welfare State Limitation) and to items 701 and 702 (Labour Groups: Positive and Labour Groups: Negative). This variable is labeled *Broad Economic Saliency*.

I first examine whether economic saliency varies systematically across institutional contexts. If we believe that a party’s electoral success is less dependent on economic outcomes in low-clarity settings, we might suspect that, all else equal, parties in those same settings will put less weight on macro-economic policy. To address this question, I look at the average for the narrow and broad measure of economic saliency for ten countries for which I have Eurobarometer data on vote intention and which have also been coded for clarity by Powell and Whitten (1993). Those countries are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway.¹¹ I look separately at countries that are categorized by Anderson (2000) as having high institutional clarity, in that they have a score on the Powell and Whitten clarity index of two or below. Those countries are France, Great Britain, Greece and Ireland.¹² I compute the averages for the narrow and broad measures of economic saliency for the two decades encompassed by the years 1980 to 1999 (inclusive). These two decades are the period of interest since they bracket the shorter time period for which individual-level data on vote intention and economic perceptions is available from Eurobarometer.

⁹ Benoit and Laver (2006) critique the MRG project because it bases a calculation of ideological position on a measure of saliency (ie: space given to a particular item). The current work therefore uses the MRG data for the purposes the Benoit and Laver would more readily approve. Further, because the measure of saliency is the sum of different individual coding items, it is less affected by the coding error that Benoit and Laver (2006) highlight in the MRG output.

¹⁰ Items under “Economy” comprise: free enterprise, incentives, market regulation, economic planning, corporatism, protectionism (positive and negative), economic goals, Keynesian demand management, productivity, technology and infrastructure, controlled economy, nationalization, economic orthodoxy, Marxist analysis, and anti-growth economy.

¹¹ Data is included for Great Britain, rather than for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland because of the different party structure that operates in Northern Ireland. The counterpart to Britain’s Labour Party is the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Northern Ireland which sits in the British parliament and generally votes with Labour MP’s but issues its own manifesto.

¹² Portugal and Spain are included in the Eurobarometer for this period but are not coded for clarity. Luxembourg is not included in the analysis because of the limited potential for independent economic policy.

There are 370 separate manifestos that are coded for those countries in the two decade period with fewer manifestos from countries like Britain that had a two-party system (14) and far more for countries like Denmark with a multi-party system and frequent elections (65). The simple averages are shown in Table One. The average for the percentage of coded sentences devoted to solely economic issues (*Narrow Economic Salience*) in low-clarity settings was 20.1 percent whereas in high-clarity settings the average was 22.2 percent and a t-test indicates that the difference in means is significant at a seven percent level of confidence. The equivalent averages for the broader measure of economic salience were 29.3 percent in low clarity settings and 32.8 percent in higher clarity settings and the likelihood that this difference would have occurred if the samples had the same mean is less than one percent. Political parties in settings with greater institutional clarity, in other words, spend more of their available time and attention talking about the economy and this difference is statistically significant. What is also apparent, though, is that parties vary widely within as well as across institutional settings, with high standard deviations across manifestos even at the same level of clarity. It is not there case, therefore, that all parties downplay economic issues in low-clarity settings.

Indeed, for the purposes of this paper, the central question is whether voters are supplied with a real choice between parties, with some presenting themselves as the agents of economic management, while others emphasize different policy areas. For voters to use economic voting selectively there must be a selection of party types available in government. To determine whether this is true, I calculate the standard deviation of the measures of narrow and broad salience for the parties in cabinet for each coalition government starting between the years 1980 and 1999. The average of these standard deviations is reported in Table Two and can then be compared to the standard deviation for all manifestos shown in Table One. The average “standard deviation” for parties in a coalition is 7.8 for the narrow measure of economic salience and 8.2 for the broad measure. This by itself is large – the “standard” deviation from a party’s level of economic salience from the mean for the coalition as a whole is approximately eight points – and the level of variance in economic salience among parties in a coalition is almost as large as it is for the set of manifestos as a whole. When it comes to governing, therefore, it is not that like goes with like. Parties in coalitions present voters with different options. Table Two also displays the standard deviation of narrow and broad economic salience for the parties in coalition governments across the different countries that support coalitions. The countries that have particularly high levels of differentiation among parties in a coalition are France, Denmark and Italy.¹³

¹³ Greece also has a high standard deviation for the broad measure of economic salience, but the coalition governments for which this standard deviation was computed were few and short-lived. The first, lasting from June to November 1989 contained PASOK and New Democracy, while the second, lasting from November 1989 until the spring of 1990 comprised New Democracy and the Progressive Left Coalition.

Next, I present the results from a regression model of economic salience that is estimated for a larger sample of manifestos from 16 parliamentary democracies for which economic and institutional data is available in addition to measures of economic salience. In estimating the model, the level of economic salience found in a given manifesto is regressed on the level of the explanatory variables observed in the calendar quarter prior to the election for which a manifesto was issued. The lagging of the explanatory variables is done to determine whether parties, in deciding the level of economic salience, respond predictably and consistently to the factors in operation when they write that document. The modeling exercise highlights the potential confounding factors with which economic salience is associated and motivates refinements in the empirical analysis that can take account of potential confounders. In estimating the regression, errors are clustered at the level of individual elections, to allow for joint shocks (eg: a controversial policy reform) that could affect the level of salience for all parties in a given country.

The explanatory variables include party-specific, economic and institutional features that are theorized to affect the desired level of salience. The first party-specific feature is size, measured as the share of vote (or share of seats) received by the party in the election prior to the current manifesto.¹⁴ I include party size because of the expected influence of this factor on the strategies of party leaders. Niche parties and small parties, measured by the percentage share of the vote that they receive, may attract voters based on specialized issues or targeted benefits, such as protection for a particular ethnic or religious group. Larger parties, however, which more closely fit the model of a “catch all” party proposed by Kirchheimer (1966) cannot offer such targeted appeals. Instead, they may stress the provision of sound macro-economic policy as a way to attract a broad coalition of supporters all of whom are in some way exposed to the macro-economy.¹⁵ Since dominant parties may not need to compete on their competence in the economic sphere, I also included the square of the percentage vote share to pick up any quadratic effect. A right-left measure of ideology (the well-known *rile* variable from the MRG data set) is included to test whether economic issues are more the province of the Right, with the Left specializing in protection of voters from market forces. Further, since parties that are further from the center may represent voters with stronger preferences over the appropriate trade-off between growth and inflation (as in the political economy model of Hibbs, 1987) I also include a measure of the deviation of each party from the assumed ideological mid-point of the MRG right-left measure.

¹⁴ Lagged vote share or seat share is used in case parties adjust manifesto statements to current expectations of popularity and vote share. Granger causality tests indicate that lagged levels of party size help to explain current levels of salience but that past levels of salience do not add additional explanatory power for size once lagged levels of percentage vote are included. Results available from author.

¹⁵ Lizzeri and Persico, 2005, make a related argument that smaller parties focus on policies that can benefit a narrow constituency, to the detriment of broad policies that provide diffuse economic benefits.

The institutional factors incorporated into the model include a dummy variable indicating whether the country was categorized as high- or low-clarity by Powell and Whitten (1993). The differences that were previously documented in salience levels across institutional settings may be due to coincidental factors, like party size, that also vary with electoral systems, but it is important to include this variable to capture whether levels of salience vary across institutions even when we control for party characteristics. Party leaders might place less weight on the economy in low-clarity settings because of the lower effective thresholds for party entry in systems with greater proportionality. In these settings, parties with a distinct focus on migration, the environment and religion can enter into the electoral arena and gain a foothold. In such settings, all parties may discuss non-economic issues in order to protect themselves from voter defection (Meguid, 2005). A stronger focus on economic policy in high-clarity settings may also be encouraged by the greater seats-votes elasticity observed in single-member district systems and a desire to serve citizens as consumers through a focus on economic policy, as in the Stigler-Peltzman model (Rogowski and Kayser, 2002).

The second institutional variable that I consider is the incumbency status of the party. Those parties that occupy cabinet may stress the economy in their manifestos because they have a documented record of economic management. The utility of this record, however, varies with the favorability of economic outcomes, the subject to which I turn next. In general, the weight that parties put on the economy is expected to vary with economic outcomes with worse news (and greater voter concern) prompting more attention to the issue. To control for this likelihood, I include the misery index (the simple addition of inflation and unemployment) for the four quarters prior to the election for which the manifesto was issued in the model. To allow for strategic responses to the economy, however, I create an interaction term for the misery index for incumbent parties, allowing parties that were in government prior to the issuance of a manifesto to respond in different ways to bad or good economic news. Finally, I include a simple trend term. Data sources are indicated at the bottom of Table Three.

As the results presented in Table Three demonstrate, party characteristics, particularly party size, have a significant effect on the salience given to the economy in electoral appeals, whether we look at either the narrow or broad measure of salience.¹⁶ The quadratic effect is also significant and negative indicating a diminishing marginal effect of size on economic salience.¹⁷ The coefficient on the measure for right-left party position is significant and positive for the narrow measure of economic salience. Since

¹⁶ Results are broadly similar if the party's share of seats, rather than percentage of popular vote, is used as the measure of party size.

¹⁷ Once the percentage of the vote received by any party exceeded 70 percent, the salience given to economic issues would actually be reduced. The size at which additional increases in size reduce a party's desired salience is calculated by setting the derivative of broad salience with respect to vote size equal to zero, or $0.70 - 0.1 * \text{Lag of Percent Vote} = 0$.

right-left ideological position is measured on a 200 point scale, going from -100 to +100 with more positive values indicating a more right-wing ideology, the positive sign indicates that more right-wing parties are associated with a greater emphasis on core economic issues in the manifesto with every ten point move to the right associated with an increase of one percent in the salience given to economic issues. The effect of ideology is however negative for the broader measure of economic salience and not statistically significant. There is little observed difference, in other words, in the attention given to broad economic policy by the left or right. By contrast, the effect of ideological deviation is more significant for the broad measure of economic salience and not significant for narrow economic salience. Thus the broad measure of salience appears to capture distributional aspects of macro-economic policy that are more relevant for parties and voters further from the ideological center.

Turning to the institutional factors that are hypothesized to affect salience, we see a significant and substantively large effect of institutional context on economic salience. Parties in high clarity settings are predicted to increase the percentage of sentences in their manifestos dedicated to the economy by almost four-and-a-half percentage points for the broad measure of salience. While there is some evidence that incumbents highlight economic issues more fully, this variable is not significant for the narrow measure of salience and is significant only at the ten percent level of confidence for the broad measure.

As we would expect, the economic environment affects what parties talk about. With each percentage point increase in the misery index, any given party increases the space dedicated to the economy by a half percentage point, but this effect is mediated by the status of the party. Incumbent parties are much less responsive to deteriorating economic conditions and the difference between incumbent and opposition parties grows as the economy worsens. The coefficients on the interaction term, taken jointly with the coefficient on the incumbent variable, implies that incumbent parties will emphasize the economy more than other parties when the misery index is low and the economy is rosy and will do so less than others when the news is bad.

Finally, the coefficient on the trend variable is also significant and positive. Since the explanatory variables are measured on a quarterly basis, the coefficient implies that salience declines by 0.12 percentage points each year for the broad measure and 0.18 percentage points for the narrow measure each year. The decline in salience over time could reflect the increased impact of globalization on the feasible autonomy of economic policy. Hellwig (2007) has indicated that voters in France have de-emphasized macro-economic policy as politician's power over economic conditions has diminished and that voters sense that parties and governments are not fully responsible for economic outcomes (see also Hellwig and Samuels, 2007, on the impact of globalization on economic voting).

The results summarized above are not due to country-specific factors that could emanate from distinct national histories and political legacies and the results are substantively very similar when a full set of country dummies, to capture country fixed effects on manifestos, are included in the model.¹⁸ The results lend support to the treatment of manifestos as reliable indicators of the salience of the economy in party communication. The distribution of salience is not haphazard and parties behave in ways that are predictable, varying the level of attention given to the economy in response to their expected electoral base, the economic fortunes of the day and their institutional setting. Parties also appear to anticipate the reaction of voters and to revise their manifestos accordingly. Incumbents reduce the space given to economic issues in their manifesto as the economy worsens, strategically downplaying the economy when judgments of responsibility might be most operative. This strategic anticipation on the part of parties affects the measures of salience that will be used in the next section. Finally, the R^2 indicates that while manifestos are associated in predictable ways with institutional, party and economic characteristics, there is still much variation in manifestos that is unexplained. Even controlling for features of party environments, in other words, there is evidence of variation and differentiation in the world of party manifestos. In the next section, I examine whether and how voters respond to this differentiation.

IV. MODELS OF VOTE INTENTION: DATA AND METHODS

In this section, I describe the data and specification used to test the link between salience and economic voting. This analysis requires the integration of two sources of data; the coding of party manifestos and data on voting or vote intention. For data on voting behavior, I turn to the Eurobarometer data used by Anderson (2000) and others whose surveys almost always include a question on vote intention.¹⁹ The Eurobarometer survey has been implemented in European Union countries (and some non-EU countries) from 1970 with regular, semi-annual surveys in the fall and spring from 1975 (Schmitt and Scholz, 2005). Approximately one thousand respondents are surveyed from each of the larger countries with smaller samples in smaller nations.²⁰

Given gaps in the coverage of covariates in the Eurobarometer survey, there are only four surveys in the trend file on which to estimate the vote function. These are Eurobarometer 42, surveyed in the autumn of 1994 (the data used by Anderson (2000)), Eurobarometer 40 from the autumn of 1993, Eurobarometer 36 from the autumn of 1991 and Eurobarometer 34 from the autumn of 1990. The set of

¹⁸ Results available from author. The measures of party size, the economic variable and the interaction term of the misery index and incumbency also remained significant for the broad measure of economic salience when a full set of party dummies for party-level fixed effects were introduced.

¹⁹ The question is worded, "If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you support?"

²⁰ The codebook and trend data file for the Eurobarometer surveys was accessed from the Mannheim Trend File, citation.

countries that are surveyed in the four available Eurobarometer surveys are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain Ireland, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal.²¹ Of these countries, all but Spain and Portugal are also coded for clarity of responsibility in Powell and Whitten's original 1993 article so that one can estimate the model of vote intention separately for high and low clarity contexts.²²

Given a desire to maximize data points and the precision of estimates, it is preferable to pool all four surveys and estimate a logistic model of vote intention for the combined observations for which we have available data. There are, however, issues that militate against including observations for particular countries and surveys. If, for instance, a Eurobarometer survey period overlaps with the start date of a new party manifesto, it is unclear whether politicians and voters would base actions and perceptions on the old or new manifesto. Moreover, since it is pre-existing manifestos that are expected to signal economic competence, it is important to connect voter intentions with the level of salience in the manifesto released in the *prior* electoral cycle. In order to minimize ambiguity, I do not estimate the model in country cases for which the start date of the manifesto is within one quarter of the Eurobarometer survey period, running from mid-September to mid-October. Thus, Danish and German observations are excluded in the estimations for Eurobarometer 42, Greece and Norway for Eurobarometer 40, Belgium and Portugal for Eurobarometer 36 and Germany and Denmark for Eurobarometer 34.²³

Second, there are particular issues that render the Italian case less useful for a study of economic voting and the mediating effect of salience in this period. The first referendum on Italy's electoral law was held in Spring of 1991 and the success of efforts by Mario Segni and others in COREL (the Committee to Promote Referendums on Elections) had drawn attention to the lack of responsiveness among Italian governing parties.²⁴ The first arrests in the Mani Pulite ("dirty hands") case were made in February of 1992 and all major parties faced large losses in local elections in December 1992. In the

²¹ Austria, Finland and Sweden are included in Eurobarometer 42 but did not collect all survey items with Austria and Sweden missing vote intention and Finland missing economic perceptions. The German observations include respondents from the former German Democratic Republic from Eurobarometer on but are not included in prior years (although they are available from 1990 onwards) because earlier vote intentions likely reflect support for the re-unification process guided by Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

²² I use the original Powell-Whitten clarity index rather than the time-varying measure computed by Nadeau et al (2002) but control for features like coalition government and relative size of incumbent parties that enter into the Nadeau et al definition of clarity.

²³ In all of these cases, the election date for which the manifesto was released fell in the months of September to December in the Eurobarometer year. Since the date that the MRG associates with a manifesto is the date of the election, and since manifestos are released prior to an election, manifestos that begin after a Eurobarometer survey period can affect party messages in the period prior to the survey.

²⁴ COREL had actually proposed three referenda, one of which was allowed by the Constitutional Court. In the 1991 referendum, 62.5 percent of those permitted to vote did so, with 95 percent voting in favor of reform.

national elections of June 1993, the Christian Democrats lost half of their support and the Socialists almost disappeared as an effective electoral force. In simple terms, popular support for established parties was imploding in Italy during the period covered by the four Eurobarometer surveys (Katz, 1996). As such, any association between economic conditions and popular support for incumbent parties is likely spurious, driven by incidental correlations between economic outcomes and an underlying trend of defection from all major parties. For this reason, the model is estimated without responses from Italy.

In order to test for the mediating effect of salience, I merge the data on vote intention from the Eurobarometer, which tabulates data on vote intention using the Zeus categorization of parties by country, with the data on manifestos from the MRG, which gives each party for which manifestos are coded a unique numeric identifier. What is created through the act of merging this data is a vote intention measure that indicates which party -- among all the parties for which manifestos are coded -- a respondent would vote for if the voter is willing to indicate a definite party preference and the economic salience for this party. Finally, because incumbent parties may strategically reduce salience during poor economic conditions, I use a moving average of salience in the current and four prior electoral periods to proxy for the long-run economic salience of a party.

In the majority of cases, it is possible to equate a Zeus categorization system vote intention with a party for which the MRG has coded a manifesto in the prior cycle but there is considerable variation. There are, moreover, particular instances where identification between party preference and economic salience in the most recent manifesto is harder. In many country cases Green parties are active before their manifestos are available for coding by the MRG project and the same is true for regional parties like the Vlaams Blok in Belgium. In the French case, there is no manifesto coding for the French Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche and there is a mis-match in the treatment of the UDF (or Union for French Democracy) since the Eurobarometer survey asks for vote intention for the UDF combined with other parties and tendencies whereas the MRG treats the UDF as an independent entity. Even in the relatively unambiguous case of Britain, questions on vote intention for the party now called the Liberal Democrats do not always align with the description of that party in the MRG. Given these issues, the percentage of observations for which the respondent expresses a vote intention and for which I can connect that vote intention to a party with a coded manifesto ranges from a low of 65.4 percent for France to a high of 99 percent for Norwegian vote intention. The countries most affected by problems in coding vote intention and connecting it with salience are France and Belgium and those least affected are Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark.

When and if each respondent's vote intention is connected to a party for which the manifesto is coded, I create an indicator variable taking the value of one if the party for which the voter intends to vote is also in government. This one-zero dummy variable then becomes the dependent variable in a logit (or logistic) model of vote intention by individual characteristics including perceptions of the economy. This variable is set to missing if the original vote intention cannot be connected to a party with a coded manifesto since we wish to test how voting is affected by salience looking only at the universe of cases for which we know the salience of alternatives. In Table Four, I present descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis. The descriptive statistics are similar to those in Anderson (2000) except that the percentage of respondents intending to vote for an incumbent party is higher because incumbent parties are more easily connected to a party whose manifesto has been coded.

It is testimony to recent work on economic voting that fundamentally re-assesses the models we use to estimate a vote-intention model that this choice of specification cannot go without argument. Van der Brug (2007) et al discuss the short-comings of models that use vote for one of the parties in government as the dependent variable, precisely because it ignores competition between parties in office. The choice of model might appear ironic given the stated purpose of the tests to capture the effect of a party-specific characteristic – salience – on voting behavior. The logit specification is employed in this case because the main hypothesis is that salience can mediate the effect of economic perceptions on vote intention. The use of an interaction term between economic perceptions and salience means that we can estimate the strength of the relationship between the subjective economy and the likelihood of voting for a governing party conditional on the signals and reputation of the party for whom the voter would cast their ballot. This allows the observed level of economic voting for incumbent parties to vary by their level of salience and indicates what kind of trade-offs voters might be making among governing parties. To avoid problems of omitted variable bias, the model also includes the un-interacted level of salience for the party for whom the voter would have intended to vote.

The remaining covariates include the socio-demographic variables described by Anderson (2000) and incorporated into his analysis: a measure of left-right ideological position, subjective social class, and religiosity based on self-description of the respondent as religious, not religious, agnostic or atheist. The socio-demographic variables help to explain the support of voters for the governments of the day, independent of economic conditions, and their inclusion means that we separate the effects of perceived economic competence from that of the socio-demographic composition of the population on vote intention.

The model also includes two measures of perceived economic conditions from the Eurobarometer. The question on general economic conditions asks “Compared to 12 months ago, do you think the general economic situation in this country has got a lot better, a little better, stayed the same, got a little worse or a lot worse?” The question thus compares to measures of retrospective, sociotropic assessments used in the U.S. context. As a measure of retrospective, pocketbook assessments I used the equivalent question that asks respondents about the financial situation of the respondent’s own household over the last twelve months. Both variables are coded so that a value of one represents the worst assessment, with the economy perceived to have “got a lot worse”, and a value of five indicates the most positive assessment.

In using subjective, economic perceptions rather than actual outcomes as my measure of the economy, I run the risk, outlined by Kayser and Wlezien (2006) of disassociating economic voting from objective conditions. As such, the analysis skirts the issues of what incumbents must do to the economy in order to be re-elected. Moreover, if voter perceptions can be cued by pre-existing ideological leanings, as suggested by recent scholarship, then we have a model in which economic voting is partially guided by party identification (Wlezien et al, 1997, Bartels, 2002, van der Eijk et al, 2007). Unfortunately, scholars of economic voting face a lack of appealing alternatives. Given the relatively small number of nation elections for which macro-economic data is available, empirical analysis for which the unit of analysis is the election faces a severe degrees of freedom problem, particularly when we wish to compare behavior across institutional settings and over different types of party. If we take the individual as the unit of analysis, however, it is appropriate to condition voting choice on perceived economic conditions in order to account for variation in the ballot choices of voters who confront identical objective conditions and to avoid improperly inflating degrees of freedom.

It is, however, correct that the tests presented here involve a key endogeneity problem. If economic perceptions are partly driven by partisan cues, then evidence of stronger economic voting for parties for whom the economy is more salient could simply indicate that those parties spend more time cuing their sympathizers with the appropriate economic perceptions. The greater weight placed on the economy on the manifesto would demonstrate a feedback from the party to voters’ beliefs rather than a feedback from voters to parties. To address this concern, and to determine whether results are driven by reverse causation, I re-estimate the model of economic voting, and its interaction with salience, using data only on respondents who report that they are not close to any party.

V. MODELS OF VOTE INTENTION: RESULTS

Before proceeding to the results of the interactive model, I first present results of a basic vote intention model for the nine countries, estimated across different institutional settings. Table Five gives the results for the basic logit model of vote intention for parties in government first for all country cases, then for high and low clarity cases (once again using the Anderson (2000) coding for high clarity as a measure of two or below on the Powell and Whitten clarity index) and lastly for cases in which clarity is least and most clear.²⁵ Models also include a full set of country fixed effects to pick-up country-specific differences in underlying support for the government of the day and survey fixed effects. For the full sample, and for high-clarity and non-coalition cases, the excluded country is Britain. For low-clarity and coalition cases, the excluded country is Belgium.

The first result to be noted in Table Five is that socio-demographic factors (like class, religiosity and ideological leaning) exert a significant effect on vote intention, as we would expect. Because the ideological leaning of governments also varied, with more right-wing governments in high-clarity and non-coalition cases, higher rankings on subjective social class, for instance, were positively associated with government support in non-coalition cases and negatively associated with government support in low-clarity cases. The key issue for tests of economic voting, however, is whether the coefficients on sociotropic and pocketbook evaluations are positive and significant (so that voters who perceive a good economy would prefer to vote for the incumbent) and how these coefficients vary across contexts.

In that respect, the results in Table Five can be seen as validation of a long line of scholarship, going back to Powell and Whitten (1993) and demonstrating a weaker response of voting preferences to economic conditions in low-clarity contexts. The coefficient on sociotropic evaluations is approximately half as large in low-clarity contexts as it is for high-clarity cases. The differences are even more pronounced if we look at the least and most clear cases. Pocketbook evaluations are never significant in low-clarity and coalition cases while they are in other cases.²⁶ Finally, the model explains more of the variation in vote intention for the government as a whole in countries in which the clarity of responsibility is higher and in cases where a single party occupies cabinet, presumably because it is in these cases that vote preferences are more informed by economic outcomes.

²⁵ Least clear cases are for a coalition government in a country with low institutional clarity. Most clear cases are for non-coalition governments in countries with high institutional clarity. The effect of clarity and coalitions are included jointly to pick up time-varying factors in the clarity of responsibility.

²⁶ Pocketbook evaluations, however, have a smaller effect on vote preferences than sociotropic evaluations and this result conforms to findings from the American case.

I next estimate the explicitly interactive model in which the effect of sociotropic evaluations on vote choice depends on the broad economic salience for the party for which a respondent intends to vote.²⁷ Table Six presents the results. If, as suggested by the game theoretic literature on production in teams, the “remuneration” of parties that specialize in economic management is more tightly linked to variation in output, the marginal effect of economic perceptions should be higher for parties with higher economic salience. In addition, if the utility of signaling depends on the context, we should see a greater mediating effect of salience on economic voting in low clarity contexts and under coalition government.

The results presented in Table Six provide some support for these hypotheses. For the sample as a whole, the coefficient on the interaction term is both small and insignificant; conditioning on salience adds little or nothing to our ability to predict vote intention. For the low clarity and least clear cases, however, the coefficient on sociotropic evaluations, uninteracted, is now negative and significant while the coefficient on the interaction term is positive and significant. Since the marginal effect of economic perceptions now depends on the level of broad economic salience, the implication is that parties who focus little on macro-economic management will see declining support as economic perceptions improve. Parties with higher economic salience, on the other hand, will see their prospects improve because the positive effect of the interaction term outweighs the negative coefficient on sociotropic evaluations. The tipping point at which the impact of economic perceptions is zero is 25.8 percent in low-clarity countries and 26.7 percent for the least clear cases, which in both cases is a little below the observed mean for broad salience for parties in low-clarity settings of 29.3 for the 1980 to 1999 period. The pattern of responsiveness to the economy reflected in the coefficients implies that vote (or preference) switching will take place among coalition partners, since some governing parties lose popularity and others gain with an improving economic outlook.

The interaction coefficient for the effect of salience on economic perceptions is estimated at -0.04 for high clarity cases and is small, negative and insignificant in the most clear cases. Once again, this is not interpreted to mean that a focus on the economy can hurt a political party as the economy improves. Rather, in contexts in which responsibility is obvious, salience should not a significant influence on economic voting and correlations between popularity and economic salience may be completely coincidental. In all cases, the coefficient on the salience measure is negative and significant, implying that voters who would cast their ballot for a party with high economic salience were less likely to vote for a governing party. This likely reflects support for parties of the far right (including Denmark’s Progress Party and its successor, the Danish People’s Party) which emphasized a free-market economic philosophy

²⁷ Similar results are obtained if we use a moving average of the narrow measure of economic salience but the fit of the model is higher when the broad measure of salience is used and those are the results presented here.

in their manifestos and, for the most part, were not included in coalition governments. It is also noteworthy that religion is a more significant determinant of vote intention in low-clarity settings in which religious parties may actually be competitive while a standard measure of left-right placement has a lower estimated effect in those settings.

Because of the concerns with endogeneity, and the evidence that parties are strategic in writing manifestos, it is crucial to examine whether the results reported above are robust to the inclusion of different control variables and to re-estimation on particular sub-samples. In Table Seven, I report the results of testing specifications of the model suggested by alternative explanations. The first column of the model re-estimates the interaction model for vote intentions for the party of the Prime Minister. If parties that specialize in economic management compete for, and hold, the office of Prime Minister, the results found for economic salience could stem simply from voters using objective features of cabinet government – who is the Prime Minister – to guide their ascriptions of responsibility. If this is correct, the interactive effect of economic salience should not be observed for the Prime Minister’s party, since the allocation of cabinet offices is sufficient to guide voter behavior. To test this, the model is re-estimated for vote intentions for the Prime Minister’s party only, using a one-zero dummy indicating whether a respondent would vote for the party of that office holder. The mediating effect of salience was, if anything, more significant for the Prime Minister’s party and the coefficient was almost the same as for the least clear cases, at 0.04. Voters may use objective features of cabinet government, in other words, to guide inferences about competence or responsibility, but the role of salience remains significant when we take account of at least one of them.

The model run in the second column takes account of the role of party size. Larger parties are likely to place a higher priority on economic policy, but they also offer tempting targets for inferences about competence and responsibility when in office. In order to test whether it is this characteristic that drives the result on salience, I include an interaction term for the percent of the vote that a party received in the last election, as well as the size variable itself. The positive and significant coefficient on the measure of size indicates that support for a larger party is positively associated with support for a governing party, but the interaction term between size and economic perceptions is negative and significant while the interaction term on salience remains positive and significant. The result observed for salience, therefore, does not appear to owe its origin to an underlying link with party size.

Next, and in order to respond to the issue of endogeneity in economic perceptions, I re-estimate the interaction model for a sample of voters who describe themselves as “not close to any party”.²⁸

²⁸ The alternative categories are “very close”, “fairly close” and “sympathizer”.

Limiting the model to this sub-sample of unaffiliated voters severely diminishes the sample size, but it reduces concern that the result is driven by reverse causation from party cues to perceptions. Even for this smaller sample, however, while the coefficient on the variable for sociotropic perceptions is insignificant, the coefficient on the interaction term is significant and positive.²⁹

Last, but not least, I estimate the model separately for the two countries (France and Denmark) for which the observed variation among parties in government, in the weight given to the economy, was highest. In both cases, and despite reduced sample size, we again see a positive interaction term: parties that emphasize the economy more are rewarded for good outcomes with additional votes.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results described above should not be taken to imply that economic voting is not problematic in low clarity settings. It is. The results in Table Five underscore the finding that the government, as a whole, does not feel the brunt of economic voting in countries with low clarity of responsibility and under coalition government as cleanly or sharply as do governments in countries that adhere more closely to the Westminster model. This conclusion is inescapable. On the other hand, the results presented in Tables Six and Seven challenge a kind of fundamental pessimism that voters in low clarity contexts can make judgments of responsibility and attach fault for economic outcomes to any particular party. Simply put, when voters are given the opportunity to choose among incumbent parties that are differentiated by the level of salience they place on the economy, they behave selectively. Voters reward some parties when the economy looks rosy and not others. Political parties that signal a particular economic focus have incentives to get the economy right.

Since voters cast their ballot for parties, and not for governments, the process outlined above suggests that the accountability mechanism inherent in economic voting is not absent in low clarity settings. Rather, the accountability mechanism differs by party target and adheres to some more than others. Parties that specialize in macro-economic policy operate under an implicit contract with voters in which voter support is more variable and more dependent on positive economic outcomes. Further, and fortunately, levels of salience differ among parties in low clarity settings so that voters have the chance to select from different party options – although perhaps not as often as we would like. While the same

²⁹ An additional concern is whether parties adapt manifestos to prevailing patterns of political contention, since Duch and Stevenson (2008) find that economic voting is far stronger for parties that are in contention to serve as the *formateur* for new governments. One of their examples is the breakthrough of the Conservative party in Denmark in the 1980's and 1990's, which saw a strong effect of economic conditions on its vote. The Conservatives had made the economy one of the mainstays of their manifestos from the 1960's, however, so that in this case patterns of contention seem to have changed in line with pre-existing manifesto commitments rather than vice versa.

differentiation exists in high-clarity contexts it is less relevant to the economic voting mechanism because outcomes can easily be attributed to individual parties.

The implications of these findings for normative judgments of electoral systems are important. While the sanctioning effect of economic voting is weaker for the government as a whole in “low-clarity” settings, the incentives inherent in economic voting still apply to particular parties. As such, we cannot assume that the voting mechanism fails to encourage a policy expertise in macro-economic management in these settings or that overall macro-economic performance will be worse. The implications for the research agenda on economic voting are also interesting. Given the evidence presented in this paper of vote switching among cabinet partners, it may be important to decompose coalition governments into their constituent parts and to explain how voting incentives operate for individual parties. It is the individual parties that maintain a particular brand reputation for economic competence or the lack thereof and the individual parties that have incentives to use policy tools to burnish that reputation. Indeed, one of the questions that arise from the above analysis is whether parties that signal a specific economic competence also seek to control macro-economic positions in cabinet and macro-economic policy-making. If they do so, we will have demonstrated a clear connection between party policy, the economy, and voter responses despite real issues in the institutional context of politics.

FIGURES AND TABLES

Table One: Average levels of Salience for Ten Countries (1980 - 1999)

	Narrow	Broad
Average	20.7 (10.0)	30.3 (10.8)
High Clarity	22.2 (10.3)	32.8 (11.7)
Low Clarity	20.1 (9.8)	29.3 (10.23)

Table Two: Standard Deviation in Salience within Coalition Governments (1980 – 1999)

	Narrow	Broad
Average	7.8	8.2
Begium	5.3	6.1
Denmark	9.6	10.7
France	15.1	16.0
Greece	5.4	9.6
Germany	5.1	4.1
Ireland	6.1	4.3
Italy	8.9	10.0
Netherlands	4.3	4.3
Norway	7.0	5.9

Table Three: Determinants of Economic Salience in Party Manifestos for 16 Countries**

Dependent Variable:	Narrow Economic Salience	Broad Economic Salience
Constant	15.70*** (1.98)	18.1*** (2.3)
Size measured by Percentage of Vote	0.63*** (0.12)	0.70*** (0.12)
Percentage of Vote Squared	-0.01*** (0.002)	-0.01*** (0.002)
Right Left Ideology (-100=left, 100=right)	0.10*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)
Deviation from Ideological Median	-0.002 (0.04)	0.10** (0.05)
High Clarity Dummy	4.25*** (0.98)	4.49*** (1.16)
Date	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)
Incumbent	1.80 (1.72)	3.76* (2.14)
Misery Index	0.34*** (0.09)	0.52*** (0.11)
Incumbent*Misery Index	-0.18 (0.13)	-0.32** (0.16)
N	661	661
R2	0.20	0.19
F-Statistic	13.73***	15.26***
MSE	9.64	11.18

** Countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden. Data on government composition, used to generate the incumbent dummy, is taken from Woldendorp et al (2000). Data on inflation is taken from the OECD Main Economic Indicators series. Data on unemployment is from the ILO's Bureau of Labour Statistics, supplemented with information from the OECD.

Table Four: Descriptive Statistics for Eurobarometer Sample**

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Subjective Social Class (0=Working Class, 5=Upper Class)	2.33	1.08	1	5	18,766
Religiosity (4=religious, 1=atheist)	3.45	0.84	1	4	19,048
Left-right self-placement (1=left, 10=right)	5.40	2.07	1	10	18,004
Retrospective Sociotropic Evaluations (5 = high, 1=low)	2.68	1.04	1	5	19,595
Retrospective Pocketbook Evaluations (5=high,1=low)	2.88	0.93	1	5	19,759
Powell Whitten Index	1.68	1.33	0	3.3	20,696
High Clarity dummy variable	0.46	0.50	0	1	20,696
Vote Intention for Governing Parties	0.46	0.50	0	1	20,696

**Descriptive statistics are calculated for the individuals who a reported vote intention that can be connected to a party with manifesto data and for non-ambiguous manifesto cases in the nine country sample.

Table Five: Economic Voting and Political Context
Logistic Model of Vote Intention, standard errors in parentheses.

Dependent Variable: One if would vote for governing party	All	By Clarity		By Clarity and Coalition	
		Low	High	Least Clear	Most Clear
Constant	-3.69*** (0.12)	-1.58*** (0.17)	-4.20*** (0.17)	-1.82*** (0.18)	-4.63*** (0.21)
Social Class	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.03)
Religiosity	0.20*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.03)	0.08** (0.03)	0.31*** (0.02)	-0.00 (0.04)
Left-right self-placement	0.20*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.28*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.01)	0.27*** (0.02)
Sociotropic Evaluations	0.30*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.03)	0.38*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.51*** (0.03)
Pocketbook Evaluations	0.11*** (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.14*** (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.22*** (0.04)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	15,880	7,910	7,970	7,275	5,077
Pseudo R²	0.10	0.07	0.13	0.07	0.15
Log Likelihood	-9,898	-5,085	-4,714	-4,673	-2,878
Chi-Square of LR	2,091	787	1450	740	1,012

Table Six: Interactions between Economic Salience and Economic Evaluations
Logistic Model of Vote Intention, standard errors in parentheses.

Dependent Variable: One if would vote for Governing Party	All	By Clarity		By Clarity and Coalition	
		Low	High	Least Clear	Most Clear
Constant	-0.05 (0.36)	3.56*** (0.59)	-1.80*** (0.50)	3.83*** (0.65)	-1.95*** (0.69)
Social Class	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.04)
Religiosity	0.18*** (0.02)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.09** (0.04)	0.29*** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.05)
Left-right self-placement	0.22*** (0.01)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.01)	0.27*** (0.02)
Sociotropic Evaluations	0.49*** (0.11)	-0.85*** (0.19)	2.05*** (0.17)	-1.01*** (0.21)	0.71*** (0.25)
Sociotropic*Salience	-0.00 (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Salience	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.15*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.02)
Pocketbook Evaluations	0.11*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.21*** (0.04)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	13,889	7,170	6,719	6,535	4,274
Pseudo R²	0.15	0.11	0.25	0.11	0.20
Log Likelihood	-8,199	-4,416	-3,504	-4,011	-2,371
Chi-Square of LR	2,852	1,098	2,307	1,000	1,152

Table Seven: Robustness Tests on Interaction Effect in Low Clarity Settings

Dependent Variable:	Vote PM's Party		Vote for Governing Party		
		Control for Size	Non-Affiliates only	France	Denmark
Constant	0.28 (0.67)	4.80*** (0.86)	2.29** (1.14)	6.97*** (1.80)	-2.90* (1.60)
Social Class	-0.10*** (0.03)	0.07 (0.03)	-0.13** (0.05)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)
Religiosity	0.57*** (0.04)	0.13*** (0.04)	0.18** (0.07)	0.01 (0.06)	0.11 (0.07)
Left-right self-placement	0.29*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.04)	0.08** (0.03)
Sociotropic Evaluations	-1.13*** (0.20)	-1.49*** (0.26)	-0.49 (0.33)	-2.12** (0.64)	-0.84* (0.49)
Sociotropic*Saliency	0.04*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.04*** (0.01)
Sociotropic*Size		-0.02*** (0.00)			
Saliency	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.43*** (0.03)	-0.09** (0.03)	-0.30*** (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
Size		0.23*** (0.01)			
Pocketbook Evaluations	0.09*** (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.00 (0.07)		
Country Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Survey Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	6,870	7,170	1,615	1,234	1,339
Pseudo R²	0.11	0.35	0.13	0.14	0.14
Log Likelihood	-3,382	-3,211	-974	-738	-784
Chi-Square of LR	993	3,510	291	232	251

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