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Non-policy communicative behaviour of political parties during electoral campaigns, Switzerland and Germany, 2009-2015

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autorise, sans se prononcer sur les opinions de la candidate, l'impression de la thèse de Madame Evgeniya De Saint-Phalle, intitulée :

"Non-policy communicative behaviour of political pafties during electoral campaigns, Switzerland and Germany' 2009-2015."

Emmanuel BAYLE
Doyen

Lausanne, le 8 novembre 2024

Resumé

Français

Cette thèse plaide pour une prise en compte systématique de l'image du parti pour la compréhension des stratégies électorales. Les cas étudiés et comparés sont deux élections en Suisse (2011-2015) et Allemagne (2009-2013). Les données sont issues du projet FNS « Stratégies des partis et dynamiques de la compétition électorale dans les démocraties multipartites ». La thèse analyse comment les partis, pendant les campagnes, conjuguent communications sur des propositions de politiques publiques (réformes et/ou régulation de l'appareil d'Etat) et communications sur eux-mêmes et leurs adversaires. La thèse propose le concept d'« image de parti » pour encapsuler ces différent comportements communicationnels non-programmatiques, et applique la théorie de l'aversion au risque (Kahneman & Tversky 1979) pour comprendre ces comportements, comment les partis se présentent aux électeurs et les facteurs influençant ces décisions. La théorie prédit que les partis adaptent leurs stratégies d'image de manière comparable à d'autres organisations : leur sensibilité au risque serait différente s'ils se trouvent dans un schéma de « gain » ou de « perte ». Pour se faire, la thèse analyse des facteurs spécifiques au parti tels que du leur statut d'incumbent, leur taille, leur "momentum", leur position idéologique, et les différents canaux de communication, spécifiquement les programmes et les communiqués. La thèse formule trois ensembles d'hypothèses en relation avec les dimensions de l'image, la présence d'attaques et la relation cumulative entre les deux : le « score de risque ». La thèse ne traite que les données et images textuelles et applique les méthodes à la fois quantitatives (analyse de contenu, régressions logistique et ordinale) et qualitatives (analyse d'entretiens avec les directeurs de campagnes). Les résultats de l'application de la théorie de l'aversion au risque sont contrastés, mais confirment certaines hypothèses. La thèse contribue aux champs de la compétition électorale et de la communication politique.

English

This thesis argues for a systematic consideration of the party's image in order to understand electoral strategies. The presented cases are two elections in Switzerland (2011-2015) and Germany (2009-2013). We derive the data from the SNSF project "Party strategies and dynamics of electoral competition in multi-party democracies". The thesis analyses how, during campaigns, parties combine policy communication (reforms and/or regulations) and non-policy communication on themselves and their adversaries. The thesis proposes the concept of "party image" to encapsulate these different non-policy communication behaviours and applies the theory of risk aversion (Kahneman and Tversky 1979) to understand these behaviours, more specifically, how parties present themselves to voters and the factors influencing these decisions. The theory predicts that parties adapt their image strategies in a manner comparable to other organisations: their sensitivity to risk would be different if they find themselves in a "gain" or a "loss" frame. In order to achieve this goal, the thesis analyses factors specific to the party such as their incumbent status, their size, their "momentum", their ideological position, and the different communication channels (party manifestos and press releases). The thesis formulates three sets of hypotheses in relation to the image dimensions, the presence of attacks and the cumulative relationship between the two: the "risk score". The thesis relies on textual data and applies both quantitative (content analysis, logistic and ordinal regressions) and qualitative (analysis of interviews with party campaign managers) methods. The results of the application of risk aversion theory are mixed, but confirm certain hypotheses. The thesis contributes to the fields of electoral competition and political communication.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"A campaign must always be about yourself [the party]. You always have to talk about yourself.

Others don't talk about the SVP being bad. They say "We are good".

Excerpt from the interview with the party manager of the Swiss FDP, 2018.

1.1. The puzzle of party image

Elections are both the symbolic and functional cornerstone of representative systems. They serve as the primary means through which political parties communicate their policy proposals, values, and main objectives to the electorate. Typically, modern campaigns encompass a diverse array of activities, including public rallies, debates (live, broadcast, and online), door-to-door canvassing, and the use of social media platforms to disseminate party messages. The duration of electoral campaigns varies between countries, often governed by legal regulations, and shaped by political traditions unique to each nation. These regulations not only dictate the length of campaigns but also establish specific rules, such as spending limits and media access. All parties participating in an election must respect these legal constraints and build up and adapt their plans of communication to maximise their gains: attracting voters and winning the elections.

For instance, in France, the official campaign period for legislative elections "begins on the second Monday before the election date and ends at midnight on the eve of the election" (Code électoral, Article L47 A), whereas it is six weeks for the House of Commons in the United Kingdom. In Germany, while the campaign for *Bundestag* does not have a strict legal length, it usually spans several months, with parties intensifying their efforts in the final weeks before the election day (Preißinger and Schoen 2016). Meanwhile, in Switzerland, campaigns tend to be shorter and less intense, reflecting the country's decentralised political structure and frequent referenda (Bühlmann et al. 2016).

A strategic dimension is therefore inherent to these campaigns, since there are limited resources to mobilise in terms of time, people, and money. A poor showing at the polls may lead to a party's decline or even disappearance, while a strong performance can grant them access to the executive or legislative power. Consequently, parties are highly motivated to invest resources into their communication to secure their political survival and influence.

The main issue of an election is clear: to decide which political proposition is "the best". Voters must pay attention to the policy programs to select what appears to be suited to defend their interests. Policies need to be communicated; however, they have never been the only aspect of a campaign. The presentation of a candidate or party and all non-issue-based elements play a crucial role in the success or failure of an electoral campaign. These, along with the policies, can be collectively referred to as "party communication". For example, a candidate's charisma and eloquence are not related to the policies defended, but certainly attract voters. The same can be said about a party: an old and respected party will most likely benefit more from its established identity than a new party, which has yet to create one. As the interviewed manager of the Swiss Liberal-Radical Party (FDP) said about their communication strategy, to a certain extent: "*a campaign must always be about yourself*", as a party (FDP Interview 2018). Some actions are coherent with the party image, some are not, as the manager of the Evangelical People's Party (EVP) signified: *"We as a Christian party cannot do anything against someone else"* (EVP Interview 2018).

When we study campaign text materials (press releases, manifestos, speeches, debates, advertisements etc.), an important part of the communicative behaviour is not related to actual policies, but rather to the attempts of parties to present themselves to voters in the best way possible. Parties try to convince voters of their competence, honesty, support of democratic values, etc. They might also try to persuade voters that other parties are not the best choice.

For decades, researchers in political communication and political marketing have focused on studying the strategic presentation of political parties in campaigns. With the ongoing professionalisation of parties, all campaigns seem to follow comparable recipes for success by controlling every aspect of their communication and, for the most part, taking inspiration from marketing and advertisement. The concept of *communicative behaviour* is a crucial aspect of the present research. In the framework of this thesis, we define it as all actions allowing a party to present itself and depict its adversaries. Communicative behaviour encompasses both policy-based (issues) and non-policy-based communication (party image). The current work focuses on the party image.

During campaigns, parties show support for certain social groups among the electorate, or highlight their qualities, such as professionalism, integrity, or even empathy towards their constituency. In Europe, where partisanship has declined, and voter volatility has increased (Drummond 2006), parties cannot rely solely on issues in order to win. In their electoral campaigns, they employ different strategies to portray themselves in the most positive manner.

Country-specific political and institutional context also plays a role in how parties decide on general electoral strategies. There is evidence (e.g., Newton 1999, 2011) that voters form their opinion based on other factors than campaigns, such as social group identification, value orientation or partisanship. More specifically, Kergomard (2023) shows how Swiss parties have always used non-policy communication in their electoral campaigns.

As a result, political parties during modern electoral campaigns must balance between allocating resources to communicate on policies (what to do) and on non-policy items (who they are, what values they stand for, who they support, and why voters should prefer them instead of their opponent). In doing so, they position themselves on a spectrum of communicative behaviour, ranging from positive (promoting themselves or praising others) to negative (stressing what or who they condemn and/or attacking their opponents). We argue that these choices are not only rational but are also guided by a "party image" strategy, and that the non-policy communicative behaviour follows a calculated course, taking into account potential risks. We also argue that these non-policy communicative behaviours take the form of a choice on the spectrum between rigidity (emphasising their party identity) and plasticity (changing and adapting their party image).

It is important for parties to preserve their political identity, honour their history, and remain consistent with their previous campaign choices to maintain coherence (*rigidity*). Conversely, they should be able to simultaneously adapt to the ever-changing context of the campaign, the strategies of rival parties, and significant ongoing political events (*plasticity*). The ability to balance between the two is crucial for parties, as it allows them to retain their core electorate while also appealing to potential new voters.

Specific focus on various parts of communicative behaviour might also change in time. For example, the British Labour Party and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s focused on progressive social justice, workers' rights, and economic policies. Under the leadership of Willy Brandt in the 1970s, the SPD promoted a range of measures aimed at reducing inequality, enhancing social welfare, and fostering economic growth (Micus 2005). In our terminology, this became the rigid identity of the SPD. Leaders like Helmut Schmidt and Gerhard Schröder continued to prioritise these issues. Schröder, in particular, spearheaded a series of economic and social reforms known as the "Agenda 2010" (Jun 2003).

However, as the political landscape developed, the SPD, as much as every other party, felt that at some point, emphasising issues alone was insufficient (Byrne 2021). Furthermore, they faced competition from other parties, such as the Green Party and the Left Party, which have encroached on its traditional policy territory (Dostal 2017). This has led to a shift from a policy-based communication towards a more holistic approach. During Gerhard Schröder's tenure as Chancellor (1998-2005), his media approach contributed significantly to his popularity and electoral success, highlighting the growing importance of personal image and public relations in political campaigns (Pautz 2009). The SPD invested its resources into this new non-policy communicative behaviour.

Another example of non-policy communicative behaviour can be observed in Switzerland. Two successful parliamentary Green parties coexist, the Green Party of Switzerland (GPS) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP). Although these parties align on sociocultural and environmental concerns, their socioeconomic perspectives diverge: the Greens lean to the left, whereas the Green-Liberals are identified as centrist liberals (Ladner 2012). This parallelism has prompted the Greens to differentiate themselves by asserting their status as the "only true green" party (Häne 2015). The GPS is founded on the salience and emergency of environmental issues, and yet, they have devoted significant efforts to distinguishing themselves from what they deemed as a *false green* party.

In the current thesis, we argue that the party image is a decisive factor that influences electoral strategies of parties. The existing literature has largely ignored this aspect, mainly because researchers have seldom considered it as a practical and effective concept. This approach brings attention to the party's image and its impact on the electoral competition model, specifically the tension between maintaining a rigid identity shaped by past achievements or embracing a more flexible and adaptable approach. By examining this dilemma, we can gain a better understanding of how parties compete with each other. It could also shed a light on the role of party families and ideologies regarding communication strategies: do the left-wing parties act differently than the right-wing ones? Do parties with extreme ideological positions choose a different way to present their image, compared to centrist parties? Can we see how a country's specific characteristics play into image strategies, or do all parties in different political cultures act similarly?

Our main research question is: *how parties present themselves to voters, and what influences their decision-making?* Through the use of communication channels, parties conceive and

convey different kinds of images to voters in order to build and adapt their overall party image. These images can be frequent or scarce, expressing values or party attributes, or appealing to certain social groups. They also reflect who or what the party wants to support or attack.

Inspired by the *risk aversion theory* (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), we expect parties to adapt their image strategies according to their risk attitudes in the same way as other organisations, such as firms, do. This risk aversion can be particularly relevant due to several factors. First, parties can be risk-seeking or risk-avoidant, based on their characteristics, current situation or specifics of the political culture. Second, their emphasis of specific types of images will be influenced by these different attitudes towards risk. This is an established position in the seminal literature on party competition (Downs 1957; Schlesinger 1984).

Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the ongoing research that examines the potential increase in the adoption of non-policy communicative behaviour by political parties. This is linked to such political phenomena as identity politics, populism, emotional appeal, and negative campaigning. Therefore, this thesis will address parts of these phenomena as they are observed in the studied elections. We also aim to look beyond these phenomena to present a systematic account of the role of images in parties' communicative behaviour.

To briefly sum up, we expect that parties differ in their choice and use of images, depending on their level of risk aversion. We also expect several party-specific factors to be at play, such as incumbency, size, recent electoral performance, extreme ideological position, and the choice of communication channels. The current research is an opportunity to delve into these factors and to discover which ones are relevant, and which ones are minor. The next section introduces the literature gap, the main research question and theoretical argumentation, and presents the structure of the thesis.

1.2. The relevance of the party image concept in electoral research

Studies on party competition have traditionally looked at issues that parties emphasise (van der Brug 2004; Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003; Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2018; Wagner and Meyer 2014) or at position taking (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Hellwig 2012 ; Hug and Schulz 2007; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2007; Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis 2013). However, recent studies have shifted to other potentially influential factors, such as issue framing (Baumgartner, Linn, and Boydstun 2009; Bjarnøe 2022a, 2022b; Hänggli 2011), and several other studies have suggested that the political image of parties and

candidates might have an impact on party competition and electoral outcomes (Balmas and Sheafer 2010; Greene and Haber 2015; Winther Nielsen and Vinæs Larsen 2014).

When it comes to elections, the concept of political image is not new to the discussion. Scholars from multiple fields have been discussing the definition, effect, and implications of images in the political process. There is a significant body of literature that addresses candidate images: *the role of candidate images in shaping the vote* (Allen and Post 2004; Brettschneider, Neller, and Anderson 2006; Hayes 2009; Hoegg and Lewis 2011; Rosenberg et al. 1986; Rosenberg, Kahn, and Tran 1991); *the impact of leader images on the vote* (Barisione 2009a; Bellucci, Garzia, and Lewis-Beck 2015; Cwalina and Falkowski 2016; Garzia 2013a; Stewart and Clarke 1992; Winham and Cunningham 1970); *the media effects related to candidate image* (Aaldering and Vliegenthart 2016; Balmas and Sheafer 2010; Hayes 2009; Hayes and Lawless 2015; Mendelsohn 1996; Miller and Krosnick 2000; Miller, Andsager, and Riechert 1998; Warner et al. 2018); *priming of candidate image* (Druckman and Holmes 2004; Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Sheafer and Weimann 2005). In the field of political marketing, *the role of advertisement* is frequently investigated (Cwalina, Falkowski, and Kaid 2000; Falkowski and Cwalina 2012; Johnston and Kaid 2002; Ridout, Franz, and Franklin Fowler 2014).

While these publications are numerous, they mostly deal with candidates and candidate images. Party image is a popular research topic in the fields of political communication (e.g., Esser 2008; Gibson and McAllister 2015; Hayes 2008) and political marketing (e.g., Bigi and Bonera 2015; Gorbaniuk et al. 2015; Scammell 2015). In parliamentary systems, however, parties still have a great impact on the voter's choice (e.g., Campbell, Green, and Layman 2011). Research on party competition often addresses questions such as the role of valence image[1] on voter intentions, relating both to a party or a candidate (e.g., Abney et al. 2013; Barisione 2009b; Clark 2009; Clarke et al. 2017; Nyhuis 2016; Stone and Simas 2010).

What unites a vast majority of these works is that scholars tend to address the demand side of politics, i.e., voter's perceptions or media portrayal. It means that when they discuss the political image, they conceptualise it as a perception of a party or a candidate. It is a minor position in the literature to analyse political image from the supply side, i.e., from a party's

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[1] The term "valence" can refer to the positive or negative orientation of evaluations or perceptions, as used in the social psychology literature (e.g., Brendl and Higgins 1996), and should not be confused with valence as the non-positional attitude or voter evaluations, e.g., "valence issues" (Green 2007) or "valence images" (Adams and Merrill 2009). Here, we focus on the latter.

perspective. For example, Parry-Giles (2016) raises the question whether it is even possible that the concept of political image could be precise and objective when it stems from a perception. He argues that, at least in the case of candidate image, one should address the analysis from the political actor's standpoint. While here we are not discussing what subjectivity of a perception means, we surely consider this call to analyse images from the supply side of politics.

We try to establish its particular influence on the political strategy by centring the scope on the party image. Parties have to deal with their self-presentation, they must consider the way they are seen as a specific organisation, what values they support, what attributes they have or should have in the eyes of the voters. They also consider the influence they could have on their own image when they decide to attack their adversaries.

Political marketing research is based mostly on single case studies of Anglo-Saxon countries or comparisons of the US/UK (Dean et al. 2015; Green 2011; Kim and Leveck 2013; Marland and Flanagan 2013; Smith 2001) settings with another country. The few comparative studies usually reveal fundamental differences in party systems and political culture, which often render the direct implementation of research design and concepts rather complicated; these have to be adapted for, e.g., Western European specificities. We aim to address this gap by examining German and Swiss elections specifically focusing on party image.

To sum up, three fundamental literature gaps can be indicated: first, the lack of the supply side analysis; second, the existing focus on candidate image and not on the party image; third, the lack of a coherent framework designed for the Western European settings. This work aims to address these gaps and advance the scholarship position on these topics.

1.3. Research question and theoretical argument

The main purpose of the current thesis is to investigate factors that influence parties' non-policy-based communication to build their party image. The exact main research question is "*What influences parties' decision-making regarding how they present themselves to voters?*" First, our theoretical objective is to investigate the concept of "political image" across several fields of research. We aim to establish a comprehensive definition of the concept of "party image". Second, our empirical objective, which focuses on two Western European countries—Switzerland and Germany—is to explore image strategies that parties use during their electoral campaign to present themselves and depict their opponents. Finally, our methodological

objective is to harmonise the existing analysis of the party image by providing a well-defined categorisation and a reproducible method of analysis.

In the theoretical part, we argue that the concept of party image is far from being coherent and easy-to-use. The lack of a unified approach to the definition of the concept, agreement on what constitutes a party image, or a clear categorisation leads to misunderstanding and confusion. It becomes difficult to compare the results of different studies, even though they address the same object. Thus, our goal is to review the relevant literature and provide a comprehensible definition, as well as a categorisation that can be applied to any image-related research.

In the empirical part, we use the concept of party image to investigate how Swiss and German parties build their image strategies during the selected elections. We construct the theoretical framework in order to explain party decision-making process and test whether the risk aversion theory can help to understand parties' non-policy communication choices. We discuss how risk-averse or risk-acceptant behaviour may influence strategic choices during the elections. We do so by formulating general theoretical assumptions regarding the outcomes and influencing factors [2].

First, we presume that risk attitudes influence how parties choose to focus on one of the three image dimensions, namely, attributes, core values, and group appeals (assumption **A1**). The discussion in Chapter 3 focuses extensively on the dimensions that can be classified as more or less risky. Our assumption is that attributes carry the highest degree of risk, followed by group appeals and core values in a descending order. Second, we assume that there is a link between parties' risk-taking and going negative by attacking opponents (assumption **A2**). The more parties are accepting of risks, the more likely they will attack opponents in their electoral campaigns. Finally, we presume that there is a potential interaction between the two strategies, which we empirically measure with the risk score (assumption **A3**). The risk score, detailed in Chapter 4, takes into account the expected risk associated with choosing an image dimension and how it combines with the anticipated risk tied to the image's negativity or positivity (i.e., whether it is meant to self-describe or attack opponents). We also discuss theoretical assumptions regarding the independent factors (A4-A8) and their hypothesised effects on the outcomes.

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[2] More detailed discussions of assumptions regarding both outcomes and independent factors are presented in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, p. 50.

In the methodological part, we employ quantitative content analysis in order to capture party images present in textual documents. We have chosen to use manifestos and press releases. We code textual data with the use of the categorisation, which we define, and employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to answer the research question. We explain how individual image categories can be operationalised. We also draw upon the interviews with party managers, which were conducted in 2018.

1.4.   Thesis plan

This thesis explores how parties use images during the electoral competition and which image of themselves they convey to the public and other political actors. In the chapter to follow, we provide the conceptualisation of the party image, construct a theoretical framework to predict the use of images in electoral campaigns, present our data collection process and operationalisation of variables. Finally, we proceed to test our hypotheses with the data at hand. The work is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the concept of communicative behaviour, its composition, and the place of the party image within it. We discuss how dimensions of rigidity and plasticity, as well as of negativity and positivity, apply to both policy-based (issues) and non-policy-based (party image) communication. We review the literature on the political image, related both to parties and candidates, and show that the concept of image varies based on the research field (political science, political communication, political marketing), as well as on research objectives and questions that scholars raise. Within this literature, we focus on scarce sources that discuss the concept of "party image" from the supply side. We then argue for its three-dimensionality, which includes attributes, core values, and group appeals. The *attributes* dimension refers to how a party conveys general information about its characteristics, such as competence, integrity, success, etc. The *core values* dimension addresses political and societal values, such as solidarity, freedom, security, etc. The *group appeals* dimension distinguishes between socioeconomic, sociocultural and political groups, with which a party wants to associate or distance from. Finally, we address the place of the negativity / positivity dimension in communicative behaviour.

Chapter 3 defines the theoretical framework. It argues that the risk aversion theory, as a descendant of bounded rationality and prospect theories, can explain why parties choose certain image strategies. It also argues that parties are influenced by their attitudes towards risk when

deciding on image strategies. We propose five independent factors that, we argue, will influence party strategies by shaping their attitudes toward risk: incumbent status, party size, party extreme ideological position, party momentum, and the choice of communication channel. Control variables are also added, such as the possible effects of country and party family. We expect that parties differ in their image choice not only within, but between countries. Nonetheless, ideologically similar parties from different countries can share common strategies, especially if they come from the same party family, like the Greens or the radical right-wing.

Based on that, we formulate hypotheses for the three dependent variables: (1) image dimensions, (2) attacking opponents, and (3) the interaction between the two, named "risk score". The first variable, the focus on one of the image dimensions, relates to whether parties decide to mention attributes, core values, and group appeals. The second variable—attacking— relates to the decision to depict opponents in a negative way. The third variable posits that the effects of our independent variables on the two types of decisions (the choice of the image dimension and the choice to focus on one's own image or to attack opponents) are non-additive. We proceed on to explain the general logic of deriving hypotheses and show how each of the independent variables influences each of the outcomes. The existing literature is incomplete and often does not link party image and risk attitudes, so we present the support for our hypotheses to the best of our knowledge.

Chapter 4 focuses on the selection of cases, research design, and general data overview. It provides the rationale for the choice of countries and parties, and describes the chosen cases. Information on the general research design, such as data collection, coding, post-processing, and data analysis, is provided. We describe the content analysis approach utilised and provide a detailed discussion of the coding rules. Operationalisation of dependent and independent variables is also given. The choice of regression models is discussed.

Chapter 5 presents the descriptive analyses. First, we discuss how parties may choose between issue- and image-based strategies, and why they might decide to do so. The interviews with party campaign managers are used to study and understand the strategies they implemented. Detailed descriptive statistics are then provided. We find that parties are well aware of the importance of their image during the elections. More specifically, party managers mention the importance of highlighting their values or their readiness to cooperate. Additionally, we explore two case studies on how German and Swiss parties interpret the value of freedom, and why dissociating from certain groups of voters might not be a viable strategy.

Chapter 6 presents the regression analysis of the first three dependent variables: image dimensions of attributes, core values, and group appeals. We find that while incumbency and party size do not correspond to our theoretical expectations, party momentum has an expected effect on the image dimension of core values. Party extremism variable suggests differences in attitudes towards risk for moderate and extreme parties, and the use of communication channels supports our theoretical assumptions. There is a statistically significant effect of country and party family, suggesting that parties are influenced not only by their risk attitudes.

Chapter 7 presents the analysis of the fourth dependent variable, attacks (negative images of the opponents). First, we draw on the interviews to see how parties themselves implement attack strategies. We show that party managers during the interviews did not see attacking the values of their adversaries as a good strategy, instead preferring to attack on attributes or stay neutral. The results obtained from logistic regression show varying outcomes across independent variables. For example, incumbent status and party size once again contradict our hypotheses, and we provide a brief explanation of a potential underlying effect. More ideologically extreme parties are be more likely to attack adversaries, although the effects of party family remain evident. The effect of the momentum, or electoral performance, is opposite to our expectations. The variable of communication channel supports our hypothesis that press releases will contain more attacks.

Chapter 8 analyses the final dependent variable, risk score. We investigate the results of the ordinal regression analysis and discuss why certain findings, especially for the incumbent status and momentum, do not conform to theoretical expectations. We suspect that the relationship between independent and dependent variables is not linear. Additionally, we suggest that the effect of the electoral performance is not one-dimensional, and that there is a potentially more complex interaction between the previous and current electoral performances. For example, we assume that parties that have a longer winning streak will have different risk attitudes than parties with a shorter history of winning. While the variable of party extremism rejects our hypothesis, the variable of communication channel confirms it.

In **Chapter 9**, the thesis is concluded with a summary of the findings, a list of the contributions made to the existing literature, an acknowledgement of the limitations, and a discussion of the implications for further research. The list of references, coding rules, and specific works used for the literature review can be found in the appendices.

Chapter 2. Party image and its role in the party's communicative behaviour

2.1. Introduction

The concept of communicative behaviour is a crucial aspect of any electoral strategy. It is the manner in which a party represents itself and portrays its adversaries, as we define it. Communicative behaviour encompasses both policy-based (issues) and non-policy-based communication (party image). Both components can be rigid (*identity-based*) or plastic (*adaptive*). Similarly, they both can be either positive or negative. Rigidity relates to maintaining the party's *identity*, respecting its history, and adhering to core values and issues. Plasticity, or what we refer to as *the adaptive component*, emphasises the need to accommodate for ever-changing political contexts, rival strategies, and significant events, as well as the tactical decision to adjust self-representation. The balance between identity and adaptive components of the party image ensures that parties retain their core supporters while also appealing to new and undecided voters, thus maximising gains and minimising risks.

In this thesis, we focus on non-policy-based communication, or what we conceptualise as "party image". We argue that party image, while used across fields of political science, political communication, and political marketing, is not yet well-defined as a critical component of the communicative behaviour. It is rather difficult to analyse the party image, as the literature appears to focus on its different constitutive parts, but never as a whole. The demand side literature centres on voter perceptions and is relatively well-researched, while the supply side remains more candidate-oriented. In the current work, we are interested in parties' strategies, and it implies actions of an organisation with broader goals, different types of communication (e.g., use of manifestos or press releases) and not only the actions of an individual candidate or use of a political communication strategy oriented towards just one sole candidate. Even the definitions of the "image" frequently depend on a specific research focus.

This chapter addresses communicative behaviour and its dimensions. We then pass to the concept of "political image" and conduct a literature review to show how it has been used in the fields of political science, political communication, and political marketing. Within this review, we develop our core concept of "party image". We argue that the concept of party image has multiple facets and consists of three dimensions: attributes, core values, and group

appeals. We explore and analyse their application in the literature. We then discuss the dimension of negativity by arguing that parties can either construct a "negative image" to distance themselves from specific values or groups, or they can employ negative portrayals of other parties (attacks) to implicitly strengthen their own positive image.

2.2. Communicative behaviour in political parties: a conceptual framework

2.2.1. Balancing rigidity and plasticity in policy and image

In Chapter 1, we discussed the communicative behaviour, or how a party communicates, represents itself and depicts its opponents, in terms of both policy-based and non-policy-based communication. It is not about a party giving up one in favour of the other, but rather about how, where, and why it emphasises either of them.

On one hand, there are *issues* which highlight the party's foundational policies and subsequent positions. These remain relatively steadfast and are evidence of a party's historical and core beliefs. Yet electoral campaigns are never static, and parties occasionally shift their policy stances, adapting in response to their dynamic environment. In this respect, the literature on issue ownership, or how political parties claim, maintain, or adapt stances on particular issues (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere 2015), deals with this question. Owned issues are generally regarded by both voters and political parties as policy areas, where the parties are particularly skilled or competent in taking effective action. The positions on these policies are rarely changed between elections.

However, parties frequently engage with non-owned issues of other parties, or with salient issues of the ongoing electoral context. Examples from the literature are issue trespassing (Damore 2004; Tresch et al. 2015), where a party will deliberately address an issue owned by its opponents; or position blurring (Rovny 2012, 2013), where a party's strategic ambiguity makes it difficult to pinpoint their stance on certain issues. A classic example of issue trespassing is presented by Norpoth and Buchanan (1992), where in the 1988 presidential elections, George W. Bush, a candidate from the Republicans, promised changes in the job market and education, issues usually raised by the Democrats. Similarly, Michael Dukakis attempted to position his campaign on the defence-related issues. Rovny (2012) addresses how right-wing parties avoid taking precise positions on economic issues. In a nutshell, we posit

that owned issues correspond to the rigidity dimension, while issue trespassing or position blurring corresponds to the plasticity dimension.

On the other hand, there is non-policy-based communication. The party image can be rigid or plastic (adaptive). We identify the concept of a party's *identity* as an embodiment of its foundational beliefs and values. Identity is arguably rigid and should not change much between electoral cycles. Yet, we must also account for the party's *adaptive* image. Here, we are referring to attributes or affiliations with voter groups that are not central to a party's foundational identity but can be recalibrated as electoral campaigns evolve[3]. For example, it might be more beneficial to a party to highlight its competence in the elections, when they have clearly shown it while being in office, a tactic frequently employed by incumbent governmental parties (Greene 2020; Powell and Whitten 1993).

We argue that the composition of the non-policy dimension is somewhat fragmented. Valence image [4], social identity and group appeals, values and ideology, for example, are often treated as distinct entities rather than equal components of a holistic concept of *party image*. This fragmentation prevents the analysis of how these components collectively shape the way parties present themselves and portray their adversaries during electoral campaigns. Parties must keep a coherent party image. The current thesis aims to unify these various elements, conceptualising the party image as encompassing both the identity-based and the adaptive image components.

There is also a dimension of negativity and positivity in communicative behaviour. Parties can convey both policy- and non-policy-based elements of their campaigns in either a positive or negative manner. In terms of issues, this can be understood as the policy stance, i.e., whether parties support or oppose a certain issue. Green parties supporting the nuclear phaseout, or liberal parties advocating for tax cuts are examples of how a party shows positive or negative stances on a specific issue. On the image side, we suggest that it can be interpreted as parties acclaiming themselves in positive terms, or distancing themselves from specific values or

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[3] We assume that while the rigidity and plasticity of general image dimensions (such as attributes, values, and groups) are consistent across all parties, the specific elements within each dimension (e.g., particular values like equality or liberty or group appeals like workers or immigrants) may vary across parties. However, there is a trade-off between the theoretical depth needed to capture these specific variations and the practical effort required to measure them empirically. For further discussion and potential developments, see Chapter 9, Section 9.3, p. 205.

[4] As non-positional attitudes or voter evaluations.

social groups. For example, the German Left Party is known for its anti-capitalist and anti-rich views, which they frequently put forward in their campaigns.

We also highlight that each type of communicative behaviour can be directed either at self, i.e., parties acclaiming, opposing or distancing themselves, or at other political actors, i.e., parties appraising or attacking their adversaries. For example, in France, the far-left party LFI (*La France Insoumise*) repeatedly attacked the incumbent Socialist Party (left) in 2012-2017 on the issue of tax cuts for private sector companies (from 33% down to 28%). The aforementioned German Left Party frequently attacks other parties, basing themselves on the value of anti-capitalism and for showing (perceived) support for the rich. More specifically, functional theory of political communication (Benoit 1999, 2014, 2017) has investigated how candidates (and parties) attack other political actors, and how these actions are embedded into their campaign strategies.

Table 2.1 presents the communicative behaviour exerted by parties. It is important to note that parties do not always decide, e.g., to go negative and then focus on images or issues, or vice versa. In other words, there is no specific order in which parties determine to focus on any elements of the electoral campaign. Moreover, though we distinguish between issues and images in the current thesis, we do not investigate issues in detail in the empirical chapters. Rather, issues are used in the construction of the communicative behaviour concept, as well as to demonstrate how both the dimensions of rigidity / plasticity and negativity apply to it. The table illustrates both the self-presentation and depicting behaviour.

Table 2.1. Composition of communicative behaviour.

	Communicative behaviour			
	Policy-based communication		Non-policy-based communication (self / other actors)	
	Positive	*Negative*	*Positive*	*Negative*
Rigidity	Owned issues, positive position	Owned issues, negative position	Positive identity (acclaiming / appraising)	Negative identity (distancing / attacking)
Plasticity	Non-owned issues, positive position	Non-owned issues, negative position	Adaptive positive image (acclaiming / appraising)	Adaptive negative image (distancing / attacking)

To sum up, we provide an example for each of the four types of non-policy-based communication. First, for self-presentation, a party might *acclaim* its positive identity (e.g., a liberal party standing for economic freedoms, or a socialist party praising their core electorate) or highlight its negative identity by *distancing* itself from specific values (e.g., a communist party showing their anti-capitalist values or a populist party being anti-establishment). *Acclaiming* can also be used to communicate positive adaptive images (e.g., a party showing its commitment), and *distancing* is used for negative images (e.g., a party distancing itself from elites in ongoing elections).

Second, within the logic of communicative behaviour, a party also depicts its adversaries. It can be done in a positive way as *appraising*, both for rigid and adaptive image, such as a party portraying another as being pragmatic or supporting the same values. It can also be done in a negative way as *attacking*, such as an opposition party labelling a government party being dishonest or supporting elites or distinct values.

2.2.2. Image concept: a literature review

We start by addressing the broader concept of a political image in order to successfully define our concept of party image. While it refers both to parties and candidates, there is no existing consensus on how to define it, meaning that authors often do not provide definitions themselves, nor do they refer to other studies. The political image concept is considered self-evident, which only develops further misunderstanding. The deeper we dive into the literature, the more confusing this concept becomes.

In order to map out the research field, we have compiled a vast set of works from research disciplines such as political communication, political science, social psychology, and political marketing. We demonstrate how the political image concept is applied to parties and candidates, and how the focus on supply and demand side changes in time. The final list is fairly representative: it encompasses several decades, starting from 1959, includes frequently cited works, and addresses both sides of the literature. The search was done using keywords such as 'party image', 'political image', 'candidate image', or, in the case of political marketing literature, 'party brand', 'party brand image', and 'party brand identity'. Afterwards, additional search contained the cited literature from the first-wave findings. Google Scholar was used as the primary research engine, alongside Web of Science. In order to classify the literature, we

use the following categories (the full review table can be found in Appendix 1, Table A1, p. 240):

1) Supply / demand: whether a study focuses on the supply or demand side;

2) Literature field: to which research field the work under question can be attributed;

3) Party / candidate: whether a party or a candidate is the focus of the study;

4) Definition of the image provided.

Based on the review of the cited works, we can conclude the following: first, as expected, most of the research, which involves the concept of image, is demand-side and candidate-oriented. Out of 81 works, 43 are purely demand side, 18 include both demand and supply side, and 16 analyse strictly the supply side. 40 works analyse candidates (or party leaders), 29 focus on parties, and 12 focus on both. Most studies use survey data and open-ended questions that allow for a wide range of textual image categories to be recorded. Often, final categories are derived after the data collection for the experiments or surveys.

Certain authors touch upon the concept of image (party or candidate) as a part of the communicative behaviour, opposing it to issues, or policy-based communication. For example, Reed (2018), while talking about the Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, distinguishes between the party communication based on policies and based on images. Luechtefeld (2009) also establishes a clear difference between issues and images. However, this distinction is rarely developed by authors, and they mostly focus on either issues or on very specific parts of the image (e.g., competence).

Supply-side literature frequently addresses candidates, more so than parties. What unites them, however, is the notion of "projection" (Bigi and Bonera 2015; Scammell 2015) or "self-description" (Filimonov, Russmann, and Svensson 2016; Pich and Armannsdottir 2018), meaning that candidates and parties define a specific set of aspects and convey it to other actors involved in the political process in particular to voters. These aspects include reputation (Baines, Harris, and Lewis 2002) and a set of attributes or qualities (Nimmo 1976; Balmas and Sheafer 2010).

Several authors address both demand and supply side, i.e., voters and parties/candidates combined, but in such cases the supply side is represented through specific communication or marketing tools, such as *priming* and *agenda-setting* (Balmas and Sheafer 2010; Druckman 2003; Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Funk 1999; Kiousis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban

1999; McCombs et al. 1997; Rosenberg, Kahn, and Tran 1991) or *branding* of the party image (Baines, Harris, and Lewis 2002; Lock and Harris 1996; Scammell 2007, 2015; Smith and French 2009). More recent works, however, have considered not only the projection of the image, but its interaction with the voters' perceptions (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018; Metz et al. 2020; Lalancette and Raynauld 2019; Lupu 2016; Peterson 2018), although researchers do not usually include in-depth analysis of the cause and effect between these two.

Despite the attention that scholars have paid to the content and effects of the overall political image, particularly in terms of electoral behaviour, their definition of the concept itself is frequently implicit. Image is typically seen as a *perception* of a political actor by voters (e.g., Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Ohr, Niedermayer, and Hofrichter 2015), *a mental picture* an individual has about a party (Trilling 1975; Tsai 2007), and even as a perception with *emotional reception* (Falkowski and Cwalina 2012; Smith and French 2009). For candidates, a demand-side image is conceived as a set of attributes, traits, and ideological positions (Cwalina and Falkowski 2016; Falkowski and Cwalina 2012; Funk 1999; Garzia 2013b; Hacker et al. 2000; Hoegg and Lewis 2011; Nimmo 1976; Nimmo and Savage 1976; Shyles 1984). In some cases, authors do not directly define the image; they conceptualise and operationalise it as a set of categories that were derived after the data collection (Kinder 1983, 1986; Niven and Zilber 2001). In the demand-side literature, there is also a tendency to include a component of *valence,* or non-policy aspect, while discussing the image (Abney et al. 2013; Adams and Merrill 2009; Baumer and Gold 2007; Clark 2009; Cwalina and Falkowski 2016; Dalton and Weldon 2005; Hellweg, King, and Williams 1988).

While the literature on leadership or candidates (e.g., Aaldering and Vliegenthart 2016; Adriaansen 2011; Bittner 2008; Lord, Foti, and De Vader 1984) may give less attention to the party and its values or ideological positions, this influence is often assumed. A candidate's image may be influenced by their party affiliation: Campbell, Green, and Layman (2011) show that voters expect certain traits from candidates, depending on their partisanship. We argue this can also be applied to parties. Party decision makers, assuming or aware of voters' expectations, will probably try to meet them.

In conclusion, we see that the research on political image, be it candidate- or party-centred, is not universally agreed upon nor does it provide an explicit definition. We propose a working definition of "party image" as a concept specifically designed to address all elements of a party's non-policy communication. However, certain authors already used this concept in a similar way. For example, they have included dimensions besides traits and characteristics in

the party image, such as *group representation* (Baumer and Gold 2007), *valenced partisanship* (Denver 2005) or *stereotypes* (Rahn 1993; Rahn and Cramer 1996), although it is not a common practice. Researchers focus predominantly on one or a couple of aspects of the party image, without considering that it might include more than purely traits, evaluative aspects or a personal brand.

2.2.3. Identity and image: two sides of the same coin?

With the development of digital technologies, new strategies for micro-targeting specific voter groups have emerged. Advancements in technology and shifts in communication mediums have altered how parties interact with their electorate (Baldwin-Philippi 2017; Barclay, Gibson, and Dommett 2023). This type of fragmented communication allows for a greater personalisation of messages, aiming to resonate more deeply with individual voter groups (Papakyriakopoulos et al. 2018; Williams 2018). Given this, is it still pertinent for researchers to look at a singular, unified party image?

We argue that it remains essential to do so, as traditional media arenas—such as television, newspapers, and face-to-face debates—still exist and require that both candidates and political parties maintain a uniform and comprehensible presentation during the campaigns. In relation to this, we can observe "bubble" images (modern techniques of targeting the audience that allow parties to differentiate their messages for social media) only to a certain extent because there is still public demand for a more coherent and clear identity of the parties. For example, research suggests that voters are prone to following the lead of ideologically coherent parties (Brader et al. 2013; Zimmerman et al. 2022). Similarly, parties run the risk of alienating their electorate if they become too market-oriented and venture too far from their core principles and values (Johns and Brandenburg 2014).

Voters have certain expectations and associations with parties, built over years or even decades of exposure. A sudden or drastic deviation from this perceived identity might alienate core supporters. If a party's communication or actions veer too far from its established identity, it may face backlash or accusations of being inauthentic (Baccini and Weymouth 2021; Rosenzweig 2021). A recent example of this can be seen in the 2022 French presidential

elections: Valérie Pécresse, the candidate from *Les Républicans (LR),* a right-wing[5] party, was trailing in polls. In an attempt to attract far-right voters, she referred to the theory of "*grand remplacement*" (a conspiracy theory about the ongoing replacement of white people by other ethnicities) during one of the crucial campaign events. This conspiracy theory was already publicly identified with Éric Zemmour, an extreme-right candidate (Le Monde 2022). This speech resulted in a media and political backlash and might have been the last nail in the coffin of the disastrous campaign of *Les Républicans*. The party achieved its lowest electoral result ever, with only 4.79% support.

Adherence to the identity is not just a matter of public perception but also a matter of internal party allegiance. Long-standing members, donors, and supporters often have an emotional and ideological attachment to what the party represents.

In political marketing, a concept of *political* or *party brand identity* exists, which relates to the image that parties convey (Aaker 2011; Bigi and Bonera 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir 2018; Pich, Dean, and Punjaisri 2016). Authors trace this concept to the classic marketing definition of the brand identity. Grönroos (2000) defines brand identity, or *organisational identity*, as the interpretative combination of an organisation's culture, history, structure, characteristics, status, and dealings with competitors, customers, and society at large; it is formulated and solidified over time (Brown et al. 2006; Scott and Lane 2000). Organisational identity theory demonstrates how identity both shapes and drives organisational goals and strategic objectives (Brickson 2007)[6]. Identity involves all that is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organisation (Albert and Whetten 1985), conveyed through its mission, vision, and association of its values and goals (Brickson 2005).

However, this concept, applied to political parties, might not consider the ever-changing context of campaigns. While organisations rarely engage in rebranding, political parties have to monitor public opinion, campaign issues, national and global events, etc. As such, political marketing provides tools to understand how a party identity is built, and how to build one, but

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[5] The exact ideological position of LR depends on the interpretation. Historically, the party has started as a centre-right party, but gradually moved to the right and is defined by academics as such (e.g., Choffat 2017; Raynaud 2019), while media outlets frequently define it as centre-right (e.g., The Economist 2019, 2022).

[6] While this marketing concept is undoubtedly useful for our current research, it is problematic, as it appears to be too broad. In other words, identity includes practically *everything* that an organisation does or has done in public. This lack of specifics in the core concept invades political marketing, political communication, and political science, creating the existing complications.

it does not deepen our positive knowledge of its evolution. In other words, it lacks the more specific focus on the adaptive component.

In conclusion, we propose to use the concept of party identity as a sub-dimension of the non-policy communication. Identity encompasses all that is stable about a party and its self-presentation, which is included in the rigidity dimension established earlier. Focusing on core values or appealing to the core electorate in their campaign communication allows parties to highlight this identity-based part of their overall image. Conversely, addressing new or undecided voters or presenting themselves in a specific way corresponds to the adaptive party image side. Image and identity are not the two sides of a coin; rather, image (in our case, party image) is the same coin, and identity is one of its sides.

2.3. Dimensions of the party image

2.3.1. Theoretical argument in favour of three-dimensionality

As discussed before, there is no widely accepted categorisation of various image components that constitute the party image, especially as an "umbrella" concept. However, several studies in the demand side literature have adopted a three-dimensional approach in order to analyse candidate and country images. We draw on these studies to inform our understanding of the party image structure. We consult the available research on candidate and country image, which is based on social psychology studies of attitudes. Eagly and Chaiken (1993, 1) define an attitude as a "psychological tendency expressed through evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". This evaluation is typically categorised into three classes: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. The latter is usually referred to as conative in candidate image research (Boomgaarden, Boukes, and Iorgoveanu 2016; Coleman and Banning 2006; Nimmo and Savage 1976).

The *cognitive* dimension consists of what is known about the object. In the case of candidates, it is their age, background, experience, and policy positions (Nimmo and Savage 1976). The *affective* dimension refers to the emotions or feelings that individuals have towards the object. The *conative* dimension is about the actions or intentions towards the object. Researchers of the candidate image frequently address only one specific dimension, like cognitive (Fiske 2019) or affective (Coleman and Wu 2010). Country image research (Alvarez and Campo

2014; Brijs, Bloemer, and Kasper 2011; Laroche et al. 2005; Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009) implements the same three-dimensional composition to analyse attitudes toward countries.

For the purposes of the current thesis, we consider using the three-dimensional structure of attitudes as an analogy for the party image composition. If we consult the existing political communication literature on elections and campaigns that involves the image concept, we do find some references to these three distinctive dimensions. A considerable amount of research has been done on candidate traits and evaluation of them, which broadly corresponds to the cognitive aspect of the image. Research on individual and political values can be connected to the affective dimension. Finally, there is a substantial amount of the research on the group appeals, but it is mostly disconnected from the party image research. However, there are authors who connect groups, especially existing core electorate, to the party identity (e.g., Baumer and Gold 2007; Stückelberger and Koedam 2022). Voters can perceive a party as being fit to represent themselves, and this is related to the party identity and partisan identification research. Table 2.2 presents work that is relevant to the three-dimensionality of the image. It includes the most prominent examples of image-related research, both party and candidate ones.

Table 2.2. Overview of the core literature on image dimensions.

Author-Year	Key concept	Concept dimensions	Examples
Leduc (1976)	Party image as positive-negative evaluation	*Ideology*, *class representation*, competence, morality, integrity (although never named explicitly).	Semantic word pairs: out-of-date / modern, left / right, foolish / wise, etc.
Wattenberg (1982)	Party image as positive/negative evaluations by its partisans	Never explicitly formulated; positive-negative evaluations on party *actions and issues*.	None explicitly mentioned.
Shyles (1984)	"Image sign vehicle": image terms which refer to candidate image attributes	Personal and professional attributes.	Altruism, Competence, Experience, Honesty, Leadership, Personal Qualities, Strength, and Other special qualities.
Kinder (1986)	"Presidential traits" ratings	Competence, leadership, integrity, empathy (personal and professional qualities).	Intelligent, knowledgeable, inspiring, moral, honest, etc.
Hellweg et al. (1989)	Candidate image and categorization; image as "factor structure"	Personal and professional attributes.	Competence, character, credibility, sociability, gender, extroversion.
Funk (1999)	Creating positive images for candidates	Based on Kinder (1983; 1986), plus *party identification and left-right self-placement.*	Based on Kinder (1983; 1986)
Hacker et al. (2000)	Issue vs. persona image; issue as a part of a candidate image	Partially based on Hellweg et al. (1989); personal and professional attributes plus *issues/ policies.*	Morality, empathy, leadership, competence (although not named explicitly).
Baumer and Gold (2007)	Party image holders	*Group representation*, *ideology*, issue stance.	A list of issues on which evaluation was taken.
Fridkin and Kenney (2011)	Voters' evaluations of candidate traits; negative images in the media	Personal and professional images.	Intelligence, leadership, honesty, caring, experience.
Gorbaniuk et al. (2015)	Party image as perceived personality traits	Post-hoc: integrity, disagreeableness, strength.	Long list of various traits mentioned in the questionnaire.
Warner and Banwart (2016)	Multifactor approach to candidate image	Based on unified categorisation of Kaid (2004).	Competence, intelligence, leadership, moral character, benevolence/ empathy, personal charm/ charisma.
Note: Concepts in cursive show potential links or references to the dimensions of core values and group appeals.			

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2.3.2. Attributes dimension

The dimension of attributes appears to be most frequently used in the literature on the party (and candidate) image. However, there are several issues that we should discuss beforehand: 1) the name of the dimension; 2) its construction; 3) differences between demand and supply sides.

The first issue concerns the underlying concept that gives the name to this dimension. While describing or evaluating political actors, scholars use various notions: *traits* (Kinder 1983, 1986; Funk 1999; Hacker et al. 2000; Hayes 2011; Hoegg and Lewis 2011; Bellucci, Garzia, and Lewis-Beck 2015), *valence* [7] (Baumer and Gold 2007; Adams and Merrill 2009; Abney et al. 2013; Cwalina and Falkowski 2016), *characteristics* (Hayes 2009), *attributes* (Shyles 1984; Kiousis et al. 1999; Barisione 2009a; Balmas and Sheafer 2010), or *qualities* (Adams, Scheiner, and Kawasumi 2016; Graber 1972; Hayes 2005; Keeter 1987; Mendelsohn 1996).

Further complications stem from the fact that most authors use these names interchangeably, and specific image categories assigned to each of these notions do not seem consistent across studies (e.g., Nimmo 1976; Nimmo and Savage 1976; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Enli and Skogerbø 2013). Moreover, some authors (see Hayes 2005, 2009, 2011) switch from one term to another across their research, while essentially describing the same object. Finally, traits, attributes, or characteristics do not indicate a separate dimension, but exist as independent concepts. Thus, we have chosen to use the term *attributes,* as traits and qualities appear more often in relation to candidates and candidate image.

The second issue is based on the proper categorisation of the dimension, or which sub-dimensions and categories are identified within it. Mostly, it has to do with the way the dimension is measured. In Table 2.2 we have presented several examples of image categories implemented by scholars, but it appears that the composition of these categories is inductive and varies based on research questions. The attribute of leadership is a good example. Certain authors define it through personal charisma (Barisione 2009b), while others identify it closer to the ability to organise and influence (Warner and Banwart 2016). Additionally, in candidate image literature, there is a consensus of dividing candidate traits into personal and professional categories. This classification finds its roots in the personalisation literature (for literature

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[7]As "non-positional" or "non-policy" aspect.

review, see Van Aelst, Sheafer, and Stanyer 2012; Adam and Maier 2010), although a clear distinction between *personal* and *professional* attributes is not always easy to achieve.

In the existing literature, the distribution of image categories appears to be arbitrary and often done after the data has been collected. Thus, we propose our own categorisation, inspired by and arranged based on the personalisation literature. Authors usually distinguish between personal and professional qualities, putting them on a continuum. For parties, no such categorisation exists so far; therefore, it is created for research purposes of the current thesis. Such a continuum also allows homogenising existing categories. We suggest the following sub-dimensions: (1) communication and responsiveness, (2) competence, (3) integrity, (4) pragmatism, and (5) strategic vision and leadership[8].

As parties themselves are organisations and not individuals, categories that refer to character, empathy, and appearance are replaced by the communication / responsiveness category. It includes everything related to the communication style, such as being respectful, showing closeness to voters, etc. Competence unites attributes that refer to experience and success; integrity is about the party's 'morality', or being reliable, honest, and committed. The pragmatism category consists of attributes that a party emphasises to show that it is ready for a democratic dialogue, such as finding consensus or compromise on a certain policy or acting in communal interests[9]. Finally, leadership and strategic vision refer to the overall capacity of the party to strategize, create and follow long-term goals.

2.3.3. Core values dimension

Similar to attributes, values are more frequently researched on the demand-side (Goren 2005; Schwartz, Caprara, and Vecchione 2010); they can also be linked to specific parties, i.e., "Democratic values", "Republican values" (Ciuk 2017; Mair, Rusch, and Hornik 2014). In the

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[8] More information on the composition of each sub-dimension will be presented in Chapter 4.

[9] In terms of party decision-making, strategic vision and pragmatism can have different implications for how decisions are made and the type of decisions that are favoured. If a political party is led by individuals with a strong strategic vision, they may prioritise long-term goals and be willing to take risks to achieve them. This can lead to decisions that prioritise the party's core values or ideology, even if it may not be popular in the short term or may require significant investment of time and resources. A party with a strong strategic vision may be more likely to propose bold or ambitious policy proposals that align with their long-term vision, even if they may face significant opposition or require significant political capital to achieve. On the other hand, if a political party is led by individuals who prioritise pragmatism, they may be more focused on achieving incremental gains or taking practical steps that can be implemented in the short term. This can lead to decisions that prioritise compromise and incremental progress, rather than more radical or transformative proposals. A party with a strong pragmatist approach may be more willing to compromise with other parties or interest groups in order to achieve specific policy objectives.

supply side literature, the terms *ideology* and *values* are used interchangeably, although they are not synonymous. A common approach to ideology is to define it as a *set of values* or a *system of political ideas* (e.g., Freeden 2003; Sypnowich 2019), frequently with a specific positioning on the left-right ideological spectrum. Authors describe "left ideology" or "right ideology", and a hierarchy of values is attributed to each. Parties typically make use of references to the ideological position, either to describe themselves or to attack other political actors. As such, we expect parties to make explicit references to these positions as a part of their image (e.g., leftist, centrist, right-wing etc.) [10].

Within the framework of the current thesis, the concept of value is defined as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach 1973: 7). It is a prescriptive or proscriptive belief, referring to (non-)desirable actions, outcomes, or behaviours. Values may be self-centred and society-centred, intrapersonal and interpersonal, based on morality or self-actualisation. Rokeach further argues that values act as standards that help to "take particular positions on social issues, and predispose us to favour one particular political or religious ideology over another. […] They are, moreover, standards employed to persuade and influence others, to tell us which beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions of others are worth challenging, protesting, or arguing about, or worth trying to influence or to change" (1973: 13).

To identify the sub-dimensions, we draw inspiration from the research of Rokeach (1973, 1979), although the final division was done after the data collection [11]. We distinguish between eight sub-dimensions: (1) collectivist and (2) individualistic values (society versus self-centred), (3) traditionalist values (culture- and religion-centred values) and (4) universalist (peace, freedoms, and human right) values. The latter two are particularly based on Schwartz's theory of basic values (1992, 2014, see also Carpara et al. 2006), where he discriminates between individual values of traditionalism and universalism. In other words, traditionalism values "in-group" identification, while universalism values "all people" identification ("we first" versus "humankind first").

There are two additional sub-dimensions that reflect how the state should function, namely, (5) economic and (6) institutionalist values. Institutional values reflect the ideal composition of a

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[10] We suppose that such images will be somewhat rigid. Parties may change positions on specific issues between elections, but will remain relatively stable in terms of how they present their ideological position.

[11] Chapter 4 further deals with the exact list of individual categories and their operationalization.

state regarding the law and role of the state, and economic system values correspond to how a state should operate economically. An additional value of (7) environmentalism is added as a sub-dimension, and there is support in the literature to consider it a separate value both on individual and political level (Dietz 2015). Left-right positioning (8) is the final sub-dimension.

Within these sub-dimensions, we expect to find specific categories; for example, collectivist values would address equality, solidarity, or communal interests. Individualistic values reflect on individual responsibility, self-determination, and personal freedom. Traditionalist values address cultural aspects, such as religious values, while universalist values represent democracy, social freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech)[12], diversity, etc.

2.3.4. Group appeals dimension

The third dimension of the party image corresponds to the group appeals. It reflects the preparedness of the parties to act towards their voters. In other words, parties convey their will to act in the interest of specific social groups. Moreover, parties can position themselves against certain groups.

Group appeal and voter targeting topics traditionally belong to the party behaviour research. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) analysed Western European parties and defined four major social cleavages: centre – periphery, state – church, urban – rural, and owner – worker. Political parties of the 1960s were heavily defined by these cleavages and rarely shared the same core electorate. Such specifics created the segmentation of the electorate and the existence of 'mass parties' (Duverger 1964), where party behaviour would be focused on targeting and mobilising a specific part of the population that they represented through the four cleavages (Krouwel 2012). Overall, social groups serve as target groups that parties attempt to attract and keep by adapting their message and their image (e.g., Kitschelt 1994, 2004; Mair, Muller, and Plasser 2004; Franklin Fowler, Ridout, and Franz 2016; Tilley and Evans 2017). Consequently, groups have become part of the electoral campaign, and, in the long term, an essential element of the party image. As non-voter groups are more frequently addressed during campaigns (e.g., migrants, the youth that will face the consequences of climate change), we incorporate these in the group appeals dimension.

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[12] We separate economic and social freedoms. An example of how it works in parties' communication is discussed in Chapter 5.

However, group appeals are not purely identity-based, as one might suggest. Addressing the core electorate relates to the rigid component of the party image, but parties are also found to employ *chasing* strategies fairly regularly (e.g., Albright 2008; Rohrschneider 2002; Stückelberger 2021). *Chasing* refers to attempts of convincing swing or new voters, while addressing your own voters is called *mobilising*. Thus, the way parties address potential voters lies on the continuum, with the focus on the core voters on one side and on the swing voters on the other (Rohrschneider 2002). In the framework of the current thesis, we define appeals to the non-core electorate as the adaptive part of the image, while appeals to the core electorate are the part of the identity, or the rigid component of the party image[13].

We argue that voter groups are crucial for the party image due to the two main reasons: (1) structural changes in the electorate and (2) the nature of the contemporary political conflicts. Economic, social and cultural changes, such as globalisation, secularisation of most Western countries, growing urbanisation, spread of mass education and *cognitive mobilisation* (Dalton 1984; Inglehart 1970), as well as the rise and spread of media use, have greatly shifted voter preferences and voting behaviour, causing both structural and behavioural dealignment (Goldberg 2020). New parties and movements were formed (Kriesi 2010; Kriesi et al. 2008), and old parties could not rely as much on their core electorate because it did not exist in the same form anymore. Growing individualisation and decreasing partisanship further fragmented the electorate and made short-term factors, such as salient issues and candidate images, more central to voters' decision-making (Dalton 1998). These structural changes forced parties to re-evaluate the role of group appeals. Parties faced the new electorate, which did not unite around social cleavages as before, had individualised preferences and, most importantly, did not strongly identify with a particular party. Therefore, parties had to adapt their strategies in an attempt to target these restructured voter groups.

The second argument posits that social groups are the core of the political conflict known as *identity politics*. Identity politics has strongly shaped Western European party systems and party competition (Mair 1990; Sitter 2008) and has contributed to the rise of the populist right-wing (Besley and Persson 2021; Noury and Roland 2020; Swank and Betz 2003) and Green parties (Bornschier 2010), among others. This has, in turn, contributed to the emergence of the new sociocultural conflicts, that are based on gender, on national identification (Kriesi et al.

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[13] We see that there are both rigid and adaptive group appeals. For the purposes of the quantitative analysis in the current thesis, we will not separate the groups that parties mobilise or chase, but rather treat them equally in the empirical analysis. However, we will use interviews with party managers in order to see which strategies are used by parties regarding voter groups.

2008; Kriesi 2012) or any kinds of newly politicised and expressed identities. In addition to the existing and emerging socioeconomic groups, the importance of new sociocultural and political groups could not to be ignored[14].

In political marketing literature on the party brand and brand identity, social groups are treated as a core element of the *party brand construction* (e.g., Smith 2001; Reeves, De Chernatony, and Carrigan 2006; Pich and Dean 2015). Target groups are essentially the voter groups that a party identifies with and includes in its party brand identity, along with other elements. In addition, in literature on group appeals, parties can not only identify with but also dissociate from certain groups (Johnson and Rhodes 2015; Thau 2018, 2019). Such dissociation is supposed to appeal to voters: if a socialist party criticises managers or the rich people, this critique targets the approval of workers or low-income voters. Several scholars also point out the strategic nature of group appeals (e.g., Dickson and Scheve 2006), which in turn connects them to the brand identity literature.

To sum up, we argue that the group appeals dimension consists of both rigid and adaptive components. It depends on which voter groups a party decides to defend or show support for, or which non-voter group the party decides to criticise or distance from. Addressing the core electorate can be considered as more rigid, as it will (most likely) not change between the elections, while employing chasing strategies will lead to creation of group appeal images that are more adaptive.

2.4. Negativity dimension of communicative behaviour

As we have discussed previously, communicative behaviour includes how a party both presents itself and depicts its adversaries. In terms of the negativity dimension, this means that parties will either construct their own "negative" image or attack other political actors. However, it does not mean that parties will present themselves in a negative light. Rather, they could reject specific values or groups, thus constructing a *negative identity* – stressing what the party clearly does not associate itself with. For example, a communist party may describe itself as anti-capitalist or anti-war, instead of portraying themselves as statist or pacifist. Another example is when in 2015 Trump campaigned on the negative portrayal of migrants: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best … They're sending people that have lots of

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[14] More specific categorisation of this dimension is discussed in Chapter 4.

problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Newsweek 2021). By using this negative image of migrants as criminals, Trump presented himself and, consequently, the Republicans as the defenders of the nation against crime and violence. This was coherent with their slogan "Law and order". This is what we refer to as "distancing" in Table 2.1 – constructing an image of self by distancing from specific groups – or values, which are arguably more rigid than group appeals.

When it comes to depicting others in a negative way, *attacking* is well-known in the literature on political communication within the approach of the negative campaigning. These attacks may appear in different communication channels, such as party manifestos (Curini 2011; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010) or press releases (Haynes, Flowers, and Gurian 2002; Norris 1999; Russmann 2017). However, *advertisements* are the main object of research, specifically in the functional theory of political campaign discourse (Benoit 1999, 2007). This theory distinguishes between three functions of political advertisements: acclaim, attack, and defend. Acclaiming, as defined by Benoit, refers to parties projecting information about themselves, be it issue positions or images, and involves only one actor, while attacking and defending have two actors – a party / candidate that produces information, and a party / candidate that is the object of this information. When examining attacks in negative campaigning literature, they are typically studied from the supply side. However, it is important to understand how they can impact a party' s own image when directed towards other political actors.

The answer is quite straightforward. Since parties seek to maximise votes, portraying another party in a negative way can be beneficial because it suggests that the party's own image is positive. When a political party criticises another party for holding different values or supporting a specific social group, it implicitly signals that it does not endorse those values or groups. A classic example is right-wing parties accusing left-wing ones of being pro-migrant. Likewise, when a party raises doubts about another's competence or pragmatism, it may suggest that it possesses these qualities itself. In other words, parties can create a positive (*acclaiming*) image of themselves by projecting negative (*attacking*) images of other political actors.

Additionally, we expect that "pure" negative self-presentation (or *distancing* in Table 2.1) on the attributes dimension will be extremely rare, as we do not expect parties to talk badly about themselves. Negative self-description is known in the political communication literature as *image repair* and focuses on how parties and individuals attempt to repair their image and reputation after a public backlash or a scandal (Benoit 2014; Heppell 2021; Strömbäck and

Kiousis 2014; Marland and DeCillia 2020). However, this phenomenon is tied to how parties are first perceived, so we do not consider these image categories in the current research.

In conclusion, the positive and negative dimensions are crucial to our understanding of the communicative behaviour and its non-policy part. Overall, the use of negative images does not mean that a party projects the negative image of itself. Firstly, it can build a negative identity to distance itself from specific values or groups. Furthermore, it can create a negative image of other actors and, as a result, position itself as their opponent. Research has indicated that voters are not particularly fond of negative campaigning and dislike trait attacks, which can essentially be identified as images, even more than issue attacks (Fridkin and Kenney 2011; Krupnikov 2011, Walter and van der Eijk 2019; cf. Mattes and Redlawsk 2020).

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we addressed the non-policy part of the communicative behaviour of political parties, which we defined as "party image". We have demonstrated the shared structural characteristics of party issues and party images in terms of rigidity/plasticity and negativity dimensions. We have proposed the concept of party image as a key analytical construct for the current thesis. The existing literature on political image suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity; it predominantly concentrates on candidates and the demand side, with recurring ambiguities in definitions. To address these shortcomings, we have selected pertinent literature that focuses on parties and the supply side, having defined party image as *the way how a party communicates on its non-policy aspects during the electoral campaign*. Subsequently, we have clarified the relationship between the concept of party identity and our proposed concept of party image.

Then, we have identified the three dimensions that make up the party image: attributes, core values, and group appeals. We have discussed how these dimensions are present in political science and political communication literature. The attributes dimension has been constructed by applying existing categories of candidate image to party image. We have addressed the place and importance of the core values dimension as a rigid part of the party image. We have explored group appeals as the party's willingness to align themselves with particular social groups. Finally, we have discussed the negativity dimension and distinguished between negative identity and negative depiction of adversaries (attacks).

In the next chapter, we are going to present our theoretical framework that will help us address what incentivises parties to choose between various elements of their image and highlight them in their campaign communication.

Chapter 3. Theoretical framework and expectations

3.1. Introduction

The main objective of the current chapter is to develop a theoretical framework and formulate theoretical expectations. To achieve this goal, we discuss two theories, bounded rationality and risk aversion theory (derived from prospect theory), and explore how they can be applied to party image strategies, electoral campaigns, and party competition.

Considering electoral strategies and communication, it is tempting to compartmentalise different facets of party behaviour and to examine them in an isolated manner. Often, party strategy, electoral performance, and public perception have been viewed as separate pieces of a larger puzzle, each with its own set of hypotheses and conjectures. Nevertheless, the political environment is not just a collection of its components, but rather a complex network of interconnected interactions. We have argued that political parties, in their quest to maximise the votes and minimise the risks, operate in a dynamic environment and balance between rigidity and plasticity. They navigate a strategic choice between choosing to present either their identity-based or adaptive images, while also making them positive or negative. These decisions can be affected by a number of internal and external factors, related to party status, its previous and current performance, ideological position, etc.

Our theoretical expectations are formulated in relation to (1) the choice of image dimension (attributes vs. core values vs. group dimensions), (2) the use of attacks, and (3) the interaction between these dimensions and negativity, which we conceive as the risk score. By exploring these expectations, we aim to contribute to the understanding of how parties employ image strategies to compete for electoral success.

3.2. The impact of risk aversion and bounded rationality on party competition and strategic choices

3.2.1. Bounded rationality and risk aversion theories in politics

Bounded rationality theory is not new to electoral research, although it is the most prevalent in demand side studies of voting behaviour. In studies of party competition on the supply side, rational choice theory is more commonly used, for example, in the research on electoral

competition (Downs 1957). However, the use of rational choice theory in party competition research has been often criticised (Albright 2010; Figueira 2018; Green and Shapiro 1994; De Sio and Weber 2014). Studies on party competition typically focus on party positions or policy issues, although the literature on issue emphasis uses an agenda-setting perspective, developed by Baumgartner and Jones (2010; see also Baumgartner et al. 2009). Yet, there is no theory that explicitly connects party competition, party image, and electoral strategies together. Therefore, the aim of the current section is to use bounded rationality theory and, more specifically, risk aversion theory to build the theoretical framework that will explain the relationship between risk aversion and image-based strategies.

Bounded rationality (hereafter BR) brings the element of uncertainty into a party's behaviour. Herbert Simon (2000, 25) defines BR as follows: "[It] is simply the idea that the choices people make are determined not only by some consistent goal and the properties of the external world but also by the knowledge that decision makers do and don't have of the world, their ability, or inability to evoke that knowledge when it is relevant, to work out the consequences of their actions, to conjure up choices, to cope with uncertainty (including uncertainty deriving from the possible responses of other actors), and to adjudicate among their many competing wants". In other words, when applied to decision-making within parties, BR argues that party decision makers are bound to act in conditions where they do not have enough information, or that they have limited capacities or motivation for collecting and treating information. We posit that these specifics of the decision-making process influence electoral strategies, including image-based strategies.

While risk aversion theory is conceptually linked to bounded rationality, authors working on these theories rarely cite each other (Bendor 2010), leading to the impression that theories are treated separately in the political science field. However, as Bendor further notes, political scientists are largely unaware of the intense work on bounded rationality models by "high-brow economic and game theorists" (2010, 21) [15] and classifies bounded rationality as a *research program* that encompasses various theories and models [16].

The literature is divided on whether electoral losses make parties risk-averse or risk-acceptant. According to risk aversion theory, individuals perceive outcomes as gains and losses rather

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[15] However, see the article by Alesina and Passarelli (2019) on risk aversion in politics.

[16] In this thesis, we treat risk aversion as an extension of bounded rationality theory, rather than as a separate theory.

than as final states of wealth or welfare (Kahnemann and Tversky 1979, 274)[17]. Losses also "loom larger than gains", meaning that a probability of loss is more influential on behaviour than a probability of gain. Specifically, studies find individuals to be risk-averse in the gain frame but risk-seeking in the loss frame, choosing a risky gamble rather than a sure loss (Zhang et al. 2017; based on Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 1984), and a sure smaller gain over an uncertain, potentially bigger one. Parties are generally seen as risk-averse organisations that defend their interests, as well as the interests of their stakeholders and followers, and are guided by ideological inertia (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Strøm, Müller, and Smith 2010). However, risk aversion is not only about electoral gains and losses. It can be generalised to the communication choices of the party regarding its status and characteristics. These choices can be influenced by its incumbent status, party size, previous and current electoral performance, ideological distance from the centre, the choice of the communication channel, or belonging to a specific party family.

3.2.2. Party image strategies in the light of risk aversion theory

In this section, we present the theoretical relationship between risk aversion and image-based strategies. Research on party electoral competition has extensively investigated how risk aversion theory explains changes in parties' electoral strategies. For example, studies have strongly suggested that parties moderate or shift their ideological positions on the left-right scale when their valence reputation changes (Abney et al. 2013; Adams and Merrill 2009; Adams et al. 2016). In other words, when they are more negatively perceived by the voters and suffer electoral losses, parties adapt (Somer-Topcu 2007). Since there is little research on image strategies, especially in the context of party electoral strategies, we draw inspiration from the literature on issues and risk aversion.

Scholars have looked into candidates' vote-seeking strategies that are based on their policies or their character (Curini 2015; Adams et al. 2016), which corresponds to our division between policy- and non-policy-based communicative behaviour. Specifically, Adams et al. (2016) describe the difference between policy-based and valence-related strategies. They find that the

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[17] See Kahneman and Tversky (1979) for general theory; Quattrone and Tversky (1988); Druckman and Lupia (2000), Vis (2011); Soroka (2014) for consequences of negativity in politics; Robertson (2018); Alesina and Passarelli (2019) for theory application in political science.

decision to focus on either depends on the comparative advantages of candidates' parties. We argue that, since parties have a significant effect on their candidates' strategies, the same factors may influence both actors.

We distinguish between two broad categories of party behaviour: risk-avoidant and risk-seeking, which are based on whether parties perceive themselves to be in a gain or in a loss frame. Risk-avoidant parties tend to prioritise stability and the maintenance of their existing support base, while risk-seeking parties are more willing to take chances and pursue strategies that could lead to greater gains or smaller losses (Müller-Rommel 1998). These different approaches to risk could have important implications for how parties deal with their party image, including which dimensions of the image they intend to focus on, whether they favour its rigid or adaptive components or whether and how they incorporate attacks on opponents. For example, electoral losses can incentivise parties to change their policies. A study by van der Velden et al. (2018) addresses the factors which motivate parties to change their platforms, based on the risk aversion theory. They find that parties are more likely to make significant changes to their platforms when they are in opposition, and that the degree of change tends to be greater for smaller parties than for larger ones.

We postulate that when a party perceives itself to be in a gain frame and is therefore risk-avoidant, it will be more likely to emphasise core values (part of the *identity*) as the least risky strategy. However, if it is risk-seeking, it will emphasise attributes (*adaptive image*) and focus less to values. We further assume that group appeals in general are relatively independent of the attitudes towards the risk; however, parties in the loss frame (more risk-seeking) might address not only their core voters but also swing ones, increasing mentions of the group appeals images in their communication.

Based on existing research on risk-avoidant parties and implications of risk aversion theory, several potential image strategies will be more likely for these parties. Firstly, risk-avoidant parties may be more likely to use "safe" images. For example, Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2009) argue that parties may adopt "unproblematic" issue positions that are unlikely to generate controversy or alienate potential supporters. This could extend to image strategies as well, with risk-avoidant parties placing greater emphasis on their rigid, or identity-based images, like core values, that are seen as widely accepted by the electorate.

Moreover, risk-avoidant parties will attack less frequently and will put more emphasis on the self-presentation image, while risk-seeking parties will do the opposite and attack their

counterparts. Research has shown that negative campaigning can be risky and might negatively impact a party's image, particularly when it is seen as unfair or overly aggressive (Fridkin and Kenney 2004; Walter 2014a, 2014b). Thus, risk-avoidant parties may be more cautious in implementing attacks, opting instead for more positive, acclaiming strategies rather than attacking ones. Similarly, parties that are more risk-seeking might be more likely to engage in negative campaigning (Walter et al. 2014). They may be more willing to take these risks as a way of gaining an edge over their opponents because they trail in polls or in general have less to lose (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008).

We observe that communication strategies encompass all types of images across dimensions. For example, parties can choose to anchor themselves in their positive identity, or core values. By emphasising them, parties aim to transcend immediate political divides and appeal to a shared societal ethos that they support. These values, often rooted in foundational principles, act as a unifying starting point, reminding the electorate of the broader ideals a party stands for (Evans and Neundorf 2020; Goren 2005; Lenz 2013).

When parties emphasise group appeals, the focus shifts to affiliations, alliances, and allegiances that resonate with broader segments of the electorate. The intention is to expand and consolidate support and to align with key demographic or interest groups, thus cementing the image of a party that is both inclusive and representative (Krouwel 2012). Simply put, parties address their core electorate, which is an essential part of their positive identity. However, we should not forget that group appeals can also address non-core voters, which are less rigid and can be categorised as the adaptive image. Finally, parties might highlight specific attributes — be it leadership qualities, historical achievements, or other tangible milestones that show their competence (Johns 2010). These are usually adapted from election to election, depending on the context of the campaign.

Finally, we assume that there is an interaction between the image dimension and the attacking. Praising their own values will be the least risky strategy and thus more attractive for risk-avoiding parties. Conversely, attacking the values of other parties will be the most attractive strategy for the risk-seeking parties. Acclaiming / appraising across all dimensions will be overall preferable for parties in the gain frame, while attacking across all dimensions will be more attractive to parties in the loss frame. We assume that since parties are more likely to use distancing in relation to their (self-presented) identity, this strategy will not be as risky as attacking.

Attacking operates in a slightly different logic. Personal critiques, which target specific attributes of political rivals, might seem mere political banter. Research indicates that while personal attacks might momentarily tarnish an individual's reputation, their long-term impact on electoral outcomes remains debatable (Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007). However, when attacking communication escalates to challenge core values of an opposing party, the repercussions are more profound (Feinberg and Willer 2019). Core values are ingrained in a party's loyalist base. Directly attacking them can polarise the electorate, leading to deeply entrenched divisions. This strategy is a double-edged sword: while it may invigorate a party's base, it risks alienating moderate, new, or swing voters.

Questioning foundational principles can appear to be an attack on shared societal values, leading to backlash not only from the targeted party but also from a broader cross-section of the society that identifies with those values (e.g., Druckman et al. 2021). This potential effect might be understood by political actors: Benoit (1999, 2014, 2017) finds that in political advertisement, US presidential candidates rarely attack on "ideals" or "principles", most likely because "[i]t is easier to for a candidate to embrace (acclaim) general goals and ideals than to reject them (attack). […] It is difficult to criticise values and principles such as freedom, equal opportunity, or justice" (Benoit 2017, 18-19). We posit that the relationship between image dimension and attacking is inverted: appraising one's own values is the least risky strategy, while attacking another's values is the riskiest one.

In summary, the way parties navigate between acclaiming, distancing, appraising, and attacking reflects both their short-term strategic goals and the underlying interplay of perception, risk acceptance, and electoral dynamics. Party decision makers operate in an environment where they do not possess all the information needed for a risk-free decision, and they are bound to be subjective. Risk aversion theory introduces two frames—gain and loss—in which parties operate. It further states that parties are generally risk-avoidant, as they depend on stakeholders and voters. More specifically, we argue that if parties perceive themselves to be in the gain frame, they become more risk-avoidant, guided by their will to protect their success; if they find themselves in the loss frame, they become more risk-acceptant, as they have less to lose and are willing to risk.

3.3. Presentation and discussion of hypotheses

In the previous section, we have discussed how risk attitudes of parties, be it risk avoidance or risk seeking, may influence strategic choices during electoral campaigns. However, we need to understand the specific factors that influence the risk attitudes in the first place. Although the literature does not provide a straightforward answer to this question, we have identified five factors that could potentially impact parties' risk attitudes and, in turn, affect their strategic decision-making. To identify potential factors, we rely on two main literature sources: one that focuses on risk aversion and issues, and another that explores party competition across three dimensions. Thus, we are met with two sets of theoretical assumptions, both for the outcomes (A1-A3) and independent factors (A4-A8), which are later used to derive specific hypotheses. These two sets are represented in the Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1. Theoretical assumptions regarding risk aversion.
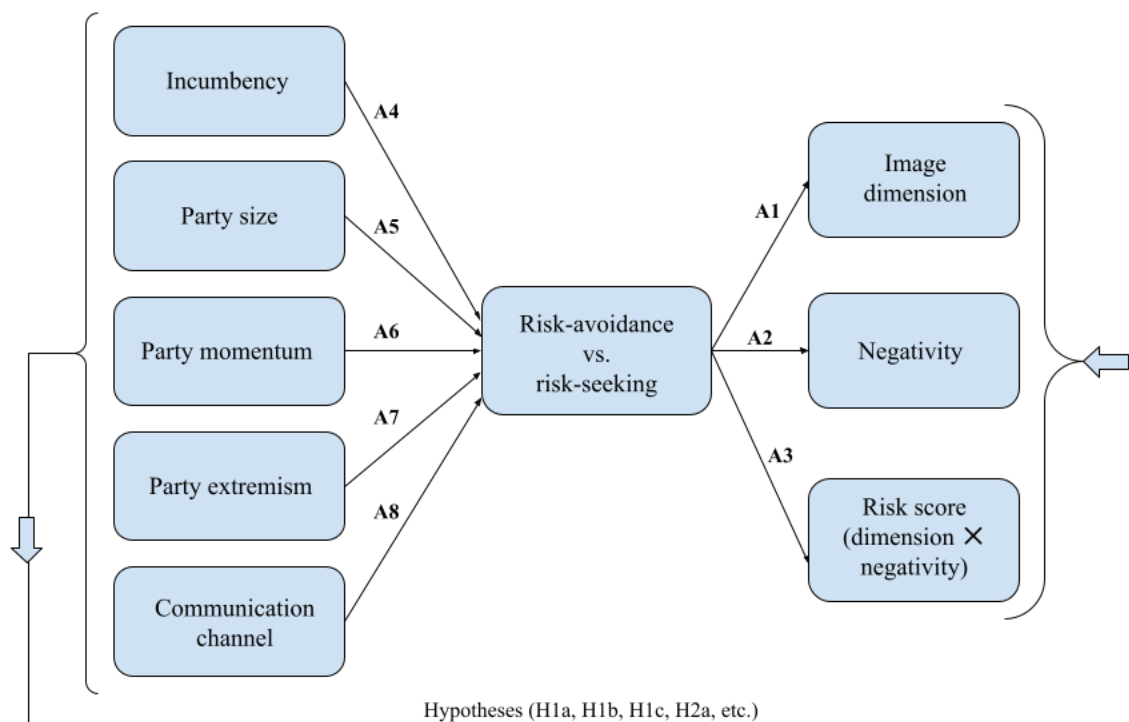
The first set of assumptions, A1-A3, focuses on the relationship between risk attitudes and the electoral strategies of parties. Following the discussion in sections 2.3, 2.4, and 3.2.2, we define three main dependent variables: the focus on specific image dimensions (A1), the decision to attack opponents (A2), and the interaction between image dimensions and negativity (A3). Thus, we present three main theoretic assumptions:

1) When a party is risk-avoidant (i.e., perceives itself to be in a loss frame), it will emphasise the less risky dimension of core values. When a party is risk-seeking (i.e., perceives itself to be in a gain frame), it will emphasise the riskier dimension of attributes. We assume that group dimensions are relatively independent of risk attitudes. Thus, we expect that group appeals "fall in-between" the core values and attributes, core values being the least risky dimension, and attributes being the riskiest one.

2) When a party is risk-seeking, it will emphasise negative images of opponents (attack) more often. When a party is risk-avoidant, it will emphasise positive images (acclaim) more frequently.

3) We argue there is an interaction between image dimensions and negative campaigning. Emphasising one's own positive values is the most attractive strategy for risk-avoidant parties, while attacking opponents on their values is the most attractive strategy for risk-seeking parties. In other words, there are three main points to consider: (1) the use of negative images (of any dimension) or attacks is riskier than the use of the positive ones; (2) among positive images, acclaiming on one's own attributes is considered being the riskiest strategy, and acclaiming on values the least risky one; (3) among negative images, attacks on values are considered the riskiest strategy, and the attacks on attributes the least risky one. This is measured with the "risk score", where attacking on each of the three dimensions changes the perceived risk-taking.

Subsequently, we identify five following factors with the potential effect on risk attitudes: incumbency (A4), party size (A5), party momentum (A6), party extremism (A7), and the choice of the communication channel (A8). Parties' risk attitudes can be influenced by each of these factors, potentially making them more or less willing to take risks:

4) When parties participate in forming governments and taking office, incumbency status is thought to reduce risk-taking, while being in opposition may increase it, as incumbent parties might be more reluctant to risk their position.

5) The size of a party or the distribution of seats in parliament can have a negative impact on risk-taking, as larger parties could be more risk-averse.

6) The momentum of a party, or its change in electoral performance, could lead to increased caution in risk-taking. Parties would likely focus on solidifying their successes and avoiding unnecessary risks.

7) The level of party extremism, which refers to how far a party's ideology is from the political centre, has the potential to influence risk-taking behaviour. Parties that are further away from the centre are more likely to engage in risk-seeking behaviour, for instance, because they wish to distinguish themselves from more moderate ones.

8) Finally, the choice of communication channel, represented here by parties' manifestos and press releases, may also play a role in defining risk attitudes. Our assumption is that parties will be more inclined to adopt riskier approaches in their press releases as opposed to their manifestos.

Therefore, we are met with the combined fifteen hypotheses, which are derived from the assumptions for independent factors (A4-A8) and outcomes (A1-A3). For example, the hypothesis H1a is derived from A4 (incumbency) and A1 (image dimension), the hypothesis H2b is derived from A5 (party size) and A2 (negativity), and the hypothesis H3c is derived from A6 (party momentum) and A3 (risk score). In the upcoming section, we analyse and establish theoretical connections between the two sets and formulate hypotheses.

3.3.1. Main hypotheses

H_1: Incumbency

Incumbency typically refers to the participation of parties in forming governments and taking office. We distinguish between incumbent and non-incumbent (opposition / challenger) parties. The role of incumbency in elections and electoral campaigns is usually analysed in terms of *campaign spending effects* (Ben-Bassat, Dahan, and Klor 2015; Benoit and Marsh 2008, 2010), *negative campaigning and attacks* (Benoit and Sheafer 2006; Damore 2002; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009; Marcus et al. 2000; Nai 2020), *time effects* (Bélanger and Nadeau 2015), *reputation* and *familiarity* (Abramowitz 1975; Bernhardt and Ingerman 1985).

Incumbent parties, due to their existing support base and desire to maintain their current image, may be more cautious in their campaign strategies. They enjoy greater visibility than non-

incumbents and are better known by the public, having a track record of being in office. Wittman (1990) finds that incumbent legislators tend to maintain their party image to preserve their party's brand. Additionally, Benoit and Sheafer (2006) observe that incumbents make more self-descriptive claims and enjoy more acclaim than non-incumbents. According to the research (Greene 2020; Powell and Whitten 1993), incumbents are more likely to emphasise their past accomplishments and avoid proposing new policies or changing their overall identity. We hypothesise that this risk-averse strategy may lead incumbents to favour the less risky core values dimension of their party image.

On the other hand, opposition parties might be more risk-seeking if they perceive that engaging in a risky strategy might increase their chances of electoral success. For instance, van der Wardt (2015) finds that mainstream parties tend to respond to issues raised by niche parties when they are perceived as important to voters, in order to prevent niche parties from gaining electoral support. Specifically, the author distinguishes between mainstream opposition parties (MOP) and mainstream government parties (MGP), showing that MOPs tend to be more risk-acceptant because of their opposition status. Additionally, Fridkin and Kenney (2004) show that opposition parties may benefit from emphasising specific group appeals to create a strong connection with voters.

Finally, opposition parties are found to be more eager to use negative campaigning (Benoit and Sheafer 2006; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010; Nai 2020). Studies show that incumbency status influences the decision to use a negative campaigning strategy. Incumbent parties are less likely to use attacks than non-incumbent ones: for example, the research by Lau and Pomper (2004) suggests that incumbent parties may be more likely to focus on positive, issue-based campaigning rather than negative campaigning. Similarly, non-incumbent parties aim to make it clear why they should replace governmental parties (Fridkin and Kenney 2004) and often do so by attacking the incumbent. Additionally, Geer (2008) shows that opposition parties may be more likely to criticise the incumbent party's record and propose new policies. Therefore, we expect opposition parties to attack more frequently.

To sum up, we expect incumbent parties to be more risk-avoidant than the opposition ones. In terms of image dimensions, incumbent parties will be more likely to focus on the less risky dimensions than the opposition ones, to use fewer attacks, and in general choose less risky strategies, preferring to self-acclaim and highlight their values. The hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1a: Incumbent parties are more likely to be risk-avoidant in their focus on image dimensions.

H1b: Incumbent parties are less likely to attack other political actors.

H1c: Incumbent parties are more likely to have a lower risk score.

H₂: Party size

Party size, i.e., the share of seats a party holds in the parliament, has a significant effect on its electoral strategies, especially in proportional representation (PR) systems. Furthermore, voters may engage in strategic voting, that is, voting not necessarily for their preferred candidate or party, but for a candidate or party with a higher chance of winning or to prevent an undesirable outcome (Cox 1997) [18]. Even if research indicates that strategic voting is reduced in the PR systems (e.g., Blais and Nadeau 1996), more complex forms need to be considered, especially the case of Germany with ticket-splitting voting (Gschwend 2007), and the case of Switzerland with "compensatory voting" (Kedar 2005).

Germany has a mixed voting system, meaning that voters cast one vote for a candidate in their constituency, and another for a party list. This has led to the strategy of "ticket-splitting", where voters might choose to support different parties in order to maximise their influence on the electoral outcome. In Switzerland, yet another strategy of "compensatory voting" has been noticed (Lachat and Selb 2010): voters may support parties with more extreme positions than their own preferences in order to influence the overall government stance. This behaviour arises from the understanding that no single party can fully implement its policies due to the consensual character of the Swiss system.

In turn, parties are well aware of the possibility of widespread strategic voting, and may adapt their strategies accordingly. Larger parties may engage in risk-averse behaviour and focus on retaining their core electorate instead of addressing new groups. Smaller parties, on the other hand, may have an incentive to build the image of willing to cooperate or enter an alliance or a coalition with larger parties, effectively emphasising the attributes dimension. The menace

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[18] For example, voting in the first round in the 2017 French presidential elections attracted left-wing voters for Macron, even though they did not support him. The prospect of having an extreme right-wing president was even more disadvantageous. Voters feared that a left-wing candidate (Hamon, Socialist Party) might lose in the second round when facing the extreme right (Le Pen, *Front National*).

of strategic voting, and thus the possible abandonment by the voters, might influence smaller parties to be more risk-acceptant.

Finally, attacking can differ because of the party size. For example, studies show that larger parties are more likely to be the object of the attacks (De Nooy and Kleinnijenhuis 2013; Walter 2014a). While this is not a direct argument that smaller parties are more likely to use negative campaigning, we at least expect larger parties to use it less frequently.

We expect larger parties to be more risk-avoidant and focus on less risky dimensions, as well as attack less, and choose overall risk-avoidant strategies of self-acclaiming. In turn, smaller parties will be more likely to focus on riskier dimensions, as well as attack more often and select overall risk-acceptant strategies. The hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H2a: The larger a party is, the more likely it is to be risk-avoidant in its focus on image dimensions.

H2b: The larger a party is, the less likely it is to attack other political actors.

H2c: The larger a party is, the more likely it is to have a lower risk score.

H3: Party momentum — previous elections results and current perceived win

In the context of electoral campaigns, party momentum is seen as a reflection of a party's recent electoral performance or current position in polls. The general risk aversion theory posits that "losses loom larger than gains", meaning that parties will be more risk-averse when they have more to lose than to gain. This, in turn, will create an incentive to be risk-avoidant when they perceive themselves to be in a gain frame and have a positive momentum. On the other hand, parties with a negative momentum will take more risks, as they might gain an advantage from an unorthodox strategy or attacks on their opponents.

Research has suggested that recent electoral performance can have a significant influence on future prospects and issue-focused campaign strategies that parties employ (Bartels 2000; Lewis-Beck and Tien 2010). For example, parties with negative momentum, as indicated by recent losses, are more likely to adapt their positions and policies (Somer-Topcu 2007). However, such parties could also turn to emphasising their traditional or core issues, as a way of shoring up their support base (Ceron and Volpi 2022; Chong and Druckman 2007; Goren 2005). In line with the current interpretation of the risk aversion theory, we adopt the former

position, claiming that the more parties lose, the more risk-acceptant they become. Finally, parties with negative momentum may be more likely to engage in negative campaigning, as they perceive the loss of support as a significant setback. As a result, they could be more willing to take risks in their campaign messages (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008).

Overall, the effect of the party momentum on party strategies is straightforward: the more a party perceives to win, the more it is likely to be risk-avoidant, and the more it perceives to lose, the more it is likely to engage in risk-seeking behaviour. The hypotheses read as follows:

H3a: The higher the party momentum is, the more likely a party is to be risk-avoidant in its focus on image dimensions.

H3b: The higher the party momentum is, the less likely a party is to attack other political actors.

H3c: The higher the party momentum is, the more likely it is to have a lower risk score.

H4: Party extremism

Party extremism refers to the ideological position of political parties which deviate significantly from the political centre and challenge mainstream political norms (Mudde 2007, 2010). The literature does not provide strong evidence connecting party extremism directly to image strategies. Research on mainstream and niche party status provides us with useful insights to construct our argument. Often, niche parties tend to lie on either pole of the ideological spectrum, such as communist or radical right-wing parties, or address a non-centrist ideology (e.g., Green parties [19]). Mainstream parties are typically seen as risk-averse, more so if they are in the government (van der Wardt 2015), because they focus on a broader set of issues and avoid extreme policy positions. Niche parties usually adopt more extreme policy positions and focus on a specific issue. The desire to distinguish themselves from the mainstream, more moderate parties, might lead to a more risk-seeking behaviour.

Studies have shown that extreme parties tend to use negative attacks more frequently (Walter and Vliegenthart 2010; Nai and Sciarini 2018; Valli and Nai 2022; Maier and Nai 2021), which

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[19] There has been an ongoing debate whether Green parties and environmental issues can still be seen as niche. For example, Wagner (2012) has argued that the German Green Party can no longer be seen as a niche party, since they have integrated a wider range of issues, including economic ones.

leads us to expect that the more extreme a party is, the more likely it will attack its opponents. Moreover, a recent study by Bjarnøe, Adams, and Boydstun (2022) finds that parties differ in their emphasis on issues versus valence images in their self-presentation; more extreme parties are more likely to attack other parties' image. This supports our previous argument.

To sum up, we expect that parties with more extreme ideological positions will be more risk-acceptant than parties closer to the centre. The hypotheses thus read as follows:

H4a: The more ideologically extreme a party is, the more likely it is to be risk-seeking in its focus on image dimensions.

H4b: The more ideologically extreme a party is, the more likely it is to attack other political actors.

H4c: The more ideologically extreme a party is, the more likely it is to have a higher risk score.

H5: Communication channel

The literature on electoral communication channels (e.g., Norris 2002, 2006; Kriesi et al. 2008) distinguishes between two types: parties' own communication infrastructure and the media. Party infrastructure stays under party control, while the media is mostly outside their influence. In order to project their message without the intervention of the media, party decision-makers might rely on internal means, like more traditional press releases, newspaper advertisements, posters, or more modern tools like websites, direct emails, and online communication. In the light of risk aversion theory, parties are likely to be risk-averse when it comes to using external media channels, as they have less control over their messages and are exposed to potential negative feedback. So, they may be more risk-acceptant when using their internal communication infrastructure.

Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in the use of online communication by parties and candidates (de Vreese 2010; Gibson and McAllister 2015; Aldrich et al. 2016; Magin et al. 2017; Hager 2019; Steffan and Venema 2020). However, we argue that parties still actively use traditional communication channels, such as manifestos and press releases, to construct and convey their overall image. Manifestos, in particular, are one of the earliest and fundamental documents that parties produce even before the start of the electoral campaign, and they are essential in communicating both the party's issues and its values. These documents

are not only released for party members but are also intended for the general public, as confirmed by interviews with campaign managers of Swiss and German parties, conducted by SNSF project members in 2018.

Press releases represent a part of online campaigning because they are usually published on the website of a party, but they are less interactive than social media (e.g., Lilleker et al. 2011; Schweitzer 2011). As such, traditional internal and modern external tools target different audiences in order to accomplish different functions: inform, involve, connect, or mobilise (Foot et al. 2007). Manifestos are seen as setting the 'ideal' agenda (Norris et al. 1999), while press releases are more adaptive during the campaign, reporting on ongoing events (Gilardi et al. 2022; Tresch et al. 2018).

Finally, little research exists that explicitly compares attacking strategies in manifestos versus press releases. However, some studies have examined the use of negative campaigning in both communication channels. One study by Schuck et al. (2016) found that negative campaigning was more prevalent in press releases, compared to manifestos in the context of the 2014 European Parliament elections. Similarly, Walter and Vliegenthart (2010) found that negative campaigning was more common in press releases and speeches than in manifestos during the 2006 Dutch parliamentary elections. These findings suggest that press releases will contain more attacks than manifestos.

The hypotheses read as follows:

H5a: In their manifestos, parties are more likely to be risk-avoidant in their focus on image dimensions.

H5b: In their manifestos, parties are less likely to attack other political actors.

H5c: In their manifestos, parties are more likely to have a lower risk score.

Table 3.1 summarises the hypotheses formulated in the section above.

Table 3.1. Overview of theoretical expectations.

Independent variables	Dependent variables		
	Image dimension	**Presence of attacks**	**Risk aversion score**
H₁: Incumbency status	H1a: Incumbent parties are more likely to be risk-avoidant in their focus on image dimensions.	H1b: Incumbent parties are less likely to attack other political actors.	H1c: Incumbent parties are more likely to have a lower risk score.
H₂: Party size	H2a: The larger a party is, the more likely it is to be risk-avoidant in its focus on image dimensions.	H2b: The larger a party is, the less likely it is to attack other political actors.	H2c: The larger a party is, the more likely it is to have a lower risk score.
H₃: Party momentum	H3a: The higher the party momentum is, the more likely a party is to be risk-avoidant in its focus on image dimensions.	H3b: The higher the party momentum is, the less likely a party is to attack other political actors.	H3c: The higher the party momentum is, the more likely a party is to have a lower risk score.
H₄: Party extremism	H4a: The more ideologically extreme a party is, the more likely it is to be risk-seeking in its focus on image dimensions.	H4b: The more ideologically extreme a party is, the more likely it is to attack other political actors.	H4c: The more ideologically extreme a party is, the more likely it is to have a higher risk score.
H₅: Choice of communication channel	H5a: In their manifestos, parties are more likely to be risk-avoidant in their focus on image dimensions.	H5b: In their manifestos, parties are less likely to attack other political actors.	H5c: In their manifestos, parties are more likely to have a lower risk score.

3.3.2. Control variables

In addition to formulated hypotheses, we also expect the country factor to play a role in the choice of image strategies. Germany and Switzerland, while geographically close, have two separate political histories and cultures. Germany is a representative democracy, while the Swiss system has elements of direct democracy integrated into the representative one. Countries differ in levels of professionalisation, personalisation of politics (Karvonen 2010; Rahat and Zamir 2018), party system composition, and institutional settings. Therefore, the country variable is included as a control, and differences between the two countries are addressed in detail in the next chapter.

Moreover, we include party family as a control variable. For instance, Carraro et al. (2010) argue that political parties from distinctive party families have different risk preferences, which align with their risk tolerance.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the benefits of applying risk aversion theory to understand how political parties choose their image strategies during electoral campaigns. The literature on party competition has typically focused on party positions or policy issues. We aimed to apply existing research to shed light on the decision-making processes related to party image strategies. Risk aversion theory brings an element of uncertainty into party decision-making and highlights the limited capacity of decision-makers to collect and process information. It also extends this framework by emphasising how parties perceive outcomes as gains and losses, and how this affects their risk-taking behaviour.

We established that multiple factors might influence electoral strategies. These can drive parties to make position and policy changes, refocus on specific core issues and values, or emphasise attribute images, such as competence, in order to regain voter support and restore their valence reputation. We classified non-policy communicative behaviour as being risk-avoidant or risk-seeking. This behaviour influences image strategies regarding the rigid and adaptive components, which parties employ during electoral campaigns. We argued that risk-avoidant parties would focus more frequently on rigid core values and avoid attacking in order to not alienate voters. Conversely, risk-seeking parties may be more inclined to use adaptive images, specifically from the attributes dimension. Additionally, they might be more inclined to attack other actors.

Drawing on existing literature, we constructed hypotheses on the role of five factors in the choice of (1) image dimensions and (2) decision to attack opponents, as well as (3) their interaction, conceived as the risk score. These factors are incumbent status, party size, party momentum, party extremism, and communication channel. Additionally, we argue that belonging to a specific party family, as well as national differences in political and electoral context and institutional settings may influence parties' risk strategies. The following chapter will cover the selection of country cases for the analysis, the operationalisation of main

dependent and independent variables, data sources consulted, methods used to collect and code the data, and the choice of regression models.

Chapter 4. Case description, methodology, and dataset overview

4.1. Introduction

The current chapter presents and explains the choice of the cases, the data, and the methods used for the analysis. It is divided into four sections. First, we discuss the case selection for the study. We justify the choice of the two countries —Germany and Switzerland— as well as of parties and elections for the dataset. We expand on the argument given in the introduction, and provide essential information on the countries and parties selected.

Second, we present the dataset and discuss the collection and post-processing of the data. The used sources consist of quantitative data, derived from the content analysis of party materials, and qualitative data, acquired from semi-structured interviews with party campaign managers. We then discuss the selection of the content analysis method, its characteristics, as well as coding rules, specifically for coding images and image dimensions, and the coding reliability. We elaborate on the operationalisation of the main concepts and define independent and control variables. Finally, in Section 4.5, we present the data structure, operationalisation of the variables, and discuss regression models.

This work is completed within the framework of a larger research project financed by the SNSF (Swiss National Science Foundation), named "Party strategies and the dynamics of electoral competition in multi-party democracies[20]", which run from 2014 to 2019. Decisions concerning the choice of the case countries, data selection, and its further treatment were made together with other colleagues within the project. Most visual components of advertisement were not included in the coding, such as dressing style, the interpretation of illustrations in texts (where applicable), the choice of colours, etc. Finally, the project data was reworked to fit the purposes of the thesis. This collaboration has made available the large quantity of qualitative and quantitative data not obtainable otherwise. The current thesis is the result of the author's collaboration in this research project at the University of Lausanne.

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[20] Grant number PP00P1-150451.

4.2. Case selection

In this section, we discuss the rationale underlying the selection of country cases. In section 2.2.1, we have shown that the literature on party images and electoral competition focuses mainly on Anglo-Saxon, two-party systems. While the existing research has paved the way for understanding how parties construct and maintain their images, as well as convey them to other actors (parties, media, voters), we still have little knowledge of these mechanisms in the comparative, multi-party, Western European settings. The current thesis aims to fill these research gaps by using data on Switzerland and Germany.

4.2.1. Country cases

Confronted with a theoretically and empirically under-explored object of study, it is crucial to choose cases with enough similarities to be comparable and enough salient variation between them. First, Switzerland and Germany are among the most developed and richest countries in Europe, and they are both stable liberal democracies with a representative system (Kriesi et al. 2008), so they are broadly comparable both economically and socially. Second, they share similar institutional settings, such as the representative, proportional electoral system and decentralised federalism[21]. Third, they have similar multi-party systems that include main party families common to Western Europe, such as Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Greens, Liberals, and the radical right- and left-wing parties. This allows us to construct a representative sample of parties from all party families in each country, which in turn facilitates the between- and within-family comparison. Fourth, both countries have comparably moderate levels of system fragmentation and polarisation[22]. Fragmentation refers to the number of parties in a system, i.e., parties elected to the legislative. Polarisation indicates relative differences in ideological positions of said parties. Finally, elections in both countries happen in the second part of the year (September in Germany, October in Switzerland), meaning that parties start to campaign around the same time, usually during the first quarter.

However, there are crucial differences between the two cases, which make them suitable for comparison in the context of risk aversion theory. One such difference is the competition for

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[21] These qualities are what Gerring describes as "background characteristics" (Gerring 2007, 134).

[22] Switzerland has always had one of the most polarised and fragmented party systems in Western Europe, but after the effects of the 2008 crisis, such countries as Germany have experienced further fragmentation of their systems.

government office, as the openness of competition might influence parties to become more or less risk-averse. Switzerland is characterised by a closed competition structure, while Germany features both open and closed competition elements[23] (Mair 1996, 2002).

In Switzerland, the government composition is relatively fixed due to *the principle of concordance,* where the largest and most influential parties are consistently included in the government (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008, 76). In Switzerland, parties in government do not form a coalition in the traditional sense, and there are no coalition negotiations. Swiss parties generally start their campaigns well aware that they have either a very high or very low probability of obtaining a position in the government, which may lead to different risk-taking behaviours depending on their standing. In contrast, Germany has a more fluid coalition landscape, with most parties having taken part in previous government formations, except for the radical ones (DIE LINKE and the AfD[24]). Governing parties are also required to sign a coalition agreement. While coalitions can be somewhat predictable, there is still room for potential changes in government, which could prompt parties to adjust their risk-taking behaviour. In general, parties might be hesitant to attack each other, given that the attacks might complicate future negotiations. Conversely, parties with "less coalition potential" seem to engage in attacks more often (Walter et al. 2014).

The prospect of obtaining a governmental position might significantly influence party decision-making. Parties may exhibit different levels of risk-seeking or risk aversion based on their current status and chances of participating in the government. Examining the differences between Germany and Switzerland yields valuable insights into the ways in which competition for government office and the presence of effective parties shape risk-taking behaviour in varying political environments.

Germany has a moderately fragmented party system, with several influential parties competing for power. In Switzerland, the party system is more stable, albeit more fragmented, with four major parties consistently sharing power in the Federal Council. However, recent studies have highlighted the increasing polarisation within the Swiss party system (Bornschier 2015;

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[23] Mair defines the closed structure of party competition as a system where there is "little or no change over time in the range of governing alternatives or in the pattern of alternation" (1996, 94), meaning that such systems will have stable governments or predictable changes of governing parties. On the other hand, the open structure of competition means that frequent shifts will be observed, and new parties will have relatively easy access to government positions.

[24] In the 2017 elections, however, AfD was close to participating in forming the 4th Merkel cabinet, causing long negotiations and resulting in the "return" of the Grand Coalition: CDU/ CSU, and SPD.

Hänggli and Häusermann 2015; Konstantinidis et al. 2019; Sieberer and Höhmann 2022). The party polarity index for Switzerland has been on the rise from 2011 to 2015. However, the party fragmentation index has decreased. This might indicate an even stronger division and differentiation between left and right-wing party families. As more parties are likely to become ideologically far from the centre, parties may be incentivised to distinguish themselves from their counterparts.

Additionally, there are country-specific differences in party extremism. In Switzerland, the last two decades of the political process were shaped by strong radical right parties, like the Swiss People's Party (SVP). On the contrary, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) had its first electoral success only in 2017, which is out of the scope of the present work. The Green and Social Democratic parties have had a long history in both countries. The same can be said about the German radical left party, The Left (DIE LINKE), which is also much stronger than similar left-wing parties in Switzerland. Several small centre parties are key players in the Swiss party system, while Germany has only one such parliamentary party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Finally, campaign regulations vary for Swiss and German parties. In Germany, all parties receive funding from the federal government, and the amount varies according to their electoral performance at state, federal, and EU levels. There is, however, no cap on the potential sum for private donations. All donations over 50,000 euros must be reported to the Parliament, which makes the donations and names of companies or organisations public. Municipal and state laws allow parties to put up outdoor campaign materials, such as billboards or posters, only a few weeks before the election day. Moreover, parties are allocated free TV time on state channels (again based on their electoral performance) only one month before the election day. Parties can purchase additional time on private TV channels, but the duration of the video is limited.

In Switzerland, political advertisement is prohibited on TV and radio, but is allowed in other media, such as newspapers, posters, etc. Moreover, at the time of the 2011 and 2015 elections, Switzerland was the only country of 47 member states of the Council of Europe that has not yet drafted a law on the federal regulation of political parties' financing[25]. Parties were not obliged to disclose neither donations nor donors, and there was no cap on the amount that could

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[25] On the cantonal level, several cantons do have regulations regarding the party financing, such as Geneva and Ticino (e.g., Rosset 2016).

be donated, which greatly decreased the transparency of the campaign process. However, as of June 18, 2021, the Parliament has finally passed an indirect counter-proposal to the popular initiative, fuelled by the parliamentary left-wing group, led by the Social Democrats (SP). The new changes have come into effect on October 23, 2022.

Table 4.1. Main institutional characteristics of the selected countries.

	Switzerland	**Germany**
Electoral system	Proportional with preference vote and open list	Mixed-member proportional
Campaign regulations	Partially regulated; no TV advertisement; no obligation to disclose donations	Regulated; federal financing of parties; limitations on political advertisement; transparent donations
Elections analysed	23.10.2011 18.10.2015	27.09.2009 22.09.2013
Party system		
Parties in the parliament[a]	**SVP** (54 / 65) **SP** (46 / 43) **FDP** (30 / 33) **CVP** (28 / 27) **GPS** (15 / 11) **GLP** (12 / 7) **BDP** (9 / 7) **EVP** (2 / 2) Lega (2 / 2) MCG (1 / 1) PdA (0 / 1)	**CDU/CSU** (239 / 311) **SPD** (146 / 193) **FDP** (93 / 0) **DIE LINKE** (76 / 64) **Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen** (68 / 63) **Alternative für Deutschland** (0 / 0)
Party system polarisation[b]	4.04 (2011) 4.91 (2015)	3.34 (2009) 3.72 (2013)
Party system fragmentation[c]	5.57 (2011) 4.92 (2015)	4.83 (2009) 3.51 (2013)
Government type	Decentralised federal, concordance government	Decentralised federal, coalition government
Competition for government	Closed	Open

Note: (a) Not all parties were taken for the final analysis. The parties in bold were selected for the content analysis. The number of seats in each election are presented in the brackets; (b) Source: Dalton (2008); (c) Party system fragmentation is measured by the Laakso-Taagepera (1979) index "Effective number of parties".

Switzerland

Switzerland has a bicameral parliament, comprising the National Council (lower chamber), and the Council of States (upper chamber). The National Council serves to represent the people, and 200 members are elected by popular vote every four years. The number of representatives a canton has depends on the size of its citizen's population and varies from one (in six cantons) to thirty-five (Zurich)[26]. At least one seat is guaranteed for each canton. The Council of States represents cantons, where 46 members are also elected by popular vote every four years. Except for six 'half-cantons', which send one representative, all cantons send two representatives.

Though the Swiss party system is defined by its high polarisation and fragmentation, these factors did not contribute to any significant instability. Most likely, this stability is observed due to the "magic formula" of concordance government implemented in the 1950s (Ladner 2001; Burgos, Mazzoleni, and Rayner 2009; Wolff and Karagök 2012). However, there were several systemic shocks that have threatened this stability. For example, the success of the Swiss People's Party has influenced the development of the radical right (Bernhard 2005). Having heavily reorganised itself, especially in terms of professionalisation (Bailer and Bütikofer 2015), the SVP quickly became the biggest party in the country. They won 28.9% of votes in 2007, the largest share for any party in the country, and the elections in 2015 resulted in an even bigger share of the vote (29.4%) and 65 seats in parliament. The 2015 success is often attributed to the EU refugee crisis, the topic being a core issue for the SVP. Third, the emergence of smaller, but successful, centrist parties, like the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP)[27] or Green-Liberals (GLP), only contributed to the growing system fragmentation (Bornschier 2015).

Being a consensus democracy with a concordance government (Vatter and Stadelmann-Steffen 2013) means that informally only parties with the largest electoral share (in this case, four parties) are eligible for seven government office positions, even though it is not a legal rule. The three largest parties hold two places each, and the fourth-largest party holds one. However, during the period of the research, between 2011 and 2015, there were five parties represented in the government. Based on their electoral share, the Swiss People's Party was entitled to two seats, but because of internal conflicts and the expulsion of the Federal Councillor Eveline

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[26] In 2011, Zurich had only 34 seats. The allocation of seats is recalculated every four years based on cantonal population size.
[27] The success is relative for the BDP, as they have already disappeared as a separate party by merging with the CVP into the new party.

Widmer-Schlumpf[28], the party lost one seat in 2008 to the newly formed Conservative Democratic Party (BDP).

Some background information on the event: since the 1990s, the SVP has been pursuing a right-wing policy under the intellectual leadership of Christoph Blocher. Following Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf's election to the Federal Council (while Blocher was not re-elected, even though the party presented him), the party demanded her resignation. When Widmer-Schlumpf refused to resign, the national branch pressured the Grisons branch to expel her. Instead, the branch supported her, and itself was expelled from the national party, as the national section of the SVP does not have the power to exclude individual members.

A Swiss Citizens' Party (*Bürgerliche Partei Schweiz*) was established, but later changed its name to the Conservative Democratic Party (*Bürgerlich-Demokratische Partei*). Moreover, a then-SVP Federal Councillor Samuel Schmidt was also expunged by the cantonal SVP Bern, being no longer viewed as the part of the party. Finally, several SVP members have also split off from the party in the canton of Glarus and founded the new party, BDP Glarus. The national section of the party, BDP Switzerland, was founded on November 1, 2008, again in Glarus. In the 2011 Swiss parliamentary elections, the BDP ran for the first time on the federal level and received 5.4% of the popular vote, thus securing nine seats in the National Council. Their only Council of States member, Werner Luginbühl from Bern, was re-elected on the second ballot.

Germany

Germany has a bicameral parliament, comprising the *Bundestag*, the lower chamber, and the *Bundesrat*, the upper chamber. The elections for the *Bundestag* are held every four years by popular vote. Members of the *Bundesrat* are not directly elected, but are delegated by German *Länder* governments. The number of seats is allocated based on a degressive proportionality, assuring that smaller states have more votes than a standard proportional distribution could grant. The minimum is three seats, and the maximum is six.

The rule of 5% threshold resulted in a historically lower level of German party system fragmentation, compared to the Swiss one. For a long time, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Western Germany had a two-and-a-half party system, with two big parties, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) plus the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) and the Social

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[28] Her more moderate position conflicted with the general line of the SVP.

Democratic Party (SPD), followed by a smaller Liberal party, the Free Democratic Union (FDP). In 1983, the newly created Green party quickly became a parliamentary player. Until 2017, there was no radical right-wing party that was sufficiently organised to achieve parliamentary representation on the national level. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) had won 10% of votes in 2017, after almost passing the electoral threshold in 2013. On the other side of the spectrum, the Left Party (DIE LINKE) represents left-wing populism, or democratic socialism (Nordsieck 2020).

In conclusion, the comparison of Switzerland and Germany provides us with enough similarities and dissimilarities to effectively apply the risk aversion framework. On one hand, they are both Western European democracies with multi-party systems, where all major party families are represented in the parliament. Both countries are decentralised federal states, with a bicameral legislative branch and a proportional electoral system. However, Switzerland has a more ideologically polarised, more fragmented party system, and a closed competition for government, while Germany has a less polarised and less fragmented system, with an open competition for government. The rules of electoral campaigns also vary: in the chosen timeframe, Switzerland did not have federal regulations on the financing of political parties, while Germany had an established law that forced parties to disclose their donations. German parties are allowed to campaign on the TV and radio, while Swiss ones are not. Overall, these factors create enough country-level variation to expect differences between the countries in terms of their strategies in relation to their self-presentation and risk attitudes.

4.2.2. Party cases

The current work focuses on national elections, or 'first-order' elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). National elections receive major attention from the media, parties, and candidates on one hand, and from the scholars on the other. Overall, national elections provide the appropriate context for the analysis of electoral campaigns, strategies, and the role of images. While national elections are the most important for many countries, it is not exactly the case in Switzerland (Golder et al. 2017; Schakel 2013; Schakel and Jeffery 2013; Selb 2006). Cantons have a high level of autonomy from the national government. The political agenda is 'regionalised' and national sections of parties are relatively weak, compared to cantonal sections. Traditionally, national elections in Switzerland have been regarded as '26 cantonal elections', although most of the parties have recently seen a rise in nationalisation in electoral

results (Bochsler et al. 2016), or in other words, how evenly the electoral success of a party is distributed across its territory (Caramani 2004; Bochsler 2010). However, Swiss parties have also experienced a rise in nationalisation in terms of campaign strategies, or coordination of national campaigns (Bühlmann et al. 2016).

Bigger parties, like the Swiss People's Party (SVP), have been more "nationalised" than other parties for a longer period. The Liberal-Radical Party (FDP) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP), for example, have increased their level of nationalisation between the 2011 and 2015 elections, while the Conservative People's Party (CVP) and the Green Party (GPS) have decreased it. Higher levels of nationalisation, i.e., similar success in the cantons and centralised campaigning, could indicate that regional parties are more likely to follow party image strategies developed by the party at the federal level. Therefore, while some variation is expected, it is the decision-makers of national parties (or a party congress with the decisive vote of the party president) who decide on the overall party image strategy[29].

Comparative research on images, image strategies, as well as party brand identity or other related topics is limited. Studies focus either on one country (Smith and French 2009 on UK party brands; MacDonald et al. 2015 on Irish party brand equity) or one party (Marland and Flanagan 2013; Dean et al. 2015). Moreover, such studies employ only one type of data, either quantitative or qualitative. This work aims to fill in the gap by choosing two consecutive elections and (most) parliamentary parties from two countries. For Switzerland, elections of 2011 and 2015, and for Germany, elections of 2009 and 2013 are selected. While this time frame does not allow for a full-scale temporal analysis, it can still uncover the changes (or lack thereof) in image strategies between the two elections. The rationale for selecting this time frame is discussed later in the chapter, but the main argument is that these elections in both countries are the last ones to be less focused on social media campaigning. For example, in 2011 only the SVP and the Social Democrats (SP) had an active Facebook page, while in 2009 all German parliamentary parties had a Facebook page and were mostly reposting links to their press releases.

The next step is the choice of party cases. For both countries, most parties that were elected to the parliament are included in the final selection. Smaller Swiss parties that gained significantly less representation, like the Swiss Party of Labour (PdA), *Lega*, the Federal Democratic Union

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[29] This is supported by the evidence from interviews, where most interviewees have indicated the decision-making process before and during electoral campaigns.

(EDU), the Christian Social Party (CSP), *Solidarités*, were omitted. In case of Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) was included for the 2013 elections, even though the party did not pass the 5% threshold. This is done in order to have at least one party representing a party family in each country.

Swiss parties

For Switzerland, eight parties, both major and minor, were chosen. The smallest parties that ran for office only in one canton were excluded: for example, *Lega di Ticino* in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino, and the *MCG* (Geneva Citizens' Movement) in Geneva. These parties are regional, and their inclusion will not reflect the national electoral campaign. Moreover, the Swiss Party of Labour, PdA, was also omitted due to its relative insignificance (less than 1% vote share and only 1 seat), especially compared to the German DIE LINKE. Finally, the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland serves as the leader of the left-wing coalition. It is also ideologically more left than the German SPD. Therefore, including another, even more extreme left party in Switzerland was deemed to be unnecessary. The final selection includes eight parties: the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP), the FDP–The Liberals (FDP), the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP), the Green Party (GPS), the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), the Green Liberal Party (GLP), and the Evangelical People's Party (EVP).

The SP, the FDP, and the CVP are the oldest parties in the system. They were established in 1888, 1894, and 1912 respectively. The SVP was merged in 1971 from the Party of Farmers, Traders, and Independents (BGB) and the Democratic Party, being established as early as 1910. It underwent significant changes in the 1990s, becoming the most powerful party in the parliament in the 2000s. As of 2019, its popularity somewhat dropped, though it still possesses 25.6% of votes and 26.5% of seats in the National Council. The FDP–The Liberals were formed in 2009 as a merger of the Free Democratic Party (est. 1894) and the Liberal Party (est. 1912). The Liberals have a more than a century-long history, but the creation of this party under a new brand might have called for new image strategies. The Green Party was founded in 1983, around the time when similar parties were emerging in Europe as a response to growing ecological concerns. The Evangelical People's Party is another old party, being established in 1919, and since then, has a small but stable support among the Swiss electorate. Finally, there are two relatively new parties in the system since 2007, the Green Liberal Party and the

Conservative Democratic Party. The former was founded by ex-Green, more market-oriented politicians, and the latter was a more moderate centre-right splinter group from the SVP[30].

German parties

In Germany, all five parties that were elected to the parliament (2009 and 2013 elections) are included in the selection, with the addition of the radical right-wing party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), due to its recent and constant rise. Two conservative parties, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU), are combined into one case because on the federal level, these two parties often have a joint campaign, and the CSU does not have any activity beyond Bavaria. Other parties are the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), and the Left Party (DIE LINKE). The high levels of party system fragmentation, discussed above, mean that no single party can win a majority, so parties have to establish coalitions to form a government.

Founded in 1863, the SPD is the oldest party in Germany and the only party that existed before the WWII. The CDU and the FDP were established after the war in West Germany in 1945 and 1949, respectively. The Green Party was a merger of West and East German parties after the reunification in the early 1990s; its West predecessor was founded in 1980. The Left Party was created in 2007 by merging the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), which makes them the descendant of the ruling East German Marxist-Leninist Party. Finally, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) was officially founded in 2013 and is currently the youngest party in the parliament. It is known for its connections with the extreme right and neo-Nazi movements and is of particular interest to researchers because of the historical influence and system challenges that this party represents to the German system (Arzheimer 2015).

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[30] In January 2021, after significant losses in the 2019 elections, the BDP merged with the CVP to create a new party, *Die Mitte*.

Table 4.2. Parties selected for the study.

Party family [a]	Switzerland [b]	Germany
Left / Social Democratic parties	Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz SP/ Parti socialiste suisse)	Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands SPD) The Left (DIE LINKE)
Green parties	Green Party of Switzerland (Grüne Partei der Schweiz GPS / Les verts – Parti écologiste suisse)	Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen)
Christian Democratic parties	Christian Democratic People's Party of Switzerland (Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz CVP / Parti démocrate-chrétien) Conservative Democratic Party of Switzerland (Bürgerlich-Demokratische Partei Schweiz BDP / Parti bourgeois démocratique suisse) Evangelical People's Party (Evangelische Volkspartei der Schweiz EVP / Parti évangelique suisse)	Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union (Christlich-Demokratische Union / Christlich-Soziale Union CDU/CSU)
Liberal parties	FDP.The Liberals (FDP.Die Liberalen FDP/ PLR.Les Libéraux-Radicaux) Green Liberal Party of Switzerland (Grünliberale Partei glp / Parti vert'libéral) [c]	Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei FDP)
Radical right-wing parties	Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei SVP/ Union Démocratique du Centre)	Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland AfD)

Note: (a) It is worth noting that chosen categories for party families do not follow the "traditional" repartition (e.g., separating between Social Democrats and left-wing parties). This was primarily done so that there would be at least one party per party family. (b) We include both German and French party names, and as can be seen, some names do not match if translated to English. The Social Democratic Party is the Socialist Party in French, the Green party includes the "ecologist", and the Swiss People's Party is the Centre Democratic Union, which is wholly different and makes them "sound" more centrist than they actually are. (c) Discussion on whether the Green Liberal party should be considered green or liberal is presented later in this chapter.

4.3. Data selection

The largest part of the data for the present thesis was collected within the SNSF project. It consists of two parts: (1) quantitative data, based on the content analysis of the parties' campaign texts, and (2) qualitative data, comprising the interviews with party campaign managers. Target interviewees were identified as party managers who were at the time (2013 in Germany, 2015 in Switzerland) responsible for the program and content development of electoral campaigns. The rest of the data, specifically for the independent and control variables (incumbency status, party size, party momentum, party extremism, party family), was collected by the author from the secondary sources outside of the project scope.

4.3.1. Textual versus visual electoral communication

Electoral campaigns are tightly linked to visual messages, such as posters and advertisements. Visuals carry non-verbal information on the intentions of parties and candidates. For the latter, appearance can sometimes be even more crucial than what they have to say (Parry-Giles 2016). However, in the framework of the current thesis, visual components are not considered. This is done for various reasons: (1) to make sure the research is applicable, (2) to avoid confusion in understanding, and (3) because of limited resources.

Firstly, this work seeks to fill in the literature gap on the analysis of the textual sources of the party image. There is already plentiful research on the visual components of electoral campaigns, especially in the field of political marketing. Textual components are either less researched in relation to images or are not analysed comparatively.

Secondly, a certain ambiguity exists in interpreting the visual information. Categorising visual and textual images together, as in the case of coding the appearance of a candidate, could potentially be influenced by a subjective perception of the coder. Consider an example: two candidates, both female, one wearing a dress, with a fit and young appearance, the other is older, dressed in a costume. How would we code their appearances and which categories would be used – age, dressing style, fitness level, agreeable looks, perceived competence? The same is true for parties: the portrayal of voter groups or values might turn out to be similar for ideologically distant parties: how does one visually portray support of "ordinary people"? Operationalising the visual information in an unequivocal way, especially when it comes to

images, is a methodological challenge. Such a challenge is beyond the scope of the current thesis.

Finally, even if we could find a way to efficiently (i.e., in a reproducible way) operationalise the visuals, it would take significantly more time and effort to collect and analyse both textual and visual data, and then find a way to represent them in the dataset. Therefore, while we find it a commendable initiative for further research, visual data is omitted from the current work.

4.3.2. Quantitative data: choice of communication channels

This thesis draws on the textual content that parties produce during the electoral campaign, such as manifestos and press releases. In general, parties possess numerous tools to convey their image to the audience, such as advertisements, social media, posters, direct mailings, personal meetings, etc. Several factors have influenced the choice of communication channels. First, as a research team, we wanted to be coherent in our choices, have at least two different sources of data (although advertisements were also collected for the project), and meet the goal of feasibility. The amount of data for coding was meant to be representative, but reasonably so to be coded and analysed, regarding the time and resources constraints. Moreover, social media did not play a sufficiently important role in the electoral years chosen for the project. Verifying parties' Facebook groups showed that most of them did not have an online presence prior to 2009. Therefore, we have opted out of social media data and addressed more traditional sources. This still allows us to have an extensible comparative framework for parties and countries in question. It is rarely done due to the vast number of resources it takes.

Manifestos are the most popular source of data for campaign and communication research. For example, the Comparative Manifesto Project aims to analyse the programmatic representation, issue salience, issue positions, and ideological stances of parties (Budge 2001; Budge et al. 2001). They are also the most comprehensive and are meant to represent the whole party and not individuals or separate party factions (Dolezal et al. 2012; Pogorelis et al. 2005). Manifestos are generally stable over time (Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009), which allows us to analyse which components (e.g., image dimensions or image frequency) remain stable and which might potentially have changed between the two elections. However, we do not expect most of the components to be different between electoral campaigns.

Table 4.3. Party manifestos' length in pages and the number of core sentences (in parentheses), Switzerland and Germany.

Switzerland			Germany		
	2011	2015		2009	2013
SVP	20 [a] (455)	200 (1635)	CDU-CSU	94 (1602)	128 (2526)
SP	12 (486)	12 (440)	SPD	94 (3139)	120 (3831)
FDP	20 (608)	3 (372)	FDP	86 (2507)	104 (2751)
CVP	16 (590)	24 (540)	Die Grünen	115 (4279)	337 (5353)
GPS	24 (939)	25 (812)	DIE LINKE	64 (2651)	100 (2882)
BDP	16 (194)	26 (631)	AfD	-	4 (383)
GLP	3 (243)	2 (134)			
EVP	1 (255)	4 (90)			
Note: (a) The length in pages is relative: for example, most Swiss parties include infographics in their programs, while German parties produce manifestos without much visual content. The number of coded core sentences is indicated in the brackets.					

The length of party manifestos varies remarkably across party families, countries, and elections. On average, Swiss parties issue much shorter programs than German ones. In Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is an outlier, with a 200-page program for the 2015 elections[31]. In Germany, parties are more or less coherent in the length of issued programs for each election, although the 2013 Green party manifesto, 337-page long, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) manifesto, 4-page long, represent two extreme cases. Furthermore, smaller Swiss parties have shorter programs, publishing fact sheets (BDP) and overviews of the most important election topics (GLP and EVP).

These differences are due to the nature of information that parties from both countries put into their programs. Swiss parties focus on smaller amounts of issues that they deem essential, while German parties often go into details, describing issues, policies, and ways to implement them.

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[31] In 2015, the SVP did not have an election platform, as they had in previous years. Therefore, the project team has decided to code the party program. For the 2011 elections, the team has opted for a shorter text in order to have a text of the length similar to other parties.

This might also happen since Swiss parties have more opportunities to communicate their policy preferences, notably through referendum campaigns and other voting tools of direct democracy. Closed government formation is yet another contributing factor. However, these differences do not pose problems for further analysis because within countries, party manifestos have approximately the same length for each election year.

Table 4.4. Number of coded press releases.

Switzerland				Germany		
	2011	*2015*			*2009*	*2013*
SVP	27	20		CDU-CSU	57	15
SP	44	29		SPD	116	93
FDP	30	20		FDP	31	5
CVP	42	22		Die Grünen	60	16
GPS	34	30		DIE LINKE	88	14
BDP	13	15		AfD	-	43
GLP	14	15				
EVP	16	5				

Another data source for the dataset is press releases**.** This communication channel is often controlled by parties, although some parties, like the Left Party (DIE LINKE), allow individual candidates to publish press releases on the party website. It is the main product of textual content during the campaign[32]. Press releases may capture the dynamics of the electoral competition before the election day, contain less information than manifestos, and cover ongoing events. Moreover, it creates a good opportunity for parties to convey their image throughout the campaign and address a wider public. Press releases have been used as a primary data source mostly in the research of party agenda and its influence on the media (Haselmayer, Wagner, and Meyer 2017), as well as negative campaigning (Walter and Vliegenthart 2010; Russmann 2017). Parties are more likely to attack other actors in their press releases, and before the mass use of social media, issuing press releases was one of the primary ways to convey negative messages (and consequently negative images).

For the purposes of the current analysis, we use press releases issued two months before elections. Most parties actively campaign across most communication channels in this period, and most press releases are also published within this time span. The documents were either

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[32] At least it was true prior to the increased use of social media.

collected by project collaborators from parties' websites or received from other researchers who had already collected them. This was the case for the 2011 Swiss elections, where the raw data was provided by the colleagues from the National Centre for Competence in Research (NCCR) – Democracy project and then recoded according to the project rules.

On average, German parties publish more press releases than Swiss parties, although Swiss ones are more consistent in the amount they publish from election to election. The 2013 elections in Germany show a strong decline in the number of PRs published, compared to 2009. In Switzerland, these numbers strongly declined only among certain parties (SP, CVP, EVP). The average number per country corroborates the argument: a fall from 70 to 31 (56% decline) on average in Germany, and from 30 to 21 (30% decline) on average in Switzerland. This can be attributed to the increasing role of social media, although several authors treat potential effects of campaigning using social media with caution.

Most notably, scholars claim that politicians use the Internet "rather conservatively and in a non-interactive manner", when discussing campaign events and salient issues (Stier et al. 2018). "Conservatively" means that politicians do not take risks in taking positions online. They appear to be "non-interactive" because they rarely converse with their audience on social media. Facebook groups often serve as a source for the same information shared in press releases (e.g., invitations to events, opinions on policies, commentaries on ongoing events etc.), but it has a broader outreach than party websites. Thus, for the chosen time frame, press releases are still important as a campaign channel of information [33]. Potentially, we are looking at the last elections where Internet campaigning was not one of the most significant channels of communication. The brief overview of Facebook activity shows that parties and candidates in both Germany and Switzerland have greatly increased their online presence and activity since 2015.

Political ads were excluded from the data because there were few observations: only 316 core sentences and 183 images were coded. Compared to the other two sources, the number of images is not sufficient to conduct a significant quantitative analysis. Moreover, political advertisements include a prominent visual component that is not analysed within the current work. Excluding the use of visuals from the newspaper ads or posters will mean that we lose the non-verbal message. This, however, maps out potential future research.

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[33] However, recently, we have seen a rise in the number of politicians, which are actively engaging with the audience, e.g., on Twitter. The question here is whether their strategy is personal or supervised by their party.

4.3.3. Qualitative data: semi-structured interviews

Interviews with party campaign managers, who were responsible for the campaign content at the time of the second elections, constitute the second part of the data. When researching images from the supply side, it is crucial to understand the internal party decision-making process, as well as the main goals and strategies that party campaigners have. Researchers use expert interviews to gain more insight into electoral strategies (e.g., Rohrschneider 2002; Kriesi 2012; Tresch and Fischer 2015), but to our knowledge, there is little research done on the image strategies that includes expert interviews (e.g., McFaul 1994; Plasser, Scheucher, and Senft 1999). The current work seeks to fill in the methodological gap by using the interviews in order to help to understand party image strategy. They are particularly crucial in understanding how parties (i.e., party officials and leaders) identify themselves and how they convey this identity to other actors.

Table 4.5. Interview response summary of political parties in Switzerland and Germany.

Switzerland			Germany	
Did the interview take place? How many people were contacted prior to the interview?				
SVP	No; refused to give an interview		CDU/CSU	Yes; two persons contacted
SP	Yes; one person contacted		SPD	No; indicated they did not have time
FDP	Yes; one person contacted		FDP	No; never responded after a reminder
CVP	Yes; one person contacted		Die Grünen	No; never responded after a reminder
GPS	Yes; two persons contacted		DIE LINKE	Yes; one person contacted
BDP	Yes; one person contacted		AfD	No; gave coordinates of two contact persons; one did not respond, one initially answered, but stopped responding after a reminder
GLP	Yes; one person contacted			
EVP	Yes; one person contacted			

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed after the main part of the content analysis was ready, and project collaborators were able to get first results from the textual data. Based on

the results, as well as the codebook structure, a 20-question survey was created in English[34]; the language of interviews was German. All meetings took place at parties' headquarters either in Bern or in Berlin. Only the interviewer and the interviewee(s) were present in the room[35]. An average interview lasted 45 minutes: some participants had schedule constraints; some were more eager to talk about their strategies than others. All interviews, except for one, were voice-recorded (the participant asked to turn off the recorder as they were not comfortable with it). Project objectives called for party officials who were responsible for developing the campaign agenda and the main message. In some cases, these people were reassigned or even left the party. However, in all cases but one, it was possible to contact and meet them. Face-to-face interviews were conducted between November 2017 and February 2018; a separate interviewer was responsible for each country [36].

Several parties declined the invitation to participate. In some cases, they argued that they "do not trust academics" or refused to discuss their strategies with outsiders, some did not respond to repeated email requests. With most German parties, project members and interviewees ran into scheduling problems, even though parties have agreed to an interview in the first place. For example, the Alternative for Germany representatives were eager to meet with the interviewer and gave contacts of crucial campaign managers, but then stopped answering the emails. In the case of the Social Democratic Party, they responded, but then explained that they were in the middle of coalition negotiation and did not have the time and human resources to spare to talk about the 2013 elections. The other two German parties, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Green Party, did not respond to first and reminder emails.

Swiss parties were more responsive than the German ones. It happened mostly because of the ongoing coalition talks in Germany at the time when most of the interviews were scheduled (late 2017 - early 2018), which created schedule constraints. However, even though there are only two interviews available for Germany (CDU/CSU and DIE LINKE), they can still be used for the analysis, e.g., to compare incumbent and opposition parties' communicative behaviour strategies.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts and covered four main topics of the SNSF project: issues, frames, images, and groups. Additionally, a couple of questions covered the potential

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[34] See Appendix 3, p. 256.

[35] The Evangelical's People's Party was represented by two people: by the current communication (2018) and old (2015) campaign managers. All other parties were represented by one person.

[36] The author herself conducted interviews with Swiss party managers.

use of negative campaigning tools, such as attacking other parties or distancing from particular voter groups. Though there is only one part that directly covers images, responses can be used to uncover how parties identify themselves and decide to convey their image. For example, discussions on issues that parties emphasised during the election can uncover the core values they defend.

4.4. Methodology

In this section, we discuss the research design by presenting the content analysis method. We explain how the method was chosen, discuss the general coding rules, and present the operationalisation of dependent, independent, and control variables. Finally, we conclude the section with the discussion of statistical models and define those that are the most suitable for the data structure.

4.4.1. Content analysis

The research design is based on the principles of quantitative conceptual content analysis. It is supplemented by a modified version of the *core sentence approach* (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 1997; Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2003; Dolezal et al. 2012)*,* which allows us to assign core sentences, rather than full documents, as analysis units. This approach is frequently used to break down complex grammatical sentences down to their essential parts, which, in our case, are the individual image categories [37]. The "core sentence" (CS) differs from a grammatical sentence (GS). A grammatical sentence (GS) can be simple or complex, containing multiple clauses and qualifiers, and follows the syntactic rules of a given natural language (e.g., English, French, German). While a core sentence can, and often does, correspond to a grammatical sentence, it can also span across two or more sentences (e.g., when sentences are connected by such words as "that is why", "because", "thus", etc.). Conversely, it also may represent only a part of a grammatical sentence.

Additionally*, political claims analysis* (Koopmans and Statham 1999) is modified to fit the objective of capturing the political subject (a party) and its image, as well as an occasional object of the image in case of attacks and appraisals. As a result, we achieve the task of coding

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[37] For an in-depth explanation of the core sentence approach and the rules of a proper dataset, see Appendix 2, p. 250.

complex grammatical sentences as claims, statements, or attacks that parties make, and the presence of images in these claims. Therefore, we capture not only the absolute and relative frequencies of the individual image categories but also the choice of dimension and positive / negative dimension, as well as the object of the statement.

The coding scheme of the project required that at least one issue or one image (self-presentation or attack) would be coded in a core sentence. An issue and an image could also be coded together in one sentence, and multiple image categories can be present in one core sentence. Due to the coding rules of the project, only one issue is coded per sentence.

We distinguish between two main types of core sentences: a self-presentation sentence and a depiction one. The first one refers to acclaiming and distancing, and the second one refers to appraising and attacking (see Table 2.1). In self-presentation sentences, an image or multiple images are coded for a party (the subject). In depiction sentences, an image is usually coded for the actor who is being appraised or attacked (the object). Images are also distinguished between positive and negative. However, more complex sentences can exist, where self-presentation and depiction can appear in the same core sentence.

Table 4.6. Examples of core sentences' coding.

Example from text	Image type (Table 2.1)	Coding
BDP—the new force!	Positive adaptive image / Acclaiming	**BDP** (subject) / **new** (positive)
People staying illegally in Switzerland and foreign criminals must be sent back.	Negative adaptive image / Distancing	**SVP** (subject) / **immigrants** [a] (negative)
The Greens fight for the democratic values that will improve people's lives.	Positive identity / Acclaiming	**Die Grünen** (subject) / **democracy** (positive)
Capitalism is incapable of solving the most urgent problems that humanity faces.	Negative identity / Distancing	**DIE LINKE** (subject) /**capitalism** (negative)
The Grand Coalition is incapable of solving real-life issues.	Negative depiction / Attacking	**DIE LINKE** (subject) // **Grand Coalition** (object) / **competent** (negative)
Among the bourgeois parties, the BDP, by its position, is part of the forces oriented towards the future which do not seek salvation in the past as do the FDP and the SVP, which cling to atomic energy.	Positive adaptive image / Acclaiming / Negative depiction / Attacking	**BDP** (subject) / **prospective** (positive) // **FDP** (object 1) / retrospective (negative) // **SVP** (object 2)[b] / **retrospective** (negative)
Note: (a) In this example, the SVP equals immigrants to criminals, which was their frequent electoral discourse during the 2011 and 2015 campaigns. (b) This would be coded as two separate core sentences, with a different object each time, but the same subject and object image.		

The development of the final list of all image categories consisted of the project phase and the thesis phase. Not only has the list been changed several times within the SNSF project, but also it has evolved for the thesis. First, during the project phase, an intuitive list of possible individual image categories within four dimensions was composed before commencing the active coding process. It was later updated various times, when new and frequent categories were encountered. Four dimensions (valence, policy, ideology, and groups) were used, allowing to code up to twelve individual image categories per sentence. Specific rules concerning how to code images were defined for each dimension:

1) Personal or professional traits that self-characterise a political actor;

2) Description of the way political actors approach the policymaking process;

3) References to ideology with three main indicators;

a) a self-description of a party;

b) explicit (positive or negative) references to political values;

c) a description of an ideal society/economy/democracy; and

4) References to seven main voter groups: age, region, gender/sexuality, family, citizenship/ immigration, socioeconomic status (based on income or occupation), and political groups.

During the thesis phase, the results of the coding were reorganised. First, a special category 'other', created to capture categories that did not appear in the project list, was revised, and new individual image categories were added (e.g., prospective / retrospective). Second, we ameliorated the categorisation within image dimensions. To reiterate, attributes dimension refers to the general information that a party conveys about itself. As a part of an adaptive image, it can be a reference to the party's competence, pragmatism, or strategic vision. The core values dimension, representing the identity, addresses the values that parties identify themselves with, such as collectivist or individualistic, universalist or traditionalist, etc. The group appeals dimension refers to the social groups (voters or non-voters) that the party wishes to associate with or dissociate itself from [38].

As discussed before, scholars generally do not follow strict rules when coding images. They establish categories as they deem most appropriate for their research questions and to capture all aspects of the collected data. Thus, names chosen for sub-dimensions and main categories were inspired by the existing literature, but essentially are our own initiative. As a result, the attributes dimension was divided into five main sub-dimensions: communication/ responsiveness, integrity, competence, pragmatism, and strategic vision/ leadership. The core values dimension is divided into the following sub-dimensions: references to the left-right ideological position, individualistic, collectivist, institutional, traditionalist, universalist, economic system-related, and ecology-related [39] values. Group appeals dimension consists of socioeconomic, sociocultural, and political groups sub-dimensions, which are further divided into specific categories: age, region, family, gender, citizenship, income, occupation, status.

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[38] As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 and 3, we do not separate between identity-related and adaptive image-related group appeals in empirical analyses.

[39] See Chapter 2. Moreover, it is worth noting that in the case of core political values, the choice for each category is the author's decision: from a philosophical perspective, one can argue whether the value of solidarity should be identified as a societal or universal value. The categorisation was influenced by the existing research of Rokeach (1973; 1979) and Schwartz (1992; 1994).

Regarding the core values, it is important to highlight the difficulties that were encountered during the coding process, as initially, these were frequently mistaken for issues by coders. As we have established earlier, issues are synonymous with policies, e.g., specific propositions, courses of action, guiding principles or procedures. Parties (or other political actors) are expected to have specific positions on certain issues, normally supporting or opposing a specific policy. Core values, on the contrary, refer to the general world view, or guidelines for choosing how to act on a specific societal or economic issue[40]. The problem of potential mistakes in coding issues and images was solved as follows: first, we have identified core sentences where a "general issue" (i.e., a broad reference to a policy topic[41]) or a frame (i.e., the way a party presents an issue) could be coded. Then, we have verified whether such sentences did not contain an already coded image and whether the general issue was indeed referring to policies rather than values. Consider the following examples:

A. We want equal pay for men and women because we want a just society.

B. We want to live in security. For this reason, we need to stop immigration.

In the sentence A, "we want a just society" can be coded as either a core value (equality) or a frame for the policy of equal pay. In the sentence B, "live in security" can also be coded as a value (law and order) or a frame that justifies stricter immigration rules. Most of these problems were solved during the project phase. During the thesis phase, we have selected core sentences, where a general issue with no position or a specific frame was coded [42], and verified whether issues were coded correctly, and no core values were present. The two examples above, for instance, were recoded from frames to respective images in the core values dimension. While we did not encounter recoding of the general issues that often, we did recode more than 500 core sentences with the frames into core values or attributes.

Table 4.7 presents the final composition of the individual image categories, combined into sub-dimensions, main categories (only for the group appeals) and the three main dimensions. For the group appeals, the list of individual categories is not extensive.

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[40] For in-depth discussion of the coding process and codebook explanation, see Appendix 2, p. 250.

[41] List of the policy topics can be found in Appendix 4, p. 259.

[42] Frames that were checked included "morality", "fairness and equality", "legality, constitutionality, and jurisdiction", "law and order", "quality of life", "cultural identity", "political", "ecological", "nationalistic".

Table 4.7. Composition of the three image dimensions.

Image dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Main categories [a]	Individual coded image categories
Attributes	Communication/ responsiveness		Authentic, close to citizens, empathetic, naïve, respectful, open-minded, rich in tradition
	Integrity		Honest, moral, reliable, transparent, committed, consistent
	Competence		Competent, successful/ influential, experienced, new, incumbent
	Pragmatism		Pragmatic, communal interest, independent, democratic, policy-oriented
	Strategic vision		Election politics-driven, ideology-driven, self-interests, special interests, voter promises-driven, prospective, retrospective, leadership, policy-oriented
Core values	References to the ideological position		Left, right, social, extreme left, extreme right, centre, centre-right, populist
	Individualistic values		Individual responsibility, individual self-determination, liberal (society)
	Collectivist values		Community, diversity, equal opportunities, equality and fairness, the people [b], solidarity, tolerance
	Institutional values		State and law, limited/protective government, pro-European, anti-European, security and law, liberal, conservative, progressive
	Traditionalist values		Traditional values, Christian values, cultural values, nationalist
	Universalist values		Freedom, democracy, human rights, human well-being, tolerance, pacifism
	Economic system-related		Liberal (economy), capitalism/ consumerism, anti-capitalism, social economy, neoliberal, economic liberty
	Ecology-related		Ecological, sustainable

Note: (a) Main categories are included only for group appeals, as other dimensions do not have the same structure. (b) Here, "the people" image included references to "everyone", whereas "the people/ nation" in the subdimension of "Political groups" (see below) explicitly refers to "all citizens", "people of the nation".

Image dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Main categories [c]	Individual coded image categories
Group appeals	Sociocultural groups	Age	Young people, old people, middle-aged people
		Region	Country, city/ countryside, region/ canton, language region
		Family	Traditional families, alternative families, single parents
		Gender	Women/ men, LGBTQ community
		Citizenship / Immigration	Refugees, immigrants, people with immigrant background, own citizens
	Socioeconomic groups	Income	Poor people, rich people, middle class
		Occupation	Employers/ Firms, employees, SMEs, farmers, doctors, other sociocultural professions
		Status	Economic elites, homeowners, tenants, consumers, criminals, victims, taxpayers
	Political groups		Ordinary people, the people/ nation, political elites
Note: (c) Main categories are included only for group appeals, as other dimensions do not have the same structure.			

4.4.2. Reliability of the content analysis

Eight human coders were involved in the coding process of the data. The coding of Swiss and German data was done by the project leader and three PhD students, either in French (Swiss data) or in German (Swiss and German data). At the beginning of the project, a codebook was created. Several coding rules and guidelines were changed and corrected during the coding process, especially for images. Multiple team discussions and intermediate reliability tests were conducted in order to control the quality of the coding scheme and overall comprehension.

Three separate tests were conducted in order to measure the intercoder reliability for issues, images, and groups [43]. However, there were various difficulties encountered for image coding: the image turned out to be a highly complex variable, prone to interpretations. While one-word images, like 'consistent' (*konsequent/ cohérent*), would be easy to define and code, longer images, especially from the core values dimension, were often an object of discussion and a reason for rule updates.

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[43] Since groups were used for another thesis within the project, it was decided to test them separately. Frames and issues were also tested (not listed here).

With this in mind, it was decided to calculate the IR based on the Fretwurst's Lotus coefficient (Fretwurst 2015). Compared to Krippendorff's alpha, it is easier to calculate and interpret, can be applied to categorical scales, and can calculate the reliability of rare phenomena. This corresponds to the features of the image variable in the dataset. Furthermore, incorrect values, e.g., the same image coded differently, are not taken into calculation. It is a problem when calculating K-alpha because when coders do not agree on the coding value itself, the presence of any value (even incorrect) still contributes to the positive reliability. The procedure ensures the coding accuracy by assigning an expert coder and comparing the results of all coders to their coding. The standardised coefficient corrects for the number of categories used in the coding, as the more categories the coders have to choose from, the smaller is the possibility of uniform agreement. There are more than 100 categories for images and groups combined, and the Lotus coefficient takes that into account.

Table 4.8. Intercoder reliability tests.

Variables	Standardised Lotus
Attributes and values	0.75
Group appeals	0.93

Table 4.8 presents the results of the two tests: images and groups. Intercoder reliability tests show satisfactory results for images [44] (>0.7) and excellent results for groups (>0.9). This result can be explained by the rarity of images in a standard coding test (usually several sampled pages) and interpretation difficulties. Nevertheless, the coefficient also shows the level of agreement on where *not* to code an image so that the results can be trusted.

As previously mentioned, the coding scheme required coding a specific image category where it could be identified in a core sentence. Additionally, the scheme required not coding a category where it does not exist. Moreover, coders were required to consult the text of the coded sentence in case where a category of "other" was coded [45]. This allowed us to create new categories, as well as to code a correct image category in case of an error. The final result is

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[44] Reliability tests were done using the project's framework, meaning that the dimensions of valence, policy, and ideology were tested together, and the group dimension was tested separately. For more information on these dimensions, see Appendix 2, p. 250.

[45] The coding software included a special field where coders put the excerpt of the coded word or text: for example, if no specific category could be coded, it would be put under the "other" category, and a string containing the excerpt of the sentence would be added in order to categorise this image during the cleaning phase.

therefore a synthesis of a collective coding effort during the project and the post-processing of the coded dataset.

4.5. Operationalisation of main variables

In the final section of the current chapter, we discuss the operationalisation of key concepts and factors, present general descriptive information, and discuss suitable models for the dataset structure. The main dependent variables are the three image dimensions – attributes (DV1), core values (DV2), group appeals (DV3) —, the presence of an attack (DV4), and the risk score (DV5). The main independent variables are: incumbency status (H1), party size (H2), party momentum (H3), party extremism (H4), and communication channel (H5). The control variables are country and party family.

4.5.1. Structure of the datasets

Several datasets were created for the analysis purposes. The dataset of the larger project (N = 38,492), which contained all coded sentences with both issues and / or images, was used to create two main datasets. For the first dataset, observations were filtered to include only sentences with self-presentation image categories for the analysis of DV1-DV3 (N = 10,241). This process excluded sentences where no image of the subject actor was present. For the second one, the initial dataset was filtered to include all sentences with either self-presentation or attack images (N = 11,120) in order to analyse DV4 and DV5. As such, sentences with the negative image of the object actor are present in Dataset 2.

Table 4.9. Descriptive statistics of dependent variables.

Dependent variable	Description	Values	Measurement
Attributes (DV1)	Indicates whether an image from the attributes dimension is present	0 – absent 1 – present N_{obs}: 10,241 N_{attr}: 1,869 (18.5%)	Binary
Values (DV2)	Indicates whether an image from the values dimension is present	0 – absent 1 – present N_{obs}: 10,241 N_{vals}: 2,877 (28.1%)	Binary
Groups (DV3)	Indicates whether an image from the groups dimension is present	0 – absent 1 – present N_{obs}: 10,241 N_{grs}: 6,444 (62.7%)	Binary
Attacks (DV4)	Indicates the presence of attacks	0 – no attack (self-presentation) 1 – attack N_{obs}: 11,120 N_{neg}: 1,441 (13%)	Binary
Risk score (DV5)	Indicates the overall risk score of images present in a core sentence	N_{obs}: 11,120 M = 3.87, Med = 5, SD = 2.88, K = 4.35, S = 0.46, Min = 1, Max = 18	Numeric (transformed to ordinal)
Note: For numerical variables, the following abbreviations are used: M – mean, Med – median, SD – standard deviation, K – kurtosis, S – skewness. Min, Max – minimum and maximum values.			

Dependent variables DV1-DV4 are simple binary variables, meaning that 0 indicates the absence of an image or an attack in the sentence, and 1 indicates its presence. The "risk score" variable was coded based on the suggested interaction between image dimensions and attacks. We have argued in Chapter 3 that mentioning one's own values is arguably the least risky choice while doing the self-presentation, while mentioning attributes is the riskiest. Group appeals stand in between, as we do not separate between risk-avoidant appeals to core voters and risk-acceptant appeals to new or swing voters.

Table 4.10. Attribution of risk scores' values across dimensions.

	Attributes	**Core values**	**Group appeals**
Self-presentation	3	1	2
Attacking	4	6	5

We assign risk scores on a simple scale from 1 to 6, where 1 indicates the choice of the least risky image category (i.e., own core values), and 6 indicates the choice of the riskiest image category (i.e., attack on the core values of the adversary). In Chapter 3, we established that when parties decide to attack, risk attitudes appear on an inverted scale, which is illustrated in Table 4.10 [46]. Since multiple images can be coded per sentence, the risk score of a given phrase can surpass the value of 6, although it is a rare occurrence. The maximum coded value in the dataset is 18.

Figure 4.1. Distribution of the risk scores in core sentences, discrete values.

Distribution of risk score values

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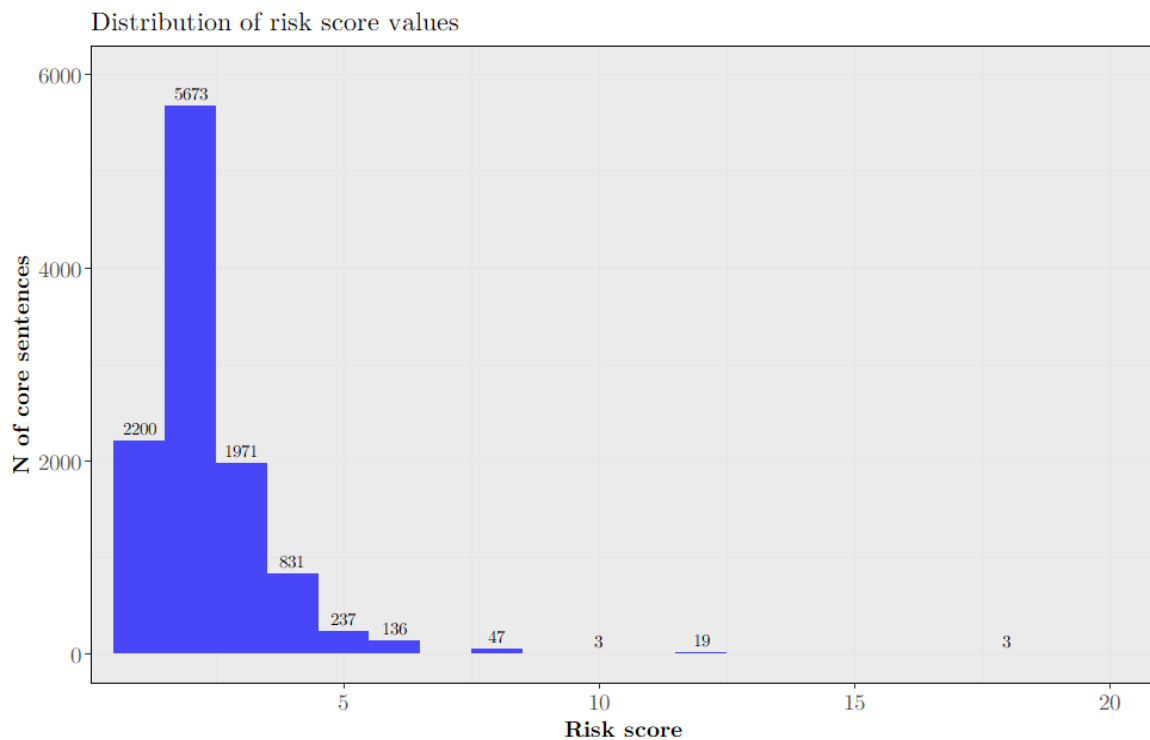
[46] For the sake of simplicity, both conceptual and operational, we do not distinguish between positive and negative self-presentation. However, in Chapter 9, we discuss the potential implications of such a choice.

However, when visualising the distribution of the risk score variable, we observe that it is not normally distributed, thus making the use of the linear regression model potentially unsuitable. Therefore, we have decided to transform the dependent variable to an ordinal scale with four categories, where the value of 1 indicates the lowest risk, the value of 2 indicates low risk, combined values of 3 and 4 indicate moderate risk, and values equal or higher than 5 indicate high risk. Figure 4.2 visualises the new distribution of the risk score.

Figure 4.2. Distribution of the risk score in core sentences, ordinal values.

Distribution of recoded risk score
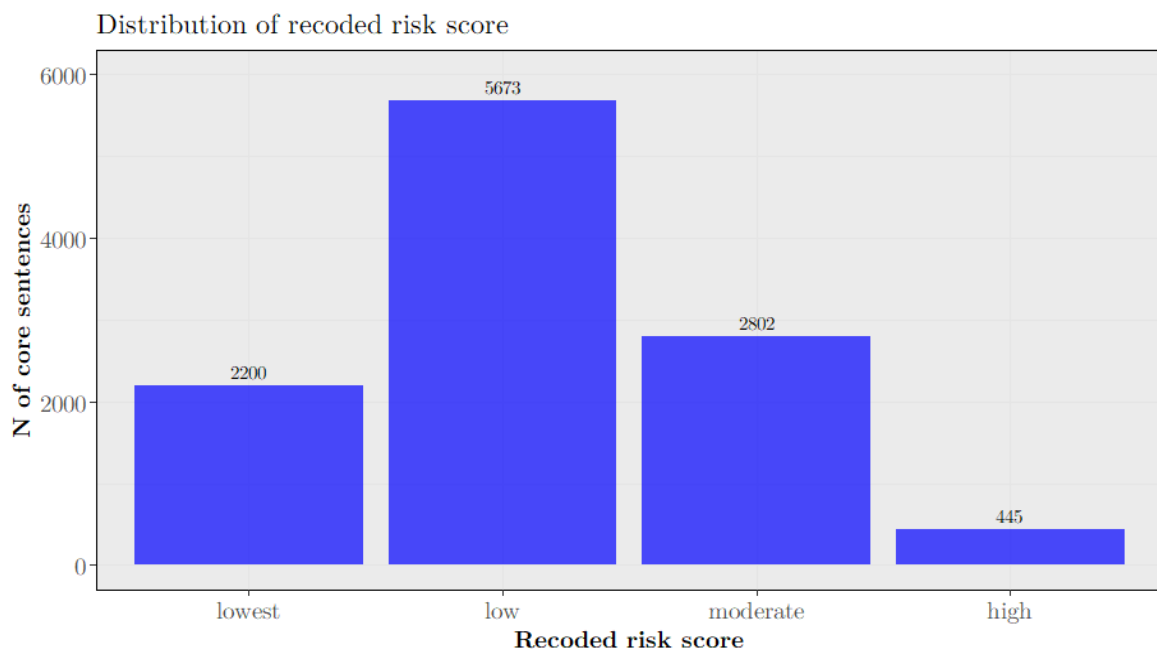
An important point of choosing the names for categories should be discussed. We do not have a "highest" category, but we do have a category for "the lowest". The choice was based on theoretical considerations. A value of 1 indicates that a party highlights its values, which, as we have established, is the least risky choice. A value of 2 can correspond to either two acclaiming values, or to one group. Values of 3 and 4, or what we name as moderate, include more variations but ultimately contain more acclaims than attacks. Finally, the values of 5 and more constitute the "high" category, and with N = 445, it is the smallest category. If we were to create a separate "highest" category, its small size, as well as the addition of a fifth category, will not bring much in terms of empirical analysis. Therefore, the choice of the names is mostly semantic. We are interested to see what incentivises parties to go one step further in accepting more risky images.

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4.5.2. Independent variables and control variables

Table 4.11 provides descriptive statistics of independent and control variables.

Table 4.11. Coding of independent and control variables.

| Variable	Description	Values [a]	Measurement
Independent variables			
Incumbency	Binary independent variable referring to the incumbent status of a party	0 – Not incumbent (47.1%) 1 – Incumbent (52.9%)	Binary
Party size	Independent variable indicating the percentage of party seats in the lower chamber of the parliament prior to elections (normalised [b])	M = 0.148, Med = 0.123, SD = 0.01, K = 2.40, S = 0.60, Min = 0, Max = 0.352	Scale
Party momentum	Numerical independent variable indicating party momentum (normalised)	M = 0.328, Med = 0.363, SD = 0.145, K = 6.59, S = 0.247, Min = 0, Max = 1	Scale
Party extremism	Numerical independent variable indicating the party position relative to the centre (normalised)	M = 1.998, Med = 1.74, SD = 1.13, K = 2.03, S = 0.355, Min = 0.25, Max = 4.08.	Scale
Document type	Nominal independent variable which indicates the communication channel	0 – Manifesto (81.6%) 1 – Press release (18.4%)	Binary
Control variables			
Party family	Categorical independent variable indicating the party family group	1 – Christian Democrats (reference category; 17%) 2 – Left / Social Democrats (30.5%) 3 – Greens (30%) 4 – Liberals (17.5%) 5 – Radical right-wing (5%)	Categorical
Country	Binary variable indicating a country	0 – Switzerland (21%) 1 – Germany (79%)	Binary
Note: For numerical variables, the following abbreviations are used: M – mean, Med – median, SD – standard deviation, K – kurtosis, S – skewness. Min, Max – minimum and maximum values. (a) Statistics are given for the larger dataset used to analyse DV4 and DV5, as values do not vary significantly between the two datasets. (b) Values were normalised for the regression analysis; non-normalised values are presented in the table.			

Independent variables

This section outlines general information on the operationalisation of the independent variables and clarifies certain issues that were encountered in the process. Descriptive analysis of dependent variables is presented in Chapter 5.

Table 4.12. Incumbent status of Swiss and German parties.

	Switzerland	**Germany**
Incumbent	SVP, SP, FDP, CVP, BDP	CDU/CSU, SDP (2009), FDP (2013)
Not incumbent	GPS, GLP, EVP	SPD (2013), FDP (2009), Die Grünen, DIE LINKE, AfD

Incumbent status was coded if a party has participated in the government formation prior to the analysed elections. It is crucial to note that due to the specifics of the Swiss government the values are constant over time: the same parties have participated in the Federal Council in both elections.

Table 4.13. Values of party size variable as seat proportions, Swiss parties.

	2011	**2015**
SVP	0.31	0.27
SP	0.215	0.23
FDP	0.155	0.15
CVP	0.155	0.14
GPS	0.1	0.075
BDP [a]	0	0.045
GLP	0.015	0.06
EVP	0.01	0.01
Note: (a) Although the party was a splinter from SVP, it was newly elected only in the 2011 elections.		

Table 4.14. Values of party size variable as seat proportions, German parties.

	2009	2013
CDU-CSU	0.375	0.384
SPD	0.368	0.235
FDP	0.101	0.051
Die Grünen	0.091	0.109
DIE LINKE	0.090	0.122
AfD	0	0

Party size was calculated as a proportion of a party's total seats in the parliament prior to the election. The reason why the proportion of total seats is chosen over the vote share goes as follows. The Swiss parliament has a fixed number of 200 seats, while the German parliament had 602 and 622 seats prior to the 2009 and 2013 elections, respectively. The translation from votes to seats can vary due to the specifics of the electoral system, making seat share a more accurate representation of a party's strength within the given electoral framework. Seat share is crucial for understanding coalition dynamics, as the ability to form or join a coalition depends on the number of seats a party holds. This aspect is not captured by vote share alone, which may not reflect the party's bargaining power and strategic position. This is especially true for Germany, where coalitions are not predetermined[47]. Additionally, seat share provides a consistent metric across different election cycles and electoral systems, even if the total number of seats changes.

Table 4.15. Values of party momentum, Swiss parties.

	2011	2015
SVP	-0.011	0.109
SP	-0.005	-0.021
FDP	-0.027	-0.002
CVP	-0.016	0.041
GPS	0.054	-0.131
BDP	-0.037	-0.146
GLP	0.432	0.022
EVP	0	-0.05

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[47] For more information on functioning of proportional systems, see Pukelsheim (2017).

Table 4.16. Values of party momentum, German parties.

	2009	2013
CDU-CSU	-0.012	0.18
SPD	-0.322	0.14
FDP	-0.041	-0.6
Die Grünen	0.467	-0.25
DIE LINKE	0.008	-0.17
AfD [a]	NA	1
Note: (a) The party was formed a few months prior to the elections, and quickly gained support just under 5%. Therefore, we assume the value of 1 to measure its momentum for 2013.		

In order to measure the **momentum** of a political party, we created a formula that considers the results from previous elections and the average trend from the current polls. In the literature, various approaches are used, but most of them combine the use of previous results and current polls. A study by Jennings and Wlezien (2016) analysed the dynamics of election campaigns across 45 countries and focuses on the relationship between election results, polling data, and the length of election campaigns. Authors incorporate previous election outcomes and current polling trends to assess the party momentum.

To calculate the variable, we collected the data from reputable polling organisations, such as *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, INSA, Forsa Institute, Infratest dimap, GfS Bern*, which provide regular updates on parties' polling performance. We then calculated the average of these polls for the six months leading up to the election, which provided a reliable estimate of parties' recent levels of support. We used the previous election results, obtained from the official election authorities. Specifically, we have used the following formula:

Party momentum = (Current polling average – Previous vote share) / Previous vote share)

This formula calculates the relative change in popularity for a given party by comparing its current polling average with its previous vote share. By dividing the difference between the current polling average and previous vote share by the previous vote share, the formula normalises the difference, giving a percentage change in popularity. This helps to account for variations in the scale of previous vote shares and makes the comparison more meaningful. It is also a relative measure for a given party, since a 2% change will be significantly different

for a party with the 25% share of votes than for one with the 5% share. In other words, the momentum for the first party in this example will be smaller and thus less impactful than for the second party.

Tables 4.15 and 4.16 show that Swiss parties have, on average, lower absolute values of momentum than German ones. Parties can pass from negative to positive momentum, like the Swiss People's Party (SVP), or vice versa, like the Conservative People's Party (CVP), but these changes are not as drastic as they are for German parties.

Table 4.17. Calculated distance from the centre of ideological positions, Swiss parties.

	Extremism level	
	2011	**2015**
SVP	4.08	3.25
SP	2.83	2.88
FDP	2.17	1.88
CVP	1.17	0.5
GPS	3.09	3.13
BDP	1.92	1.25
GLP	0.33	0.25
EVP	0.8	0.25

Table 4.18. Calculated distance from the centre of ideological positions, German parties.

	Extremism level	
	2009	**2013**
CDU-CSU	1.6	1.58
SPD	1.38	1.23
FDP	1.6	1.54
Die Grünen	1.38	1.38
DIE LINKE	3.69	3.77
AfD	NA	3.92

Party extremism refers to the distance between a political party's position and the perceived centre of the political spectrum. The further a party's position is from the centre, either to the left or right, the more extreme it is regarded. This variable is measured on a scale from 0, indicating the closest proximity to the centre, to 5, representing the farthest distance from the centre. The Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) data is used to calculate the variable. The

original CHES data is measured on a 0-10 scale. To compute the variable, the data is transformed to a folded scale where the values are converted to a -5 to 5 scale. The absolute value of each party's position is taken to calculate its extremity. For instance, a party with a position of -2.5 has the same extremity as a party with a position of 2.5. The CHES data is a widely used source in political science research and has been used in various studies (e.g., Hooghe et al. 2010).

Table 4.17 and 4.18 show calculated extremism values for Swiss and German parties for both elections. In Germany, most parties converged to the centre in the 2013 elections, except for DIE LINKE, which became more extreme. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) also enters with the most extreme position. In Switzerland, we observe that the Christian Democratic (CVP, BDP, EVP) and Liberal (FDP, GLP) parties moved closer to the centre in 2015, while the Social Democrats (SP) and the Greens (GPS) became slightly more extreme.

For the quantitative analysis, we have opted to create a categorical variable with three levels: "centrist" (values below 1.5), "moderate" (values between 1.5 and 3.5) and "extreme" (values above 3.5). The choice for "cut-off" points is purely our own decision, as scholars working with the same factor tend to base such points on their research objectives and the data. We argue that since parties do not radically change their positions between elections and generally stay within the same category, it is theoretically more coherent to think in terms of differences between moderate and extreme, or centrist and extreme parties. Small changes in the ideological position might not be captured by the quantitative models. Table 4.19 presents the new categorisation for the parties. We see that except for the BDP, most parties do not shift their positions enough to change categories.

Table 4.19. Three categories of the party extremism variable.

Categories	Parties
Centrist	Switzerland: CVP, BDP (2015), GLP, EVP Germany: CDU-CSU, SPD, Die Grünen
Moderate	Switzerland: SP, FDP, BDP (2011), GPS Germany: FDP
Extreme	Switzerland: SVP [a] Germany: DIE LINKE, AfD
Note: (a) We have decided to classify SVP as a purely extreme party, regardless of its CHES values, as the party is defined my most scholars as a radical right-wing party with an extreme right position (e.g., Bernhard 2016; Giger et al. 2018; Lutz 2016).	

Document type variable shows whether a core sentence appears in manifestos (coded as 0) or in press releases (coded as 1).

Control variables

The following variables were selected as controls: country and party family. These variables can be seen as extraneous, meaning that they can have a potential effect on the images. Although a potential impact was indicated, no specific hypotheses were proposed. For example, there are certain differences in the political context between Switzerland and Germany. In terms of negative campaigning (and, consequently, use of negative images) there has been research that investigated the presence and use of negative campaigning in Germany (Walter et al. 2014) and Switzerland (Bol and Bohl 2015), showing differences between the two. Results indicate German parties engage more often in negative campaigning, so we expect the country's effect to be significant.

Table 4.15. Respective party families of Swiss and German parties.

Party family	Parties coded
Christian Democratic	Switzerland: CVP, BDP, EVP Germany: CDU-CSU
Left / Social Democratic	Switzerland: SP Germany: SPD, DIE LINKE
Liberal	Switzerland: FDP, GLP Germany: FDP
Green	Switzerland: GPS Germany: Die Grünen
Radical right-wing	Switzerland: SVP Germany: AfD

The **party family** variable was coded based on the typology of political parties (Kriesi et al. 2008). Some categories were merged in order to have at least one party for each family. Therefore, there are five final categories coded for this variable: left / Social Democratic, Green, Christian Democratic (including mainstream and small centrist parties, such as the EVP and the BDP), liberal, and radical right-wing parties. Swiss Green Liberals (GLP) are classified as belonging to a liberal party family.

In the literature, the GLP is usually categorised as a centrist party, scoring 5.3 on a CHES 0-10 general scale (Bakker et al. 2015) against the GPS with a position of 1.9. Ladner (2012) compares four Swiss parties — Social Democrats, Greens, Green-Liberals, and Liberals — and finds that candidates from the former three parties show little disagreement on environmental issues and are, in general, striving for a more liberal society. However, when it comes to economic and welfare state questions, there is a clear divide between the left SP / GPS and the liberal GLP / FDP. He also notes that Green Liberal candidates are rather homogenous in their policy positions when compared to the Liberals and the Christian Democrats, even though the party does not have a written party program.

4.5.3. Discussion of regression models

Since there are several dependent variables, one of which (risk score) is analysed on a different scale, several models were chosen for the regression analysis. This section discusses how specific datasets were constructed from the initial dataset (N = …), and presents arguments for the choice of regression models.

Dataset 1 – image dimensions

Our theory calls for the choice of images within the three dimensions, so the first dataset includes all coded core sentences where at least one image of the subject actor (e.g., a party) is mentioned. The total number of observations is N = 10,241. Because the three dependent variables of attributes, core values, and group appeals are binary, we opted for the logistic regression.

Dataset 2 – attacks and the risk score

For the DV4 and DV5, the initial dataset was filtered to include core sentences where at least one image was mentioned, for either subject or object actor. Therefore, the number of observations for this dataset is N = 11,120. For the presence of attacks model, the logistic regression model was chosen. For the risk score, we face the issue of over-dispersion, where almost a half of the core sentences (49.6%) have a risk score of 2.

Dataset 3 – descriptive analysis

For the descriptive analysis presented in Chapter 5, an additional "long" dataset (N = 13,281) was created. In Datasets 1 and 2, the unit of observation is a core sentence, where several images can appear in the same statement. However, to analyse all specific image occurrences within dimensions, we reshaped the dataset to have the individual image category as the unit of observation. This allows us to analyse how parties construct their overall party image by using dimensions, sub-dimensions and individual image categories, as well as the frequency with which parties mention them. This dataset is not used for regression analyses.

Necessity of a multilevel structure?

In preliminary analyses, the use of multilevel data was considered. Multilevel regression design, or mixed-effects regression, is fairly popular in political science literature, especially when it comes to cross-national data. This design is used to account for the potential source of variation on a higher level (Fieldhouse et al. 2007; Dahlberg 2009; Mustillo and Mustillo 2012; de Nooy and Kleinnijenhuis 2013). Electoral studies are a prominent example where such a design can be crucial to obtain reliable results.

However, some scholars specifically warn that multilevel models are difficult to fit, often hard to converge when there are too many random effects (Wilson et al. 2015), and that one should always check whether there is "enough cluster interdependence to justify the use of multilevel modelling" (206, citing McMahon 2006). We have conducted numerous goodness-of-fit metrics and tests, such as AIC, BIC, or likelihood ratio, have proven that the use of the multilevel regression does not yield better results. We suspect that the models did not show higher explanatory power due to insignificant higher-level variation (country) or the model's inability to capture meaningful group-level (party) effects. Furthermore, using "country" or "country-election year" for the multilevel structure did not provide significantly different results, suggesting the added complexity is not justified. None of these models have shown results that were significantly better than a non-levelled regression. Therefore, it was decided that the multilevel model structure would not be a good choice.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in the current work. Firstly, we presented the rationale for choosing Switzerland and Germany as our country cases and detailed data sources. We then discussed the content analysis method, coding process, and operationalisation of images, as well as independent and control variables. The chapter is concluded with the detailed description and discussion of regression models, selected for each dependent variable and dataset.

In the following chapters, we present empirical analyses of our research questions. Chapter 5 deals with the descriptive analyses of dependent and independent variables, as well as looks into interview responses. Chapter 6 analyses the dependent variables related to the image dimensions (DV1-DV3). Chapter 7 deals with the presence of attacks (DV4), and Chapter 8 addresses the final dependent variable of the risk score (DV5).

Chapter 5. Party strategies for self-presentation and their tactical application

5.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the strategic decisions made by German and Swiss political parties regarding their non-policy communication. Our analysis follows the premise of the risk aversion theory and looks into how party image is built and maintained. First, we discuss the possible reasons explaining the choice between policy and non-policy communication strategies by briefly presenting examples from previous elections and using the material collected from the interviews with party campaign managers. More specifically, we are interested in the incentives to use non-policy-based communication. We analyse the frequency of image categories, that is, how often they appear in parties' communication. Additionally, our objective is to uncover the specific image categories that these parties employ to construct their political identities across the three dimensions.

5.2. Strategic choice between policy and non-policy communication

When assessing their chances in the upcoming elections, parties are aware (at least to the best of their ability) where and how they can stand in the electoral race and choose to balance between policy-based or non-policy-based communication accordingly.

For example, the focus on non-policy communication can help move away from policy failures or internal divisions and mitigate potential electoral losses (Scammell 2014). In 2011, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) faced internal strife (Udris 2012). To diminish prospective losses, the party focused on their allegiance to traditional Swiss values and nationalism. They particularly emphasised maintaining Switzerland's independence from the European Union, and taking this position process potentially helped them to preserve their status as the predominant party in the National Council with 26.6% of the vote share. Likewise, the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), a splinter party, among other things concentrated on advancing women and distinguishing themselves as a "new" party. They managed to secure a stable 5.4% share of votes in this election. Both parties may have adapted their strategies to face specific risks from

their recent past, and addressed it in a constructive way by investing in their party image, which might have been an advantageous strategic move.

Emphasising the non-policy communication can simplify a complex electoral discourse and reduce the risk of voter confusion or disengagement. In 2009, German Free Democratic Party (FDP) centred their campaign around defending individual freedoms, civil liberties, and pro-business policies. They discussed complicated topics of economic reforms and taxation in an approachable way and actively stressed their attributes of competence and commitment to these solutions, which potentially struck a chord with voters. The party won its best-ever electoral result of 14.6% vote share (Lees 2012). This might be a good illustration of how the non-policy communication aspect can be crucial, albeit not central to the electoral success.

Moreover, to mobilise core supporters, parties may decide to appeal to shared values or identities (Bolleyer and Bytzek 2013). In the 2015 Swiss federal elections, the Green Party of Switzerland (GPS) prioritised their commitment to environmental protection, social justice, and sustainability[48] instead of focusing solely on the ongoing refugee crisis. They maintained a steady parliamentary presence, losing only four seats, especially considering that environmental issues did not have the highest saliency. In comparison, the Green Liberal Party (GLP) lost five seats from the previous twelve. They have taken the risk to engage with the salient issue of managing the crisis and lost. While this choice might not have been the main losing factor, it could have contributed to underwhelming results.

While charismatic leadership is not a direct focus of this thesis, it may play a significant role in the effectiveness of non-policy-based strategies. For instance, in the 2013 elections the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leveraged Angela Merkel's popularity as a reliable leader to project an image of stability and competence (Debus 2017; Clemens 2018). This tactic proved to be successful, and they attained a substantial vote share of 41.5% without taking on divisive policy positions. On the other hand, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Peer Steinbrück, called for a national minimum wage and greater social spending but could not match Merkel's popularity. While again the electoral results are not influenced solely by non-policy communication decisions, this illustrates the likely risks associated with only issue-based strategies when confronted with a charismatic leader (Wagner and Weßels 2012).

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[48] One might argue that for Green parties (especially niche ones) environmental protection and ecology may be more than just policies or issues, but a value such as responsibility, which will guide the decisions, both individual and social. If we were to apply the definition of the value concept as formulated in Chapter 3, we might find ourselves with a value, not a policy of only combating climate crisis or ecological issues.

Ultimately, image-based strategies can be effective when responding to voter disillusionment (Mudde 2004). In 2013, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) played on highlighting their anti-establishment position and commitment to challenging the political status quo. The party presented itself as a fresh alternative to the traditional parties and as a defender of German interests and sovereignty (Arzheimer 2015). This resonated with disaffected voters, and the AfD expanded their vote share, especially in the later 2017 federal elections by coming third with 12.6% (Schwander and Manow 2017; Schulte-Cloos 2022). In contrast, mainstream parties like the CDU and the SPD continued to focus on issue-based strategies. As a result, they found it difficult to address the worries of voters who saw little variation in policy matters of incumbent parties. Likewise, in the 2011 Swiss elections, the Green Liberal Party (GLP) was a newcomer. Their hybrid approach to establishing their own specific party image and issue positions most likely strengthened the unique combination of environmental concerns with liberal, entrepreneurial values. Thus, they sought to differentiate themselves from both the Green Party and the centre-right parties. This approach, too, appealed to voters who were ready to accept an alternative in the political landscape, and they have come out of the elections with 5.4% of the vote share (Ladner 2012). Furthermore, in parties' communication, we observe that mentioning specific issues and image categories is not mutually exclusive; they often appear together.

Table 5.1. Issue and image presence in core sentences, both countries (row % in parentheses).

		Issue [a]		Total
		Not present	Present	
Image	Not present	-	28251 (100%)	28251 (73.4%)
	Present	1421 (13.8%)	8820 (86.1%)	10241 (26.6%)
	Total	1421 (3.7%)	37071 (96.3%)	38492 (100.00%)

Note: (a) All "empty" sentences (purely factual sentences or direct attacks on other actors without an image recorded) are excluded from the analysis.

We observe that issues appear in most of the coded sentences (although it primarily has to do with the coding rules[49]), and images are more present when an issue is mentioned, in 86% of the cases. This means that policy-based strategies do not mean the exclusion of using images.

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[49] In Chapter 4, we have discussed that a core sentence is coded if an issue or at least one image is present. One grammatical sentence can have multiple issues, and a separate core sentence would be coded for each issue.

The nature of the communication channels analysed here, i.e., manifestos and press releases, suggests that parties will inevitably build their electoral campaign around issues. However, depending on whether they perceive themselves to be in a gain or loss frame, parties should adjust the frequency of mentioning images.

To sum up, we observe that policy and non-policy-based communication are not mutually exclusive. Parties in Germany and Switzerland rely mostly on issues in their electoral campaigns, but they also use image-based strategies. As seen in the examples from recent elections, some parties may have benefited from a well-constructed strategy with a heavier focus on images, such as core values or group appeals. However, the success may depend on the choice of a specific dimension.

5.3. Insights from the interviews: why focusing on the image can be an attractive strategy

The interviews with party campaign managers shed further light on the decision-making process of the parties. Notably, some parties have deliberately chosen to focus on their image rather than highlight issues, and have explained their reasoning for doing so. For example, the Swiss Liberal-Radical party (FDP) interviewee, when asked "What were the most important topics of your previous electoral campaign?" said:

"*We deliberately decided against a topic strategy. [W]e would not take up any issues, but that we would prioritise the values of our party: freedom, public spirit and progress. Accordingly, we didn't build the whole election campaign on topics but on these values, in the sense of an image campaign*" (FDP Interview 2018).

Here, he explicitly defines the 2015 electoral campaign as an "image campaign" based on values. It is worth noting that prior to these elections, the FDP had been experiencing a slow but steady drop in their electoral share for at least two decades. We assume that, having accessed the risks and finding themselves in a loss frame, the party leadership decided to pivot their strategy and focus more on values, which are considered being less risky.

As the interviewee further explains, the election campaign strategy is decided by a small committee comprising the parliamentary group president, campaign manager, party president, and general secretary, which is then approved by the cantonal party presidents. The strategy is made two to two-and-a-half years before the elections, with topics and fine-tuning being done

at least a year before, and any unplanned initiatives after January 1st of the election year cannot be implemented. This indicates that the party is most likely influenced by their ongoing performance and closely monitors the events. Moreover, we note that the strategy itself is decided well before the electoral year, and at least in the case of the FDP, the party appears to be rather rigid in their campaigning once the planning has been done. Besides, it can be noted that the FDP changed its strategy in the 2019 campaign, deciding "suddenly" to focus on the environment, as it became clear that this issue would be pivotal for voters' choices. This decision, however, sparked debates within the party (Ladner 2020).

Most importantly, the interviewee has highlighted a few crucial points. First, he notes that issue-based campaigns are virtually impossible for most of the Swiss parties, mostly because of the fragmented political system:

"The problem is that, as a party, you can no longer set an election campaign issue per se. Anyone who says, especially in a party system as fragmented as Switzerland, that you as a party can put an issue on the agenda, that it will become the most important issue […]. This is only possible in Switzerland with one party, the SVP. All other parties are released from this decision to set the topic". (FDP Interview 2018).

He also continues explaining that the logic of media reporting has changed, so that the "meta level", or external and ongoing events related to a particular issue, not the issue itself, is often discussed. This, according to the interviewee, makes national electoral campaigns based solely on issues no longer possible.

Similarly, the Conservative Democratic Party's (BDP) manager has highlighted the prevalence of "slogan campaigns", which he defined as image-based. He also explained that their first campaign in 2011 was based on constructing their party image as a newly formed party.

Other interviewees did not explicitly specify that they preferred image-based strategies. However, several of them supported the idea that issues are not at the core of their campaigns. The Social Democratic Party's (SP) manager noted that, since there is "*no majority government that can be elected on the basis of their government program*" (SP Interview 2018), the election campaign in Switzerland can never be a purely topical campaign. For her, national elections are not about setting the issue agenda because it can be done in referendums and popular initiatives, but reacting to a broad variety of issues.

We can argue that, for Swiss parties, non-policy-based strategies are far more important than issues in the national campaigns. Party managers have specified that talking only about issues

is not a viable strategy, either because voters do not react to them (as noted by the FDP interviewee), the policy positions are clearer during referendum and initiative campaigns due to clear positions (for or against), or simply because most of the parties cannot set the agenda. This is a crucial finding, since it supports our argument that not only images are essential in electoral politics, but parties also actively implement them.

In contrast, German party managers talked significantly less about images and image-based strategies. The Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) interviewee touched on the topic of competence and being perceived as competent and consistent, but only in relation to policies. However, he mentioned that this perception is closely monitored by surveys, not only for the competence but also for values that are salient among the voters. The idea that voters can be interested in some particular values occasionally is rather surprising. This way of thinking from the party manager might show a more professionalised way to address the electorate, where the party is driven to show plasticity in addressing the "trending", or salient, values. The CDU is the biggest party in Germany, and has been employing professionalised campaigns for a long time. It comes naturally that they will be tailoring their strategies to the existing preferences.

Additionally, *Spitzenkandidaten* and party leaders play a significant role in the German political arena. More explicitly, the CDU interviewee indicated that strategic choices in the campaign will most likely be influenced by the candidate's performance:

"*We always analyse […] the results from the polls, and we can always deduce whether the party is pulling the candidate, or the candidate is pulling the party. […] And depending on [this], the election campaign will also be organised and aligned. […] Since the 2009 election campaign, it has always been [clear] that the top candidate's results were significantly better than those of the party, which led to the focus [on] top candidate or that she takes on a stronger role*" (CDU Interview 2018).

We argue that Angela Merkel, being the focus of the 2009 and 2013 ad campaigns, is a good example of a party campaign being focused on the leader. The party identity, in this case, is restructured around the personality. This has advantages and disadvantages, as the research on the party leaders shows. Holmberg and Oscarsson (2013) have found that these effects vary between countries and elections. Specifically for Germany, they have found significant results for Gerhard Schröder positively influencing the electoral outcome. However, if a party's campaign is solely structured around a candidate or a leader, and they face a scandal during the campaign, this can ruin a party's electoral outcomes (Lupu 2014; Rudolph and Däubler 2016).

This was the case in the 2017 French elections, when François Fillon was implicated in hiring his wife (Jadot et al. 2020; Lees 2017).

Moreover, they argued that the more polarised a party system is, the less important are the effects of leaders. This goes in line with the observed situation in Germany and Switzerland. Swiss parties are more polarised, and values of the polarisation index have been increasing. At the same time, the values have been dropping for the German system[50]. We observe that parties in Switzerland do not consider their leaders or candidates to be as critical in electoral campaigns as they are for German parties. This assumption is supported by the personalisation literature (Rahat and Zamir 2018; Zittel and Nyhuis 2019, 2020).

On the other hand, smaller parties might understand the advantage of building and maintaining their party image rather than focusing on the strong candidate. More specifically, such parties are restricted in the choice of issues they address, therefore limiting the scope of the non-policy-based strategies they use. The Left Party's (DIE LINKE) interviewee, when asked about the most important issues of the campaign, has indicated rather broad policies that resemble core values:

"*So, the central message in the election campaign for the left was social justice. Germany has a massive problem with the social division. [...] The second is the issue of peace, within the political parties we have a certain attitude, which means that we are against the Bundeswehr's attempts at war, i.e., to end them and also reject the policy of permanent rearmament* [here we understand that the military always tries to get funds to prepare for any conflict or threat, a vision not shared by DE LINKE, a pacifist party]. *And the third focus of the election campaign was the fight against the right [-wing parties]*" (DIE LINKE Interview 2018).

While these are three issues, on which the party has clear positions, they are formulated around the two values of social justice and pacifism, and an ideological positioning as anti-right. Furthermore, while talking about the reputation and perceived competence on their core issues, the interviewee highlighted the importance of maintaining the image. Even though he refers to the perceived competence on specific issues, especially those owned by the party, he emphasises the importance of "sticking with things", i.e., with the party identity and reinforcing the party image:

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[50] See Table 4.1, p. 67.

"*Well, the first thing you have to do is maintain an image that has been built up, sticking with things, that means being noticed again and again in public with these issues, both in the Parliament and in people's everyday experience*" (DIE LINKE Interview 2018).

When asked about the balance between highlighting the values and the policymaking, the interviewee indicated the importance of linking policies to the core values:

"*We tried to do both [focus on values and policymaking process], but with an emphasis on the content images, i.e., justice, peace, […], energy transition. Of course, we also tried to clarify that what we are proposing is feasible […] because that is often a reproach that is made against the left that the demands are definitely not feasible, i.e., populist. [Policy-making and values play] a role, but that is not campaign-dominating*" (DIE LINKE Interview 2018).

What is curious in this particular response is that the party manager mentions the energy transition not as an issue or a policy, but as a "content image", next to the values of justice and peace. We argue that such an understanding of ecological or energy issues among parties, albeit non-mainstream, has a specific goal. It appeals to voters who understand ecological and environmental issues not simply as policies, but as values that guide their lives and decisions. There are numerous movements and ideologies that link the socioeconomic structure of the society directly to green politics or even anti-globalisation, such as eco-socialism, eco-anarchism, etc. Within these ideologies, ecology means more than policies and measures, but a very specific individual and social value that we could link to responsibility.

In conclusion, we see that parties in Germany and Switzerland present different reasons as to why focusing on the non-policy-based part of communication might be useful. In Switzerland, parties are aware that policies are frequently discussed "outside" of national elections. Thus, it might be more practical to choose image-based strategies and remind voters what parties stand for and whom they support. In Germany, strong candidates that perform well in polls might be decided as a campaign focus, shifting the focus from the party image to the candidate. However, it is also possible for smaller parties to highlight their core values on which actual policies and policy stances are based. This might be done in order to avoid being labelled as "not feasible", as the example of DIE LINKE shows.

5.4. The prevalence of images across party communication channels

5.4.1. Dataset specifications

As already discussed in the previous chapter, parties in both countries vary in the length of their texts and the number of coded sentences [51]. Swiss parties have significantly fewer coded sentences than German ones, due to lengthy party programs of the latter. Yet, there is not much variation in the number of sentences coded in press releases. Although German parties are more thorough in their programs and might develop them in great detail, they do not differ much from the Swiss ones regarding the press releases. The amount of information, i.e., coded core sentences, is roughly the same [52].

5.4.2. Frequency of self-presentation images in parties' texts.

In this section, we briefly describe the prevalence of coded image categories in the core sentences. More specifically, we are interested in self-presentation images, as these constitute the three dependent variables of image dimensions. We show how image occurrence varies across countries, election years, and document types.

Table 5.2. Overall image count, per country.

		Switzerland	Germany	Total
	No	5912 (73.9%)	22339 (73.3%)	28251 (73.4%)
Image present	Yes	2090 (26.1%)	8151 (26.7%)	10241 (26.6%)
	Total	8002 (20.8%)	30490 (79.2%)	38492 (100.00%)

From Table 5.2, we observe that Swiss and German parties have a similar frequency of images. In Switzerland, the dataset comprises 8,002 core sentences (CS), making up 20.8% of the total dataset. Of these, 2,090 CS (26.1%) include an image. In Germany, the dataset is considerably

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[51] Recall that core sentences do not exactly correspond to grammatical sentences. One grammatical sentence can be split into two and even more core sentences if there are more than one object, e.g., multiple actors that are being addressed, or multiple issues.

[52] This is likely because coding was done only over a part of press releases, and only 15 first lines were coded in each text.

larger with 30,490 core sentences, accounting for 79.2% of the total number of coded entries, and 8,151 CS, or 26.7%, contain an image. This difference may be explained by how parties treat manifestos. In Germany, party manifestos include lengthy explanations of the policies across various topics, as well as an in-detail description of how they plan to implement them. In Switzerland, parties rarely discuss specifics, and these documents often represent the outline of the next electoral cycle programme. The data presented in Table 4.3 and 4.4 in Chapter 4 similarly shows that not only Swiss parties have shorter manifestos but also fewer press releases published overall. Nevertheless, we conclude that, in general, the occurrence of images in texts is fairly consistent across the two countries.

Table 5.3. Image count by election year, Switzerland.

		Elections		Total
		2011	**2015**	
	No	2577 (74.5%)	3335 (73.4%)	5912 (73.9%)
Image present	Yes	880 (25.5%)	1210 (26.6%)	2090 (26.1%)
	Total	3457 (43.2%)	4545 (56.8%)	8002 (100.00%)

Table 5.3 focuses on the image counts by election year in Switzerland. The table shows that the total sample size for Switzerland is 8,002 core sentences, with 43.2% from the 2011 election and 56.8% from the 2015 election. In terms of image presence, there is a negligible increase from 25.5% in 2011 to 26.6% in 2015.

Table 5.4. Image count by election year, Germany.

		Elections		Total
		2009	**2013**	
Image present	No	9854 (73.4%)	12485 (73.2%)	22339 (73.3%)
	Yes	3571 (26.6%)	4580 (26.8%)	8151 (26.7%)
	Total	13425 (44%)	17065 (56%)	30490 (100.00%)

Table 5.4 offers a similar picture for Germany. The total dataset size for Germany is 30,490 core sentences, with 44% of CS from the 2009 election and 56% from the 2013 election. In terms of image presence, its rate is remarkably stable, registering 26.6% of coded core sentences in 2009 and 26.8% in 2013.

By examining both countries, we observe that in general, the proportions of image occurrence are consistent across countries and election years. Any existing fluctuations are minor and do not indicate a significant shift. However, in Chapter 4 we have discussed the number of core sentences may vary based not only on the country but also the party and election. Therefore, we want to see whether the re-partition of image occurrence on the party level is similar to the country level.

Table 5.5. Number of core sentences with mentioned images and total number of core sentences, per party and elections, Switzerland.

| | | Elections | | Total |
		2011	2015	
	SVP	69/412 (16.7%)	333/1591 (20.9%)	402/2003 (20.1%)
	SP	103/433 (23.8%)	134/420 (31.9%)	237/853 (27.8%)
	FDP	218/559 (39%)	95/360 (26.4%)	313/919 (34.1%)
	CVP	200/561 (35.7%)	176/529 (33.3%)	376/1090 (34.5%)
Party	BDP	53/169 (31.4%)	206/621 (33.2%)	259/790 (32.8%)
	GPS	155/857 (18.1%)	192/801 (24%)	347/1658 (20.9%)
	GLP	44/214 (20.6%)	29/133 (21.8%)	73/347 (21%)
	EVP	38/252 (15.1%)	45/90 (50%)	83/342 (24.3%)
	Total	880/3457 (25.5%)	1210/4545 (26.6%)	2090/8002 (26.1%)

When examining the party level data, we observe a range of image occurrence rates that are quite diverse, yet generally in line with the national average. For instance, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) shows a moderate increase from 16.7% in 2011 to 20.9% in 2015, aligning relatively closely with the national level. The Social Democratic Party (SP), on the other hand, shows a substantial increase from 23.8% in 2011 to 31.9% in 2015, exceeding the national average. Parties like the Liberal-Radical Party (FDP) and the Conservative People's Party (CVP) demonstrate percentages (39% and 35.7% for 2011, 26.4% and 33.3% for 2015, respectively) that are noticeably higher than the national average, particularly for the 2011 elections. On the other end, parties like the Green Party (GPS) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP) maintain the same percentage levels (18.1% and 20.6% for 2011, 24% and 21.8% for 2015, respectively), which are more in line with the national figures. The Evangelical People's Party (EVP) stands out with a significant increase from 15.1% in 2011 to 50% in 2015; the latter being significantly higher than the national average.

Table 5.6. Number of core sentences with mentioned images and total number of core sentences, per party and elections, Germany.

		Elections		Total
		2009	**2013**	
	Union	457/1646 (27.8%)	613/2473 (24.8%)	1070/3937 (26%)
	SPD	805/2983 (27%)	887/3611 (24.6%)	1692/6594 (25.7%)
	FDP	656/2434 (27%)	816/2709 (30.1%)	1472/5143 (28.6%)
Party	LINKE	458/2426 (18.9%)	663/2789 (23.8%)	1121/5215 (21.5%)
	GRÜNEN	1195/4118 (29%)	1552/5158 (30.1%)	2747/9276 (29.6%)
	AfD	0/0	49/325 (15.1%)	49/325 (15.1%)
	Total	3571/13425 (26.6%)	4580/17065 (26.8%)	8151/30490 (26.7%)

Examining the data on the party level, the Union (CDU-CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) parties experience a decline in image occurrences, although these values are still close to the national figures. On the other hand, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left Party (DIE LINKE), and the Green Party (GRÜNEN) witnessed an increase. Whereas the Left Party stays below the national average, the FDP and the Green Party exceed it, especially in the 2013 elections.

Comparatively, both German and Swiss tables reveal a similar trend of stability in the proportions of image occurrence, with minor fluctuations between elections. However, at the party level, we notice variations, where some parties in both countries align with the national average, while others significantly deviate. This might suggest that the role of images in parties' communicative strategies might be influenced by party specifics.

Table 5.7. Image count per document type, Switzerland.

| | | Communication channel | | Total |
		Manifesto	Press release	
Image occurring	Yes	1372 (30.2%)	718 (20.8%)	2090 (26.1%)
	No	3176 (69.8%)	2736 (79.2%)	5905 (73.9%)
	Total	4548 (56.8%)	3454 (43.2%)	8002 (100.0%)

In Switzerland, we observe that manifestos have a higher image occurrence in 30.2% of core sentences, while press releases stand at 20.8%.

Table 5.8. Image count per document type, Germany.

| | | Communication channel | | Total |
		Manifesto	Press release	
Image occurring	Yes	7430 (28.4%)	721 (16.7%)	8151 (26.7%)
	No	18741 (71.6%)	3598 (83.3%)	22339 (73.3%)
	Total	26171 (85.8%)	4319 (14.2%)	30490 (100.0%)

The data for Germany offers similar values: manifestos exhibit an image occurrence in 28.4% of sentences, slightly lower than in Switzerland. However, the figures for press releases are considerably lower, where only 16.7% have self-presentation images.

When comparing both countries, it is apparent that the general trend remains consistent: manifestos tend to have a higher rate of image occurrence than press releases. However, the gap between these types of documents is wider in Germany than in Switzerland. The distribution of core sentences also differs between the two countries. In Switzerland, core sentences from manifestos make up 56.8% of the total documents, whereas in Germany, they constitute a much larger share at 85.8% of all core sentences.

In sum, we observe that overall, there is a general consistency in the rate of image occurrence in core sentences between Switzerland and Germany. This consistency is observed both at the national level and between elections. While the size and distribution of datasets differ, with

Germany having a substantially larger dataset, the proportions of image occurrences remain fairly stable and similar across the two countries. At the party level, however, there are notable variations in both countries, suggesting that image use may also be influenced by party-specific strategies. Overall, descriptive findings indicate that while there are country-specific nuances, the image occurrence remains relatively stable.

5.5. Focus on image dimensions

In this section, we delve further into the composition of each image dimension mobilised by German and Swiss parties. We first discuss absolute numbers, then relative (percentages) frequencies, as well as each dimension in detail. It is important to note, however, that we look only into the self-description images here. Negative images, or attacks, of other political actors, are addressed in Chapter 7. For descriptive purposes, the total number of observations refers to the number of individual images, not core sentences (N = 13,281). We support our data findings with examples from party texts and interviews, and further link them to the risk aversion theory.

Moreover, we have established that within countries, parties may vary in how often they mention images in their core sentences, we have decided to show the use of image dimensions for parties, not for documents. It is also dictated by the fact that we use party interviews as a support material. Therefore, analysing the use of image dimensions at the party level makes more sense. Finally, in our research framework, although we did not initially hypothesise the exploration of image sub-dimensions, their inclusion could be instrumental in understanding country- and party-level differences that might not be captured in our quantitative models.

Figure 5.1. Use of images across dimensions, absolute numbers.
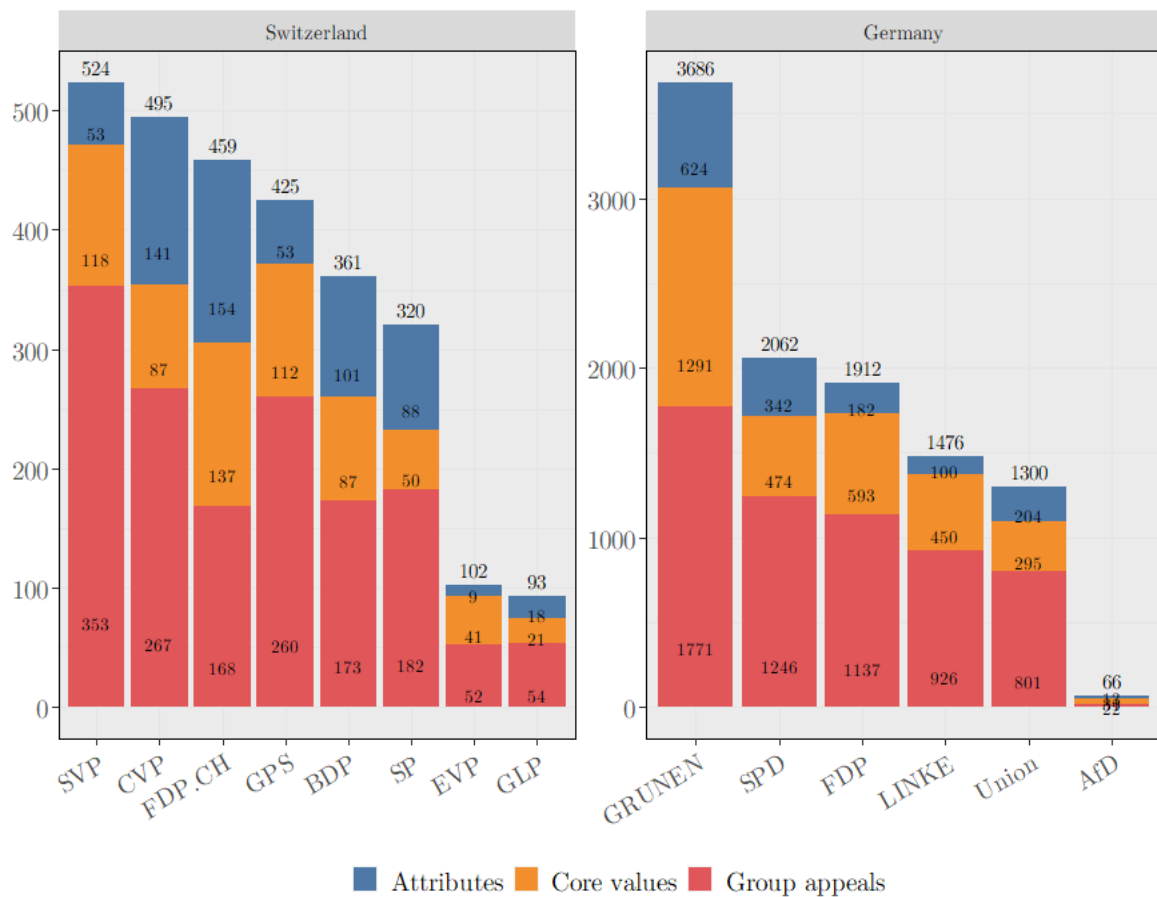
German parties have a higher absolute number of images than Swiss parties. For example, the German Greens have a record 3686 individual images mentioned; however, the AfD has only 69 images. Swiss parties, except for the EVP and the GLP, have a comparable number of images. The SVP shows the highest value of 524 and the SP has the lowest value of 320 individual categories. This is peculiar, as the SVP and the SP are the two biggest parties in Switzerland, yet they clearly vary in how often they mention images.

In Germany, we observe the inverse effect: the biggest party, the Union (CDU/CSU), has the lowest count among parties, if we exclude the AfD as an outlier. The second-biggest party, SPD, has the second-highest number of images. This difference might indicate strong country-related specifics between parties from the same party families. In this sense, the Social Democrats are more comparable to the German Left Party. Finally, liberal parties, both Swiss and German FDP, are in third place in the absolute image count.

Figure 5.2. Use of images across dimensions, relative frequencies.
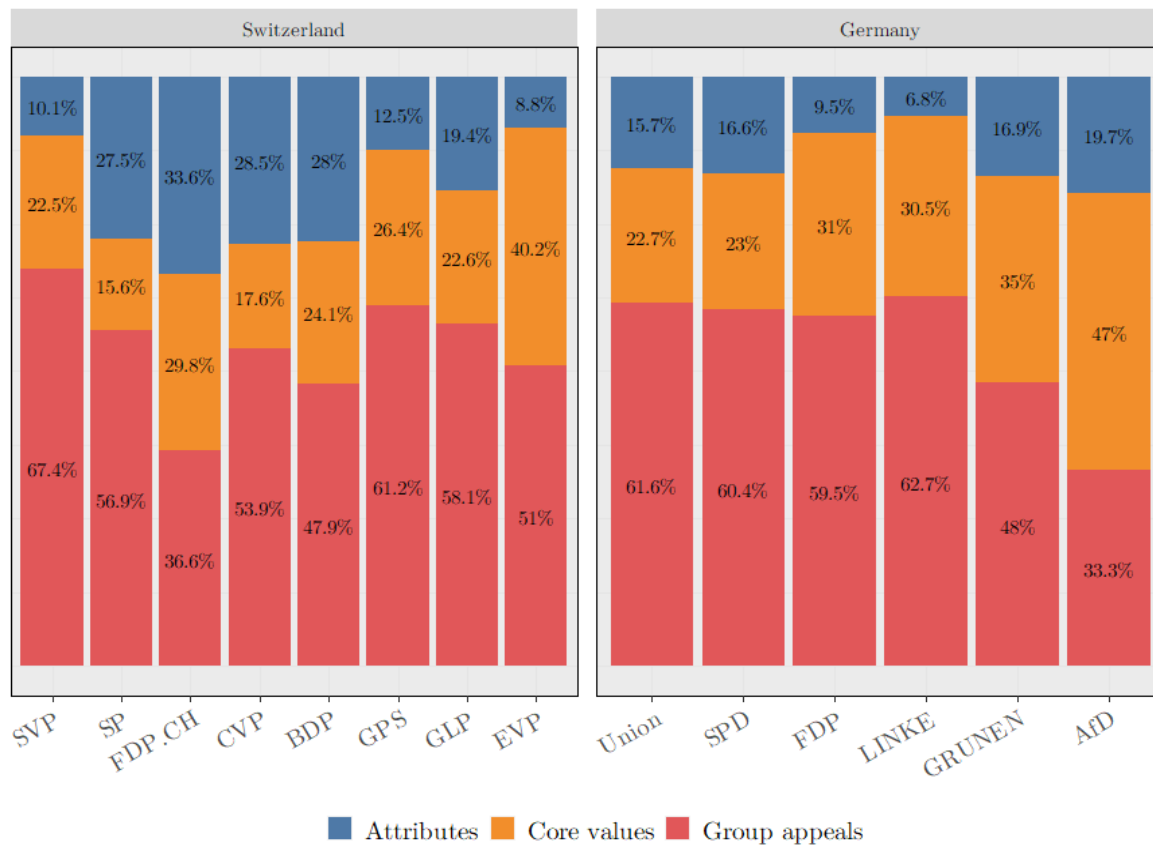
In terms of relative frequency, German parties are more homogenous across dimensions; most parties mention around 60% of images in the group appeals dimension (except for the Greens and the AfD). The two biggest parties, the Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD), have a comparable percentage of core values mentioned (22.7% and 23% respectively) and attributes (15.7% and 16.6% respectively). The Free Democratic Party (FDP) and The Left (DIE LINKE), have a comparable distribution of image mentions, around 30% for the core values and less than 10% for attributes, respectively. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the only party where the core values dimension has the biggest proportion, standing at 47%. Thus, we define four clusters: the Union and the SPD, the FDP and the Left, the Greens and the AfD being two standalone parties.

Conversely, Swiss parties are more heterogeneous in the repartition of focus on image dimensions. For example, parties like the Liberal-Radical Party (FDP) and the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) have fewer images in the group appeals dimension, as they focus more on attributes and core values. Other parties, such as the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Green

Party (GPS) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP) have more group appeals, whereas core values and attributes are less frequent. The SVP focuses on attributes dimension only in 10% of cases, while the GPS does so for 12.5%. The Evangelical People's Party (EVP) emphasises core values almost as much as group appeals (40% and 51%, respectively). Therefore, it is hard to divide Swiss parties into similar clusters as it is with German ones.

5.5.1. Attributes dimension

Attributes dimension is the least mentioned in parties' documents, counting 2082 individual images, 617 (29.6%) coded for Swiss parties and 1465 (70.4%) for German parties. In Switzerland, images from this dimension appear in manifestos and press releases almost equally, at 47.5% and 52.5%, respectively. In Germany, 89.6% of all coded attributes for this country are found in manifestos, while press releases have only 10.4% of mentions. Swiss parties clearly decreased their mentions of attribute images from 2011 to 2015 (61.75% and 38.25% of all attribute image mentions, respectively, accounting for a 23.5 p.p. decrease). German parties experienced a moderate increase in mentions, from 41.7% of in 2009 to 58.4% in 2013, accounting for a 16.7 p.p. increase.

Figure 5.3. Relative frequencies of sub-dimensions, attributes dimension.
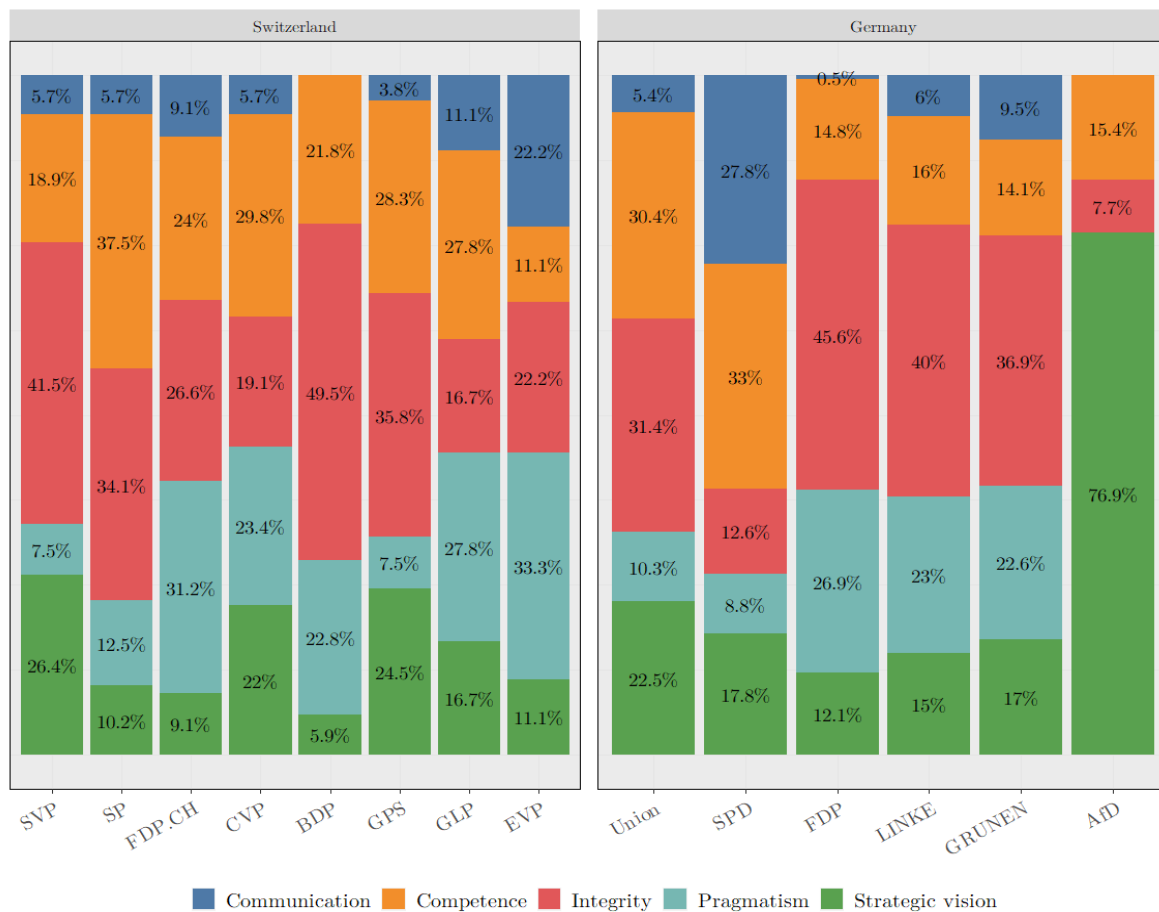
The Figure 5.3 shows the use of the five sub-dimensions within the attributes dimension. The use of the strategic vision sub-dimension is somewhat more consistent among German ones. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) specifically stands out with the prevalence of strategic vision images. They have neither communication, which refers mostly to candidates and their style, nor pragmatism, as they were running for the election only for the first time in 2013 (and were not elected). However, the use of such image categories as "policy-driven" and "elections-driven" might indicate that the party wanted to be seen seriously by other political actors. Any new party might face a problem of image, considered inexperienced and not fit for power. The AfD tried to counter this potential concern by intensively presenting itself as a strategic player.

We observe that, for the four centre-right parties in Switzerland, the sub-dimension of pragmatism is crucial. On average, they dedicate 28% of their images to this attribute sub-dimension. Consider the following examples from parties' manifestos. In these statements,

parties explicitly convey the image of pragmatism, of readiness to compromise and seek solutions.

 A. The CVP is the party that campaigns for *solutions*, seeks balance and *compromise* (CVP 2011).
 B. The FDP is committed to *realistic* ideas and *realisable solutions* (FDP 2015).
 C. To maintain its unique cohesion, Switzerland needs politicians *who think and act constructively* (BDP 2015).
 D. In Switzerland, people are always *solution- and consensus-oriented*. Neither party is in the majority, *consensus* is always needed (EVP interview 2018).

Interestingly enough, in Germany only smaller parties pay much attention to pragmatism; the Union and the SPD have less than 10% of attribute images. This might be explained by the fact that smaller parties need to construct their image as a potential coalition partner, while the two biggest parties know that at least one of them will form the government. Therefore, it is up to junior coalition partners to show their readiness to cooperate.

On the other hand, German parties, except for the SPD and the AfD, show more interest in the image of integrity. Consider the following examples. Here, German parties present themselves as consistent and committed to what they promise. DIE LINKE also emphasises being honest, while attacking the federal government for the lack thereof.

 A. Likewise, we *unreservedly* stand by the agreements of the Bonn/Berlin law (Union).
 B. We will continue on this path *consistently* (FDP).
 C. To say so is *honest* politics. This federal government has long since said goodbye to that (DIE LINKE).

It appears that for German parties, consistently showing their commitment, honestly and morality is quite central to their party image. In Switzerland, on the other hand, parties communicate their image of pragmatism not only to voters but to potential members of the parliamentary coalition.

5.5.2. Core values dimension

The core values dimension includes 3787 individual image categories, with 653 (17%) in Switzerland and 3134 (83%) in Germany. Both Swiss and German parties mention

considerably more core values in their manifestos: 94.7% of all core value mentions in Germany and 77.5% in Switzerland. This indicates that Swiss parties, on average, mention core values much more frequently in their press releases than German parties. Moreover, the use of core values between the two elections differs for both countries. Out of 653 individual core values images, Swiss parties have mentioned 40.4% of them in 2011 and 59.6% in 2015. German parties, on the other hand, have 37.9% of 3133 core values mentioned in 2009, while 62.1% of individual images were mentioned in 2013.

Figure 5.4. Relative frequencies of sub-dimensions, core values dimension, Switzerland.
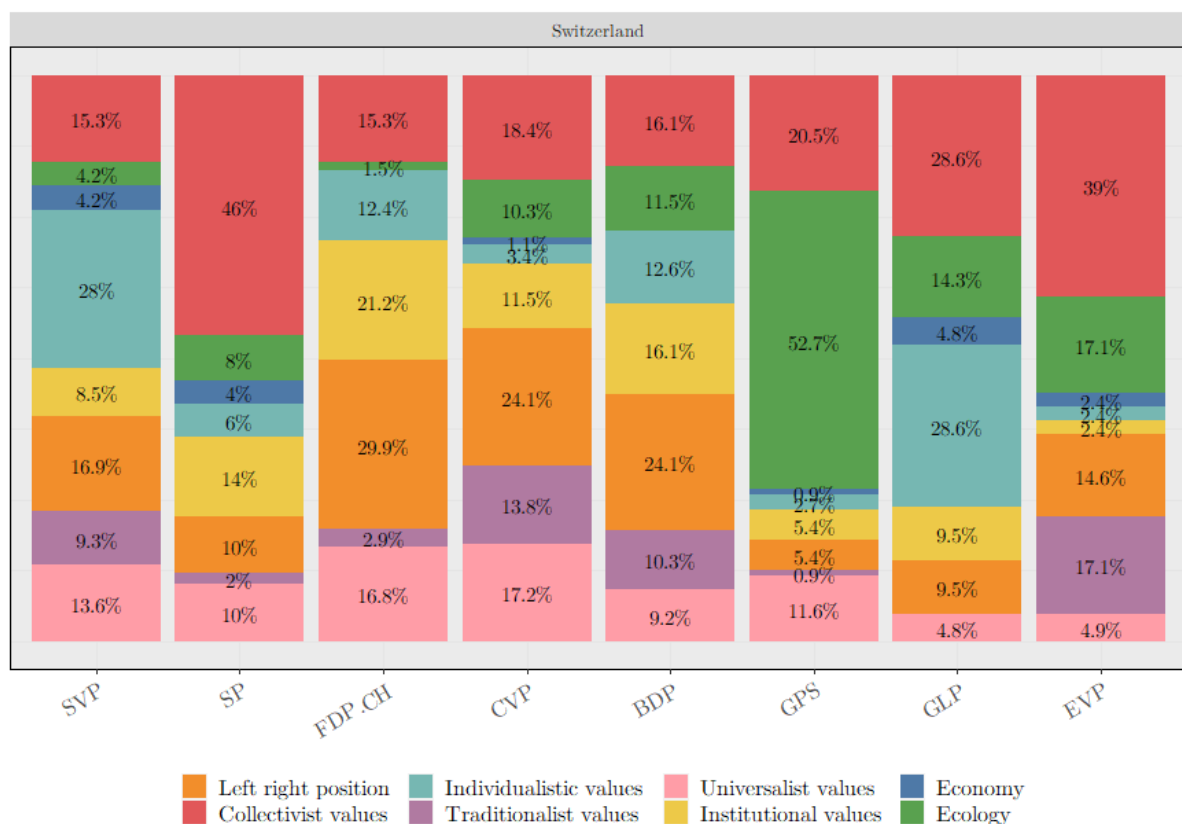
The SVP most frequently mentions individualistic values, which constitute 28% of all core values mentions. In contrast, the SP places significant emphasis on collectivist values, accounting for 46% of all mentions. For the FDP, the CVP, and the BDP, references to their ideological position are the most salient, leading at ~30%, 24% and 24%, respectively. Unsurprisingly, the GPS stands out with its overwhelming focus on the ecological value at almost 53%. The GLP, on the other hand, balances between collectivist and individualistic

values, at 28.6% each. Finally, the EVP leans towards collectivist values, mentioning them in 39% of core values mentions.

The focus of the three parties– the FDP, the CVP, and the BDP– on highlighting their ideological position reflects the desire to position themselves as centrist parties. Indeed, the BDP party manager emphasised several times that being considered a conservative centrist was a priority for the party in the 2015 elections. Moreover, all three parties focus on positioning themselves as "progressive", which is indicated in how often institutional values are mentioned.

Additionally, the four biggest parties – the SVP, the SP, the FDP, and the CVP – dedicate around 10% or less to the value of ecology. Interestingly enough, while the GPS has a half of the core values as references to ecological values, another green party, the GLP, has a much lower focus on these. This might be explained by the fact that the GLP is not a "pure" green party, and is defined as belonging to the Liberal party family, not to the Green family.

The Social Democratic Party (SP) has a strong focus on collectivist values, as well as the Evangelical People's Party (EVP). Meanwhile, the profiles of these parties are different. The SP is a mainstream party that participates in the government and positions itself as a left party; while the EVP is a niche party that has less than 2% of the electoral share and is best described as a small centre party. In the interview, there is a curious similarity that campaign managers of both parties have explicitly stated. The SP manager described how taking issue positions based on values and was careful not to mention the word "ideology":

"[…] We, as the largest left party, want to take clear positions here, and these are value-based and recognisable in clear SP jargon" (SP interview 2018).

The EVP campaign manager mentioned that:

"We have a strong value system. That's also an ideology, although I don't like using the word. We are a party of values. These values have not changed, and as an EVP we mostly use these values as a starting point to define our positions" (EVP interview 2018).

We see that for both parties, values are the key point to taking positions on issues. The SP has the lowest focus on values dimension and a second-highest focus on attributes. In a way, this contradicts their interview statements, where the interviewee has stated the importance of values and emotions for the electoral campaign:

"In Switzerland, it is more important to emphasise one's own values in elections. Not so much pertinent technical politics. In the elections, we want to capture the emotions that people pick up with a clear positioning" (SP interview 2018).

However, we might argue that the SP frequently "translates" their values into specific policy positions, hence the low number of core values images mentioned in their texts. While it is beyond the scope of the current thesis, the interview gives us some hints: the interviewee mentioned specific issues that were at the core of their campaign, such as "good wages, good pensions, affordable housing". They even further specified that such issues are chosen because they are "specific, important to people and concern them" (SP interview 2018). These issues are arguably the direct translation of the collectivist values that SP traditionally supports.

Figure 5.5. Relative frequencies of sub-dimensions, core values dimension, Germany.
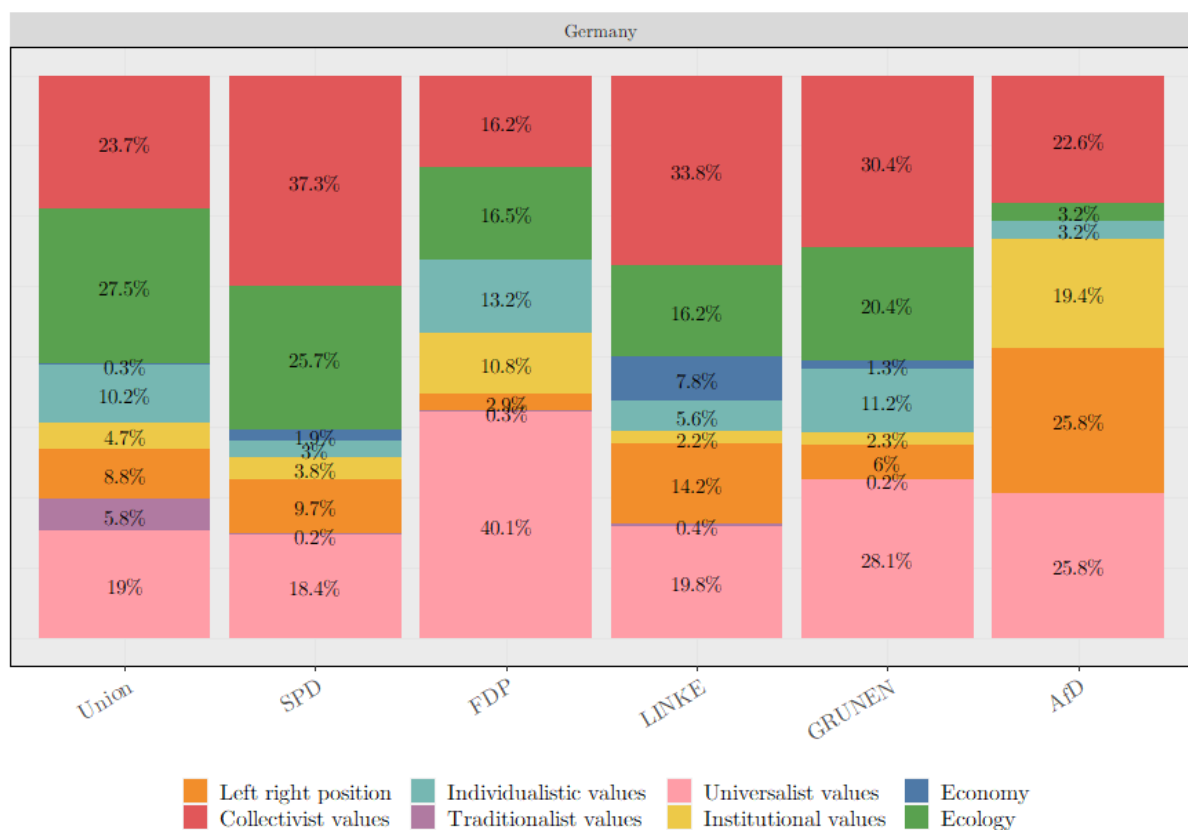
For the Union (CDU-CSU), ecology is surprisingly the most mentioned value, at 27.5%, closely followed by collectivist values at 23.7%. The Social Democrats (SPD) lean heavily

towards collectivist values, which account for a significant 37.3% of mentions. The Free Democratic Party (FDP) places the most emphasis on universalist values, taking up 40.1% of the focus. The Left Party (DIE LINKE) is oriented towards collectivist values at 33.8%. The Green Party (Die Grünen) is almost evenly split between universalist values at 28.1% and collectivist values at 30.4%. In contrast to the Swiss Greens, ecological values make up only 20% of all core values mentioned. Finally, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) has a more balanced distribution due to a smaller number of images coded, but references to the ideological position and universalist values both stand at 25.8%.

German parties show somewhat more similarities in sub-dimensions they address. Overall, the most popular sub-dimension is collectivist values, followed by universalist values and ecology. On average, the least popular ones are traditionalist values, institutional values, and economy-related values. The SPD and the Left Party both place a strong emphasis on collectivist values, which reflects the assigned party family (Left / Social Democratic). On the other hand, the FDP and the Greens seem to be closer together due to their similar focus on individualistic values. However, the Greens also have a nearly similar focus on collectivist values.

More specifically, the campaign manager of the Left Party explicitly states in the interview that collectivist values are important for them:

"For example, in order to stay on the subject of refugees, we have of course not only discussed this question of human rights but also specifically under the question of social justice. And that's why it was always important for us to explain it through the example: "It's not good for society to position the weak against the weakest". [...] The Federal Republic is such a rich country. The unemployed in Germany must not be mobilised against refugees" (DIE LINKE interview 2018).

Another peculiar thing that we observe in Germany is that all parliamentary parties emphasise ecological values. This might indicate that ecological issues are salient for all the voters, or that these issues are no longer considered niche and gone mainstream so that it has become almost necessary for all parties to show support for ecological values. Indeed, in 2011, a Bundestag resolution was passed, setting a 10-year plan for a nuclear phase-out after the disaster occurred at Fukushima nuclear plant [53] (Atomgesetz 1959; Dreizehntes Gesetz zur Änderung des

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[53] This issue has sparkled various debates over sociopolitical, economic, ecological and energy security importance, and, as of time of writing, is not over due to the energy crisis caused by "Russia's war of aggression" (Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management 2024).

Atomgesetzes 2011). This potentially prompted German parties to discuss environmental issues actively, which could have been based on their own ecological values.

The failure to do so might be risky behaviour and could be punished by voters, especially given the rising saliency of the climate crisis issue. Therefore, emphasising or simply addressing ecological values is an important part of the image building for German parties for both elections in question. This might be explained by the rising salience of environmental and ecological issues for the electorate and thus for mainstream parties (Carter 2013; Franzmann et al. 2020).

We argue that this value can also be considered a "valence" image, similar to a "valence issue". A valence issue is such an issue, "on which parties or leaders are differentiated not by what they advocate, but by the degree to which they are linked in the public's mind with conditions, goals, or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves" (Stokes 1966, 143), like increasing economic growth or supporting education. This might be the case with ecological values, as related issues have ceased to be strictly niche in most Western European countries in recent years.

In Switzerland, parties, except for the Greens, rarely mention ecological value [54], although it is particular that the EVP have a higher share of ecologist images and even highlight their adherence to ecological values in the interview:

"And sustainability too. All parties are currently discussing this, but the EVP was the first green party in Switzerland. Before the Greens existed, the EVP initiated a water protection law in the 1940s. Decades before the GPS, we had a focus on sustainability" (Interview EVP 2018).

Overall, when we compare German and Swiss parties, we observe peculiar specifics. For example, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany and the Social Democratic Party (SP) in Switzerland both emphasise collectivist values, although the former has a substantial focus both on ecological and universalist values. The Green parties in both countries focus heavily on ecological values, but the emphasis is much stronger in the Switzerland's Green Party (GPS), where it constitutes over half of the mentions. In Germany, the Green Party has a more diversified focus. Moreover, the Liberal parties differ significantly: while the German FDP

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[54] More recent research on the 2019 Swiss elections suggests that environmental issues have become significantly more salient for voters, but parties have been ignoring them for a long time. On the other hand, there is also a tendency for the green parties, who own the issue, to dedicate less attention to energy and environmental issues (Lüth and Schaffer 2022). Scholars explain it either by the general trend of the green parties towards a more mainstream profile (Green-Pedersen 2019) or by the fact that green parties still retain the issue ownership over environmental issues despite the decreased focus on them in the elections (Bischof 2017).

emphasises universalist values, the Swiss FDP focuses on its ideological position. The biggest parties in both countries, the SVP and the Union, also highlight distant values of individualism and ecology, respectively. This may indicate that belonging to the same party family might not necessarily mean that parties will highlight the same issues.

In order to further analyse specific country-level differences, we select a specific value and uncover how parties define and use it. To do so, we focus on the value of freedom / liberty. We will be looking for such words as '*Freiheit*' (DE) and '*la liberté*' (CH). Consider the following examples (own translation):

A. Need we recall that individual freedom is precisely a consequence of the Christian conception of the human being? (SVP).
B. Freedom and the market economy are decisive factors for the development of a thriving society and economy (BDP).
C. This law must define what is allowed and what is not; all the rest is a matter of individual freedom (GPS).

We notice that Swiss parties, regardless of their ideological position, define the freedom value not exactly related to the economy. The BDP even contrasts it to the market economy, explicitly pointing out that freedom is not about the economy but rather about the individual and the society. The literature on the concept of freedom notes the conceptual difference between negative and positive freedom / liberty. Negative liberty is the absence of constraints, and positive liberty is the possibility of acting (Berlin 1969). We argue that for Swiss parties, the former is closer to what they present as freedom/ liberty value. They frequently stand either for having less state control (e.g., the SVP, the FDP) or a clearer definition of restrictions on a particular subject (e.g., the GPS).

German parties, on the other hand, present a slightly different understanding of the freedom / liberty value. Consider the following examples:

A. Education is a prerequisite for living in freedom (Die Grünen).
B. For us, civic engagement is essential when it comes to activating values such as freedom, justice, solidarity, personal responsibility and participation in our society […] (SPD).
C. In Germany today, more people have the freedom to fulfil their dreams and to go their own way (FDP).

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While it is not explicit, we argue that German parties define the concept of freedom closer to the positive definition: empowering an individual or the society to pursue their goals and be free in their actions. As seen in the examples provided, parties link freedom to other values and rights, such as education, solidarity or personal responsibility. We see that freedom / liberty is more about society than the economy, and thus is more present as a value image for German parties than for the Swiss ones.

One might argue that these findings correspond with the general attitude towards welfare state and state intervention into society life: in terms of Esping-Andersen's seminal work "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" (1990), both countries are categorised as conservative welfare states, but that since the publication, new rival typologies have emerged (see Powell et al. 2020 for the detailed review). In the new typologies, such as by Hudson and Kühner (2009) or van der Veen and van der Brug (2013), Germany and Switzerland are attributed to separate categories that can actually explain the different interpretation of this value. In most post-Esping-Andersen works, Switzerland is considered being a liberal, or hybrid welfare state, while Germany remains in the conservative, or corporatist category.

Belonging to a specific welfare state, having a certain tradition of media representation or social activism contributes to the overall political discourse in which political parties engage in electoral competition and thus are obliged to build their image according to the values that are predominant in the society. Hence, the example of German and Swiss parties shows why they have a distinct interpretation of "freedom / liberty" value image and varying frequency in their texts.

Furthermore, consider an example of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Researchers define it as a populist right-wing party (e.g., Arzheimer 2015), but in terms of image it is *perceived* to be populist; a party itself would certainly never portray itself as populist [55]. Instead, it presents itself as a 'party of people', or a 'party against elites', or a "truly democratic party"[56]. Remarkably, such images would be actually the definition of populism (see Pappas 2016). However, being a "party for democracy" does not automatically make it a populist one. In Switzerland, neither the FDP nor the BDP would be considered populist parties. For them,

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[55] In France, Jean-Luc Mélénchon is a prominent exception: "I no longer want to defend myself against the accusation of populism. It's the disgust of the elites – do they deserve better? Let them all go!" (L'Express 2010).
[56] However, to be defined as populist, a party should also have a clear anti-establishment or ant-elitist stance, which most parties in our case studies do not have.

being democratic is about supporting values that "define Switzerland". That is, again, a good example of distinct value interpretation.

5.5.3. Group appeals dimension

This dimension contains 7412 individual coded group appeal images, with 1509 (20.4%) mentioned by Swiss parties and 5903 (79.6%) by German parties. In Switzerland, parties mention approximately two-thirds of their group appeals in manifestos (68.7% against 31.2% in press releases). In Germany, on the other hand, a staggering 91% of all group appeals are mentioned in manifestos, indicating that Swiss parties are more consistent across their communication channels. However, German parties are more consistent across electoral years, mentioning 45.7% of their group appeals in 2009 and 54.3% in the 2013 elections. On the contrary, Swiss parties dedicated only 36.1% of all their group appeals images in the 2011 elections, while the 2015 elections saw a rise to 63.9% images, respectively.

Figure 5.6. Group appeals dimension, three main sub-dimensions, Switzerland.
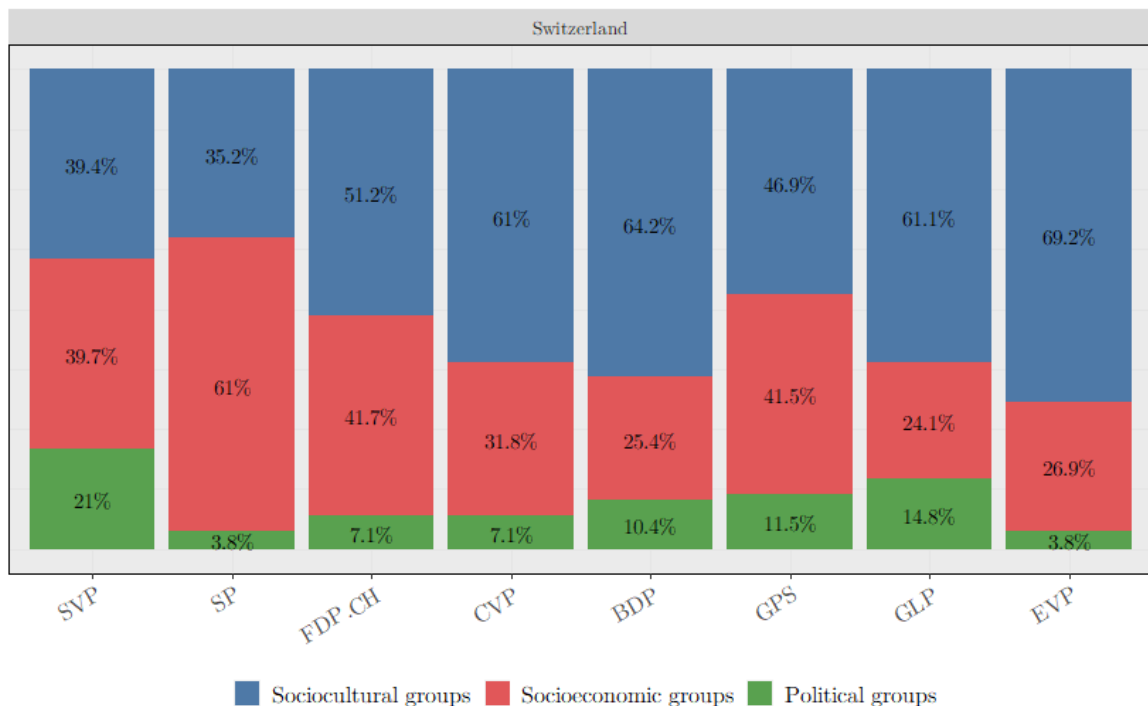
We observe that most Swiss parties, except for the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Social Democrats (SP), place the highest emphasis on sociocultural groups. Both appear to be outliers with their significant focus on both sociocultural and socioeconomic groups, but the SP leans more towards socioeconomic groups. Additionally, the SVP also has the highest focus on political groups (more than 20%), compared to other parties.

Figure 5.7. Group appeals dimension, three main sub-dimensions, Germany.
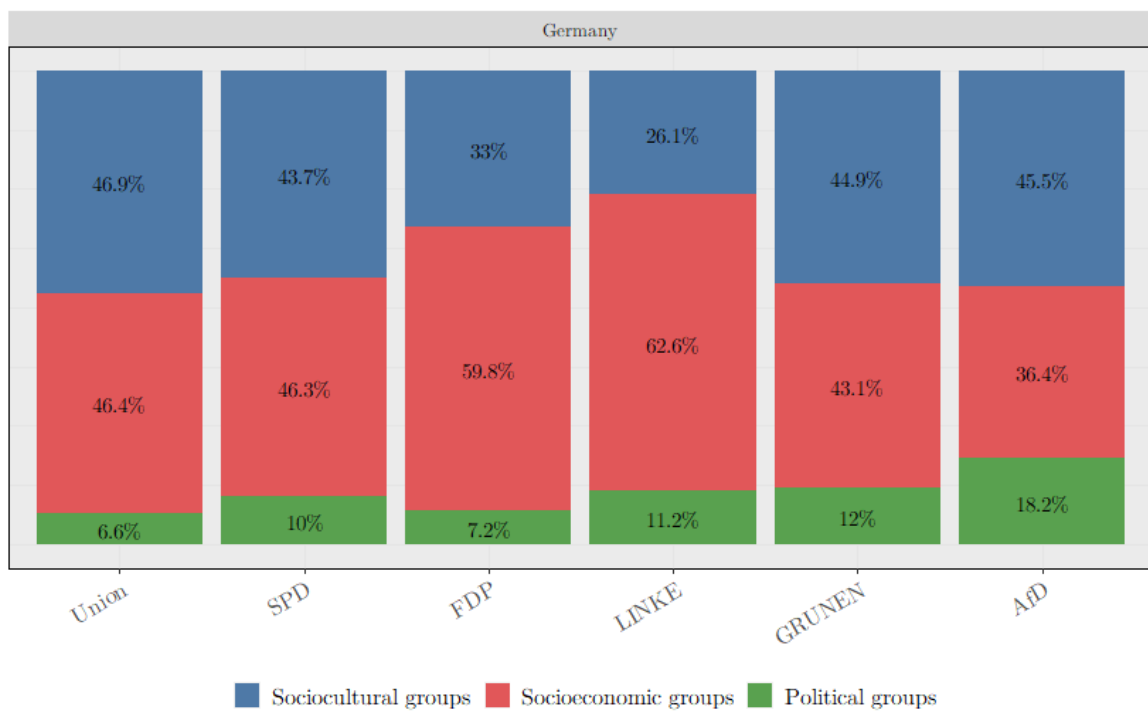
The Union (CDU-CSU) has a balanced approach, giving almost equal attention to socioeconomic and sociocultural groups at 46.4% and 46.9%, respectively. The Social Democrats (SPD) follows a similar pattern but leans slightly more towards socioeconomic group appeals with 46.3% of mentions compared to 43.7% for sociocultural ones. The Liberals (FDP), on the other hand, focuses strongly on socioeconomic group appeals, which account for a high 59.8% of their mentions. The Left Party (DIE LINKE) follows the similar pattern, prioritising socioeconomic groups even more markedly at 62.6%. The Green Party maintains a balanced but slightly leaning approach towards sociocultural groups at 44.9%. Finally, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), although limited by a smaller dataset, shows a balanced distribution but with a noticeably high emphasis on political groups at 18.2%.

Overall, we observe that in both countries, appeals to political groups, such as "elites" or "the people", is rather limited, except for the radical right-wing parties, the SVP and the AfD, as both parties exhibit similar focus. As stated in Chapter 4, the composition of this category includes such images as 'ordinary people', 'the people/ nation', and 'political elites' (frequently used as distancing). Both parties are considered being right-wing, populist and Eurosceptic (Ackermann, Zampieri, and Freitag 2018 on the SVP; Arzheimer 2015 on the AfD). Recent works on populism define it as the referral to ethnos rather than demos (Akkerman 2003) or both ethnos and demos (Jansen 2011), and as anti-elitist sentiment (Jagers and Walgrave 2007). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that both parties describe themselves by claiming to represent and support "the people" or "the nation" (frequently distancing themselves from migrant groups, as we will see later).

Left-leaning parties like the SPD in Germany and the SP in Switzerland place significant emphasis on socioeconomic groups. However, the Swiss SP shows a stronger inclination in this direction. Likewise, both countries' Green parties focus on sociocultural groups, although the emphasis is more balanced for the German Greens. The Liberals in both countries is an interesting case: the Swiss FDP leans towards sociocultural groups, while the German FDP leans heavily towards socioeconomic groups [57]. In summary, German political parties prioritise socioeconomic groups, whereas Swiss parties tend to emphasise sociocultural ones more frequently.

In order to better understand the group appeals dimension, we go one level down and look at the main categories within the three sub-dimensions. To recall, the socioeconomic sub-dimension consists of income, occupation, and status group appeals, sociocultural sub-dimension refers to age, region, family, gender, and citizenship / immigration group appeals, while political group appeals do not have further division.

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[57] This, however, might be an artefact of project coding, where the Swiss FDP has numerous mentions of regional group appeals. If we look closely, we see that the party often talks about Swiss people in terms of geographical position. According to coding rules, this cannot be interpreted as "the people", but potentially can be put in the category of "citizenship". Nevertheless, it does not change the overall focus of the Swiss FDP on sociocultural groups, as compared to the German FDP.

Figure 5.8. Main categories of the group appeals dimension, Switzerland.
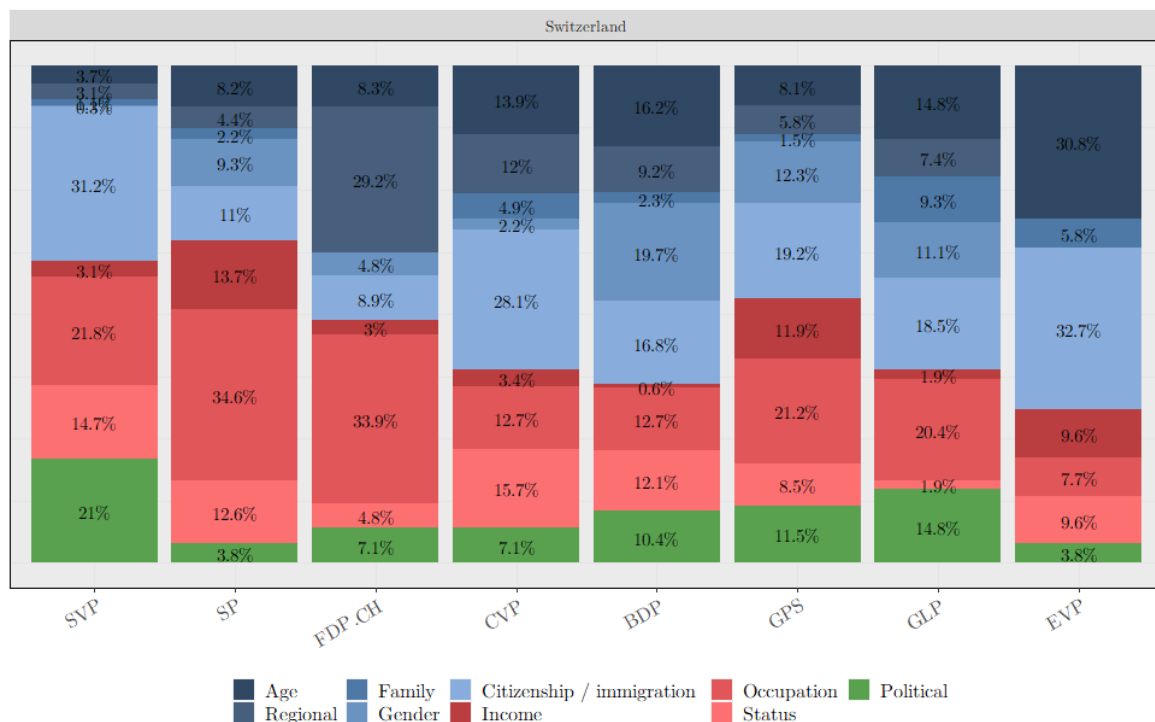
The SVP predominantly highlights "citizenship/immigration" groups in its appeals, accounting for 31.2% of its mentions in this category. This is followed by "occupation" and "political". More specifically, within the "citizenship/ immigration" group appeals, the party mostly distances itself from migrants and asylum seekers, frequently portraying them as "criminal immigrants" (*immigrants clandestins*). Followed by a heavy focus on political groups, this well reflects the right-wing, populist ideas. On the other hand, the SP primarily focuses on "occupation[58]", representing 34.6% of its mentions. This is closely followed by "income" and "status[59]". Within these, the party often distances itself from the rich.

On the other hand, the Conservative People's Party (CVP) and the Evangelical People's Party (EVP) also have a heavy focus on the "citizenship/ immigration" groups. However, this can be explained by the ongoing refugee crisis during the 2015 elections, and most centrist parties were involved in its discussion, hence the higher focus. The Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), as supported by the interviews, had a significant focus on promoting women both in

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[58] Refers to the professional status.

[59] Refers to the income-based differentiation (e.g., rich people, poor people) and general socioeconomic status (e.g., homeowners etc).

the 2011 and 2015 elections. Furthermore, we notice that the CVP, the BDP, and the EVP, centre bourgeois parties, make more frequent appeals to families, in contrast to other parties. The BDP, the GPS and the SP also dedicate their attention to gender groups, and in both cases these parties portray themselves as supporters and enablers of women in both politics and society. As the BDP interviewee has put it:

"The second topic was women's power. We didn't write [like] that, but it was a working title [...]. The reason maybe is that from the very beginning the BDP had women in senior positions. [...] In the Parliament, too, the first female parliamentary group president was a woman, and that's why we knew that we would be credible here if we [promoted] women in work and politics" (BDP Interview 2018).

This is reflected in the interviews with party campaign managers; the BDP representative repeatedly mentioned that they support female politicians, and the Green Party (GPS) representative noted that women were one of their core electoral groups and focus, and that their policies were made to benefit them (BPD Interview 2018; GPS Interview 2018).

Figure 5.9. Main categories of the group appeals dimension, Germany.
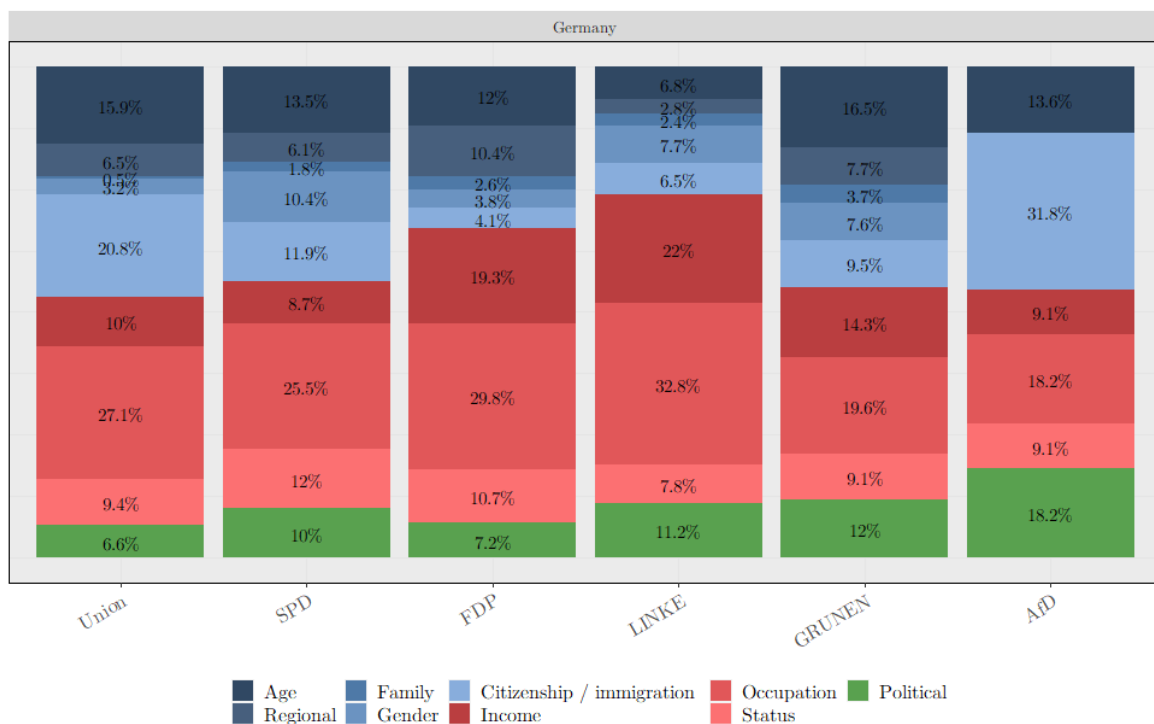
The Union places their most considerable emphasis on "occupation" at 27.1%, similar to the Social Democrats (SPD), which has "occupation" images mentioned in 25.5% of all group appeals. The Liberals (FDP) and The Left (DIE LINKE) have even higher focus on these groups, standing at 29.8% and 32.8%, respectively. Moreover, both have "income" as a second most mentioned group, perhaps indicating their strong stance as centre-right liberal and left-wing parties. The Greens present a more balanced approach across all main categories, with "occupation" being mentioned in almost 20% of cases. Finally, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) shows a marked focus on "citizenship/immigration" at 31.8%, which aligns with their right-wing profile.

Except for DIE LINKE, all parties dedicate quite some attention to age groups, and the most used image categories within this subcategory are 'young people', 'next generation', and 'old people'. We argue that this category does not actually give anything specific to a party's profile and is just a 'salient image'.

To look for further insights, we turn to the interviews. In Germany, only two interviews are available, for the CDU and DIE LINKE. While we cannot make an overview of all parties as in the case with Swiss parties, we can establish differences between a big centre-right party and a small left party. For example, the CDU explains the difficulty of addressing the core electorate:

"*In order to achieve the goal of the campaign, to generate as many votes as possible, they are also important, i.e., the regular voters, but if you were to limit yourself to just them, then you would make the big mistake of a… maybe with a larger group of swing voters to alienate people. […] So, are they [core voters] significant? For one part, super important. For the other part, I sometimes have to programmatically listen to things that don't correspond to them*" (CDU Interview 2018).

Moreover, it was the first time for the CDU where they have decided to abandon the explicit voter targeting. The interviewee has explained why socio-demographic data is sometimes not useful:

"*I made a chart like this in preparation for the campaign for internal persuasion that describes the socio-demographic group "a man over 60, very successful in his job, father of a family, above-average income and 3-4 other categories". And then that is supplemented with two photos: one of Ozzy Osborne and one of Prince Charles, to which all these [sociological characteristics] apply. […] Which party will Ozzy Osborne vote for[?] And Prince Charles? I*

don't mean to offend any of them, but I think it's illusory to be able to determine this on the basis of socio-demographic data" (CDU Interview 2018).

This indicates that for big, catch-all parties, such as the CDU (see Lees 2012), mentioning explicit group appeals in their texts is not as important, as it is probably for smaller parties. To check that, we looked into the interview with DIE LINKE.

The Left Party's party manager has mentioned several groups that the party has targeted in the latest elections: low-income people, or "people in socially difficult circumstances", young and first-time voters, and middle-class voters that *"are either afraid of social decline themselves or say, out of an inner need, "We are doing well, and we want everyone to do well" i.e., are achievable for the left from a more value-related approach"* (DIE LINKE Interview 2018). Interestingly enough, as a left-wing party with strong socialist values, the choice of specific group appeals is connected to the values the party supports. They also mention their frequent criticism of rich people, large companies, or lobby groups [60], which also corresponds to their anti-capitalist values. Therefore, we observe that smaller parties, at least in Germany, most likely have a specific focus on their core voters as specific sociocultural or socioeconomic groups.

In the case of Swiss parties, the focus on specific voters and subsequent group appeals are rather clear even in the case of big parties. The SP talks of people with low income, "new", middle-class, women, and people with migration background, which corresponds to the categories illustrated in Figure 5.8. The Liberal-Radicals (FDP), on the other hand, say that *"[s]ocial groups are extremely broad, there are many"* (FDP Interview 2018) and does not provide a clear target. However, from Figure 5.8, as well as from the textual data, we find that their main focus is on the middle-class citizens, and small and medium entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the CVP has indicated their focus on middle-class families, as well as on traditional core voters. A younger party, the BDP, has established their focus on women, *"modern bourgeois"* and young people, while another new party, the Green Liberal Party (GLP), has talked about young, highly educated and *"cosmopolitan and progressive"* voters. In a similar line, the GPS addresses women, educated people and urban dwellers. On the other hand, a much older party, the Evangelical People's Party (EVP), presented a focalized vision of their core voter: active Christian, middle-class habitants of agglomerations, *"value-oriented"* people.

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[60] For more discussion on negative appeals, see Chapter 7.

We observe that parties in both countries are similar in their focus on socioeconomic subcategories (income, occupation, and status), but vary in the focus on sociocultural ones (age, gender, family status, regional provenance). For both countries, appeals to voter groups based on occupation are the most frequent, although this effect varies. The CVP, the BDP, and the EVP, all Christian-Democratic centrist parties, have a lower number of images in this subcategory. Appeals to status groups (various social groups including homeowners, consumers, criminals etc) have a rather stable focus among all parties, while income group appeals (such as "low-income people" or "middle class") are more popular among German parties. It can be linked to the fact that Swiss parties tend to speak about "the middle class" in relation to specific policies directed at small and medium businesses.

The most striking similarity across both countries is the universal importance of "occupation", which likely speaks to the overarching concerns of voters about employment and economic stability. However, Swiss parties appear to engage more with groups in "citizenship/immigration", which could reflect a broader national debate around immigration (especially in 2015 with the ongoing refugee crisis and toughening the rules around immigration). German parties appear to give somewhat more weight to social factors like "age" and "status".

In Chapter 2, we have discussed that parties can either acclaim specific groups (voters and non-voters) in order to show their support, but they can also distance themselves from such groups. In this section, we rely on the interviews and evidence from the party documents in order to show whether Swiss and German parties consider such a strategy to be useful for their non-policy communication.

In Switzerland, the FDP interviewee stated that it was overall a risky strategy to be associated with a certain voter group: "*No, it's not a viable strategy. In an extreme emergency, yes. Then you have an image problem that you are associated too strongly with a group, which can be harmful to you* (FDP Interview 2018). Judging from the interviewee's words, they are well aware of their image and its perception by the electorate. It appears that the association or dissociation from a specific socioeconomic, sociocultural, or political group is a crucial part of the party image.

Similarly, the GLP interviewee has underlined that they "*criticise grievances, but don't do any propaganda against individual groups. We play on the thing [issue], not the person*" (GLP

Interview 2018). As he has put it, it will not work for smaller parties but will most likely be successful for bigger ones:

"*It's difficult for a small party. It is important for us to put ourselves first. It's good when other parties criticise us, that gives us a profile. We ourselves are less concerned with criticising others. […] It is very attractive for left-wing populists to shoot managers, for right-wing populists [to be] against migrants. It's not a strategy for us*" (GLP Interview 2018).

While parties are risk-averse towards distancing themselves from voters (or non-voter groups), they may consider attacking other parties instead: "*We do not do that [distancing from voter groups]. You don't gain anything for your image that way. We only criticise other parties for their views. We say they want to abolish solidarity because they don't support pension reform. But not actually entire [voter] groups* (CVP Interview 2018).

The SP interviewee has underlined that being against a specific voter group would go against party values. They noted that "*we have a policy for all (pour tous sans privilèges); we aim to be there for everyone*" (SP Interview 2018). It is sometimes possible to distance from specific groups, but for the SP, it was important to be inclusive, not exclusive. The same issue of following the party's values is seen in the answer of the EVP interviewee: "*We don't shoot people. We drive factual politics. […] the risk of upsetting our core constituency is far too great. We as a Christian party cannot do anything against someone else*" (EVP Interview 2018). Here, we observe that EVP is restricted in its actions by their party identity. Adhering to the "Christian ethos" is arguably an important part of their party image, and deviating from it may cause a backlash from their core voters, a risk the party understands and highlights.

In Germany, the CDU interviewee states explicitly that distancing from social or voter groups is not a viable strategy for a big party. It might bring an opportunity to mobilise most of the voters against the common enemy, but the situation can get out of hand. As they have put it, "*we are all against right-wing extremists, but making them an issue in the election campaign is a mistake. […] It has to be in a political context somehow and then there must be political reasons, so to speak, to position oneself against this group in the campaign* (CDU Interview 2018)". They note that such a strategy can be possible for smaller parties with a smaller target group, even regardless of their left-right position. A strategy to portray a part of the electorate or any other social groups negatively does not seem to be a first choice for a big incumbent party. Based on their perspective, it can help to achieve "*a degree of homogenisation*" among their own voters, but potential risks outweigh the gains.

The Left (DIE LINKE), on the other hand, confirm that distancing is an electoral strategy that they implement, but they specifically underline that it cannot be used as a standalone or main one:

"When it came to the question of social justice, of course, in certain escalations, we directly addressed either large companies or specifically rich people [...] and lobby groups that influence politics and also very deliberately scandalised [them]. [...] The chance is that you can communicate societal problems in a more understandable way. [...] The difficulty is, that's why I said you can't do it alone, that you have to be careful not to reduce social conflicts to individuals, but to make it clear that we have a structural problem [...]" (DIE LINKE Interview 2018).

While the interviewee admitted that the party distanced from certain social groups, like rich people or managers of big companies, they made sure to stress that it was done in relation to particular values (e.g., social justice) or issues (e.g., low salaries of working class versus pay bonuses of managers). A negative image strategy is possible only when it is supported by other tools and tactics.

We conclude that German and Swiss parties have a different approach to distancing from specific voter and non-voter groups as a part of the non-policy communication. In Switzerland, is it overall considered a privilege of bigger parties [61]. This might indicate the overall tendency of Swiss parties to strive for consensus and a pragmatic approach to the political process. In Germany, on the other hand, the representative of the CDU explained that such a strategy is not possible for big parties, while the opposition party (DIE LINKE) accepted the possibility of distancing, albeit conditionally.

Most parties also seem to exhibit a risk-averse behaviour by stating that they do not want to portray themselves distancing from a specific voter group in fears of going against their core voters. In Germany, this strategy might be considered viable for smaller opposition parties that either have no chance of getting into the government (such as DIE LINKE), or do not see the possibility of creating a coalition with the winning party. To investigate further, we look at the frequency of mentioning distancing group appeals images in parties' communication.

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[61] However, the SP and the FDP interviewees both stated that they do not engage in this strategy. We assume that party managers indirectly meant SVP, when they were referring to "other big parties".

Table 5.9. Top three distancing group appeals categories, by party, Switzerland.

	1st	2nd	3rd
SVP	Immigrants	Asylum seekers	Criminals
SP	Firms	Banks	The rich
FDP	Employers	Firms	Immigrants
CVP	Criminals	Employers	Immigrants
BDP	Criminals	Banks	—
GPS	Firms	Banks	Employers
GLP	Immigrants	Ordinary people	Elites
EVP	The rich	Firms	Criminals

Statements given by party managers seem to be corroborated by the image frequencies in the textual data. In Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) focuses on the "clandestine migrants", the recurring topic of their anti-immigration discourse in the 2011 and 2015 electoral campaigns. Moreover, these are not voter groups, but specific sociocultural groups that are not included in the electoral process. The Social Democratic Party (SP), on the other hand, does not focus on voters but rather on broad categories of firms and banks. Other parties have very little mentions of negative groups and are rather unspecific. For example, the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) distances itself only from "criminals" and "banks". Nevertheless, the ongoing debates around immigration laws might be reflected in the recurring distancing image of "immigrants".

Table 5.10. Top three distancing group appeals categories, by party, Germany.

	1st	2nd	3rd
CDU/CSU	Immigrants	Criminals	Firms
SPD	Firms	Banks	The rich
FDP	Firms	Banks	Criminals
Die Grünen	Firms	The rich	Banks
DIE LINKE	Firms	The rich	Banks
AfD[62]	Banks	The rich	Political elites

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[62] In the 2013 elections, migrants were not the primary focus of AfD. Their electoral discourse was primarily focused on the economic crisis and the Greek state. It is in the 2017 election, after the 2015 refugee crisis that AfD started actively distancing themselves from migrants.

Interestingly enough, the Union (CDU/CSU) is the only one that focuses on such groups as "immigrants" and "criminals" (except for the FDP). Other parliamentary parties – the Social Democrats (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Greens, and The Left – distance themselves from "firms", "banks", or "the rich". The Alternative for Germany (AfD), as a populist party, criticises "political elites", while also distancing itself from "banks" and "the rich".

It is notable that almost all parties in Germany and Switzerland (apart from the SVP, the CDU, and the AfD) converge on a set of "common enemies", namely firms, banks, and the wealthy, albeit framed negatively. This universal focus on the same groups suggests a shared narrative that is critical of economic actors, perceived to wield disproportionate influence. However, such uniformity in identifying scapegoats raises the question of ideological distinctiveness among the parties. If every party claims to oppose the same "bad actors", it blurs the lines of differentiation for voters.

5.5.4. DV4 – the presence of attacks

In this section, we present the fourth dependent variable of attacks' presence. Here, we do not use the descriptive dataset and instead pass on to analyse the Dataset 2, which includes all core sentences where at least one image (self-presentation or attack) is mentioned. Therefore, our total number of observations varies from the previous dataset.

On average, we observe that Swiss parties are more likely to mention attacks on their opponents than German parties, standing at 19% of core sentences that include an attack, compared to 11% of core sentences among German parties. This percentage might be exaggerated by the total fewer core sentences coded for Swiss parties. In Switzerland, we also note a marked decline in the number of attacks, from 23.5% in the 2011 elections to 15.4% in 2015. In Germany, on the other hand, the frequency of attacks drops marginally, from 12% in the 2009 elections to ~11% in the 2013 elections, indicating an overall stable willingness of parties to attack their adversaries. Overall, while on average Swiss parties are more likely to include the attacks of their adversaries, this trend decreases in the second elections. In Germany, on the other hand, the decline is negligent and might indicate a more stable role of attacks in non-policy communication. These initial findings, however, are in contrast to what other studies

have found so far (e.g., Nai, Tresch, and Maier 2022); further conclusions are needed after a regression analysis.

Figure 5.10. Percentage of attack images, by country and document type.
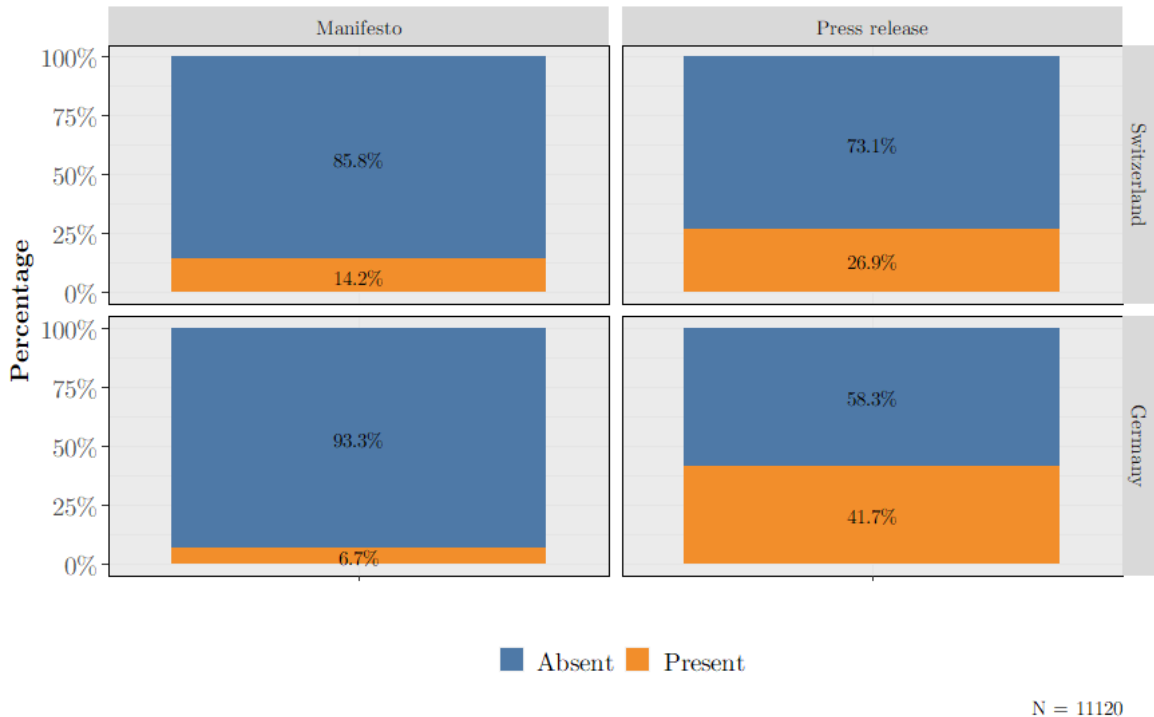
In both countries, manifestos are arguably less adversarial, standing at 14.2% and 6.7% of core sentences that mention an attack for Switzerland and Germany, respectively. However, press releases not only show a rise in how frequently attacks are mentioned, but German parties attack almost in half of the coded core sentences (42%). This might indicate that while on average, Swiss parties mention attacks of the adversaries more often, German parties are significantly more negative in their press releases. This could imply that press releases, which are perhaps aimed at immediate impact, resort to negative images of adversaries more frequently than manifestos, which are generally more programmatic and forward-looking. Overall, the data suggests that German parties might opt for a more confrontational tone during the campaigns by attacking their opponents in press releases, as opposed to Swiss parties, who maintain a more consistent approach across formats.

5.5.5. DV5 – the risk score variable

In this section, we present the final dependent variable of risk score. We continue using Dataset 2 for the descriptive analysis, where at least one image is present in a given core sentence. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, this variable was initially coded as a numeric variable, but due to the non-normal distribution, we have decided to transform it to ordinal with the four categories.

Figure 5.11. Percentage of risk score categories, by country.
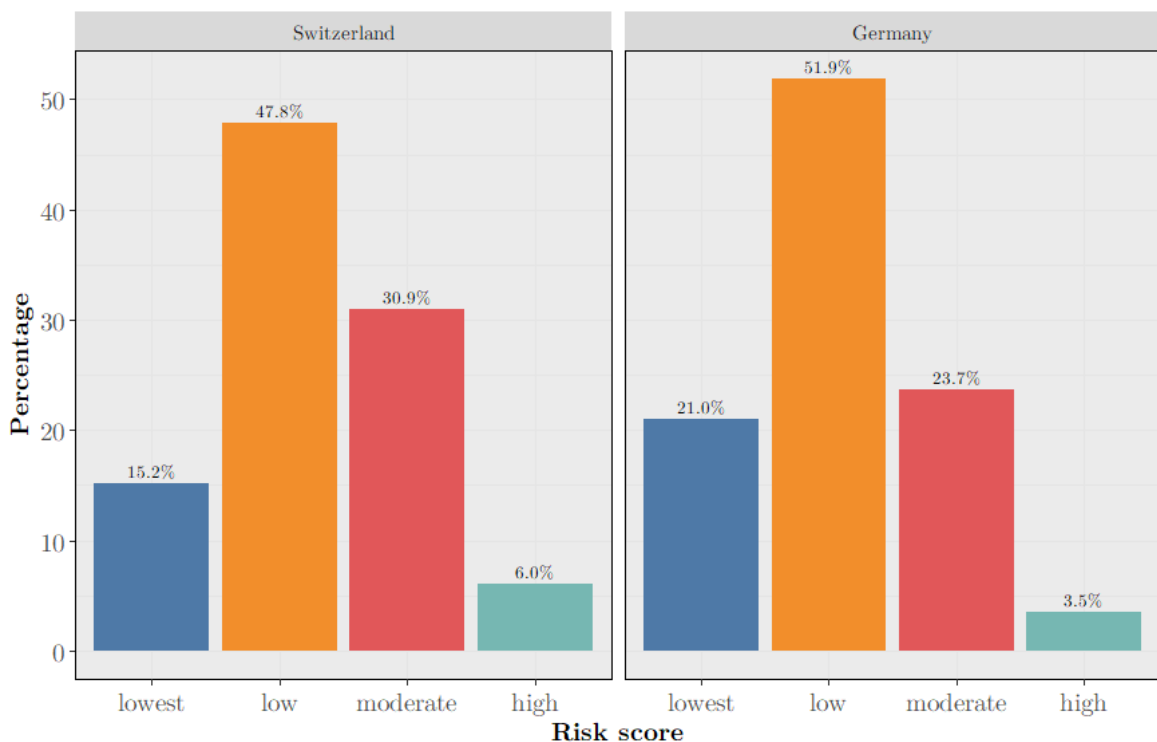
We observe that overall, parties in both countries mention the most images that fall into the low-risk category, at 47.8% in Switzerland and 51.9% in Germany. However, Swiss parties, on average, have more images mentioned in the "moderate" and "high" categories, standing at 30.9% and 6%, respectively. In Germany, "lowest" and "moderate" categories are more balanced, being used in 21% and 23.7% of core sentences, respectively.

Figure 5.12. Percentage of risk score categories, by country and document type.
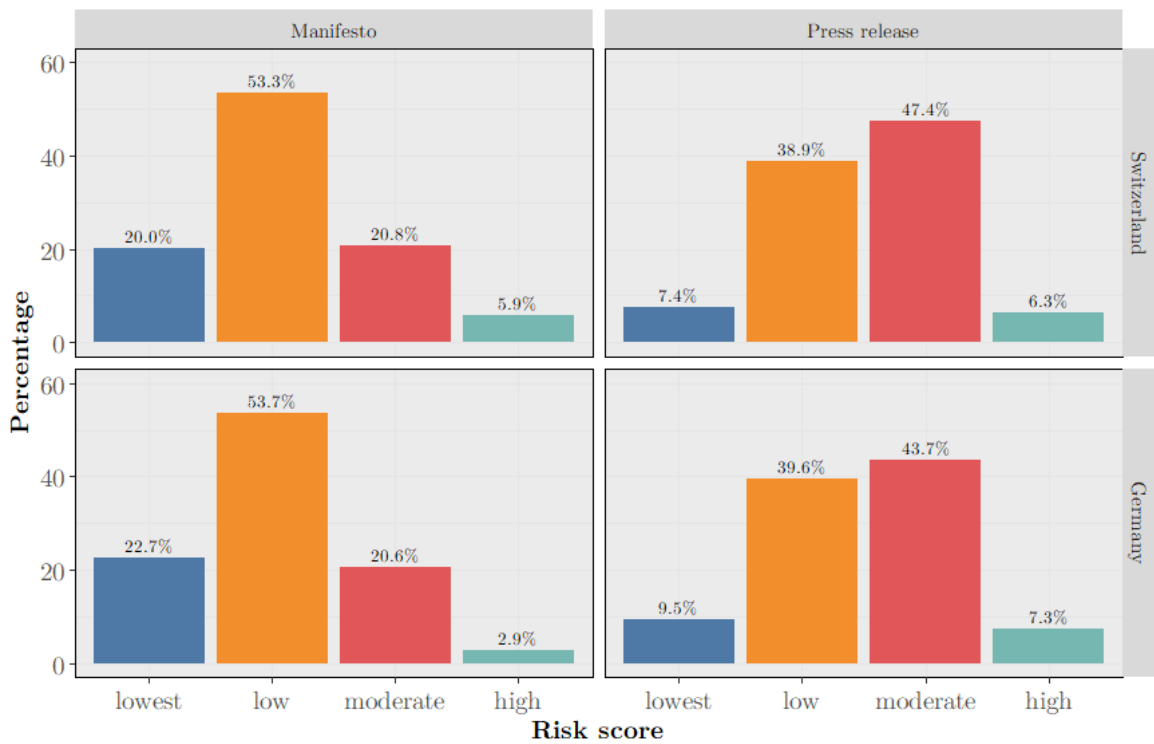
On the document level, there are clear similarities between the two countries. Manifestos have the majority of risk scores in the "low" category, while press releases have slightly higher risk scores, where the "moderate" category is mentioned twice as often, compared to manifestos. Additionally, the "high" category is more frequent, although in Switzerland, these values are similar (5.9% and 6.3% for manifestos and press releases, respectively).
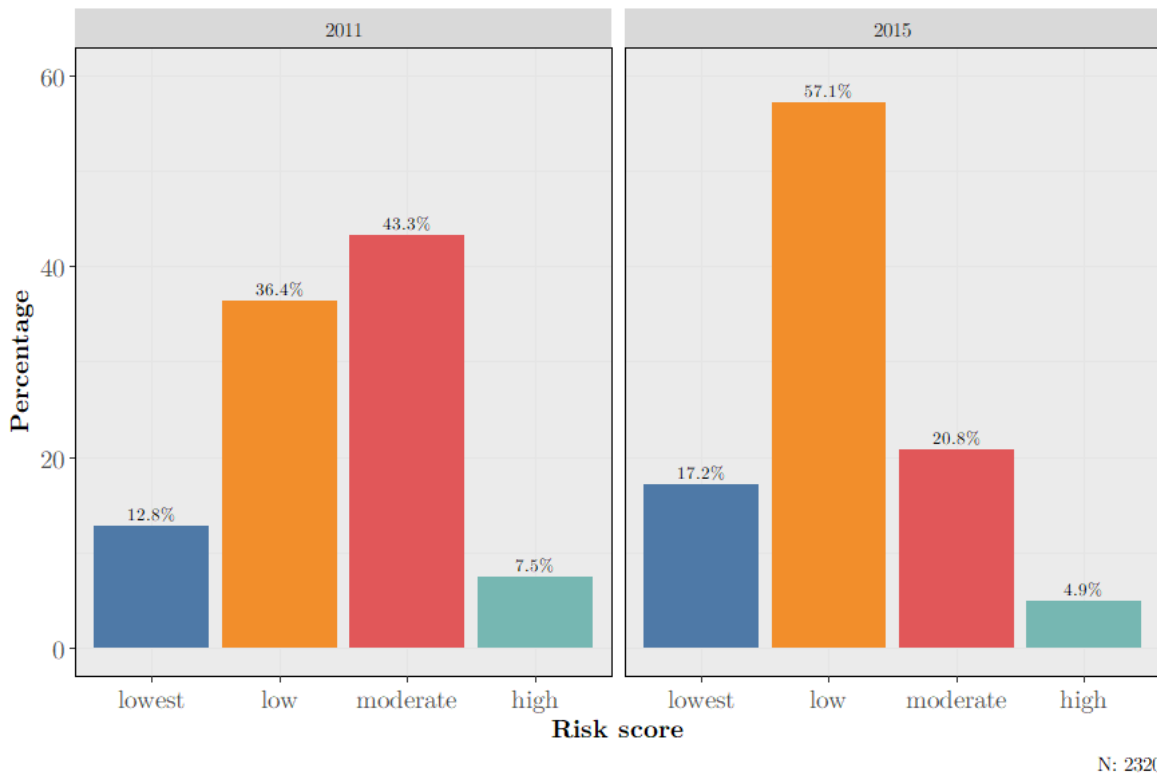
For Swiss parties, we observe distinctive variability between the elections. In 2011, half of all coded core sentences had "moderate" and "high" risk images mentioned. By 2015, parties saw a significant surge in low-risk scores, making up more than half of the records for that year. This suggests a potential change in general risk attitudes among parties.
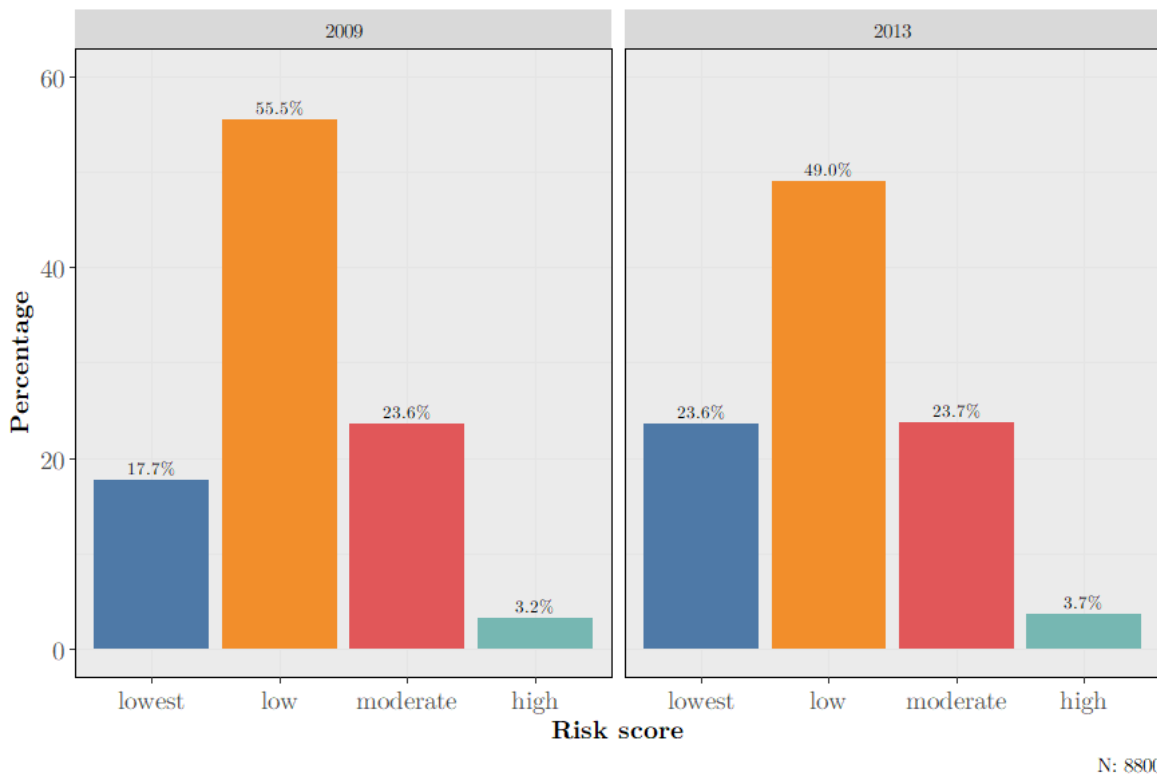
In Germany, both 2009 and 2013 elections feature mostly low and lowest-risk scores, and are more consistent over time compared to Switzerland. The prominence of the lowest risk score rises in the 2013 elections, becoming equivalent to the moderate category. Both countries, however, saw a downward trend in the risk attitudes. Additionally, while risk attitudes are similar in documents, they clearly vary between the elections in each country.

In conclusion, Swiss political parties exhibit greater risk-taking tendencies than German parties. However, there is a shift towards more risk-averse behaviour in Switzerland over time, which is evidenced by the rise in low-risk scores from 2011 to 2015. Conversely, German parties maintain a more consistent, risk-averse posture across elections. Both countries present similar patterns in the type of document: manifestos tend to be low-risk, while press releases tend to be riskier. The data suggests a country-specific temporal variability in risk attitudes, as well as a communication channel-specific uniformity, which could reflect underlying differences in political culture. Moreover, we assume that the transition between categories is not only quantitative but also *qualitative*, especially between "moderate" and "high" categories. This happens because a "high" risk score almost always implies the presence of a negative image (or a combination of "high risk" positive images), which is rather rare.

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5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed why and how parties choose to focus on their non-policy communication in the electoral campaigns. We have presented several examples from previous elections where parties have highlighted different aspects of their party image, with varying degrees of success. Drawing on the interviews, we have shown what parties think about image strategies and when these can be effective. Specifically, we have identified that there is a significant difference between Swiss and German parties in how they approach non-policy-based communication and focus on their image. Swiss party campaign managers have indicated that elections in Switzerland are less likely to have big issue debates, as most debates happen during popular initiatives and referendum campaigns. Therefore, most parties seize the opportunity to convey their images to voters (and to other parties) during the national election campaigns.

In Germany, due to the lack of the interview material, we cannot draw the same conclusions. However, we have observed that the mainstream, incumbent party, the CDU, has prioritised the focus on the top candidate (*Spitzenkandatin)* Angela Merkel because she was leading in polls. Thus, the party management has decided to put the emphasis less on the general party image and more on the leader because it was considered beneficial. On the other hand, a smaller opposition party, DIE LINKE, has shown the approach to tie together policy-based and non-policy-based communication. The interviewee emphasised the importance of the core values that build the base for the actual policies.

We have then looked into how prevalent individual image categories are in parties' texts, as well as looked into the three dimensions. Within each of the three dimensions, we have discussed how parties differ not only between the countries but also within. Swiss parties exhibit a heterogeneous approach to emphasise various sub-dimensions and individual categories, while German parties are more similar. In general, we have observed that, while Swiss and German parties are comparable in terms of how frequently images occur in their texts, but there are substantial variations on the image dimension level.

Chapter 6. Across the three dimensions of the party image

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we test the first set of theoretical assumptions, formulated in Chapter 3 (A1), in relation to the risk attitudes towards image dimensions. We argued that the more risk-averse parties are, the more likely they are to choose less risky dimensions. We have defined the attributes dimension as the riskiest dimension, core values as the least risky one, and the group appeals as lying in-between. We test whether the independent factors increase the probability of an image from the three dimensions being mentioned in a core sentence.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the data structure and theoretical expectations call for the use of a logistic regression, meaning that our dependent variable is binary, with 0 indicating the absence of an image, and 1 indicating its presence. The total number of observations includes all core sentences where at least one self-presentation image is mentioned (N = 10,241). Before running the full model with the two control variables of country and party family, a preliminary model was tested. The comparison of the two models indicated that a full model is a better fit, showing lower values of AIC and log-likelihood.

This chapter is structured as follows: in each of the sections, we run three logistic regressions for each of the image dimensions: attributes (DV1), core values (DV2), and group appeals (DV3). For each model, we present the results and visualise marginal effects for statistically significant independent variables. Then, we pass on to the discussion of the results and confirmation of the hypotheses, offering explanations where our expectations are not supported by the analysis. We conclude the chapter by briefly summarising our findings.

6.2. Regression analysis, attributes dimension (DV1)

This section presents and discusses the results of the logistic regression, computed for the first dependent variable, a presence of an attribute image in a given core sentence. Table 6.1 contains the coefficients (as log-odds) and standard errors for independent and control variables.

Table 6.1. Logistic regression results, attributes dimension.

Independent variables	
Incumbent status	-0.00
	(0.07)
Party size	0.15
	(0.16)
Party momentum	0.14
	(0.23)
Party extremism (ref = centrist)	
Moderate	-0.00
	(0.10)
Extreme	-1.00 ***
	(0.11)
Press release	0.56 ***
	(0.07)
Control variables	
Germany	-0.70 ***
	(0.08)
Party family (ref = Christian Democrats)	
Left / SD	0.08
	(0.10)
Green	0.38 ***
	(0.10)
Liberal	-0.13
	(0.12)
Radical right-wing	0.00
	(0.20)
Constant	-1.13 ***
	(0.15)
AIC	9566.19
Log Likelihood	-4771.10
N	10241

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, + p < 0.1. All coefficients represent untransformed log-odds.

In this model, variables of incumbency, party size and party momentum do not show statistically significant results, thus rejecting our hypotheses H1a, H2a, and H3a. Party extremism shows a significant negative effect only for the category of extreme position. The variable of the communication channel indicates a higher probability of encountering an attribute image in the press releases. As for the control variables, German parties have a lower probability of mentioning images from this dimension. Finally, the variable of party family indicates a statistically significant positive effect only for the Green parties, compared to the reference category. To further analyse the effects, we compute predicted probabilities of the

dependent variable for each independent variable by taking an "average" value for each factor's proportion [63].

Figure 6.1. Predicted probabilities of the attribute image, party extremism variable.
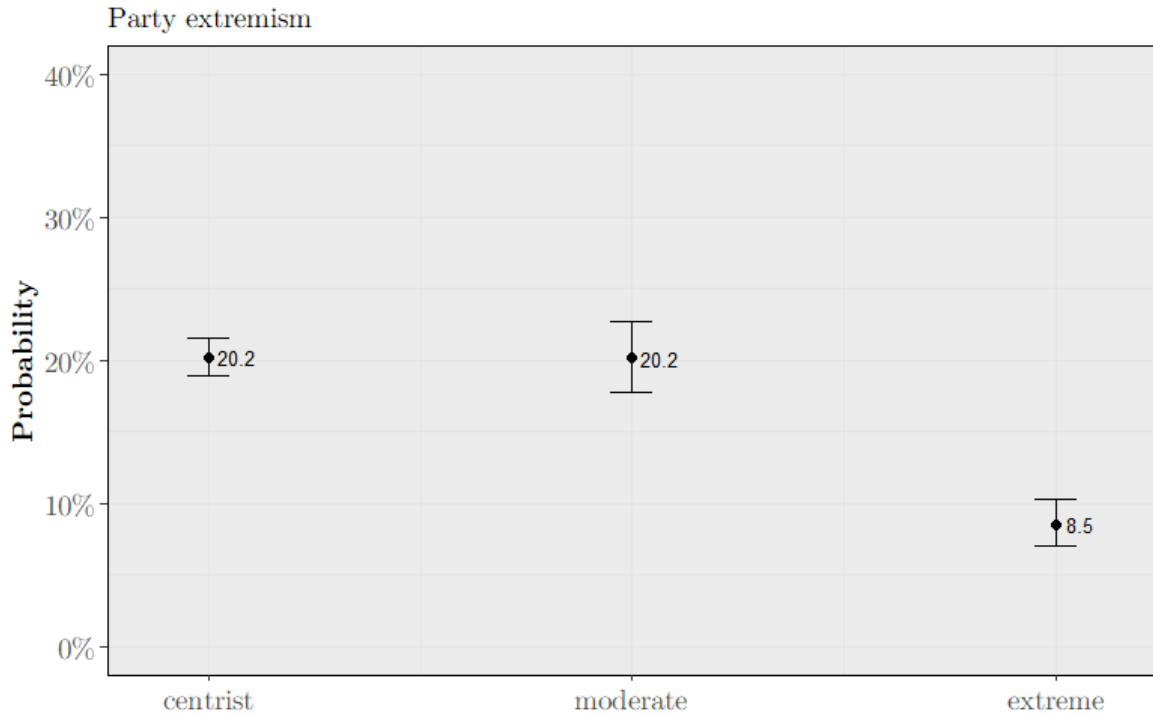
The results indicate that, compared to the centrist parties, parties with the extreme ideological position have a lower probability of mentioning attribute images, estimated at 8.5%. This contradicts our theoretical expectations so far (**H4a**).

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[63] This is used in the current and subsequent values to report the predicted probabilities. The *ggeffects* command is used, which returns *marginal means*, since the effects are "marginalized" (or "averaged") over the levels of factors (or values of character vectors) (Lüdecke 2018; Lüdecke et al. 2020). In other words, it is used to show how changes in one of the factors (IVs) affect the predicted outcome (DV), while keeping other factors constant. This allows to effectively isolate the effects of one variable at a time. Additionally, when calculating marginal effects for models that include categorical variables, the package takes into account the observed distribution of the factor levels in the dataset. Instead of generating predictions for each category separately, it computes an 'average' prediction by weighting the predictions for each level according to their proportions in the data. For example, if a factor has three levels, and the dataset contains 40% of observations in one level, 30% in another, and 30% in the third, the marginal effect is averaged over these proportions.

Figure 6.2. Predicted probabilities of the attribute image, communication channel variable.
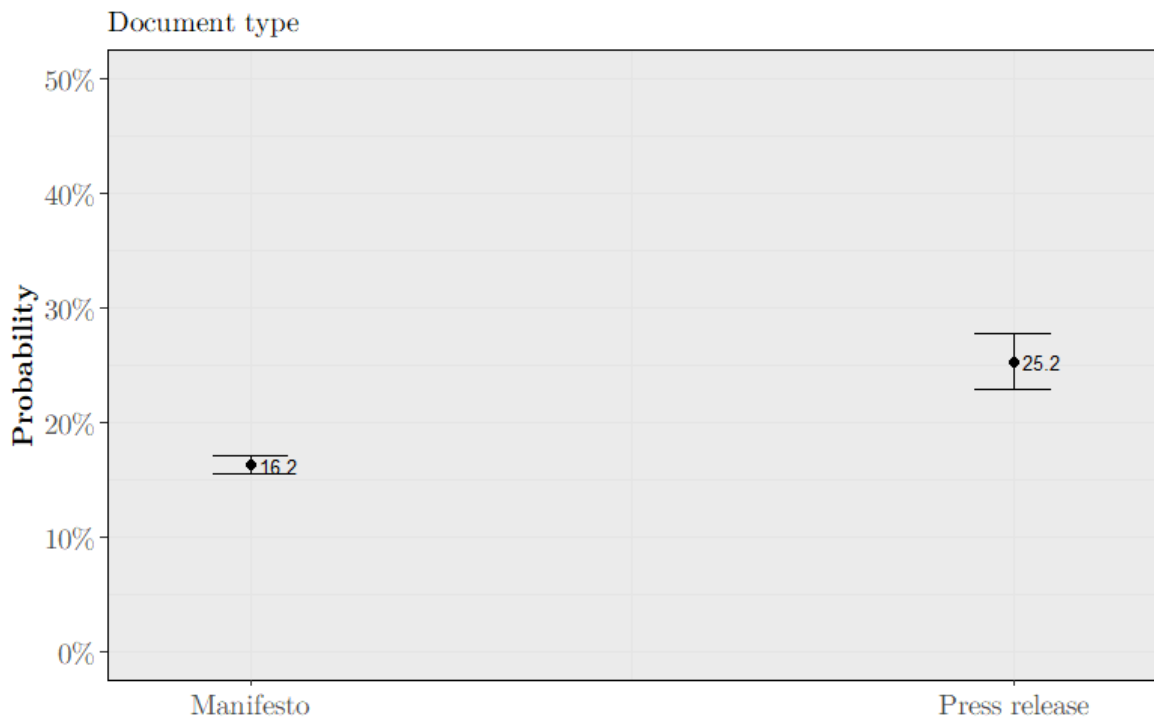
The communication channel variable indicates that the probability of encountering an image from the attributes dimension is higher in the press releases than in the manifestos (25.2% and 16.2%, respectively). This confirms our theoretical expectations so far (**H5a**).

Figure 6.3.Predicted probabilities of the attribute image, country variable.
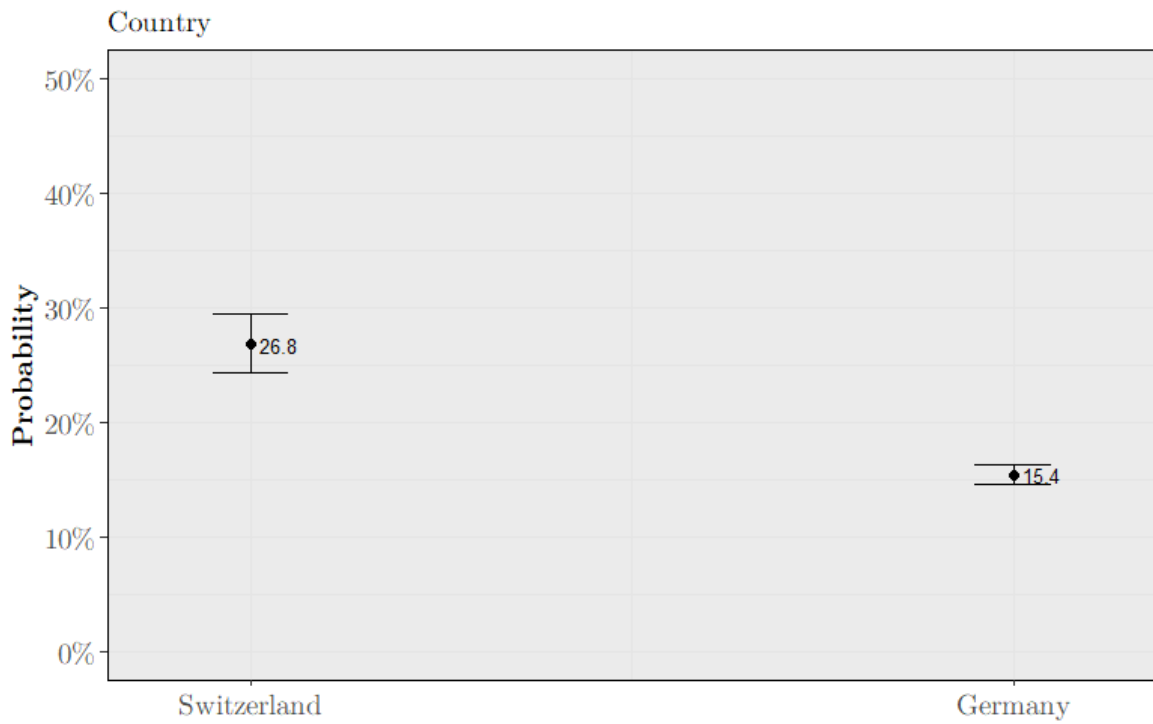
We observe that Swiss parties have a higher probability of mentioning attribute images, standing at 26.8%, compared to the German parties at an estimated 15.4%.

Figure 6.4. Predicted probabilities of the attribute image, party family variable.
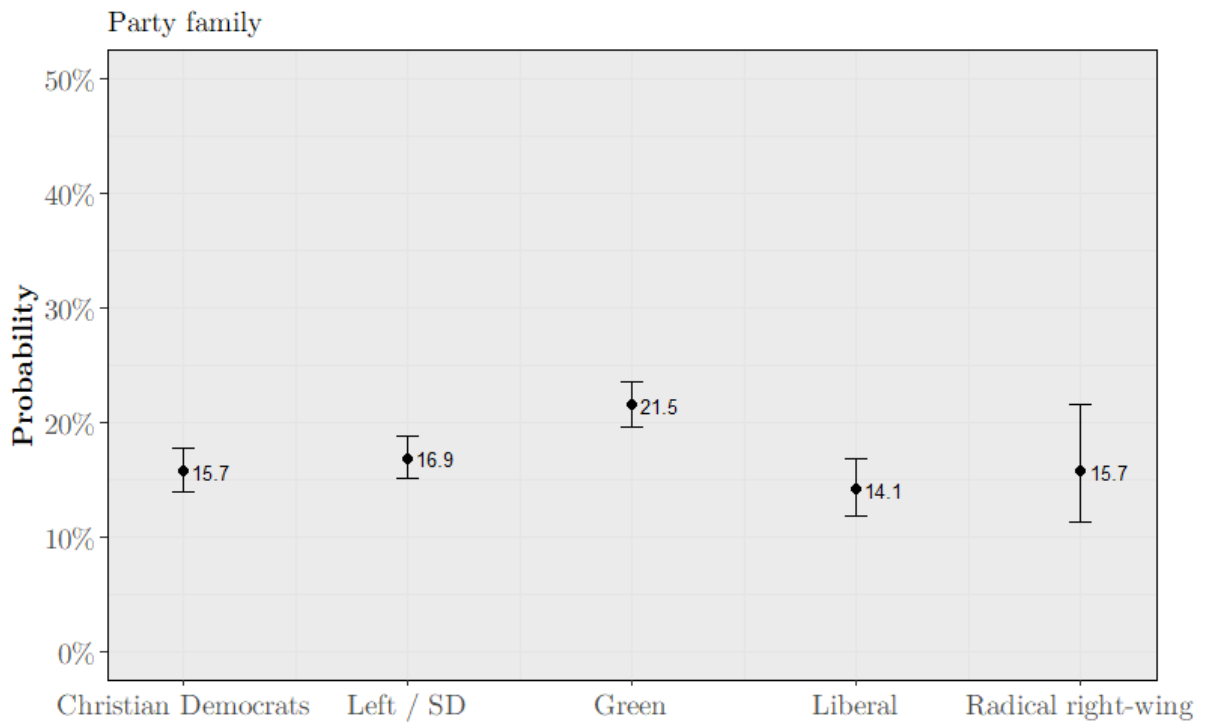
We also observe an effect of the party family control variable. Compared to the reference group of Christian Democrats (at 15.7% of predicted probability), the Green parties show a higher chance of mentioning attributes (21.5%).

6.3. Regression analysis, core values dimension (DV2)

This section presents and discusses the results of the logistic regression, computed for the second dependent variable, a presence of a core value image in a given core sentence. Table 6.2 contains the coefficients (as log-odds) and standard errors for independent and control variables.

*Table 6.2. Logistic regression results, core values dimension.*

Independent variables	
Incumbent status	-0.33 ***
	(0.06)
Party size	-0.61 ***
	(0.15)
Party momentum	-0.46 *
	(0.20)
Party extremism (ref = centrist)	
Moderate	0.22 *
	(0.11)
Extreme	-0.22 *
	(0.09)
Press release	-0.53 ***
	(0.08)
Control variables	
Germany	0.06
	(0.07)
Party family (ref = Christian Democrats)	
Left / SD	-0.15
	(0.10)
Green	0.07
	(0.10)
Liberal	-0.22
	(0.12)
Radical right-wing	0.51 **
	(0.17)
Constant	-0.31 *
	(0.14)
AIC	12060.74
Log Likelihood	-6018.37
N	10241

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, + p < 0.1. All coefficients represent untransformed log-odds.

In this model, incumbency, party size, and party momentum have significant negative effects on the dependent variable, which contradicts our expectations. This implies that higher values in these variables (or being incumbent) lead to a lower likelihood of mentioning an image from the core values dimension. On the other hand, the moderate category of the party extremism variable has a significant positive effect, compared to being centrist, while the extreme category

has a significant negative effect. Press releases are associated with a reduced likelihood of mentioning a core value. Among the control variables, only the radical right-wing party family shows a statistically significant positive effect on the outcome. The other control variables, such as being a German party or belonging to other party families, do not show statistical significance and thus do not seem to have any effect on the dependent variable.

Figure 6.5. Predicted probabilities of the core value image, incumbent status variable.
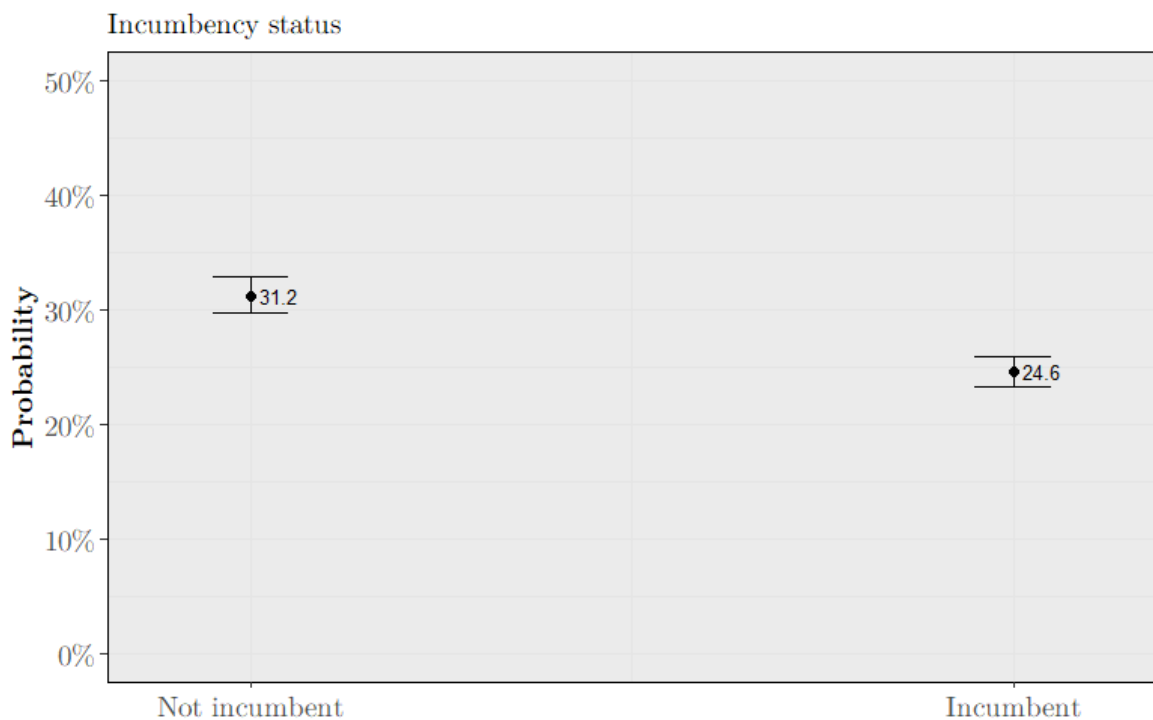
The variable of incumbency status indicates that incumbent parties have a lower probability of mentioning their core values. This contradicts our theoretical expectations so far (**H1a**).

Figure 6.6. Predicted probabilities of the core value image, party size variable.
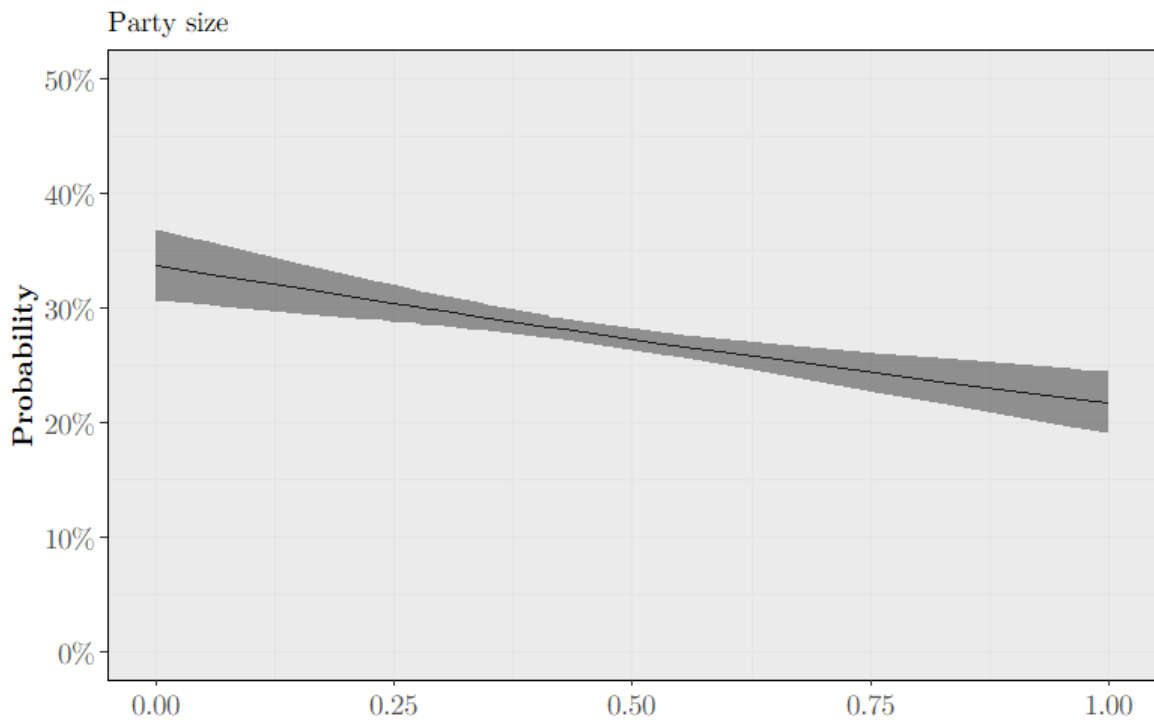
The results indicate that the larger a party is, the less likely it is to mention core values. However, this does not support our hypothesis so far (**H2a**).

Figure 6.7. Predicted probabilities of the core value image, party momentum variable.
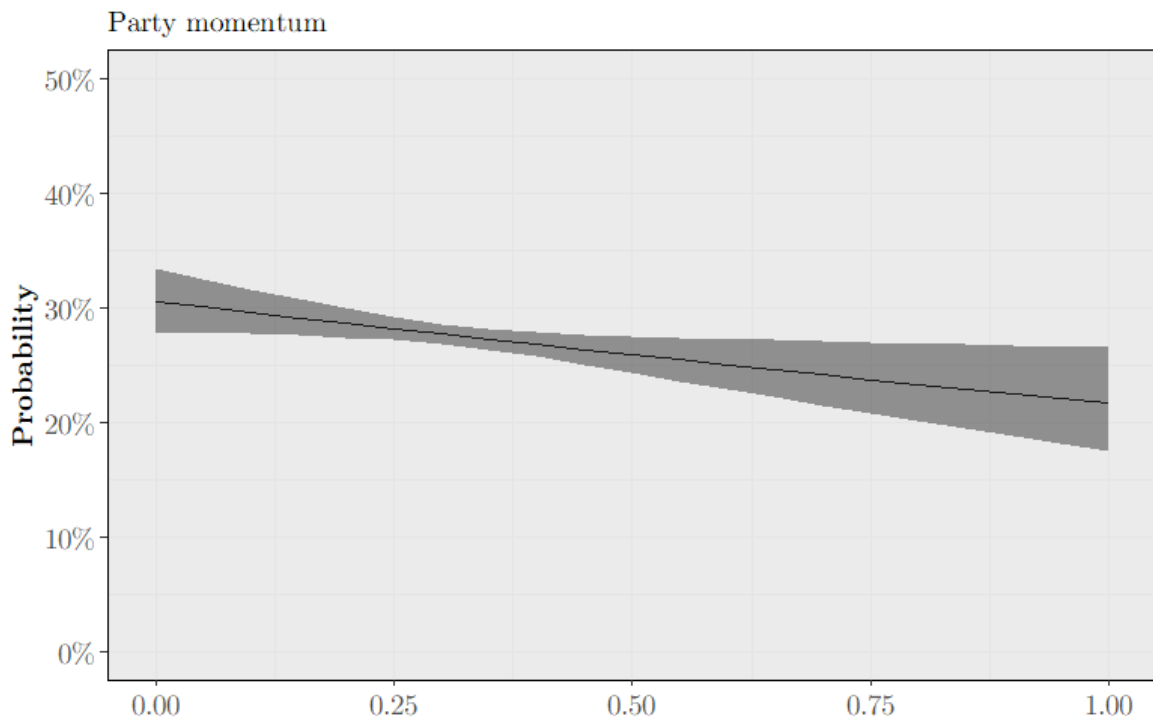
The variable of the party momentum shows a negative relationship with the dependent variable: the higher is the momentum, the lower is the probability to mention core values. This does not go in line with our theoretical assumptions (**H3a**).

Figure 6.8. Predicted probabilities of the core value image, party extremism variable.
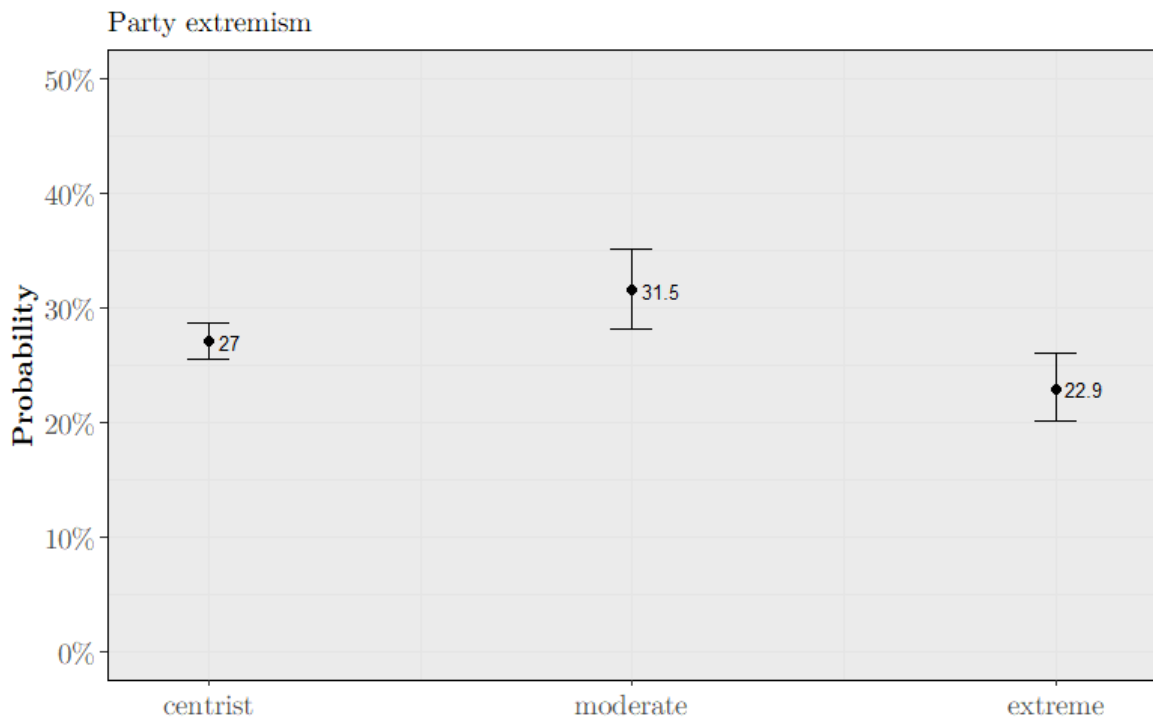
The variable of the party extremism shows an interesting relationship with the dependent variable: parties with a moderate ideological position are more likely to mention core values than the centrist ones (31.5% and 27%, respectively). On the other hand, parties with the extreme ideological position are much less likely to mention these images (22.9%). This partially confirms our hypothesis (**H4a**).

Figure 6.9. Predicted probabilities of the core value image, document type variable.
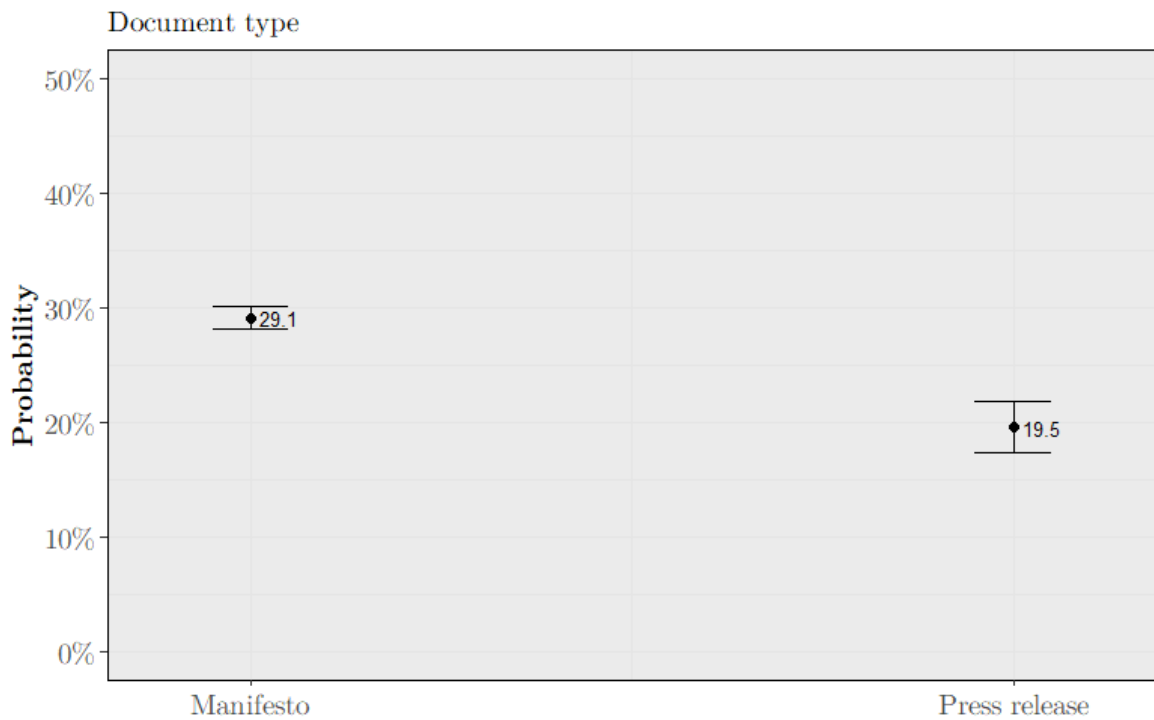
As expected, press releases have a lower probability of mentioning images from the core values dimension than manifestos (19.5% versus 29.1%, respectively). This confirms our theoretical expectations (**H5a**).

Figure 6.10. Predicted probabilities of the core value image, party family variable.

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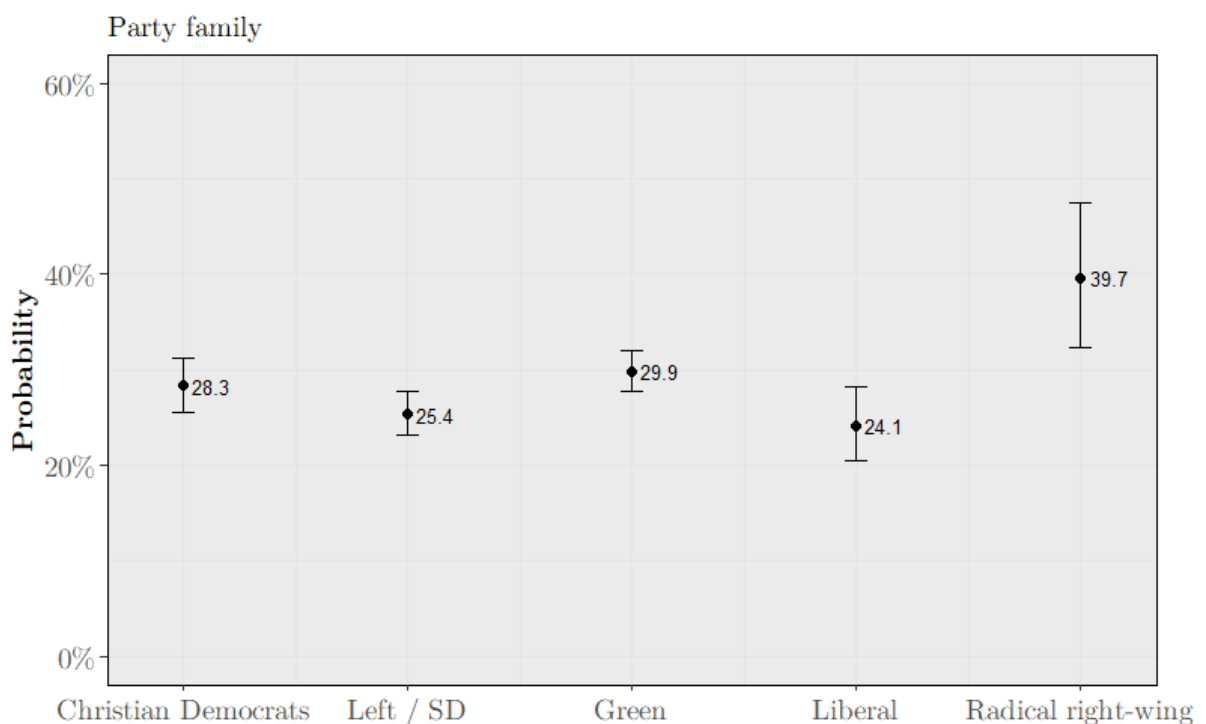
Compared to the reference category of Christian Democrats, only the parties from the radical right-wing family show a higher probability of mentioning core values, compared to the reference group.

6.4. Regression analysis, group appeals dimension (DV3)

This section presents and discusses the results of the logistic regression, computed for the first dependent variable, a presence of a group appeals image in a given core sentence. Table 6.3 contains the coefficients (as log-odds) and standard errors for independent and control variables.

Table 6.3. Logistic regression results, group appeals dimension.

Independent variables	
Incumbent status	0.26 ***
	(0.05)
Party size	0.24 +
	(0.13)
Party momentum	-0.03
	(0.18)
Party extremism (ref = centrist)	
Moderate	-0.03
	(0.18)
Extreme	-0.05
	(0.09)
Press release	-0.10
	(0.06)
Control variables	
Germany	0.17 *
	(0.07)
Party family (ref = Christian Democrats)	
Left / SD	0.09
	(0.09)
Green	-0.16+
	(0.09)
Liberal	0.21+
	(0.11)
Radical right-wing	-0.16
	(0.16)
Constant	0.07
	(0.13)
AIC	13529.98
Log Likelihood	-6752.99
N	10241

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, + p < 0.1. All coefficients represent untransformed log-odds.

In this model, incumbency has a significant positive effect on the dependent variable, indicating that incumbent parties are more likely to mention images from the group appeals dimension, which contradicts the hypothesis. Party size shows a positive but marginally significant effect, making it less conclusive. The variables of party momentum, party extremism, and communication channel do not show statistically significant impact. Among the control variables, being a German party increases the likelihood of mentioning group appeals. The Liberal and Green party families show marginally significant effects, positive and negative respectively, while the other party families are not statistically significant. For this dependent variable, we do not have specific theoretical assumptions, as they were not formalised for this dimension in Chapter 3. We do, however, discuss the results in section 6.5.

Figure 6.11. Predicted probabilities of the group appeals image, incumbent status variable.
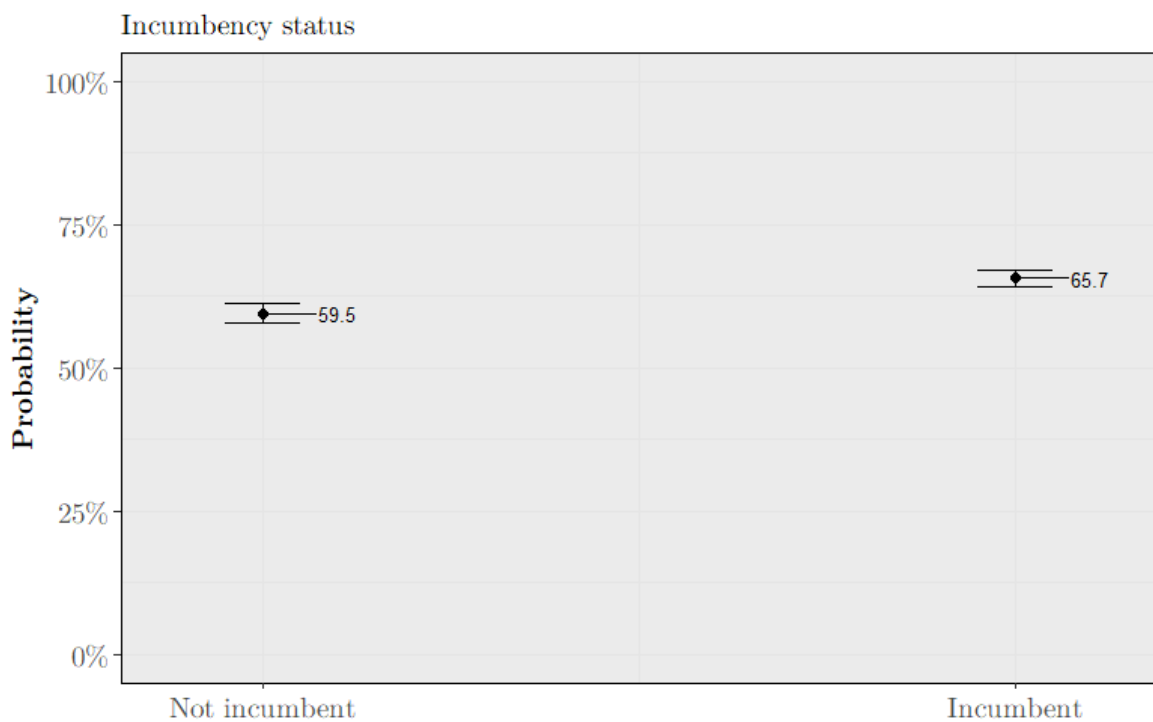
The results indicate that incumbent parties are slightly more likely to mention group appeals than non-incumbent parties (65.7% and 59.5%, respectively).

Figure 6.12. Predicted probabilities of the group appeals image, party size variable.
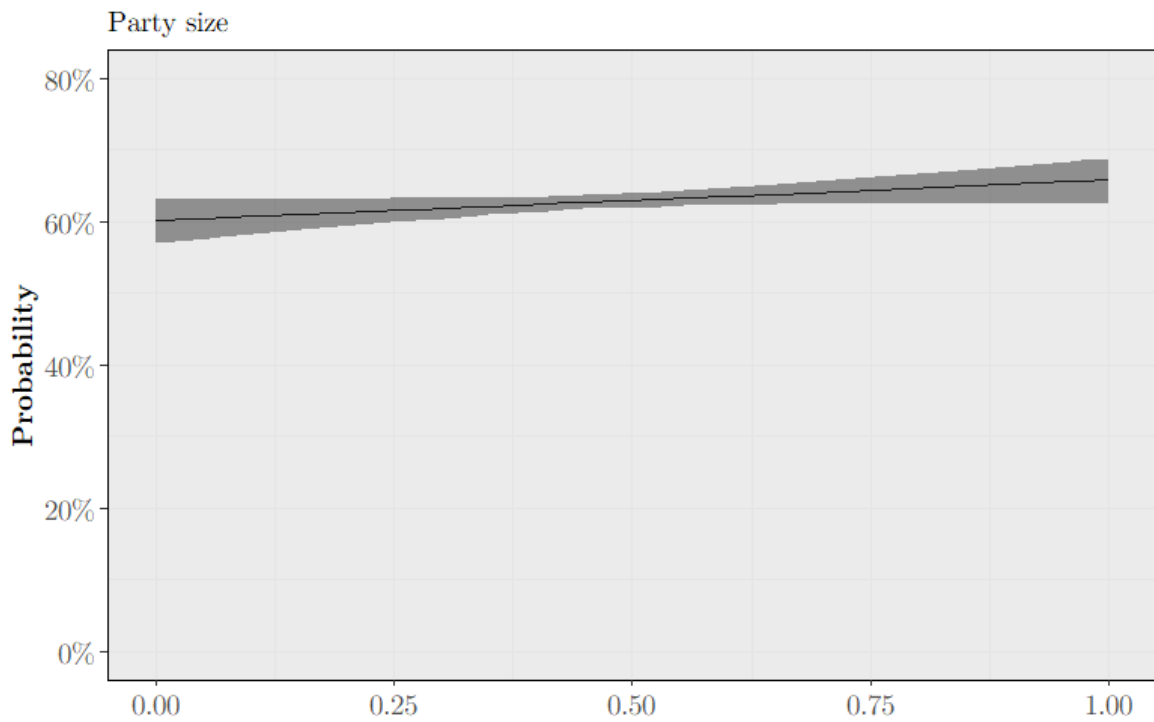
The effect of the party size is rather modest: the difference between the smallest and the largest party analysed stands at 6 percentage points (60% and 66%, respectively).

Figure 6.13. Predicted probabilities of the group appeals image, country variable.
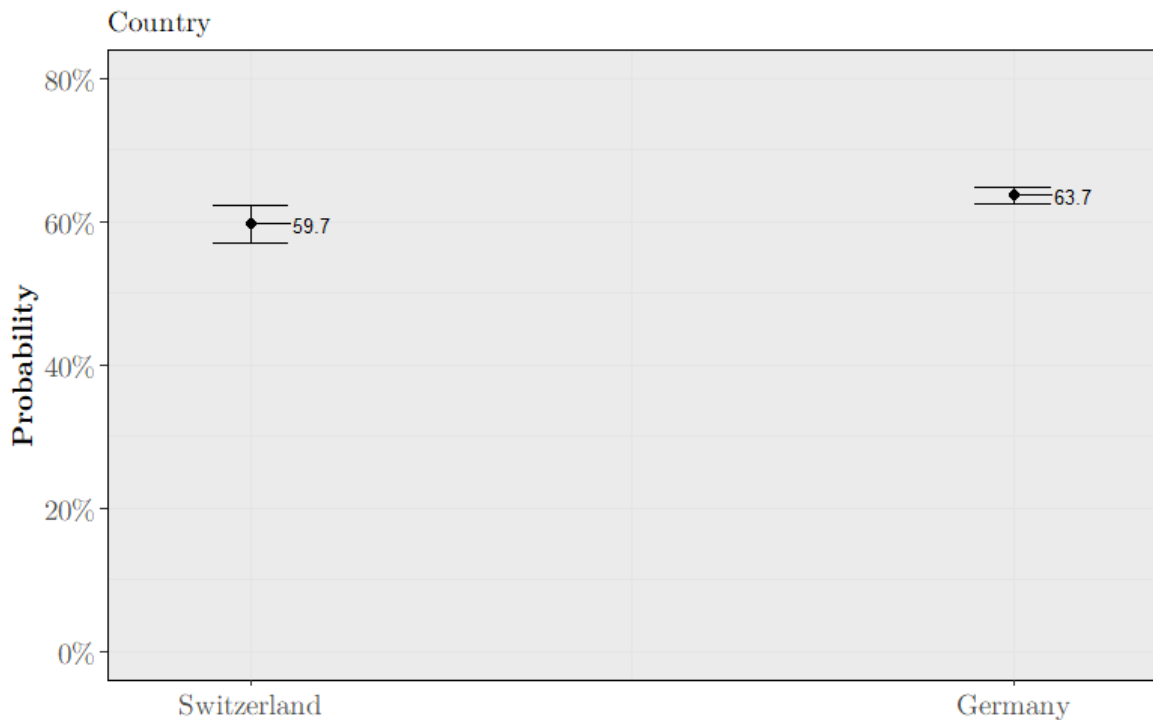
As for the control variable of the country, the results suggest that German parties are slightly more likely to mention images from the group appeal dimensions.

6.5. Discussion

When we compare the findings across the three dimensions, several patterns emerge. First, the incumbency effect is statistically significant only for the core values and group appeals dimensions, showing a negative and a positive effect, respectively. These results reject our theoretical assumptions (**H1a**) that incumbent parties tend to focus on less risky dimensions.

We assume that incumbent parties are known to voters because of their policies or their general record. By employing it to their advantage, parties might attempt to diversify their strategies. Research suggests that parties invest their resources into "non-policy endowments" (Calvo and Murillo 2019: 7), that is, non-policy communication where parties (or candidates) enjoy a relative advantage over their adversaries. In other words, voters may perceive one party as being more competent than another, even though both address the same policy or have the same policy stance. As such, incumbent parties, which usually have a larger policy profile, might attempt to maximise their outcomes by investing more in their attribute image of competence, integrity or pragmatism. Another explanation is that incumbents make more self-descriptive

claims and enjoy more acclaim than non-incumbents (Benoit and Sheafer 2006), thus making attributes more likely to be mentioned.

Second, party size shows a statistically significant negative effect on the core values images, as well as a marginally significant positive effect on the group appeals. However, in either of the three dimensions, the effect does not correspond to our theoretical expectations (**H2a**) that the bigger a party is, the less risky dimensions it will choose. In terms of group appeals dimension, incumbent parties might prefer to address a wide range of voter (and non-voter) groups more often as a part of a "catch-all" politics, thus also downplaying their core value. For example, Huber (2022) finds that parties use group appeals in their campaign communication in a strategic way in order to broaden their electoral base.

Third, party momentum is statistically insignificant for the attributes and group appeals dimension and exerts a negative effect on the core values dimension. Therefore, we cannot confirm our hypothesis, (**H3a**) that the higher is the momentum, the more parties will emphasise the risky dimension of attributes and downplay the core values dimension.

Furthermore, the impact of party extremism is not straightforward. It is peculiar that having an extreme ideological position lowers the probability of image mentions both in the attributes and core values dimensions. For the moderate position, on the other hand, the probability of mentioning core values rises. Overall, the results do not fully support our theoretical expectations that the more extreme a party is, the more likely it is to emphasise the risky dimension of attributes and downplay the core values dimension (**H4a**), and we reject our hypothesis.

Compared to both centrist and extreme parties, parties with a moderate ideological position might be more risk-averse and choose to highlight their core values. Focusing on core values allows them to establish a distinct identity without committing to polarising policy positions. This is a comparatively low-risk strategy in terms of public opinion and electoral consequences, as general core values might be less divisive than specific policy stances. Moreover, the focus on core values over specific policy positions enhances the party's flexibility in coalition negotiations. By not locking themselves into rigid policy commitments, moderate parties can adapt and align with various partners, be they centrist or even mildly extreme. This flexibility is a valuable asset in multi-party systems where coalition governments are the norm, allowing parties like SPD and CDU to form a "Grand Coalition" (e.g., Proksch and Slapin 2006).

We also assume that ideologically extreme parties may focus their communications on policies, possibly those that are more polarising or driven by core values, rather than on their attribute image. Bjarnøe, Adams, and Boydstun (2022) have found that parties differ in their emphasis on issues versus valence images in their self-presentation, and that parties holding more extreme ideologies place greater emphasis on issues. Another explanation is that extreme parties on both left and right are frequently found to be in opposition to other parties. As such, they will be less interested in cultivating their image of competence or pragmatism (especially if they have a low probability of joining a coalition), or simply will lack a specific governmental record to highlight. This, in turn, will incentivise these parties to focus more on their policies and especially positions [64].

Finally, the variable of the communication channel shows a positive effect on the attributes dimension and a negative effect on the core values dimension. The effect on the group appeals was not significant. Therefore, we can confirm our hypothesis that parties will most likely mention core values in their manifestos and attributes in their press releases (**H5a**).

As for the country effect, we observe statistical significance only for the attributes and group appeals dimensions. One potential explanation is that core values constitute the rigid part of the party image, which is rarely changed between the two elections. Expanding the time frame (and even country cases) in the future research might shed more light on our understanding.

The variable of the party family indicated that the Green parties are more likely to mention images from the attribute dimension and are marginally less likely to mention group appeals. The higher likelihood of Green parties mentioning images from the attributes dimension might be attributed to their opposition status and frequent focus on specific issues of environmentalism, social justice, and sustainability. As they do not have a record in government positions, they might feel the need to emphasise their competence and pragmatic approach to their policies. Radical right-wing parties are more likely to mention images from the core values dimension, which somewhat contradicts the findings of the party extremism. Additionally, there is a marginal negative effect of the Liberal party family on the probability to mention group appeals.

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[64] We also suspect a potential link between the extremist position and populism, but investigating this relationship is beyond the scope of the current thesis.

6.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed our first set of theoretical expectations (A1) related to risk attitudes towards three image dimensions: attributes, core values, and group appeals. Through the utilisation of logistic regression models, we have uncovered several intriguing patterns that either support or question our initial hypotheses. The chapter presents a contrasting view of how various independent variables impact the probability of a party mentioning images from the three dimensions. While some of our hypotheses were confirmed, others were not, thus setting the stage for further research to unravel these complexities.

Chapter 7. Attacking the opponents

7.1. Introduction

In the current chapter, we test the second dependent variable of the presence of attacks (DV4). In Chapter 3, we postulated that the more parties are risk-acceptant, the more likely they are to attack their opponent. First, we draw on the available interviews and the textual data to uncover how often parties consider using attacks as a part of their non-policy communication. For Switzerland, interviews from all but one party (Swiss People's Party) are used. Only two interviews (Christian Democratic Union and DIE LINKE) are available for Germany. Then, we briefly present the most frequent objects of parties' attacking images.

In the second part of the chapter, we test whether our independent variables increase the probability of the attacks' presence in the core sentences. Our dependent variable is binary, with 0 indicating the absence and 1 indicating the presence of an attack. This data structure calls for the logistic regression. As explained in Chapter 4, the number of observations differs from the previous chapter, since we include the core sentences with either self-presentation images or attacks (N = 11,120). We present the results of the regression and visualise the marginal effects for the statistically significant variables. Then, we discuss the results in light of the formulated hypotheses and conclude the chapter by summarising both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

7.2. Calculated risks: the art of considerate negative campaigning

Negative campaigning can be found in virtually every electoral campaign across most democracies. Researchers have extensively looked into negative strategies and attacking both in Switzerland and Germany (Bol and Bohl 2015; Holtz-Bacha and Johansson 2017; Nai and Sciarini 2018; Steffan and Venema 2020; Walter 2014b). Most of the research suggests that parties in both countries do not engage as much in building a negative image of their opponents, as it happens, for example, in the USA (e.g., Mattes and Redlawsk 2020; Mark 2007). Frequently, attacks feature issues, i.e., one party attacking another on their particular policy stance or policy handling. Moreover, in multi-party systems, especially those with frequent coalitions, attacking your opponent, who could become your ally, might be a risky strategy.

Research has shown that party competition in such systems typically obscures the risks and benefits of negative campaigning (Walter 2012; Hansen and Pedersen 2008).

Overall, researchers agree that negativity and attacking in elections is highly contextual and depends on a set of factors, from national political traditions to party characteristics. We have established that in Switzerland, parties are preoccupied with showing their readiness to cooperate with others, while German ones address a wide range of voters and avoid antagonising them. Furthermore, existing literature shows that in Switzerland, direct democratic campaigns tend to be more negative (Nai and Sciarini 2018), and that German parties prefer to attack the opponents using posters, both online and real-life (Steffan and Venema 2020).

7.2.1. Switzerland – the cooperation is the key

Virtually all Swiss party campaign managers, who took part in the interviews, have highlighted the difficulty of using negative campaigning in the Swiss context. For example, the SP interviewee has directly outlined that the usual negative campaigning strategies would not be efficient in Switzerland, although she has stressed that it is not an opinion held by everyone in the party:

"I do not consider the classic negative campaigning in Switzerland to be expedient. We don't have that tradition; people don't like to see that when you do negative campaigning, which is known and normal in the US. […] I also think it is only of limited use to only talk about the political opponent and his mistakes. People want to know what we do well and what our solution is, not what SVP does all the bad things. […] In most cases, we have an inclusive attitude and should focus on ourselves, not the opponent. But maybe not everyone in the party sees it the same way" (Interview SP 2018).

Here we discern two main ideas, which are later shared more or less by all interviewees. First, party managers fear a public backlash or believe that voters in general dislike negative campaigning. Second, it is considered as not beneficial or pragmatic to focus on the opponents: "*People would rather not hear what the SP finds bad about the SVP. But people want to know what our [solutions] are* (Interview SP 2018). Likewise, the BDP manager noted that attacking the opponents, especially for smaller parties, is a substantial risk of losing credibility: "*And what is done in a dubious style of the platforms therefore has the chance that the risk is […]*

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you will then no longer be accepted and noticed in the political world" (Interview BDP 2018). Here, we see the risk-averse attitudes of party managers towards the idea of attacking opponents.

The FDP interviewee demonstrated the same idea by stating that "*a campaign must always be about [your own party]. You always have to talk about yourself. […] [Parties] don't talk about SVP being bad. They [say] "We are good". The criticism is not part of it. It can be part if you don't have an overlap to differentiate yourself thematically*" (Interview FDP 2018). This might indicate that parties would be incentivised to use attacking when they have similar positions on issues. In this case, portraying the opponent negatively may be a possible strategy. BDP, GPS and GLP interviewees have also highlighted the necessity to talk on issues, not on the character or values. However, the GPS party manager has noted that the party is generally against the "right slide" (*Rechtrutsch*) in the political sphere. It is not a direct attack of a specific party, but rather a self-positioning as a party against the right-wing parties (what we indicated as distancing).

For CVP, criticism is a necessary part of the political process, and they specify that it is done in relation to actual policies or popular initiatives, and can also boost their visibility: "*Also because we use [criticism] to show what we do. You shouldn't just respond to criticism… It's even better if you make politics yourself and the others criticise you, and you'll be noticed better that way* (Interview CVP 2018). FDP takes the viability of attacking the opponent even further: "*Our communicative enemy is the SP. Only the SP and the FDP have zero points of contact, so I can happily criticise as I want. I can argue with the SP. […] On the other hand, they probably do the same thing. There you are in a dialogue, in an argument*" (Interview FDP 2018). Here, the party manager directly indicated that the Socialist Party is their political "enemy", although he named this interaction as a sort of dialogue. Even though he indirectly says that the FDP and the SP do not have the same values, he does not consider attacking the SP on their values as a viable strategy. Rather, the manager prefers to "keep civil" and stay in the democratic dialogue.

EVP interviewees have mentioned an example of their unsuccessful attempt of negative campaigning that backfired with their constituency. They have admitted the mistake of using the attacks on a political actor instead of attacks on the issues and positions that another party supports:

"We drive factual politics. […] We tried that [attacking] once 8 years ago. We made a funny website where you can read statements from Mr. Blocher recorded and then [them being] exposed. Kind of fact check. In a snappy way. We then presented that in the election campaign and were destroyed. But not by the public, but by our voters. We as a Christian party cannot do anything against someone else. What would work would be if we took the politics of another party, e.g., the SVP, into the fact check. Not the people, but the [issues]" (Interview EVP 2018).

This is an example of what can happen if a party decides to take the risky decision of attacking its opponents and is electorally punished by its own constituency. Moreover, EVP went a step further and attacked not a party but its leader, Christopher Blocher, by "exposing" his statements. This attack on the character of an individual politician did not go well for the EVP, and they have acknowledged that attacks on the policymaking or specific issues might have been less risky.

To sum up, we see specific patterns in the approach to the use of attacking strategies among Swiss parties. First, smaller parties, such as BDP, GPS, GLP, or EVP, explicitly underline that negative campaigning might not be a useful and effective strategy. It can fail with the core electorate, which will not appreciate such attacks because it would be incoherent with their core values and rigid identity. It can fail with other parties in the political process, and the attacker will not be taken seriously. However, more or less, all parties mention SVP at some point as an implicit political opponent. We note the desire to distance from the political decision-making (SP) or the general image (BDP) that SVP represents in the Swiss political arena. Finally, it is considered impractical, and even if parties attack their opponents, they claim to do so only based on specific policies or issue positions, not on the character of candidates. Direct attacks on core values are rare, and only general references to 'left-wing' or 'right-wing' politics were mentioned in the interviews. Overall, party managers clarified that creating their own identity and image and then conveying it to the public and other political parties is the primary goal in the electoral strategies. For Swiss parties, attacking is deemed to be too risky compared to the potential electoral gains.

7.2.2. Germany – "Thank you for your competition!"

As there are only two interviews available for German parties – CDU and DIE LINKE – we are going to focus on perceived differences in how a big incumbent centrist party and a small opposition left-wing party approach attacking as a communication strategy and consider

actively using it. For example, according to the party manager, CDU did not frequently portray their opponents in a negative way in the 2013 elections, but merely responded to attacks:

"[W]hen you are in a government like the CDU, we are attacked by political opponents with false statements. So, I have to criticise [them], and that's why it's a relevant factor in the campaign discussion, but the degree of importance is not determined by us alone" (Interview CDU 2018).

The interviewee explained that, since they are a governmental party, they frequently get attacked by other parties. Thus, they have to respond, and occasionally, it involves criticising their opponent. For them, the attacking strategy of a party is not decided unilaterally, but is also influenced by other actors in the electoral campaign. As such, it is considered being rather a tactical than a strategic choice. The incumbent status plays a crucial role: parties in government would get criticised frequently, which is already observed in the literature.

On the other hand, for an opposition party like DIE LINKE, attacking opponents is seen as a strategy to distinguish themselves. However, the interviewee clarified it that such a strategy should be used not as a principal, but rather as a part of the overall party communication. He has outlined a specific risk that, once the opponent, which a party has been attacking, changes their position, e.g., on a specific issue, the attacking party could "*suddenly have a problem*", since their criticism will no longer appear as valid:

"*[To address] people more precisely, you as a party must not define yourself solely through others, i.e., through the distinction from others, but rather you can only achieve competence and a longer build-up of electorate and core electorate through your own programmatic strength*" (Interview DIE LINKE 2018).

This statement indicates that parties are well aware of the importance of constructing their image of self-presentation, and most likely acclaiming, since the interviewee specifically mentions the "distinction from other", which we can define either as distancing or attacking images. They also highlight how crucial it is to build the core electorate in order to be strong.

Overall, we observe that CDU, as an incumbent centrist party, claimed to avoid attacking their opponents in their electoral campaigns. They saw it only as a response to attacks in their direction, especially when it is based on their governmental status. DIE LINKE, as a small opposition party, did not exclude the possibility of using negative image strategies to distinguish themselves both from ideologically close (e.g., SPD) or distant (e.g., CDU) parties. However, they accentuated that such a strategy is feasible when it is done alongside other

communication strategies. For them, it is seemingly more important to build their distinctive image based on their own actions, not on the actions of political opponents.

Other German parties have engaged in building a negative image of their ideological opponents, too. For example, prior to and in the 2013 election, the Green Party consistently criticised the Black-Yellow coalition (CDU-CSU-FDP) for their policies on climate change and energy, as well as on social issues ("Schwarz-Gelb: '2013 ist der Spuk vorbei'" 2012; "SPD und Grüne attackieren" 2013). They also questioned the credibility of the CDU-led government when addressing the energy transition (*Energiewende*) in Germany, alleging that the government was not doing enough to promote renewable energy sources and phase out nuclear power. More so, their video and poster campaigns specifically targeted Merkel and her colleagues in a satirical manner. They even used such epithets as "*Die Schneke*" (a snail) and "*Bundesklimabremserin*" (Federal Climate Brakewoman). In this example, we see that not only the Greens have attacked the main incumbent party on specific issues, which are also their owned issues, but also on the character of the CDU's leader. These attacks were quite risky, and overall, the 2013 campaign did not bring the Green Party an electoral success: they lost five seats and stayed behind the Left Party. While we cannot claim that this attacking behaviour contributed to lack of success, we might assume that the party decided to engage in more risky communication, since they were already trailing in polls.

Another example we consider is Alternative for Germany (AfD), which was present only in the 2013 election. Their primary focus was based on opposing the European Union's policies on the euro and bailout packages for countries in financial distress. Although AfD's original platform centred around economic issues, over time, the AfD shifted towards anti-immigration and anti-establishment policies. They criticised the CDU and SPD for their handling of the Eurozone crisis and the Greek bailout, arguing that German taxpayers were burdened with the costs of these policies. They also targeted the FDP for supporting the euro and the EU's financial policies.

The AfD repeatedly attacked most of the parliamentary parties in their press releases. They have criticised other parties for being greedy: "Whether the SPD, the CDU or the Greens – the more tax money they can squeeze out from the people, the happier they are" (AfD 2013). However, their attacks are civil. While attacking the CDU on their handling of family policies, AfD has specifically used a negative image: "It does not cast a good light on the CDU when

long-serving officeholders publicly criticise the political direction that the party is trying to take to create a modern image" (AfD 2013).

In general, these attacks are rarely done on specific and explicit values, instead focusing on how other parties participate in the political process: "Instead of finally doing real opposition work and standing in the way of Merkel and Schäuble's supposedly no-alternative policies, the SPD is only trying to redirect the sceptical mood in the country to its election campaign" (AfD 2013). It is remarkable that in the same text, AfD uses this image of attacking SPD and CDU to portray themselves in a good light by stating that people should vote for the AfD if they want to "be heard". This is a prime example of how attacking opponents and depicting them in a negative way may be used in favour of the self-presentation image.

To conclude, we observe that parties in both countries are aware that depicting their opponents in a negative way is risky. Most of the interviewed party managers exhibited a risk-averse attitude towards attacking as the part of their non-policy communication. However, as discussed, parties in Germany may use posters, both on the streets and online, to convey their attacks. Moreover, "fighting back", i.e., responding to attacks, is considered a possible electoral tactic. In turn, interviewed Swiss party managers declared that they, in general, try not to attack their opponents or at least link these attacks to specific political issues. The SVP, however, which did not agree to the interview, is quite known for their negative attitude towards other political actors ("Right-wing apple opens can of worms" 2019). Overall, we observe that parties understand the risks of attacking and the potential backlash it can bring. For some, responding might be seen as less risky. Others will engage in attacking behaviour in the political advertisement (e.g., the Greens) or be generally negative towards everyone in their press releases (e.g., AfD).

7.3. How and whom do parties attack?

In this section, we use the available textual data to show the most frequent objects of attacks for Swiss and German parties. We present the three most common actors that are mentioned and briefly discuss the findings.

Table 7.1. Top three political actors as the objects of attacks, by party, Switzerland.

	1st most frequent	2nd most frequent	3rd most frequent
SVP	Federal Council	All other parties	Left-wing parties
SP	SVP	Bourgeois parties	Right-wing parties
FDP	SVP	SP	Left-wing parties
CVP	SP	SVP	Left-wing parties
BDP	National Council	Federal Council	SVP
GPS	Administrative actors	Intermediary actors	Right-wing parties
GLP	National Council	Federal Council	Bourgeois parties
EVP	Left-wing parties	Federal Council	National Council
Note: While not explicit, attacks on "bourgeois" parties hint at the CVP and the BDP as objects, while attacks on "right-wing" suggest the FDP and the SVP.			

In Switzerland, few parties seem to attack one (or more) specific party. Most parties prefer vague formulations as 'left-wing parties' or 'right-wing parties'. Additionally, the SP, the FDP, the CVP, and the BDP specifically mention SVP as one of the most popular objects of their negative images. We also assume that 'right-wing parties' might refer predominantly to the SVP (which was also hinted at in the interviews). Smaller parties, which are not included in the Federal Council, frequently criticise this institution, as well as the National Council. The GPS, while mentioning 'right-wing parties' in general, is more focused on attacking administrative and intermediary actors, such as the UN, NATO, or Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety commission. It is consistent with their political stance as an ecologist and pacifist party: nuclear phaseout and nuclear waste management are a few of the core issues of the GPS.

In general, the polarisation of the party system, which we have established in Chapter 4, is echoed in the objects of attacks. The left-wing parties, the SP and the GPS, choose right-wing and bourgeois (centre-right) parties as their attacks' objects. In turn, centre-right and right-wing parties, like the FDP and the CVP, attack left-wing ones. The SVP presents itself as an opposition party, although it is no longer in the formal opposition (Bernhard, Kriesi, and Weber 2015). It appears that the SVP follows a populist image strategy by contrasting itself to all other parties, which are "said to disregard the peoples' voice" (2015: 133). These findings are also consistent with the analysis of press releases done by Stückelberger (2019).

The BDP has the SVP as the object of their rare attack images. We assume that it is a part of distancing themselves from their background (splitting from the SVP) and constitutes a part of self-presentation image. In the interview, the BDP campaign manager mentioned that their first

campaign was "*an image campaign because we [...] were new, we [have separated from] SVP with the slogan 'Pioneering' or 'Showing the way'*" (Interview BDP 2018).

Table 7.2. Top three political actors as the objects of attacks, Germany.

	1st most frequent	2nd most frequent	3rd most frequent
CDU/CSU	SPD	Red-Green (SPD/ Greens) coalition	Die Grünen
SPD	Federal government	CDU/CSU	Black-Yellow (CDU-CSU / FDP) coalition
FDP	SPD	Die Grünen	Federal government
Die Grünen	Federal government	Black-Yellow coalition	Grand coalition (CDU-CSU / SPD)
DIE LINKE	Federal government	SPD	CDU
AfD	Federal government	All other parties	Government of another country (Greece)

In the case of German parties, a clear distinction between opposition and governmental parties, as well as common alliances, can be seen. The most frequently attacked actor for all opposition parties is the federal government. Moreover, smaller parties frequently attack bigger ones. Finally, the AfD opposes itself to all other parties by choosing them as the object of their negative statements. In addition to attacking the national government, they constantly criticise the Greek government in their press releases, which is related to the Euro crisis at the moment of the elections.

German parties seem to attack each other based on the incumbent status. Several coalitions feature as the objects: the Red-Green (SPD and the Greens) coalition, the Black-Yellow (CDU-CSU and FDP) coalition, and the Grand (CDU-CSU and SPD) coalition. We assume that the government formation plays a decisive role in the choice of political actors to build negative images. In a closed government competition, like Switzerland, parties in the government are predefined, and coalitions are predictable. In Germany, which has open government competition, parties risk finding themselves in a position where they have to form a coalition with a party they have been attacking (like it was the case of the Grand Coalition in 2013). More so, coalitions frequently change, and it might be a safer strategy to attack the government or the ruling coalition (or a party in the coalition) than to attack parties based on their political values. In general, this corresponds to the existing research, where "negativity in a multi-party system is aimed at a limited number of opponents structured according to coalition membership" (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008, 27).

In conclusion, we have observed a restrained and risk-averse approach of most Swiss and German parties towards attacking as a part of the non-policy communication. It is, however, crucial to note that we used textual sources— manifestos and press releases— to support our assumptions. Posters and political advertisements, as mentioned in the example of the German Greens, may appear more negative in both countries. The main out-take from our discussion is that parties remain reserved towards the active attacking of the opponents. In Chapter 5, we have shown that, on average, press releases are more negative, while manifestos stay rather "civil". This hints at the tactical, rather than strategic, nature of attacks and may be highly dependent on the ongoing campaign events or debates.

7.4. Regression analysis, presence of attacks (DV4)

In this section, we present the results of the logistic regression, run for the dependent variable of attacks' presence. The full model is presented here; we have also run the preliminary model without the control variables of country and party family and conclude, based on the values of AIC and log-likelihood that the full model performs better. Table 7.3 contains the coefficients (as log-odds) and standard errors for independent and control variables.

Table 7.3. Logistic regression results, presence of attacks.

Independent variables	
Incumbent status	0.14
	(0.09)
Party size	0.17
	(0.19)
Party momentum	0.93 **
	(0.30)
Party extremism (ref = centrist)	
Moderate	0.05
	(0.12)
Extreme	0.99 ***
	(0.11)
Press release	1.94 ***
	(0.07)
Control variables	
Germany	0.19 *
	(0.09)
Party family (ref = Christian Democrats)	
Left / SD	0.77 ***
	(0.13)
Green	0.91 ***
	(0.14)
Liberal	0.46 **
	(0.17)
Radical right-wing	1.20 ***
	(0.20)
Constant	-3.92 ***
	(0.23)
AIC	7256.17
Log Likelihood	-3616.17
N	11120

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. All coefficients represent untransformed log-odds.

Incumbent status and party size have no statistically significant impact, thus rejecting our hypotheses **H1b** and **H2b**. The model indicates that party momentum has a positive effect on the likelihood of attacks, which goes against our assumptions (**H3b**). Having an extreme ideological position, as opposed to a centrist, also has a significant positive effect on the probability of attacks, confirming the hypothesis **H4b**. The communication channel variable indicated that press releases have a higher likelihood of mentioning the attacks, which also confirms our formulated assumptions (**H5b**). Additionally, control variables show a positive effect on the dependent variable. To further analyse the effects, we compute predicted

probabilities of the presence of attacks for each independent variable by holding other variables at their mean (for numeric) or mode (categorical) [65].

Figure 7.1. Predicted probabilities of attacks' presence, party momentum variable.
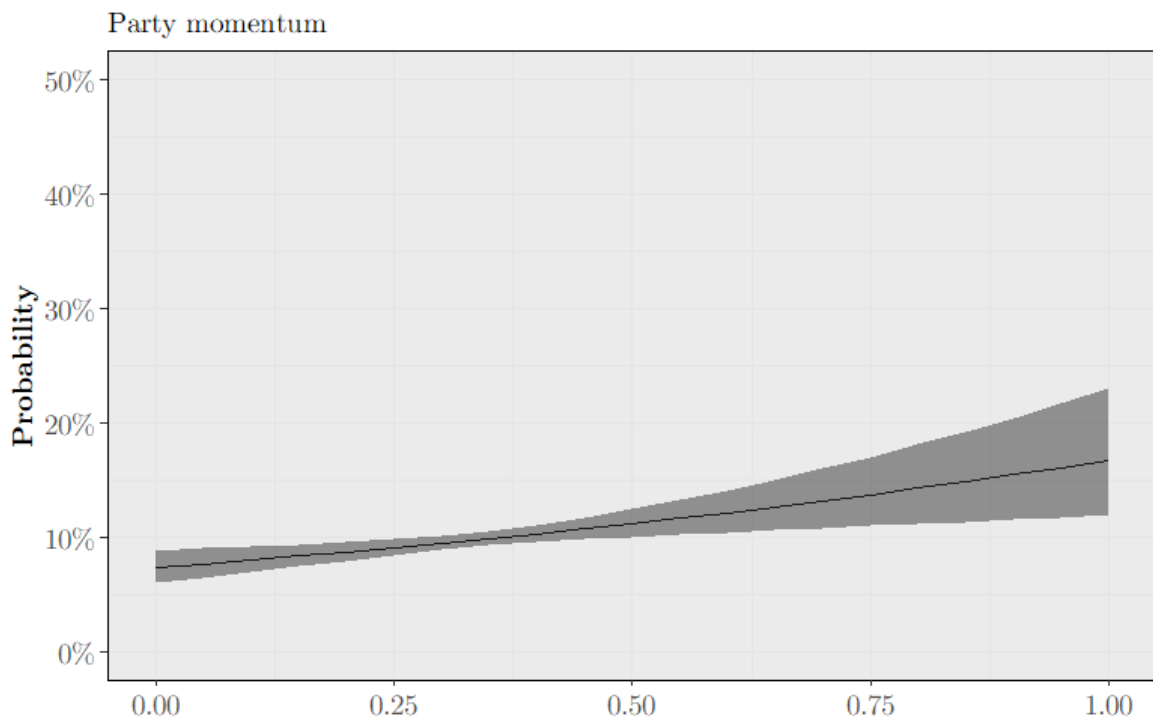
The party momentum variable exerts a positive effect on the probability of mentioning an attack: the difference between the lowest and the highest momentum in the data is 10 percentage points (7% and 17%, respectively). These findings, however, reject our theoretical expectations (**H3b**).

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[65] Incumbent status: not incumbent. Party size (normalised): 0.48. Party momentum (normalised): 0.32. Party extremism: centrist. Communication channel: manifesto. Country: Switzerland. Party family: Christian Democrats.

Figure 7.2. Predicted probabilities of attacks' presence, party extremism variable.
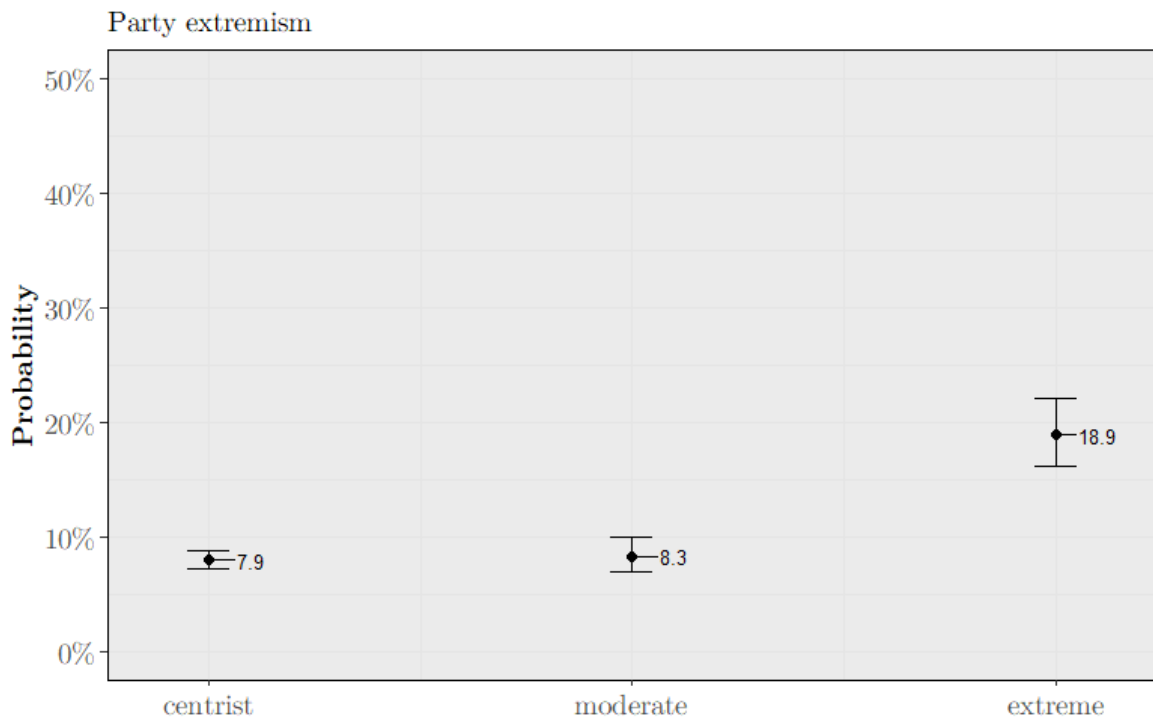
Our findings indicate a significant relationship between a political party's extreme ideological position and the likelihood of mentioning an attack, compared to the reference category. These findings confirm our hypothesis (**H4b**).

Figure 7.3. Predicted probabilities of attacks' presence, document type variable.
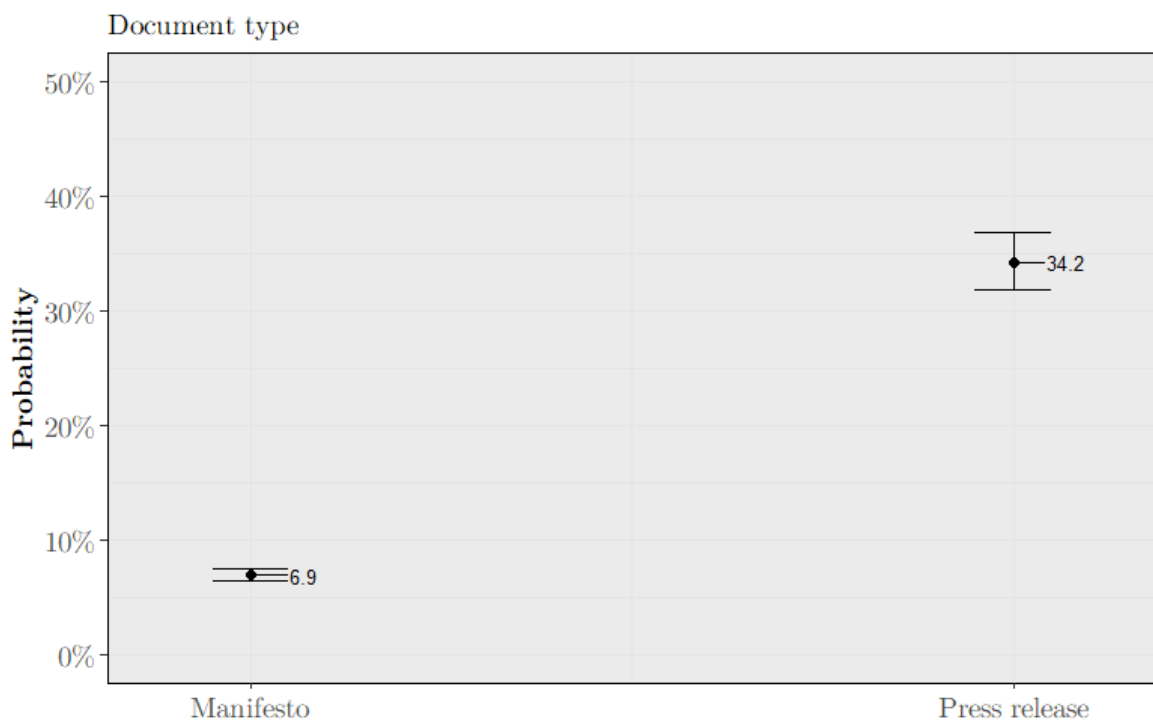
As hypothesised, the probability of mentioning an attack is much higher if the chosen communication channel is a press release, 34.2% versus 6.9% for manifestos. This confirms our theoretical assumptions (**H5b**).

Figure 7.4. Predicted probabilities of attacks' presence, country variable.
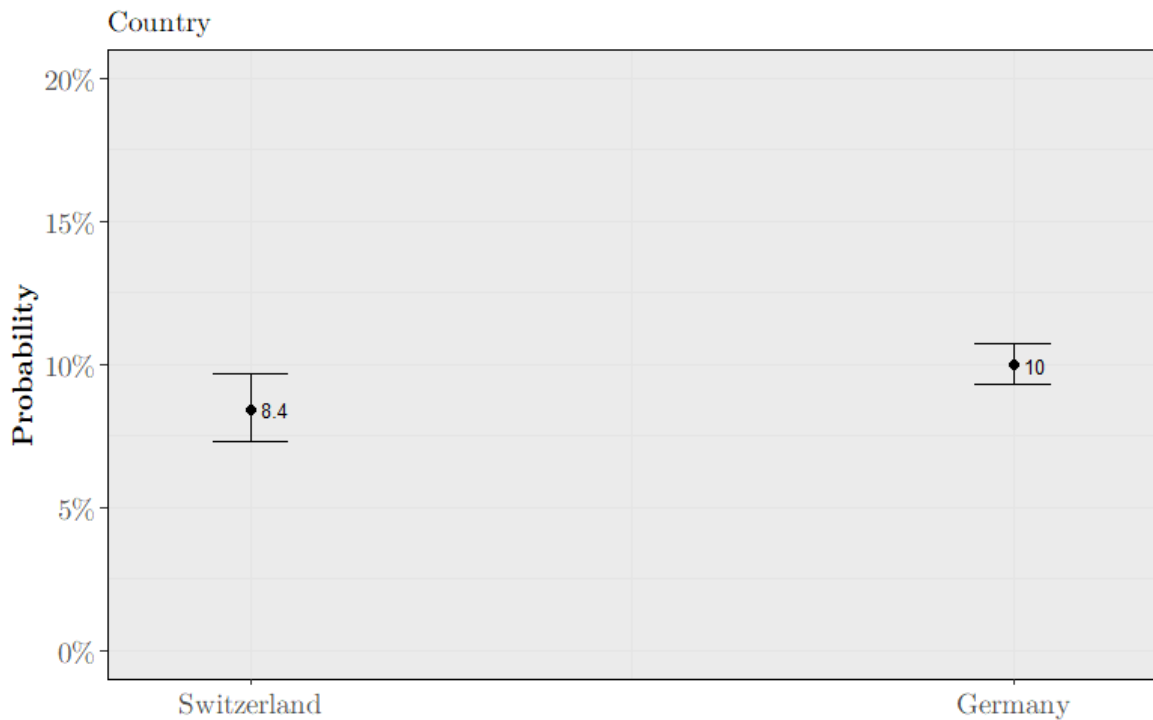
The country variable has a weak statistical significance and indicates that German parties are slightly more likely to attack their opponents, compared to Swiss parties.

Figure 7.5. Predicted probabilities of attacks' presence, party family variable.
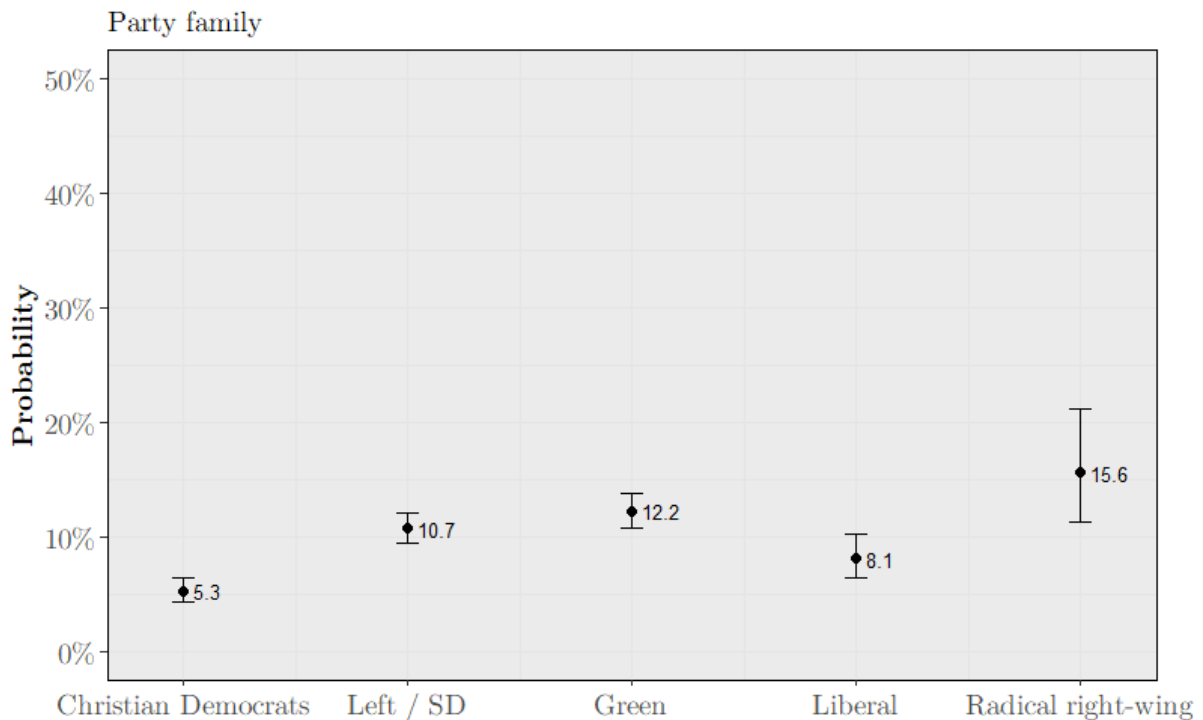
The party family variable was statistically significant for all categories. Compared to the reference category of the Christian Democrats (probability of 5.3% of an attack present), radical right-wing parties are more likely to attack their opponents (probability of 15.6%). Other party families have a slightly higher likelihood to mention attacks, compared to the reference: Liberals stand at 8.1% of predicted probability, while the Left / SD and Green parties stand at 10.7% and 12.2%, respectively.

7.5. Discussion

The results of the regression analysis presented mixed outcomes. The variable of incumbency shows no effect on the probability of mentioning an attack. Thus, we cannot confirm our theoretical expectations (**H1b**). While the literature does not provide us with immediate explanations, we suggest the following: incumbent parties are often the objects of attacks. As such, our results could reflect a defensive strategy, where the party feels obligated to issue counter-responses to each attack aimed at them. This reactive posture may inflate the overall probability of attacks mentioned by a party, serving as more of a measure of the external pressures they face rather than their incentive to engage in attacking opponents. The similar

explanation can be attributed to the variable of the party size. It has shown a positive relationship with the dependent variable, rejecting our hypothesis that the larger a party is, the less likely it is to attack its opponents (**H2b**).

The variable of the party momentum indicated that the higher is the momentum, the more likely a party is to mention attack images. This rejects our formulated hypothesis (**H3b**). We assume that this positive effect of the momentum might be caused by a "feedback loop" (Priest 1993): the more parties perceive to win, the more likely they will take risks of attacking their opponents. Additionally, we suspect that the effect of the momentum is not strictly linear. Small wins or losses might not have the same incentive on electoral strategies as big wins or losses; moreover, it might matter whether a party has previously lost and now perceives to be winning, or vice versa. The existing literature does not provide a straightforward answer to this question.

For party extremism, we have observed a statistically significant positive effect of having an extreme ideological position. Thus, this tends to confirm our theoretical expectation that more extreme parties are more likely to use attacks against their opponents (**H4b**). The results for the communication channel variable have confirmed our expectations that press releases are more likely to contain attacks (**H5b**).

The control variable of the country has indicated that German parties are more likely to attack their opponents than Swiss ones. While the descriptive analysis in Chapter 5 suggested a seemingly contradictory picture, this discrepancy can be explained by methodological differences. First, logistic regression controls for various confounding factors that might not be evident in a simple descriptive analysis. For instance, the descriptive analysis might show a general trend without accounting for other variables that could affect the likelihood of German parties attacking their opponents.

Second, results of the descriptive analysis (section 5.5.4) suggests that Switzerland's context plays a significant role in determining the likelihood of disseminated images being negative. However, Tables 5.7 and 5.8 demonstrate that press releases are three times more frequent in Switzerland than in Germany, which is one of the largest differences between the two countries. Now, the regression results (Table 7.3) show that press releases have a considerable effect on negativity, while the control variable of country does not. Therefore, once the effect of press releases is controlled for, the effect of "Swissness" fades away. It becomes clear that the negative tone of images might be due not to their being disseminated in Switzerland, but rather because press releases, which tend to be more negative, are more prevalent in Switzerland. This

difference between communication channels might explain the contrast between the bivariate and multivariate analyses.

Moreover, the variable of the party family indicated differences in how parties approach attacking. The set of values, or ideology, which is associated with each party family, might play a significant role in how parties assess risks related to attacking opponents. For example, Christian Democratic parties typically appeal to moderate and centrist voters, as well as emphasise traditionalism, such as conservative social values, stability, and order (e.g., Krouwel 2012), and frequently form governments with other mainstream parties (Green 2011; Meyer and Wagner 2013). Thus, we assume that these may prefer not to engage in attacking to avoid alienating their core constituency. This idea is partially supported by what the party managers of BDP, EVP, and CDU mentioned.

On the other hand, Green parties, which focus on environmental protection, climate action, and social justice, may be more inclined to be risk-acceptant. This approach could help them to respond to the evolving concerns of their core supporters, who are typically younger, progressive, educated urban voters. In their research on the policy preferences of green parties, Spoon et al. (2014) found that these parties are more likely to take radical policy stances on environmental and social issues. We hypothesise that an overall acceptance of risk-taking might incentivise parties to attack.

Finally, radical right-wing parties have shown the highest probability of mentioning attacks. Such parties often have extreme ideological positions, and previous studies have shown that extreme parties tend to use attacks more frequently (Walter and Vliegenthart 2010; Nai and Sciarini 2018; Valli and Nai 2022; Maier and Nai 2021). Moreover, such parties are often categorised as populist, which implies their "us-against-them" stance and general negativity towards other political actors.

7.6. Conclusion

In the current chapter, we have analysed the second set of the theoretical assumptions (A2) using the presence of attacks as a dependent variable. We presented the results of the interviews with party campaign managers, where the questions about attacking opponents were discussed. Swiss parties were found to be generally risk-averse towards attacking their opponents, and we

argued that negative campaigning is deemed to be too risky by most Swiss parties[66]. German parties, represented in the interviews only by CDU and DIE LINKE, have shown mixed feelings about using negative image strategies. Overall, we concluded that parties in Switzerland and Germany are risk-averse towards the use of negative campaigning and mindful of the potential backfire.

In the second part of the chapter, we have conducted a logistic regression in order to analyse the five independent factors (and two control ones) and their effect on the probability of mentioning an attack. We have found significant effects for the independent variables of party size, party momentum, communication channel, as well as for control variables of country and party family. The results were mixed, as we have fully confirmed the hypothesis only for the communication channel, rejecting (or having found only partial support for) others.

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[66] SVP is known for using negative campaigning, especially in their advertisement. For one of the most notable examples, see the article "Switzerland's largest political party insists on depicting foreigners as black sheep": https://qz.com/617050/switzerlands-largest-political-party-insists-on-depicting-foreigners-as-black-sheep

Chapter 8. Risk-taking strategies: analysing risk scores

8.1. Introduction

In the current chapter, we analyse the dependent variable of risk score (DV5). In Chapter 4, we have discussed the choice of the ordinal regression instead of the linear one. This was mostly driven by the data distribution (see Figure 4.1); an ordinal model with four categories–lowest, low, moderate and high–was proposed. Such a model can be more suitable than a linear model for several key reasons.

Firstly, the nature of our dependent variable in ordinal models is better suited for categories that have a natural order but where the gaps between categories are not necessarily uniform, rather than linear models that are designed for continuous variables with evenly spaced intervals. Secondly, the assumptions made by linear regression models, such as homoscedasticity and normally distributed error terms, may not hold true for ordinal data. Ordinal models are specifically designed to accommodate the categorical and ordered nature of the data. Lastly, using linear models for ordinal data can result in biased estimates, potentially leading to misleading conclusions. In contrast, ordinal models provide more valid statistical inferences, making the analysis more robust and accurate.

Another important point is that risk scores are a theoretical construct that we employ to test the overall risk attitudes (risk avoidance or risk seeking) of parties. In Chapter 3, we have argued that there is an interaction between the choice of an image dimension and negativity dimension. In this sense, the risk score is the test of how well the risk aversion theory explains our data. Therefore, the results presented in the current chapter aim to support or definitively reject the findings of the previous two chapters.

This chapter is structured as follows: we present the results of the ordinal regression and the marginal effects for the statistically significant independent and control variables. We discuss the results, offer potential explanations where our assumptions were not met, and conclude the chapter by summarising the results.

8.2. Regression analysis, risk scores (DV5)

In this section, we present the results of the ordinal regression, run for the dependent variable of the risk score (DV5). As in the case with all previous regression analyses, a preliminary model without controls was tested. The full model also does not significantly outperform the no-controls models in terms of lower AIC or log-likelihood values. Table 8.1 contains the coefficients (as log-odds) and standard errors for independent and control variables.

Table 8.1. Ordinal regression results, risk score.

Independent variables	
Incumbent status	0.18 ***
	(0.05)
Party size	-0.32 **
	(0.11)
Party momentum	0.30
	(0.16)
Party extremism (ref = centrist)	
Moderate	0.05
	(0.08)
Extreme	-0.20 **
	(0.07)
Press release	1.13 ***
	(0.05)
Control variables	
Germany	-0.11
	(0.06)
Party family (ref = Christian Democrats)	
Left / SD	0.12
	(0.08)
Green	0.13
	(0.08)
Liberal	-0.06
	(0.10)
Radical right-wing	0.27 *
	(0.13)
Threshold values	
lowest|low	-1.25 ***
	(0.12)
low|moderate	1.15 ***
	(0.12)
moderate|high	3.53 ***
	(0.13)
AIC	24691.82
Log Likelihood	-12331.91
N	11120

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, + p < 0.1.
Coefficients for independent and control variables
represent untransformed log-odds.

In the results of the ordinal regression, the thresholds indicate the boundaries separating different levels of the ordinal dependent variable. These values represent the points on the continuous underlying scale that divide the categories of the dependent variable. These thresholds are important because they determine how the underlying continuous variable is translated into discrete categories. The statistical significance of these thresholds means that the boundaries are not due to random chance but are reliable and meaningful distinctions between the categories.

The results reveal that being an incumbent positively impacts the likelihood of choosing a higher risk category, which rejects our theoretical assumptions (**H1c**). On the other hand, being a larger party decreases these odds, supporting the hypothesis **H2c**. Party momentum does not show a statistically significant effect, leading us to reject the hypothesis **H3c**. Having the extreme ideological position lowers the likelihood of having a higher risk score, but the effect for the moderate position is not significant, which tends to reject our hypothesis **H4c**. The variable of the communication channel shows that press releases are more likely to have higher risk scores, supporting our claims (**H5c**). The control variable of the country does not show a statistically significant effect. Among the control variables for party families, only affiliation with the radical right-wing party family shows a significant positive impact.

Figure 8.1. Predicted probabilities of risk score variable, incumbency variable.
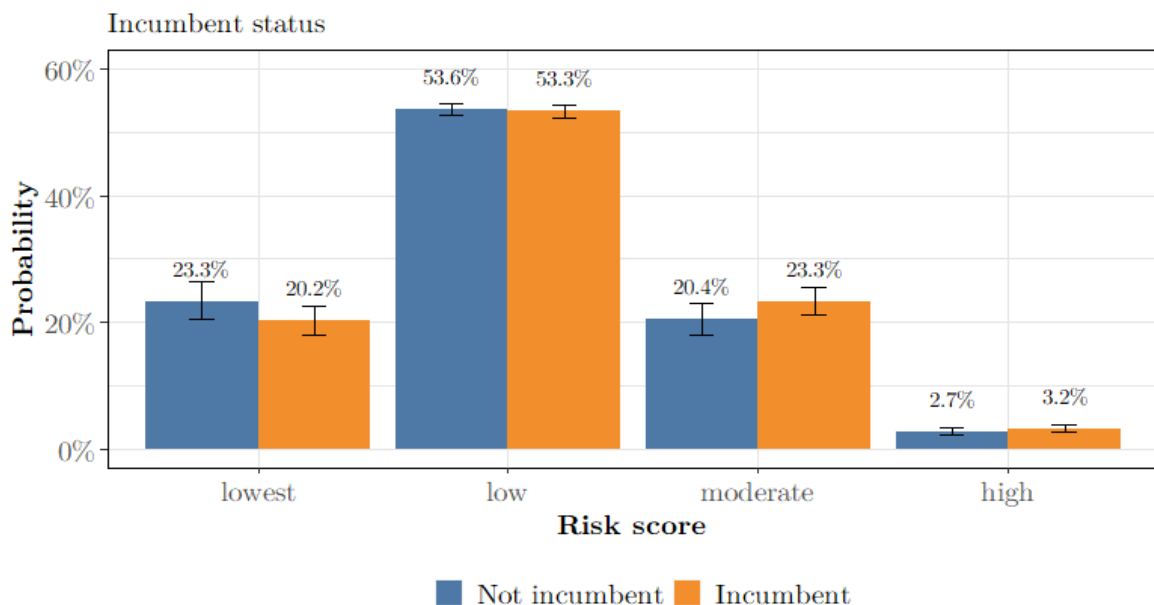
The incumbency variable shows a positive relationship with the risk score, meaning that incumbent parties will have a higher chance of having higher risk scores in their sentences. Hence, we reject our theoretical expectations that incumbent parties will be more likely to choose less risky strategies (**H1c**).

Figure 8.2. Predicted probabilities of risk score variable, party size variable.
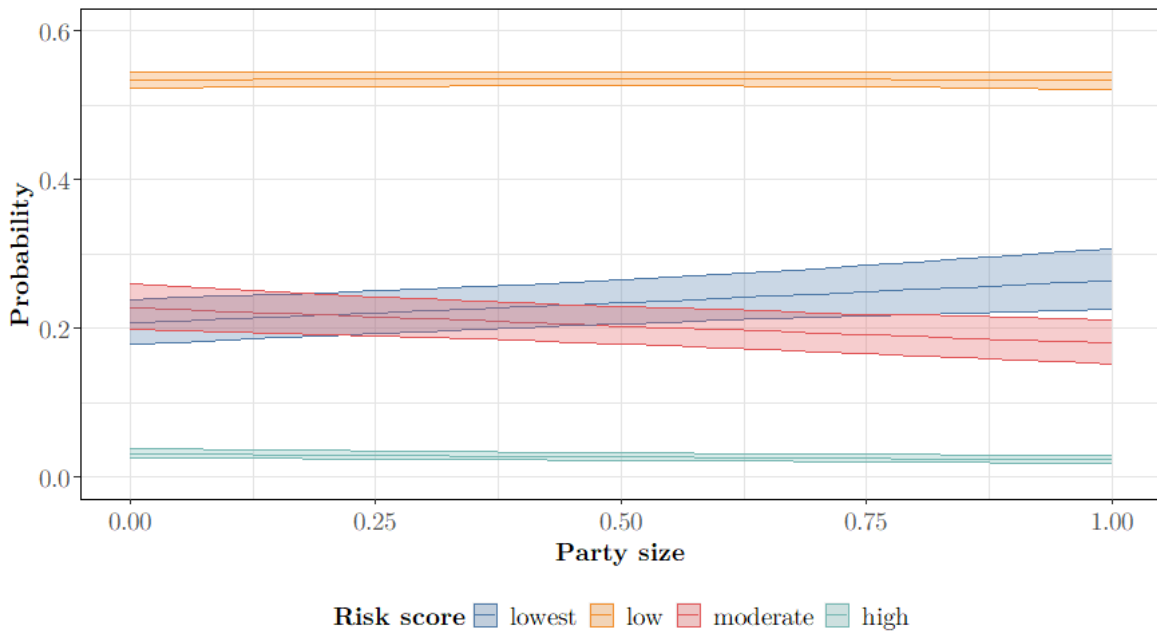
The results support our theoretical expectations that the larger a party is, the less likely it will select risky strategies (**H2c**). This effect is especially prominent for the "lowest" and "moderate" categories and supports our theoretical expectations.

Figure 8.3. Predicted probabilities of risk score variable, party extremism variable.
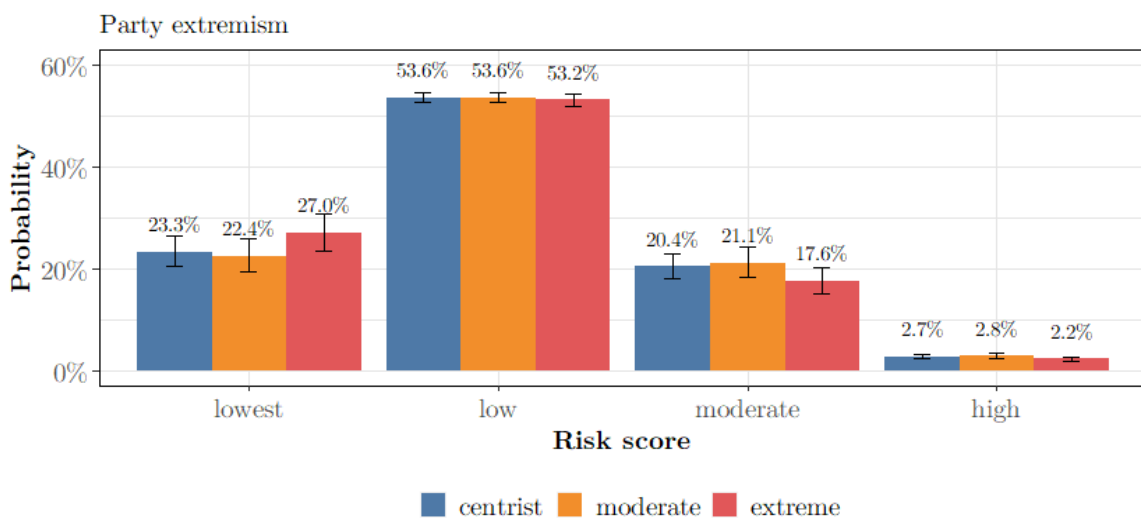
The results are significant only for the extreme ideological position and show a negative relationship, while for the moderate position this relationship is positive and statistically insignificant. Thus, we reject our theoretical expectations (**H4c**). However, the largest differences we observe lie in the "lowest" and "moderate" categories: 27% versus 23.3% for the centrist parties in the "lowest" category, and 17.6% versus 20.4% in the "moderate" category.

Figure 8.4. Predicted probabilities of risk score variable, communication channel variable.
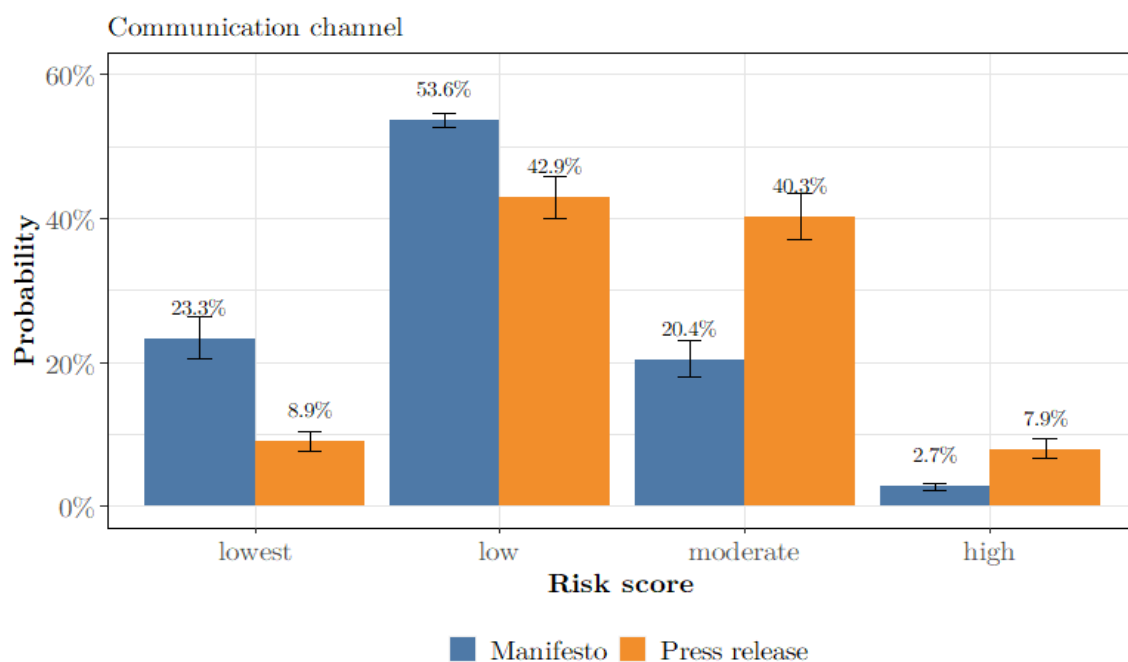
The variable of the communication channel indicated that higher risk scores are more likely to appear in press releases than in manifestos. Visualised marginal effects in Figure 8.4 show that the probability of having a risk category of "moderate" is almost 20 p.p. higher in press releases than in manifestos. Respectively, for the "high" category, this probability is approximately 5 p.p. higher. These findings confirm our hypothesis (**H5c**) that in their manifestos, parties are more likely to have a lower risk score, and press releases are more likely to have a higher risk score.

Figure 8.5. Predicted probabilities of risk score variable, party family variable.
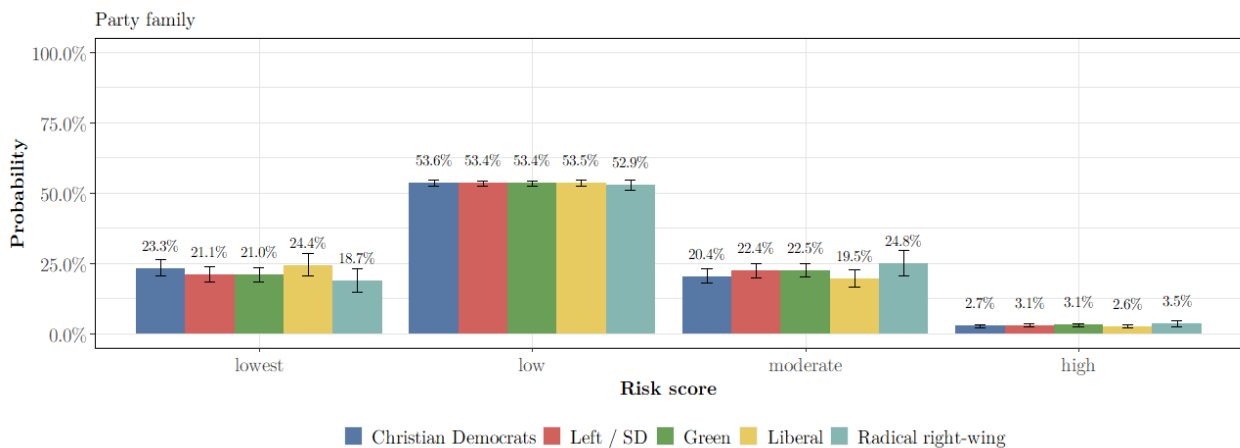
Only the category of the radical right-wing party family was statistically significant. Parties from this category are more likely to have risk scores in the "moderate" and "high" categories, compared to the reference category of Christian Democrats. While not significant, the Left / SD and Green parties show slightly elevated probabilities in the same categories.

8.3. Discussion

The results of the ordinal regression have presented mixed evidence for our theoretical assumptions (A3). The results for the incumbency variable have rejected our hypothesis (**H1c**) that incumbent parties will focus on acclaiming (by highlighting their own core values and groups), thus having an overall lower risk score. An explanation may lie in how the data is organised: the "moderate" category includes images from the attribute dimension, as well as multiple images from core values or group dimensions. In Chapter 6, we have discussed that incumbents are more likely to acclaim themselves on adaptive images (e.g., competence or pragmatism) on the attributes dimension in order to maximise their electoral outcomes. Therefore, the supposedly higher risk acceptance might come from which specific image dimensions parties prefer to highlight.

The variable of party size showed a negative relationship with the risk scores, corroborating our theoretical expectations (**H2c**). The relationship between party momentum and risk-taking did not align with our theoretical expectations (**H3c**), as it showed a statistically insignificant positive effect.

The variable of party extremism (**H4c**) has in general rejected our expectations: extreme parties are more likely to choose less risky strategies. This does not go in line with the findings in

previous chapters, as ideologically extreme parties were found to downplay their attributes and emphasise their core values, but to attack more frequently. This lowered frequency of attacks may explain why we have seemingly contradictory results: because attacks are relatively rare, the expected positive effect of extremity on attacking may be washed out by its unexpected effects on attributes and core values, which are more frequent.

These results might also be connected to the specifics of parties in the dataset that we have classified as ideologically extreme: SVP in Switzerland and DIE LINKE and AfD in Germany. Results of the party family control variable indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the Left / SD and the radical right-wing party families in terms of image choices and risk attitudes. Therefore, our results might be inconclusive when we compare parties with diametrically opposing ideological profiles. We suggest that there is not only the effect of the extreme position on risk attitudes but also the direction (extreme left or extreme right) of such a position.

The findings indicate that press releases are more likely to have higher risk categories compared to party manifestos. This supports the hypothesis that long-standing documents, like manifestos, tend to have more conservative stances in terms of the risk-taking (**H5c**). At the country level, no statistically significant differences were observed. For the party family control variable, only belonging to the radical right-wing party family increased the probability of having more risky strategies, compared to the reference category of Christian Democrats. This generally goes in line with the findings of the previous chapter, where the radical right-wing parties are found to attack their opponents more frequently.

8.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed our third dependent variable, risk score, through ordinal regression analysis. The results showed a range of outcomes: we have rejected most of the hypotheses, namely the effect of incumbency and party momentum (no statistically significant results). Findings for the party extremism have partially confirmed the hypothesis, showing a predicted effect for extreme position. Results for the party size and communication channel variables have confirmed the corresponding hypotheses.

Chapter 9. Conclusion: decision-making in party image

The primary objective of this thesis was to improve the understanding of the party image concept and its role in both electoral campaigns and party competition. We defined it as an element of a party's campaign strategy, whereby the choice of different types of images can be explained by a party's inclination to take or avoid risks. The research question we have raised was *how parties decide to present themselves to voters, and what influences their decision-making?* To answer this question, we have used the concept of communicative behaviour and identified it as *how a party presents itself and depicts adversaries*. The thesis has proposed a detailed conceptualisation of the non-policy communicative behaviour (the party image), which is appropriate for the political science field.

In Chapter 2, using the two-dimensional structure of rigidity/plasticity and negativity dimensions, we have described the communicative behaviour that includes both party issues and party images. Within the rigidity / plasticity dimension, we have distinguished between the rigid (e.g., values or historical stances) and adaptive images (e.g., attributes or attacks). For example, as shown in Chapter 7 in the interview of the Swiss Evangelical People's Party (EVP), the rigid identity (being Christian) can restrain the usage of certain images (attacking). With the addition of the negativity dimension, we identified four types of party images: acclaiming, distancing, appraising, and attacking. We defined three key dimensions that constitute party image: attributes, core values, and group appeals. Here, we explored relevant elements existing in political science and political communication scholarship.

In Chapter 3, a comprehensive theoretical work was constructed using risk aversion theory. Based on it, parties, like any other institution or organisation, are expected to behave strategically in a risk-averse or risk-acceptant manner. Risk aversion theory posits that losses loom larger than gains; moreover, parties are generally regarded as risk-averse organisations. Hypotheses were formulated on how various factors, including such party characteristics as incumbency, party size, party momentum, party extremism, as well as the choice of communication channels influence risk attitudes of the parties in regard to the three dependent variables (choice of image dimension, presence of attacks, and their interaction). Additional control variables of country and party family were added. We did not form any specific hypotheses for these controls.

Chapter 4 has established the rationale for the choice of country and party cases. First, we have presented institutional and structural similarities and differences for each country. Then, the research design was discussed: quantitative content analysis, based on political claims analysis and core sentence approach, was implemented to operationalise dependent variables. The following five dependent variables were created to address the three main theoretical questions: binary variables, indicating the presence of an image from attributes, core values, or group appeals dimension (DV1-DV3) in a given core sentence; a binary variable indicating the presence of an attack (DV4); an ordinal variable with four categories (lowest, low, moderate, high) indicating a risk score assigned to a given core sentence (DV5). Independent and control variables were also discussed. Descriptive statistics and data collection specifics were provided.

9.1. Main findings

In this section, we summarise the findings of empirical chapters. We present both the confirmed and rejected assumptions and provide explanations for the latter where possible. The variable of communication channel was the only independent variable for which we have confirmed all theoretical expectations across the three assumptions. Other independent variables presented varying results. The incumbency variable showed results that rejected formulated hypotheses across all three dependent variables. Results for the party size variable confirmed our hypotheses only in case of the risk aversion score. Party momentum variable also did not confirm theoretical expectations, with the hypotheses being rejected across all three dependent variables. Finally, the variable of party extremism showed an expected result in case of the presence of the attacks. The Table 9.1 presents the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 9.1. Summary of hypothesis testing results.

Independent variables	Dependent variables		
	Image dimension	**Presence of attacks**	**Risk aversion score**
H_1: Incumbency status	**H1a: Rejected.** Negative effect on core values; positive effect on group appeals; no effect on attributes.	**H1b: Rejected.** No effect on probability of mentioning attacks.	**H1c: Rejected.** Positive effect, with incumbents having higher risk score.
H_2: Party size	**H2a: Rejected.** Negative effect on core values; marginal positive effect on group appeals; no effect on attributes.	**H2b: Rejected.** Positive effect, larger parties are more likely to attack.	**H2c: Confirmed.** Negative effect on risk score.
H_3: Party momentum	**H3a: Rejected.** Negative effect on core values; no effect on attributes and group appeals.	**H3b: Rejected.** Higher momentum increases the likelihood of mentioning attacks.	**H3c: Rejected.** No effect on risk score.
H_4: Party extremism	**H4a: Rejected.** Negative effect of the extreme position on attributes and core values; positive effect of the moderate position on the core values.	**H4b: Confirmed.** Positive effect of the extreme position.	**H4c: Rejected.** Ideologically extreme parties are more likely to choose less risky strategies.
H_5: Choice of communication channel	**H5a: Confirmed.** Press releases are more likely to contain attributes; manifestos are more likely to contain core values; no effect on group appeals.	**H5b: Confirmed.** Press releases are more likely to contain attacks.	**H5c: Confirmed.** Manifestos tend to show lower risk scores.

9.1.1. Image dimensions

In Chapter 5, we explored the emphasis that political parties place on non-policy communication during electoral campaigns, illustrating the strategies with case studies from past elections. Our interviews revealed distinct approaches between Swiss and German parties. Based on those, Swiss campaigns tend to focus on party image, largely because major policy debates occur during the campaigns for popular initiatives and referenda. However, the results of the content analysis revealed that the use of images is roughly equal in both countries. In Germany, the German Conservative Democratic Union (CDU) prioritised its leader, Angela

Merkel, over a broader party image, while the Left Party (DIE LINKE) sought to integrate policy-based and non-policy-based communication. A textual analysis indicated that although Swiss and German parties frequently use images in their campaign material, they differ substantially in their focus on various image dimensions, both between and within the countries.

Distinct strategies are employed regarding the attribute dimension. In Germany, integrity plays a crucial role, but pragmatism is less emphasised, particularly among major parties like the Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In contrast, Swiss parties put significant emphasis on pragmatism, aiming to project readiness for compromise and solution-seeking. These parties explicitly use manifestos to communicate this attribute, reflective of the Swiss political culture that is supposed to value consensus. While major German parties do not focus on pragmatism, it becomes important for smaller parties who aim to establish themselves as viable coalition partners. Overall, German parties tend to value attributes like integrity and strategic vision.

On the core values dimension, further national differences appeared throughout the research. Swiss parties, like the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Social Democratic Party (SP), focus heavily on individualistic and collectivist values, respectively, while the Union in Germany (CDU/CSU) surprisingly highlights ecology. Ideological positioning is a strong focal point for centrist Swiss parties like the Liberal Radical Party (FDP), the Conservative People's Party (CVP), and the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), contrasting with their German counterparts who often stress universalist or collectivist values. Both Swiss and German Green parties prioritise ecological values, albeit with different intensity. Interviews reveal that these choices are calculated; for instance, Swiss parties leverage non-policy communication more often due to the debate tradition in the country, while German parties highlight ecological values across the board, possibly reflecting rising voter concern over climate issues. Additionally, despite belonging to the same party families, Swiss and German parties display considerable variation in focus on values, which underlines diverse approaches to party image and strategy choices across these nations.

On the group appeals dimension, we have observed that Swiss parties predominantly mention sociocultural groups, while German parties give more attention to socioeconomic ones. Moreover, right-wing parties, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD), were found to have a higher focus on political groups. This was explained by their use of populist discourse, which antagonise "the elites" and "the People" (*le peuple / das Volk*). In

Germany, the two most frequently mentioned group categories are income and occupation-related ones, and in Switzerland, citizenship/immigration and political groups. Some parties, such as the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) or the Social Democratic Party (SPD), were found to have a higher focus on gender groups, mostly on women, as illustrated by the interview with the party manager of both parties. We have further discussed how important it is for party decision makers to show their support for specific voter groups.

Chapter 6 has analysed the first set of theoretical expectations in relation to image dimensions (A1). Three logistic regression models, one for each of the dimensions (attributes, core values, group appeals), were fit. The findings were mixed; while incumbency significantly impacts core values and group appeals, it does not align with the hypothesis that incumbent parties tend to highlight less risky dimensions, such as core values. Similarly, larger parties do not necessarily adopt safer strategies, although they prefer to emphasise their group appeals.

The study also observes that party momentum and extremism have complex, sometimes counterintuitive effects on these dimensions. Specifically, party momentum indicated a negative effect on the likelihood of mentioning core values and had a statistically insignificant effect on the attributes dimension. In turn, party extremism indicated potential differences between moderate and extreme parties. For the moderate position, the probability of mentioning core values rises. For the extreme position, the probability of mentioning both attributes and core values decreases.

Finally, communication strategies vary depending on the channel used. We have seen that press releases are more likely to contain images from the attributes dimension and less likely to contain core values. The group appeals dimension did not show a statistically significant effect. As for the control variables, party families exhibit distinct tendencies in their image dimensions, with Greens focusing more on attributes and radical right-wing parties more on core values.

9.1.2. Attacks

Chapter 7 has dealt with the fourth independent variable, the presence of attacks. We have tested our second set of theoretical assumptions that the more risk-averse parties are, the less likely they are to attack their opponents (A2). In Chapter 4, Table 4.9, we have seen that attacks occur rather sparsely in party texts: only 13% of sentences contained a negative image. We

then built upon the interviews with the party managers to investigate attacking strategies in detail. Swiss parties have shown a general aversive attitude towards using negative campaigning tools, listing political traditions and context as the main argument against their usage. Most of them have explained that even if they decided to attack other parties, they would do it only on the basis of specific policies. The managers of the Evangelical People's Party (EVP) presented an example, where attacking a politician from the Swiss People's Party (SVP), Christoph Blocher, backfired with their own voters. Some parties, like the Conservative People's Party (CVP) and the Green Liberal Party (GLP), have noted that attacks directed at them are useful because they bring exposure. Overall, Swiss party managers have shown their awareness of risks, which come with building their own image based on a negative image of someone else.

German parties, represented only by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and The Left Party (DIE LINKE), demonstrated the differences between big incumbent and small opposition parties. The CDU manager has claimed that their party rarely tried to attack first or negatively address any specific social or voter groups. They have stated that they gave negative images of their opponents, such as the Social Democratic Party (SPD), only when they were attacked first and felt the need to responded. DIE LINKE, on the other hand, confirmed that they actively use negative images of social groups or political actors, but stressed the importance of building the image based primarily on their own actions and values, not only on attacks. Therefore, these attacks can come during the campaign either intentionally or as a reaction. However, as illustrated by the example of the political advertisement by the German Green Party against Angela Merkel, attacking might be a strategic, rather than tactical, part of the campaign.

In the second part of the chapter, a logistic regression was fit. Incumbent status did not show a statistically significant effect. Variables of party momentum, extremism, and communication channel showed positive effects on the likelihood of mentioning attacks, contradicting initial hypotheses for the first two variables and confirming the latter. Contrary to our expectations, larger parties were more inclined to mention attack images, possibly reflecting defensive strategies rather than a genuine propensity for attack, since our coding scheme does not distinguish between attacking and responding. Responding to an attack with another attack may seem like a safer option than not responding at all.

Party extremism significantly influenced the presence of attacks, confirming that more ideologically extreme parties are prone to this behaviour. Press releases were identified as having a higher likelihood of containing attacks than manifestos. Country-specific factors

showed that German parties were more attack-oriented compared to Swiss ones. Party families, such as Christian Democrats, Greens, and radical right-wing parties, demonstrated varied tendencies towards risk acceptance and mentioning attack, potentially due to differences in their core ideologies and voter demographics.

The literature suggests that parties do engage in negative campaigning more often, based on belonging to a specific party family, such as Greens (Bürgin and Opperman 2020) or radical right-wing (Forchtner, Krzyżanowski, and Wodak 2013). The literature also observes a link between the opposition status and the increased likelihood of attacks (Walter and van der Brug 2013), or how likely it is for a party to enter a coalition (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008, 2010). As such, the party family might be connected to whether a party is likely to gain a position in office. Therefore, the results of this chapter support the stance of these authors.

9.1.3. Risk scores

In Chapter 8, we analysed our third set of theoretical expectations that the more risk-averse parties are, the less risky image strategies they will choose, focusing on acclaiming rather than attacking, and emphasising less risky image dimensions overall (A3). The construction of our dependent variable of risk score (DV5) called for the ordinal regression model. The results produced varying results.

The incumbency variable did not align with the hypothesis that incumbent parties would focus more on acclaim and thus have a lower risk score. Although statistically significant, the observed differences were marginal. Incumbent parties exhibit only a modestly higher likelihood of falling into the "high" risk category, by 0.5 percentage points (Figure 8.1). The more significant differences appear for "moderate" category, with 23.3% likelihood for incumbent parties, compared to the 20.4% for non-incumbent ones. The same is true for the "lowest" category, where the likelihood for incumbent parties is lower (20.2%), compared to the non-incumbent ones (23.3%). This modest variation indicates that while incumbency does have a statistically significant impact on party behaviour, the practical implications might be limited. In addition, confidence intervals of different categories overlap, making the distinction questionable. A potential explanation could be that incumbents often use adaptive images like competence in the attributes dimension, thus "inflating" the measurement of risk score.

Party size had a negative relationship with risk, consistent with theoretical expectations. Party momentum showed a positive but insignificant relationship with risk, ultimately rejecting our expectations. Party extremism did not follow our hypothesis either; extreme parties showed a tendency towards less risky strategies. This contradicts earlier findings in Chapter 7 that extreme parties are more likely to attack their opponents, although these findings echo the results of Chapter 6. The deviation may be attributed to the specific parties classified as extreme in the dataset, such as the Swiss People's Party (SVP), The Left Party (DIE LINKE), and the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Press releases were found to have higher risk categories than manifestos, supporting the hypothesis that longer-lasting documents like manifestos are more conservative in risk-taking. The party family control variable indicated significant differences between the Left/ Social Democrat and radical right-wing parties in terms of image choices and risk attitudes. No significant country-level differences were observed, but radical right-wing parties were more inclined to use riskier strategies, consistent with previous findings that they are more prone to attack.

9.1.4. Overall assessment of findings

For the **incumbency** variable, we have rejected all formulated hypotheses, partially because the results contradicted our expectations, partially because no statistically significant effects were found. We do not have a definitive answer to the question why we observe such counterintuitive results. In our data, group appeals are considered being less risky than attributes, and they appear more often. This might indicate that incumbent (and often larger) parties might engage in "catch-all" politics by addressing a wider range of voter groups, thereby downplaying or focusing less on their core values. This strategy aims to broaden their electoral base, consistent with recent literature findings (Huber 2022) on strategic use of group appeals.

This answer accounts for the lower emphasis on core values but does not clarify the perceived increase in attacks' probability. The idea that incumbent parties are often the target of attacks, and thus engage in counterattacks, could be a potential answer. The functional theory of political advertisement (Benoit 1999) includes responding to attacks as one of the functions of the ads, next to acclaiming and attacking. This behaviour may be perceived as less risky than not responding at all. Applying risk aversion theory may require a more nuanced approach: the

risk associated with launching an attack might vary depending on whether a party is the attacker or the defender. Therefore, not all attacks should be categorically deemed "risky" regardless of their nature or context.

Across the three chapters, the results for the **party size** variable partially diverged from the initial hypotheses. Contrary to the first theoretical expectation that larger parties would focus on less risky dimensions, party size has a negative effect on core values images and a marginally significant positive effect on group appeals. The lack of explicit literature support makes it challenging to definitively explain why larger parties were found to be more prone to attacking others. However, in terms of risk scores, party size aligns with the third theoretical expectation by showing a negative relationship, suggesting that larger parties do, in fact, opt for less risky strategies. We assume that the mechanism might be similar to that of incumbency, as described above.

The findings concerning the **party momentum** present a curious picture. Momentum has an insignificant effect on the attributes dimension and a negative effect on the core values dimension. Moreover, it contradicts our hypothesis by showing a tendency to encourage attack strategies. The relationship between party momentum and higher risk score is positive, although statistically insignificant, again deviating from theoretical expectations. We argue that the whole inverse effect could be driven by a "feedback loop," where parties that perceive themselves as winning are more likely to engage in risky behaviour like attacks. The data also hint that the effect of momentum may not be linear and could vary based on the magnitude of wins or losses, a question not straightforwardly addressed by existing literature.

This seemingly contradictory positive effect of party momentum on risk attitudes might be better explained by the concept of the *positive feedback loop*. It focuses on systems' dynamics and posits that initial changes in a system variable can lead to further adjustments that amplify the original effect (e.g., Gigler et al. 2014 on accountability gap in governance). In a political context, an initial successful event for a party, like an electoral win, serves as positive reinforcement, enhancing the party's resources and morale. This encourages the adoption of similar or even riskier strategies, in expectation of more success. If these strategies also yield positive outcomes, it validates and further amplifies the party's approach, culminating in a self-perpetuating cycle of increasing boldness and risk-taking. This dynamic can account for why political parties may take more risks when they perceive themselves as winning, challenging a

simple or literal application of the risk-averse perspective. In any case, a revision of the theoretical approach and variable operationalisation is necessary.

The findings on **party extremism** present a complex picture that challenges initial theoretical expectations. Extreme ideological positions seem to lower the probability of mentioning attributes and core values, yet parties with such positions are more likely to engage in attacks. Surprisingly, extreme parties also appear to prefer less risky strategies in terms of risk scores. In Chapter 6, we have suggested that extreme parties might choose to focus on their issues rather than on their "valence images" (Bjarnøe et al. 2022), thus reducing the probability of encountering images in their communication. Future research may require a more sophisticated method of calculating risk scores. Another explanation is that the negative effect the extreme position has on core values actually cancels out its positive effect on attacking.

9.2. Theoretical and empirical contributions

Our first theoretical contribution lies in presenting a coherent definition of the party image as a non-policy communicative behaviour. Our intention is for this new categorisation to also make a methodological contribution, enabling future studies to be easily compared. Our second theoretical contribution considers risk aversion theory and its role in the party campaign behaviour. We advance the understanding of how parties compete in elections and employ image strategies, based on the losses or gains they experience.

This brings us to our third theoretical contribution: the role of the party image in electoral competition. Party image can be used as yet another factor of party competition, alongside issues or policy positions. The significance of party image in political communication is highlighted by the fact that 26% of the written communication during major elections in Germany and Switzerland were image-based. This non-policy behaviour consumes a considerable portion of a party's resources, both financial and temporal.

The current study, in line with existing research, has highlighted the use of self-presentation (Steffan 2021), negative campaigning (Nai 2020), and image strategies (Bast 2021; Heinze and Weisskircher 2021; Nasr 2020) during electoral campaigns. Party images are highly effective in conveying political messages, especially for uninterested voters. Rafałowski (2022) shows how parties emphasise their valence traits to reach such voters. The prevalence of images thus begs the question: could their use enhance or hinder the clarity of the electoral process for voters? Other problems, such as the surge in related concerns about "fake news" and foreign

interference in electoral processes, particularly in the US, has been an object of recent academic debates. Some authors have already proposed solutions to counteract the effect of "post-truth" on the democratic institutions (Farkas and Schou 2019), an effect that could impact party image strategies.

However, the role of the party image and the use of images might not be as negative as it first appears. For example, focusing on images might actually be useful to voters and their decision-making process. Political parties are acutely aware of the heuristics that voters employ when making electoral decisions. Despite variations in the literature, heuristics consistently imply an effort-saving simplification of decision-making (Shah and Oppenheimer 2008). These heuristics, such as party values, group appeals, or leader images, serve as mental shortcuts that help voters quickly and efficiently process information about parties without the need of the in-depth knowledge of every issue or a specific candidate. For example, Popkin (1991) highlights how voters rely on shortcuts such as party images and candidate appearances. Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2009) analyse how campaigns emphasise different aspects, such as candidate image and issue positions, to appeal to voters' heuristics. The literature also suggests that parties deliberately adapt their strategies to match voter behaviour and preferences, and that they used branding, leader images, and targeted messaging to appeal to specific voter segments (Gillies et al. 2021).

In the age of mass data collection and analysis, the role of party image might become more important than ever. Research has firmly established the importance of the role of the leader image: Garzia (2013a, 2013b; see also Garzia et al. 2020) discusses how party leader images significantly impact voter behaviour in European multi-party systems, demonstrating that leader evaluations serve as vital heuristics. The literature also provides some points in favour of the party image: as discussed in Chapter 3, Adams et al. (2011) highlight how parties use their established images to signal policy positions and ideological stances (which conceptually correspond to core values) to voters, who then use these images as heuristics to infer where the party stands on various issues.

In a nutshell, emphasising party image might be seen as a functional communication tool for parties in order to provide voters with simple information for voting decisions. Future research could focus on the party image that uses all three dimensions (attributes, core values, and group appeals) together, and also could connect the demand side (voter perceptions) with the supply side (party strategies). The current thesis has established the framework that can be used in order to address these issues in a more conceptually unified way.

Furthermore, there has been an ongoing debate on whether parties continue to have the same level of importance in the electoral campaigns. A significant number of researchers argue that politics is becoming more personalised, with individuals – leaders or candidates – taking precedence over parties. This apparent shift implies that parties, and their associated issues and images, become less central, while leaders (personalisation) or candidates (individualisation) and their personal images gain prominence. Although the extent to which political personalisation has fully manifested is debated in the literature, it is evident that parties increasingly utilise personalisation and individualisation strategies in their campaigns.

Karvonen (2010) discusses the growing influence of leader images in Western democracies, noting that voters often base their decisions more on their perceptions of party leaders than on party platforms. Garzia (2019) further supports this idea by demonstrating that leader evaluations have become a crucial factor in voter behaviour, reinforcing the centrality of personalisation in contemporary elections. Conversely, Rahat and Kenig (2018) present a contrasting view, suggesting that although personalisation is on the rise, it has not completely diminished the significance of political parties. They suggest that while leaders play a crucial role, the underlying party structure and its traditional functions remain vital to political processes. Additionally, according to Enli and Skogerbø (2013), it is important to note that despite the growing prevalence of leader-focused campaigns, political parties still wield considerable influence over political agendas and the choice of candidates. According to Cross and Pilet (2015), party organizations are capable of adapting to personalisation without sacrificing their core functions. They emphasise that parties still have a crucial role in shaping voter decisions and holding politicians accountable.

Moreover, the strategic use of strong candidates to restore or enhance a party's image can be seen as a pragmatic communication choice rather than a deviation from traditional party politics. This approach strengthens the party's reputation and has the potential to attract a broader voter base by capitalising on the charm or competence of leaders (Smith 2001). More specifically, Davies and Mian (2010) show that the leader's reputation is more likely to have an effect on the party's image, although the effect appears to be different in case of the decline of Tony Blair's reputation.

We suggest that the role and importance of the party image as opposed to leader image in electoral campaigns is highly contextual: in the current thesis, we have discussed that the Christian Democratic Union has decided to run its 2013 campaign based mostly on Angela Merkel's image, as it was considered strong at that point. On the other hand, Swiss parties,

especially smaller ones, like the Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) and the Green Liberals (GLP) opted for a blurred programme and a broader focus of a "modern bourgeois party" or "green and liberal party", respectively.

Additionally, the effect of party professionalisation might be present. Professionalisation is usually understood as the intensive use of multiple communication tools (including social media), marketing-oriented campaign strategies, a centralisation of power within parties, including growing nationalisation (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; Plasser and Plasser 2002; Swanson and Mancini 1996). In the case of Germany, we have seen that often, parties do not vary much in their focus on image dimensions or in the frequency of mentioning images. When comparing Swiss and German political parties, we found that in Switzerland, parties are less professionalised, particularly during the examined time frame (Bailer and Bütikofer 2015; Bochsler et al. 2016; Esser et al. 2012). We argue that when parties become professionalised and start shifting towards the marketing-oriented campaigns, their communication – and consequently party image strategies across parties – become more homogenous. As a result, voters might become dissatisfied with parties not being coherent anymore, but constantly adapting and calculating their image. Further research is necessary to establish exact trends and changes.

Such party behaviour might also spark the growth of populist parties that are incentivised to distinguish themselves more, a phenomenon we currently observe in Europe and worldwide. While we do not engage in the discussion of populism and its exact definition, we argue that parties might employ populist image strategies. As we have seen from our analysis results, such strategies do build an anti-elitist image of a party that claims to represent "the people" or "the majority", confirming the most consensual definition of this debated phenomenon (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). A party can also play on the nationalistic and cultural identification and take an oppositional stance against the "bureaucracy" or "political elites". It might be possible to qualify a party as populist, based on its own communication strategy. This, in turn, might be rather objective and factual, as the party's own words would be used.

Finally, the empirical contribution of the current thesis is the conducted analysis of two Western European countries, Switzerland and Germany. While two cases are the minimum for the comparative analysis, this work nevertheless contributes to various fields of the relevant literature, including party competition, campaign communication and negative campaigning, by analysing image strategies across two countries, two elections, and two communication channels.

9.3. Limitations and implications

This thesis is based on the combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods, which shows the value of the mixed methods approach in the studies of image strategies. There are several limitations related to the theory, data collection and analysis methods that we would like to point out.

While the theory of risk aversion is used quite often by the scholars of party competition, our empirical analyses have shown that its relevance in interpreting party image is at best modest. This might be due to the number of case studies that we have chosen, be it countries, parties, or electoral years, or it might be because the theory does not work in the same way for images as it does for issues. For example, a recent study by Lockwood and Rockey (2020) analysed voter loss aversion with regard to candidate policy platforms and candidate valence. Among other things, they have found that the loss aversion theory did not have the same effects on valence. While the study is not directly related to the current thesis, it suggests that strategies based on valence or policies do not work in the same way.

Furthermore, other theories can be tested in relation to party competition on the non-policy dimensions. For example, path dependency theory is often used in relation to institutional change (Trouvé et al. 2010) or policy analysis (Crouch 2004; Kay 2005). However, there has been an attempt to apply this theory to the rhetoric of politics (Grube 2016). In a nutshell, political parties are bound by their historical choices in terms of their image, especially by its rigid part. For example, a party, historically rooted in workers' rights (such as most social democratic parties in Western Europe), might find it difficult to identify and address the new core electorate. Doing so would confuse its voter base and contradict its rigid image, which can result in an electoral backlash. This is related to what path dependency would refer to as 'lock-in,' a situation where past decisions create a set of expectations that restrict future options.

Such historical constraints could make parties risk-averse on the non-policy communication, making them stick to tried-and-tested formats or themes. They may also affect how parties respond to external pressures such as social change or technological advancements, perhaps slowing the adaptation of their image compared to parties with less "historical baggage". Therefore, applying path dependency theory (or articulating it as the risk aversion theory) to party competition in non-policy dimensions may offer insights into why parties maintain

certain images over time, how they evolve, and the kinds of challenges they may face when attempting to alter those images.

While regression analysis is an efficient tool to analyse the quantitative data, the results heavily depend on the collected data. We have observed that certain variables, such as incumbency status, were influenced by the national specifics of each country. Thus, we could have achieved different results if our sample of parties were different. In future research, more countries or parties could be included in the dataset in order to test the hypotheses on a larger data sample. The collection of the data also proved to be somewhat complicated. On one hand, the interview process was hindered by schedule issues, and on the other hand, human-coded content analysis has taken significantly more time and resources than was previously planned. Further research on this topic can address the computer-assisted or supervised content analysis, with a possible simplification of image sub-dimensions.

Related to that is how we have initially conceived the concept of rigidity and plasticity in regard to the image dimensions. We suggested that plasticity and rigidity are consistent across all image dimensions and parties. In this case, the same core value or group appeal image will have the same "level" of rigidity for two different parties. However, we are conscious that it is a clear trade-off between the theoretical depth and the operationalisation effort required to measure it. The primary idea is the examination of consistent images from relevant parties over time, but this thesis is based on data from just two elections. Moreover, this would involve setting a "baseline" for each party, which would necessitate a substantial effort in terms of analysing the content. To thoroughly analyse election data for over ten years, even from just two political parties, would be a significant undertaking. Ideally, a team of researchers and substantial funding would be needed for this task.

The limitations of the current dataset also point out the need for a broader scope, both in terms of electoral cycles and geographic regions. Multi-party European countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, or France could be incorporated into subsequent studies to confirm or challenge our observations. This expansion will lend more weight to our arguments and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role images play in modern political communication. Taking the Netherlands as another country for the further analysis is a good perspective, as the data were collected within the SNSF project but unfortunately not finalised.

Finally, future research can address the issue of time trends. This research has established that the party identity image is rather stable, and in order to see whether and how it changes, we

should include a larger time span of elections into the analysis. It would allow to test the potential effect of the path dependency argument on party image strategies. Observing image strategies across time, preferably for a decade or two, will surely help us advance our understanding of the crucial role image plays in campaign communication and party competition in general.

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Appendix 1. Literature overview on the concept of political image.

Table A.1. Overview of the scholarly literature on the concept of political image

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
1	Boulding (1956)	Sociology	Yes, image as message and image as perception	Supply/ Demand	Parties / candidates	Different approaches to the concept of image from psychology to political science
2	Trilling (1975)	Political science	Yes: a "mental picture" an individual has about a political party" (p.285)	Demand	Parties / candidates	Electoral behaviour connected to party image
3	Ogmundson (1975)	Political science	No	Supply	Parties	Party images and class voting
4	Butler and Stokes (1976)	Political science	Partially	Demand (public perceptions)	Parties / leaders	Public perceptions of parties
5	Nimmo (1976)	Political communication	Yes: qualities, traits, and attributes	Supply	Candidates	Image making and professional image makers in politics
6	Nimmo and Savage (1976)	Political communication	Yes; qualities, traits, and attributes; partisan self-images	Demand	Candidates	Image as a human construct imposed on an array of perceived attributes projected by an object, event, or person
7	Wattenberg (1982)	Political science	No	Demand (party identification)	Parties	Two-party and multi-party systems comparison

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
8	Shyles (1984)	Political communication	Yes: a candidate's ethos, character attributes	Supply ("source-projected model")	Candidates	Televised political advertisement, difference in demand-side and supply side images
9	Rosenberg et al. (1986)	Political communication	Yes: image as appearance and style	Demand (voting behaviour)	Candidates	Non-verbally communicated image
10	Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986)	Political science	No	Demand (public perceptions)	Parties	Issues vs images dichotomy
11	Farrell and Wortmann (1987)	Political marketing	No; understood as the self-presentation	Supply	Parties / leaders	Leader and party images as a part of the "communication policy"
12	Sanders (1988)	Political science	Yes (voter perceptions)	Demand	Parties	Different categories of responses
13	Hellweg, King, and Williams (1988)	Political communication	No clear definition; image as voter evaluations of candidates	Demand	Presidential candidates	"Factor structure"—predefined dimensions of images
14	Rosenberg, Kahn, and Tran (1991)	Political communication	Partially; the categories and perceptions	Supply/ Demand	Candidates	Shaping the image to voters' expectations
15	Stewart and Clarke (1992)	Political science	Partially; the categories that constitute the image	Demand (party choice)	Parties / leaders	Party leaders and party choice

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
16	Klingemann and Wattenberg (1992)	Political science	No	Demand	Parties	Party identification and party images; survey data, open-end questions
17	Jacobs and Shapiro (1994)	Political science	No	Supply/ demand	Candidates	The interconnectedness of issues and images for candidates
18	Baumer and Gold (1995)	Political science	Yes: voter perceptions	Demand	Parties	Image as perceptions to evaluate parties and candidates
19	Janda et al. (1995)	Political science	Image as identity: "what citizens have in mind when they think about [the] party" (p.171)	Supply/ Demand	Parties	Changes in party manifestos after election defeats
20	Rahn and Cramer (1996)	Political communication	Yes, party image as a stereotype	Demand	Parties	Impact of the television of the stereotypes
21	Lock and Harris (1996)	Political marketing	Image as a part of political brand	Demand/ Supply	Parties/ candidates	First attempt to define image as a political marketing concept
22	McCombs et al. (1997)	Political communication	Yes: ideology, qualifications, personality	Demand/ supply	Candidates	Candidate images and agenda setting
23	Kiousis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban (1999)	Political communication	Yes: a set of attributes	Demand (voter perception)	Candidates	Attribute salience; agenda-setting and framing
24	Funk (1999)	Political science (candidate evaluation)	Set of trait categories based on Kinder (1983, 1986)	Demand (voter evaluation)/ Supply	Candidates	Candidate evaluations, candidates presenting their image

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
25	Hacker et al. (2000)	Political science	Yes: source credibility traits or persona impressions	Demand (voter perception)	Candidates	Issues vs images dichotomy
26	Smith (2001)	Political marketing	Yes	Demand	Parties/ leaders	Political marketing approach to parties' and leaders' image
27	Niven and Zilber (2001)	Political communication	No, but the image is the set of attributes and traits	Supply	Candidates	Gender differences in cultivating image
28	Baines, Harris, and Lewis (2002)	Political marketing	Partially: image connected to reputation	Supply	Parties	Political marketing approach to building party image
29	Druckman (2003)	Political communication	Yes: image as non-verbal clues	Demand (priming and evaluating)	Candidates	Television images; images vs issues
30	Allen and Post (2004)	Political science	Partially; the categories that constitute the overall image	Demand (voting behaviour)	Candidates	Candidate image as a multidimensional variable
31	Baines et al. (2005)	Political marketing	Image as perception	Demand/ Supply	Parties	Market segmentation, product-attributed voter segmentation
32	Dalton and Weldon (2005)	Political science	No, but the image is related to valence (negative or positive evaluation)	Demand	Parties	Public image of parties
33	Brettschneider et al. (2006)	Political science	No	Demand (voting behaviour)	Candidates	Changes in perception through time

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
34	Baumer and Gold (2007)	Political science	Yes: combination of valence attributes and group representation	Demand	Parties	Partisanship and party image
35	Tsai (2007)	Political science	Yes, image as perception "in minds of people (p.10)	Demand	Parties	Party images, issue positions, and party performance
36	Scammell (2007)	Political marketing	Image as "brand concept", adding an "emotional layer"	Demand	Leaders	Proposing to call image the "brand concept"
37	Barisione (2009a)	Political science (voter behaviour)	Yes: psycho-political and socio-cognitive definition	Demand	Candidates/ leaders	The effect of leader image on voting intentions
38	Luechtefeld (2009)	Political science	Yes; various definitions from authors	Supply/ Demand	Candidates	Issues vs images dichotomy
39	Barisione (2009b)	Political science (voter behaviour)	Yes; leadership-related perceived attributes	Supply/ Demand	Candidates/ leaders	Valence image of leaders
40	Clark (2009)	Political science (voter behaviour)	Image as valence	Demand	Parties	Valence images and electoral outcome
41	Smith and French (2009)	Political marketing	Image as perception, often with an emotional attachment	Demand	Parties/ candidates	Images as a part of the political brand

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
42	Adams and Merrill (2009)	Political science (voter perception)	Image as valence	Demand	Leaders	Valence dimensions of honesty, competence, charisma, and unity
43	Balmas and Sheafer (2010)	Political communication	Yes; set of attributes	Supply	Candidates	Agenda-setting, voting intentions
44	Kaylor (2011)	Political marketing	No	Supply (image repair)	Parties/ candidates	Image in the political marketing sense (part of the brand)
45	Campbell, Green, and Layman (2011)	Political science	No	Demand	Parties	Images of voter groups
46	Hoegg and Lewis (2011)	Political marketing	Yes; image as a set of traits and attributes	Demand/ Supply	Candidates/ parties	Political marketing approach
47	Schill (2012)	Political communication	Yes; the visual part	Supply/ Demand	Candidates	Review of the visual communication literature
48	Falkowski and Cwalina (2012)	Political marketing	Image as a perception with "emotional reception"	Demand	Candidates	Political marketing approach
49	Garzia (2013a)	Political science (voter behaviour)	Yes, image as a set personality and issue stands (quoting Garramone 1983)	Demand	Leaders	The effects of leaders' image on voting behaviour
50	Enli and Skogerbø (2013)	Political communication	No, but the image is the set of attributes and traits	Demand/ Supply	Candidates	Social media as the communication tool

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
51	Abney et al. (2013)	Political science	Partially; connected to valence	Demand	Leaders/ elites	Image as character-based valence
52	Fernandez-Vazquez (2014)	Political science (party policy)	Partially: perception of left-right position	Supply / Demand	Parties	Party policy statements and images
53	Schneider (2014)	Political marketing	Party image as "brand personality"	Demand	Leaders / parties	Attributes as a part of party image / brand personality
54	Bellucci, Garzia and Lewis-Beck (2015)	Political science	Yes, personality traits	Demand	Leaders	Issues vs images dichotomy
55	Bigi and Bonera (2015)	Political marketing	Yes: "projected images" of organizational elites	Supply	Parties/ leaders	Party brand identity and brand image; political marketing approach
56	Cross and Pilet (2015)	Political communication	No; understood as voter perceptions	Supply / Demand	Parties/ leaders	Leaders as a part of the party image
57	Scammell (2015)	Political marketing	Partially; brand identity as the image that parties convey	Demand/ Supply	Parties	Brand image and brand identity as demand and supply side, respectively
58	Dean, Croft, and Pich (2015)	Political marketing	Yes; image as a "heuristic enabling efficient information processing"	Supply/ Demand	Parties	Brand as a combination of image, logo, leadership, and values
59	Ohr, Niedermayer, and Hofrichter (2015)	Political science (voter perceptions)	Image as "mental perception" (*mentale Vorstellungsbilder*)	Demand	Parties	Party images in connection to class

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
60	Gorbaniuk et al. (2015)	Political psychology	Image as party "personality" perception	Demand	Parties	Socio-psychological approach
61	Cwalina and Falkowski (2016)	Political marketing	Image as the set of valence traits	Demand	Candidates	Political branding of candidates
62	Filimonov, Russmann and Svensson (2016)	Political communication	Image as self-presentation of parties	Supply	Parties	Focus on the visual and non-verbal part of the communicative behaviour
63	Grossmann and Hopkins (2016)	Political science	No; understood as voter perceptions	Supply / Demand	Parties	Public image as both what party conveys and voters perceive
64	Lupu (2016)	Political marketing	No	Supply / Demand	Parties	Party image as the part of the party brand
65	Parry-Giles (2016)	Political science	Yes	Supply	Candidates	Clear definition of political image
66	Scammell (2015)	Political marketing	No; image as both self-presentation and voter perceptions	Supply / Demand	Parties / leaders	Party image as a highly flexible part of the communicative behaviour that is tailored
67	Warner and Banwart (2016)	Political science (voter behaviour)	Partially; the categories	Demand	Candidates	Candidate image and low-information rationality
68	Ahler and Sood (2018)	Political science	No	Demand	Parties	Image as voter perceptions of parties; partisan bias and misperceptions that voters hold
69	Bossetta (2018)	Political communication	No	Supply	Candidates / parties	Image as the (self-) presentation on the social media

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
70	Bleiker (2018)	Political communication	Image as a visual and non-verbal communication	Supply / Demand	Candidates / parties	Visual communication as a part of the political process
71	Muñoz and Towner (2018)	Political communication	No; image as a visual component	Supply / Demand	Candidates	Role of the visual image in the communicative message
72	Pich and Armannsdottir (2018)	Political marketing	Brand images as self-presentation	Supply	Parties	"External orientation", or the communicative behaviour and self-presentation
73	Pich, Armannsdottir, and Spry (2018)	Political marketing	No	Supply	Parties	Separation of reputation and image within the party brand
74	Reed (2018)	Political science	No; understood as the self-presentation	Supply	Parties	Clear division between party image and party policy
75	Kaur and Sohal (2019)	Political marketing	No; image as the party brand	Demand	Parties	Political advertisements and their effect on voters' attitudes
76	Lalancette and Raynauld (2019)	Political communication	No	Supply / Demand	Candidates / leaders	Image management as a part of the communicative behaviour
77	Jackson and Lilleker (2020)	Political marketing	No	Demand	Candidates / MPs	"Impression management"
78	Peterson (2021)	Political science	"Narrative policy image"; understood as the interaction of position taking and framing	Supply / Demand	Candidates / leaders	Politics and storytelling

N/O	Author(s) – Year	Literature field	Definition provided	Supply / Demand	Parties / Candidates / Leaders	Core ideas
79	Plasser and Plasser (2023)	Political communication	No	Demand	Candidates / parties	Practices of campaigning professionals
80	Avina (2023)	Political marketing	No; understood as both the self-presentation and perception	Supply	Parties	"Image overhaul", image rebranding as an electoral strategy

Appendix 2. Coding rules.

1. Image of subject actor

This section includes **the definition and coding rules relating to the four image dimensions** (valence attributes, policy, ideology, and social groups), as they were defined in the broader project.

The research design is based on the principles of quantitative conceptual content analysis. It is supplemented by a modified version of the core sentence approach (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 1997; Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2003; Dolezal et al. 2012), which allows us to assign core sentences, rather than full documents, as analysis units. This approach is frequently used to break down complex grammatical sentences down to their essential parts, which, in our case, are the individual image categories.

Additionally, *political claims analysis* (Koopmans and Statham 1999) is modified to fit the objective of capturing the political **subject** (a party) and its **image**, as well as an occasional object of the image in case of attacks and appraisals. As a result, we achieve the task of coding complex grammatical sentences as claims, statements, or attacks that parties make, and the presence of images in these claims. Therefore, we capture not only the absolute and relative frequencies of the individual image categories but also the choice of dimension and positive / negative dimension, as well as the **object** of the statement.

The coding scheme of the project required that at least one issue or one image (self-presentation or attack) would be coded in a core sentence. An issue and an image could also be coded together in one sentence, and multiple image categories can be present in one core sentence. Due to the coding rules of the project, only one issue is coded per sentence.

Thus, two types of sentences are present in the current thesis:

1) Subject – Image type;
2) Subject – Object – Image type.

Consider these examples:

A. We are the party that best defends SME's interests.
B. We want fewer foreigners in Switzerland.
C. We are the green original.
D. We have not always been consistent on this issue.

In example A, the subject actor positively portrays itself as the defender of a socioeconomic group (coded: small and medium businesses / positive), whereas in example B s/he distances itself from a given group (coded: foreigners / negative). In example C, the subject actor positively praises itself as the original (coded: authentic / positive), whereas in example D s/he allows for a more negative image (coded: consistent / negative).

2. Valence attributes

The valence dimension focuses on **personal** attributes, that is, on (positive and negative) self-characterization or the characterization of another political actor (ally or competitor). Such attributes are easiest to recognize and code in short sentences, which only contain a message about an actor's image (see example C above), but they can also appear in longer sentences, in combination with other image dimensions and/or together with an issue (and frame). Consider the following examples:

A. BDP—the **new** force! (val1=new)
B. Our place is at your side—and it **will stay that way**. (val1=committed)
C. DIE LINKE has the **experience** and **competence** to deal with social and regional inequalities. (val1=experience, val2=competence)
D. We **learned** from our mistakes, **gained strength** from our ambition and **advanced** society with our **courage**. (val1=experience; val2=leadership qualities; val3= leadership qualities; pol1=successful)

Often, single adjectives signal valence attributes. However, coders should not just blindly look for some keywords; adjectives that could potentially highlight personal characteristics are sometimes used in a different context, as in this example: "The CVP is committed to maintaining the Swiss model of our parents and grandparents, for its reliability". Here, it's not the party that is described as "reliable", but the Swiss model. Hence, no valence attribute is coded.

3. Policy dimension

The policy dimension does not focus on the content or position for or against a given policy, but on how parties describe their approach to politics or their way to do politics and find policy solutions (e.g., feasible, pragmatic, consistent). Again, a core sentence can solely refer to the policy dimension of image building, or can also contain references to other image dimensions and/or issues (and frames). Here are some examples:

A. We want to ensure that **words are followed by actions**. (pol1=voter promises driven)
B. Our program is **feasible**, **affordable** and **a step towards a better, more humane society**. (pol1=pragmatic, pol2=pragmatic, pol3=communal interest driven)
C. We have **consistently** opposed the restriction and erosion of fundamental and civil rights. (pol1=consistent, issue=civil rights (200), issue position positive)

4. Ideology dimension

We code references to ideology in three different cases:

1. **Self-descriptions** and self-characterization of a party:
   A. The Greens are the only real **environmental party** (ide1=ecological / positive)
   B. The Left is the **socialist civil rights** party (ide1=extreme left / positive, ide2=freedom / positive)
   C. We are a **liberal** party. (ide1=liberal / positive)

Note that one could be tempted to also code an issue (i.e., environment (700) in example A, 200=liberties in example B). However, given our general rule that we do not code any single information twice, we code the ideology, not the issue.

2. Explicit (positive or negative) **references to ideology:**
   A. **Capitalism** is proving incapable of solving humanity's most pressing problems. (ide1=capitalism/consumerism negative)
   B. Capitalism is **a system geared towards profit maximization**, which is currently increasingly relying on short-term gains on the financial markets. (ide1=capitalism/consumerism negative, issue=1502, no position)

C. Today, like tomorrow, [the party] bases its commitment on three central values: **freedom**, **cohesion** and **innovation**. (pol1=consistent, idé1=freedom, ide2=community cohesion, ide3=progressive)

3. **Description of an ideal society/economy/democracy**
   A. A **society that is primarily oriented towards profit and the market** cannot and will not satisfy the needs and interests of an increasing number of people and leads to ecological catastrophe. (ide1=capitalism / negative)
   B. The Greens fight for the **democratic values** that will improve people's life. (ide1=democracy positive)
   C. As part of **democratic society**, The Left also stands **against ideologies of inequality and hostility to democracy**. (ide1=democracy / positive, ide2=equality/fairness/justice / positive, ide3=democracy / positive)

As can be seen from the various examples, different image dimensions can be combined in a single sentence and even appear together with issues (and frames).

Note that ideologies can overlap with issues and/or frames. For example, "equality/fairness" can be an ideology, but also a frame. Or "redistribution" can be an ideology, but also an issue. Given our general rule that we do not code the same information twice, **we do not code an ideology when it already appears in an issue or a frame**[67], for example:

A. *We want equal pay for men and women because we want a just society.* Here, the reference to fairness/justice/equality is in the justification of a concrete policy proposal. Hence, we code a core sentence with an issue and a frame, but without an image/ideology.
B. *Diese Umverteilung von unten nacho ben ist von SPD und Grünen unter der Schröder-Fischer-Regierung eingeleitet worden, wurde dann von der grossen Koalition und jetzt von der Merkel-Regierung fortgesetzt.* Here, redistribution clearly refers to a concrete, past and current policy rather than to a general ideology or principle. Hence, we code a core sentence with the issue=redistribution, without an image/ideology.

5. Social group representation

Note on social group representation

Definition: Social groups are defined broadly including groups such as "families", which describe a group of people sharing a socio-economic characteristic, as well as groups, which refer to sections of the society (e.g., the media) and the economy (e.g., SME) or the whole of the (national) society (e.g., the country).

5.1. Coding rules.

Social groups (up to 3 per sentence) are always coded when parties, in the sentence in question, express their support or criticism of a group. There are several forms in which this support/criticism can occur:

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[67] In the framework of the current thesis, frames and issues, which could overlap with ideology images, were thoroughly checked and recoded. In total, about 20% of frames and 10% of (general) issues were recoded to images.

1. **Direct criticism/support of (the rights/the protection of) a group**
    A. Supporting SMEs (grs: KMU / positive)
    B. We need courageous politicians who fight against the injustices inflicted upon the tenants. (grs: tenants / positive)
    C. Note that adjectives can also signal criticism/support, e.g. We want a family-friendly taxation policy (grs: families / positive)
2. **Appraisal of a group**
    A. Families are really important for society (grs: (traditional) families / positive)
    B. Switzerland is a great country (grs: country / positive)
3. **Emphasise the effects of a policy on a social group**
    A. Collective labour agreements protect the employees and guarantee them good working conditions (grs: employees / positive)
    B. We are against mass immigration, so that we have fewer foreign criminals (grs: immigrants / negative)
4. **Talk about a policy reserved for a certain social group**
    A. We should reduce taxes for families (grs: (traditional) families / positive)
    B. Additional tax cuts for businesses (grs: firms / positive)

Statement including groups are **not coded if** the position of the party towards the group is not or only implicitly discernible, as it is the case for:

1. Factual statements about a group, including descriptions of its hardship

    A. In the cities, up to 50% of children have a mother tongue other than our national languages.
    B. Women earn on average 20% less than men.

2. Demands towards a group

    A. Immigrants have to adapt to our customs.
    B. That is a responsibility of the people themselves.

Groups used to describe a policy field can also be coded if a position on the issue is made clear. In the sentence "The Socialist Party fought for women's right to vote", "women" are coded as a group. However, no group is coded in the sentence "We want to reform family taxation" because no clear position can be discerned.

General categories such as regions, the country or the society are also coded if the actors clearly position themselves to it (e.g., "Supporting a strong Swiss Industry") but are not coded if the emphasis is on what kind of society/country is desired (e.g. "We want a country in which people respect each other".) or on the society/country as the relevant policy arena ("In Switzerland…").

Note that in some cases, the reference to a specific social group can refer to two categories (e.g., criminal foreigners, older workers, firms from Eastern Germany). In such cases, we write down the specific group in the string variable, but only code the broader group category (e.g., foreigners, workers, firms).

5.2. Difference between social group representation and issue emphases.

Sometimes, it is difficult to differentiate between image building and issue emphases. This is especially the case when image priming refers to the representation of social groups. Consider the following statement of the CVP:

>   A. Strengthening SMEs – relieving the burden on families.

Obviously, the CVP wants to portray itself as the defender/advocate of SMEs and families. At the same time, the references to SMEs and families could also be coded as issues (codes 1521 and 1208, respectively). In general, however, **we do not code the same information twice**, with different variables. In such cases as the above, when the organization/social group is the primary focus of a statement and no reference to an issue/policy is made, we only code the group image. However, if the policy is the primary focus of a statement (e.g., "we want to reform family taxation", "we have to tighten the immigration law"), we only code an issue, but not a group image.

5.3. Difference between social group representation and object actor.

Similarly, it can be difficult to differentiate between the positive or negative reference to social group**s** as part of an image building strategy and the positive or negative reference to an object actor. Consider these examples:

A. The past has shown that the private sector mostly acts in its own interests.
B. Faulty banks should not be protected.
C. We want to hand over an intact environment to future generations and not burden them with risks due to the short-term interests of the nuclear lobby.

When a subject actor criticizes or supports another actor for his policies, positions or actions, then this actor should be considered object actor ("the private sector" in example A). In other words, object actors did/plan to do something, and they are supported or criticized for it. In contrast, in case of references to social groups, the actors/groups haven't usually done anything. The subject actor expresses whom he does (not) want to represent/defend (examples B and C).

5.4. Difference between social group representation and framing.

In some cases, references to social groups are difficult to distinguish from issue frames. This is especially the case when social groups and frames overlap, as in the case of "for everyone" and "for Switzerland". In both cases, the social group (for everyone=socio-economic group/ordinary people, for Switzerland=regional group/the country) corresponds to specific frames (for everyone=fairness and equality frames, for Switzerland=nationalistic frame). In general, coding groups answers the question "for/against whom" is an actor whereas coding frames relates to the question of "why" an actor advocates a particular issue (position). Sometimes, frames are introduced by specific linguistic markers (e.g., in order to, because, etc.), which help us differentiate between frames and social group appeals. If such markers are present, we always code a frame. In practice, however, there are often no such markers and it becomes very hard to differentiate between frames and social group references.

Consider these two examples:

A. For a health system without risks and side effects.
B. For everyone instead of just a few. Bilateral YES—EU accession NO. For the love for Switzerland.

In these and similar cases, we make an exception to our rule that we do not generally code the same information twice and **code both the frame and the social group**:

SP / socioeconomic groups—ordinary people / general reforms of the health care system / positive / fairness and equality frame

FDP / regional group—own country / Swiss-EU relations / positive / nationalistic frame

FDP / regional group—own country / Swiss-EU relations / negative / nationalistic frame

6. Images and unitizing

In general, the reference to an image dimension (valence, policy, ideology, social groups) does not automatically justify the coding of a new core sentence. Keep in mind the following rules (see also p. 8):

1. Sentences with several images (e.g., Thomas Hodler— sincere, liberal, constructive): all image variables are coded in a single core sentence (e.g., honest, liberal, pragmatic)
2. Images in the middle of an issue list (e.g., "The CVP is committed to a sustainable and solutions-oriented policy, to a social and ecological market economy and a framework where life is good for families"): in such cases, we code a separate core sentence for the references to an image (sustainable politics: pol1=consistent, solutions-oriented: pol2=pragmatic) plus a separate core sentence for each issue.
3. References to an image, followed by an enumeration of policies: in this case, we code the image with each issue. Consider three examples:

   A. We reinforce the middle class and families thanks to: stable social insurances, safe jobs, and an attractive economic place.

Here, we code a separate core sentence for each issue and always add the reference to the social groups (middle class, families:

> *CVP / middle class positive, families positive / stable social insurances (1300, +1)*
>
> *CVP / middle class positive, families positive / safe jobs (103, +1)*
>
> *CVP / middle class positive, families positive / attractive economic place (100, 0)*

   B. A strong social market economy. Safe money. Solid budgets. Relief for the middle class. More educational opportunities. And strong, free citizens. **That was only possible with us.** That was only possible with the FDP.

Again, we code a separate sentence for each issue and always add the refence to the policy dimension (successful-positive).

   C. The transition to a **just society** requires several decisions at the same time: separating wealth and poverty, i.e. collecting money through taxes and levies on the rich that can be used to finance public services and good infrastructure.

Also, here we code a separate sentence for each issue and always add the reference to an ideal (just) society (ide=equality/justice/fairness positive).

Appendix 3. Interview questions.

Q1: What were the main campaign topics in your last campaign?

Q2: Who determines the topics of the campaign and when?

Q3: When you decide on the main topics for the campaign, what do you consider?

> Please indicate the three most important factors.
> *(Note for the interviewers: If the answer doesn't mention any specific factors, provide some examples of possible factors:*
> For example, ideological traditions, electoral base, competitors, other)

Q4: When voters decide which party to vote for, they often consider the competence of parties to solve specific problems. Which are the particular topics in which you want to be perceived competent as a party?

Q4.1: How do you try to strengthen this reputation?

Q5: Until now we talked about topics that your party chooses to campaign with. But what if a topic that is not part of your main campaign agenda becomes suddenly prominent because of some external event, for example, the refugee crisis or the Fukushima catastrophe, or due to the campaigns of other parties, under which circumstances would you engage in the discussion on this topic?

Q6: The same topic can be discussed from different angles. For example, when talking about immigration one can highlight its impact on the economy, employment and so on, or its impact on the culture, on traditions or the national way of life. If you are facing an issue that was brought to the agenda by external events (see Q5), what factors influence the way you present this topic? Please indicate the three most important factors.

Q7: If you face a situation when your competitors and you advocate the same policies, how do you try to distinguish yourself?

Q8: Can you think of a topic for which your party changed the way of discussing and presenting it (in the past)? For example, changing the discussion of a topic like immigration from a more economic to a more cultural focus.

Q8.1: *(Question to be asked only if the answer to 8 is "yes")*

When you changed the way you presented the topic, which factors did you consider? Please indicate the three most important factors.

Q9: Strong changes in policy positions are rather rare among parties but still one could observe some important changes in the last years with regard to for example nuclear energy or asylum policies. Do you recall a major policy shift by your party? If yes, please indicate the three main

factors that influenced this change. If you do not recall such a change, under which circumstances would you consider such a policy shift?

Q9.1: If a party's voters are divided over an issue or if a party's position is unpopular among the wider public parties might blur their positions rather than taking a clear stance. Do you consider this strategy viable? What are the gains/risks you see in that strategy?

Q10: In terms of how a party wants to be seen by voters, a party might decide to emphasise its (general) ideological belief, such as equal opportunities, sustainability, being left or liberal, or it might want to highlight how it approaches policy-making and works on policies. Would you say it is more important for you to put forward your ideology or your work on policies?

Q11: How do you want to be perceived by voters? Please select up to three attributes. Are there any other images (attributes) that you wanted to convey?

> *(Explication for the interviewers:*
>
> *Attribute: a quality or feature that party has and wants to be associated with*
>
> - Authentic: being true to yourself
> - Liberal: advocating the freedom of the individual
> - Traditional values-oriented: based on values like family, modesty, patriotism
> - Consensus/compromise-oriented: willing to negotiate to find a solution
> - Modern and new: keeping up with times, being progressive in both communication and issues
> - Responsible and accountable: transparent and willing to admit fails/mistakes
> - Solid and unified: party that keeps a strong inner discipline across factions and regions
> - Adaptive: a party that seizes the moment
> - Conservative: a party that is oriented on preserving what is established, preferring gradual development to abrupt change
> - Committed: dedicated to its goals, keeping promises, finishing what it has started

Q12: *(Only for Germany)*

Some parties mainly focus on their main candidate (*Spitzenkandidat*), others focus more generally on the party. In your last campaign, how did you find the balance between emphasising the role of your main candidate/party leader and promoting your party?

Q13: As not all voters are equally susceptible to the messages of a campaign, campaigns generally try to identify particular target groups. Please indicate how important the following three groups of voters were for your campaign on a scale from 1 to 4 with 4 being very important and 1 being very unimportant.

Q14: Which are the three specific voter groups such as young people or women that your campaign considered to be the most important ones? Follow-up question: Are those new target groups or traditional ones, that had already been targeted for years?

Q15: For those social groups (see Q 14) please indicate how you tried to appeal to them. *(Explication for the interviewers: Write the number corresponding to the group following the question 14 in the cells, multiple options are possible*

- Stated support: Explicitly stating e.g., "our party supports families"
- Visual presence: use the images of e.g., young people in advertisements
- Candidates from groups: e.g., Emphasise the gender of candidates
- Criticism of other groups = e.g., criticising bankers because they are disliked by employees)

Q16: For those social groups (see Q 14) please indicate through which communication channels you tried to appeal to them.

Q17: Some parties distance themselves from certain social groups. For example, some parties might attack managers for their high salaries, others might attack immigrants for their lack of integration. Do you consider this strategy viable? What are the gains/risks you see in that strategy?

Q18: What role did criticism of other parties play in your campaign strategy on a scale from 1 to 4 with 4 being very important and 1 being very unimportant?

Q19: What are the main gains and risks you associate with criticising your opponents?

Q20: Regarding the objectives of such criticism: Would you rather do it to energize your base or rather to attract voters that might vote for that opponent instead of your party?

Appendix 4. List of policy topics.

100   Domestic Macroeconomic Issues

200   Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties

300   Health

400   Agriculture

500   Labour and Employment

600   Education

700   Environment

800   Energy

900   Immigration and Refugee Issues

1000   Transportation

1200   Law, Crime, and Family Issues

1300   Social Welfare

1400   Community Development (includes Private Home Ownership)

1500   Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce

1600   Defence

1700   Space, Science, Technology, and Communications

1800   Foreign Trade

1900   International Affairs and Foreign Aid

2000   Government Operations

2100   Public Lands, Water Management, and Territorial Issues

2300   Cultural Policy Issues

2400   State and Local Government Administration

2500   Reunification (**only for Germany**)