Rethinking the Group Basis of Party Competition:

Evidence from Britain

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Electoral politics plays out at two levels. At one, political parties or candidates compete to win support. At another, citizens decide whom to vote for. Social groups have always been central at each. In well-known work, Lipset and Rokkan (1969) argued that across Western Europe political parties drew their support from social groups they chose to mobilize. For example, workers voted for socialist parties, and socialist parties targeted the working class in their electoral appeals. Farmers voted for agrarian parties, and farmers were targets in agrarian parties' appeals. And Christians supported Christian democratic parties, while these parties targeted Christian people. Though expressed differently across countries, politics was "group-based".

However, electoral politics has changed since the 1970s. Comparative political research has convincingly shown that short-term evaluations are crowding out long-term predispositions as explanations of voting behavior (Dalton et al. 1984; Crewe and Denver 1985; Franklin et al. 1992; Inglehart 1997; Thomassen 2005). Voters' social group belonging is still reflected in their vote choice, but the pattern is now much less pronounced.

But for all we know about group-based voting and how it has changed, we know surprisingly little about the group basis of party competition. Which groups are parties appealing

to? Are parties still appealing to their core group constituencies, or do they now appeal to groups beyond traditional alignments? Do parties target social groups as such to a lesser extent focusing more on policies, their competence as leaders, or something else entirely?

This article provides the first study of the groups that parties appeal to when competing for office. For years, comparative political research has been interested in how parties are adjusting to their changing environments (e.g., Mair et al. 2004). While some scholars have studied changes in organization, membership, or recruitment (see Katz 2014), others have focused on how party competition has evolved. For example, Kitschelt (1994) finds that social democratic parties have adopted more centrist policies to remain attractive to large numbers of voters. Kriesi et al. (2008) show how parties in eight European countries are repositioning themselves along a policy dimension dividing winners and losers of globalization. And Green-Pedersen (2007) finds that parties now take policy stands across a much broader issue range than previously in a constant fight to set the public agenda.

Yet, the group basis of party competition has eluded the research agenda. Existing work shares a common focus on policies as the "currency" in the electoral market (Kitschelt 2007: 525). Although the conventional view is that the group basis of politics was build and upheld "by the group appeals of parties themselves" (Dalton and Wattenberg 1992: 196; see also Lipset 1960: 220; Satori 1969: 203; Urwin 1973: 196; Przeworski 1985: 101) no study has yet explored if, and how, parties' group appeals have changed over the years.

In this article, I define group appeals as the explicit references to categories of people that political parties make in their communication. These can be made as part of policy statements, or they can be made without any reference to policies. In a content analysis almost 12.000 group appeals have been recorded to produce a new dataset covering 50 years of British party

competition. Like other advanced industrial democracies, Britain has undergone much electoral change. However, Britain is a particularly valuable case for two reasons. First, this is often thought to be where electoral change has been most striking (see Denver et al. 2012). Thus, we know that British parties have had strong incentives to reinvent themselves making Britain an ideal place to explore questions of group-based party competition for the first time. Second, as Britain is now the prime example a new "performance politics" (Clarke et al. 2009), we can consider it a least-likely case if party competition retains its group basis.

Results show that group appeals are a substantial part of party electoral strategy, and that they continue to be so. I argue that political parties appeal to categories of citizens because group appeals effectively inform and persuade voters. Parties have always found this attractive – even more so in recent years as voters' support can no longer be taken for granted. Further, findings show how traditional constituencies – in Britain groups related to social class – are being replaced by target groups that are "new" in the sense that they have not been historically politicized. I explain this pattern by the fact that class constituencies have "electorally relevant" (Best 2011). Class appeals also undermine parties' efforts to widen appeals as they remind people about historic group-party alignments. For these reasons, parties seek wining coalitions beyond traditional, class constituencies. For instance, parents and families are now two of the most frequently targeted groups – for both major parties in Britain.

What are group appeals?

Political parties and their candidates often talk of groups. For example, in the 1970s, the Labour Party in Britain claimed to work for "fundamental change in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families". In 2015 their Conservative counterparts spoke of

"giving young people power and opportunity". Such appeals are not confined to Britain but are part of how parties campaign in many countries. In her 2016 convention speech, Hillary Clinton mentioned "mothers", "fire-fighters", and "entrepreneurs" all within only two minutes' times, to give just one recent example beyond the European context.

This article provides the first study to systematically analyze such appeals in a long-term perspective. It defines group appeals as explicit references to categories of people found in political parties' communication. While parties almost certainly appeal to groups in subtle, implicit ways, I focus only on what is explicit and manifest to allow for reliable recording. At its core, any group appeal consists of one party, on one side, and one target group, on the other.[1] When the Conservative Party in Britain concerns itself with "the welfare of the old, the sick, the handicapped and the deprived" we observe four different group appeals each featuring the Conservatives and one of the four groups mentioned.

Group appeals are distinct from policy appeals. This is important if the study of group appeals is to add to our understanding of how party competition is evolving. However, it varies just how distinct they are. Sometimes groups are implicated in policy statements, as when a party proposes a policy to the benefit of a particular group; other times, parties refer to groups alone. In the former case group appeals are perhaps best thought of as something *more* than a policy statement rather than something else entirely. In both cases, however, they can be identified empirically, and in both cases they matter to parties because they serve important functions vis-à-vis voters.

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[1] The dataset used for this article also contains information on the relation between party and group. However, as analyses focus on group emphasis this aspect is left out. Descriptive analysis show that almost all appeals relate the party and group positively. If parties mention a group, they do it to associate themselves with it (see also Budge and Farlie 1983 on "selective emphasis").

Why group appeals matter

Group appeals serve two basic purposes for political parties. One is communication; the other is persuasion. First, research shows that voters think in terms of group categories when it comes to politics. Lazarsfeld, Berrelson and colleagues of the so-called Columbia School famously wrote that "a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially" (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948: 27). This point has been echoed ever since. Most persuasively, Converse (1964) argues that people organize political inputs according to social categories because politics is complicated while group life and social relations are intuitive (see also Conover and Feldman 1981; Conover 1988; Popkin 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2006). It is important to recognize, that even if voting patterns show less of a group basis, this does not imply that people no longer see politics through social categories. A leading explanation of the decline of class-based voting, for example, claims that electoral choice is now based on so many different group sentiments that patterns have become unpredictable (Dalton 2013: 164).

Thus, I suggest that group appeals work as the "interstitial 'linking' information indicating why a given party or policy is relevant to the group" (Converse 1964: 236-37) that voters are constantly looking for. The first major reason that parties appeal to categories of people is simply that this makes for good communication. Voters relate more easily to parties and the things they say when politics is explained in group-based terms.

Yet, parties do so for a second reason speaking perhaps more to the nature of party competition. The literature on political opinion formation has long since documented that political choice is highly susceptible to the ways in which current events, specific policies, or parties themselves are presented at the time of decision-making (Zaller 1992; Chong and Druckman 2007). This means that, given their privileged place in democratic politics, political

parties are in an ideal position to influence how the public evaluates them. This is also what agenda-setting scholars as Schattschneider (1960) pointed out long ago. One way parties do this, I suggest, is through their group appeals. Work by Kinder (1998; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Kinder and Kam 2009) shows that group references are particularly effective in persuading voters because these exploit existing group sentiments (see also Miller et al. 1991).

Consequently, political parties not only have incentives to talk in terms that people understand. They also have a strong impetus to target citizens' group sentiments and turn these into support for themselves by explicit appeals to them. Just as parties fight a constant battle to influence which issues are most salient (Riker 1986; Budge et al. 1987; Petrocik 1996) so they fight to become representatives of certain groups and to make elections about these rather than others.

Expectations

How might the group basis of party competition have evolved over time? First, as citizens continue to think about politics in terms of social categories, group appeals serve the same communicative purpose that they have always done. Parties want to "connect" with voters. Thus, they present themselves, their achievements, and their plans in terms that people can easily comprehend. Parties explicitly provide cues about which groups they stand for in order "to make politics more 'user-friendly'" (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000: 7). This argument suggests that group appeals should be at least as widespread today as previously. However, considering also that voters have become increasingly disloyal and more volatile (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995) parties likely find it necessary to appeal even more to groups today. Thus, *I expect that political parties have increased their number of group appeals.*

Not only are parties faced with a more "floating" electorate, they are also under pressure from alternative forms of representation. As Mair (2007) argues, social movements and other emerging forms of representation are threating parties on their very existence. Social change and the rise of "new politics" (Franklin et al. 1992; Clark and Lipset 2001) has spurred many new, often narrower groups seeking recognition (Kriesi 1995). Political parties are forced to adjust to this to remain competitive and relevant. Therefore, *I expect that parties will appeal to more different groups over time*. Related to this, we should also see change in how parties allocate the emphasis they put on different group categories. In an electorate increasingly particularized, *I expect that parties divide the emphasis put on group categories more evenly* in order to appeal to all segments of the citizenry.

But what of the targets in appeals? While the previous three expectations all concern group appeals in general, we should also ask if time has changed which groups parties appeal to. Mair et al. (2004: 12-13) point to an important difference between traditional constituencies and group categories that are new in the sense that they are not tied to or "owned by" (Petrocik 1996) any particular party. While groups related to the class cleavage are the obvious case of the former in Britain; parents or families are examples of the latter. Overall, existing work suggests that traditional, class constituencies will lose emphasis in parties' group appeals. For example, Best (2011: 282) argues that class constituencies are simply not as "electorally relevant" as they once were. To take the most obvious example, workers constitute a diminishing portion of parties' vote shares in all advanced industrial democracies. Some of this is due to more the fractured voting described earlier but mainly it is due to structural changes. Class constituencies have simply shrunk in size (Crouch 2008). So even if a party like Labour in Britain could successfully rebuild working-class loyalty, this would not have the same strategic value that it

used to. For this reason alone, social democratic parties are forced to broaden their appeal beyond traditional catchment areas (Kirchheimers 1966; Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Sainsbury 1990; Kitschelt 1994; Mair et al. 2004; Evans and De Graaf 2013).

Moreover, parties in Britain and elsewhere have long-standing reputations of linkage with class-based groups. The public often sees one party in particular as the representative of a group (Key 1961; Dalton 2013: 31). Even today more than 70 percent of British voters still think that Labour looks after the working class *very* or *fairly closely* compared to only 34 percent the Conservatives does so (2015 British Election Study). This picture is not very different from the one presented by Butler and Stokes (1974) four decades ago. Even in the US, where politics has always been considered less cleavage-based than in Western Europe (Kingston 2000), parties have stable, contrasting group images (Nicholson and Segura 2012). Thus, parties are historically bound when campaigning, and this raises a dilemma. Although appeals to traditional constituencies are presumably most effective in shaping voter decision-making because they fit existing beliefs (Iyengar and Kinder 1987), they also undermine efforts to become a catch-all party. If voters are constantly reminded that Labour is a working-class party, they also infer that Labour is *not* a business party; if voters think of the Conservative Party in terms of business linkage, it cannot also hope to come across as a party caring for the poor. Based on this, *I expect to find that parties in Britain are replacing class-based appeals with appeals that that target group categories that are not owned by any party.*

Research design and data

To study how the group basis of party competition has evolved, this article presents a new dataset on group appeals in Britain from 1964 to 2015. Each party in each year is the unit of

analysis. In line with the party competition literature, it contains measures of the percentage of all appeals devoted to each group category. The dataset itself is based on a total of 11925 appeals made by the two major parties in Britain during the period studied: the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. As the literature on electoral change (Dalton et al. 1984; Franklin et al. 1992) point to the 1970s as the era when change set in, I have chosen to cover an extensive time period at the expense of additional countries. British electoral politics has seen changes typical of many advanced industrial countries since the 1960s, and findings should therefore bear relevance beyond the British context. I discuss this further in the concluding section.

The dataset has been produced through content analysis of election manifestos. While the use of manifestos has been debated (Laver 2001), they are fitting for our purposes. First, manifestos represent the party as a one, whole unit. Second, they exist for the entire time period studied. And third, their function as a coordinating campaign document has remained the same over the years (Budge 2001: 51; Helbling and Tresch 2011:175-76). These are the same qualities that led the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP; Budge et al. 1987; see Volkens et al. 2013) to opt for election manifestos as source texts. Ideally, the CMP or comparable datasets could have been used for the analysis. The CMP does actually contain a few categories under the heading of "social groups" (e.g., category 703). Although this testifies that Budge and Farlie (1983) were well aware that parties reference groups in their appeals, unfortunately the quality of these categories suffer on several accounts.[2]

The content analysis was designed to record all group appeals made in the corpus text. Proceeding from a codebook, two hired coders and the author read through each election

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[2] For example, the CMP codebook explicitly states that coders must only use these categories as a last resort because policy content always has priority over a group reference. Consequently, references to groups are rarely ever coded as such, and when they are it is done unreliably (Mikhaylov et al. 2012). Both issues might well explain why these particular categories have hardly ever been used (but see Stoll 2010).

manifesto sentence by sentence to identify appeals and code them according to a number of variables of which this article focusses on the most important one: the group category targeted.[3] Thus, the method follows closely that of several major projects based on human coding of party policy (Volkens et al. 2013; Baumgartner et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2006). However, in one respect our method differs. A major goal of the content analysis was to *explore* which group categories parties actually target. Therefore, in addition to a list of defined categories, coders also recorded the text denoting a group in an open-ended variable. Doing so was the main reason to employ human coding (as opposed to an automated approach). Results in this article draw on extensive post-analysis of this open-ended information. Additional details on the coding procedure are given in the appendix (*will be made*) and in the project codebook. Several tests suggest that group appeals have been identified reliably (lowest Krippendorff's alpha= .85)

In post-analysis 99 group categories have been constructed from the open-ended entries. Thus, resulting categories are grounded what parties have actually said over the years. For this, I have relied on an automated technique called *the-bag-of-words* (see Grimmer & Stewart 2013). I proceeded as follows: First, using statistical software, all the open-ended information was partitioned according to unique words (excluding words on a stop-list such as "the" or "a"). Second, the 11925 observations were grouped according this bag-of-words resulting in around 800 word categories.[4] Third, I sort the categories according to frequency. Fourth, starting with the highest frequency, I manually group categories that have the same basic meaning. For example, "the handicapped" and "disabled people" are collapsed. So are "the sick" and "those in need of care". Likewise, a few categories are subsumed under a more abstract category if the *n* is very small – as with "Asian people" and "coloured people", which are added to "ethnic

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[3] The full list of variables can be found in the codebook available from the author.
[4] The *texttools* package available for both *Stata* (commercial) and *R* (open source) was used for this.

minorities".[5] Although the reason that we separate the tasks of identifying and categorizing appeals is that group categories can be built inductively, this has the additional advantage that reliability issues are eliminated from the latter process (Laver et al. 2003).

Group appeals in Britain 1964-2015

This section examines how the two major parties in Britain have changed their group appeals over the past five decades. First, I consider the overall extent of group appeals as well as the range and diversity across different group categories. Second, I analyse whether parties are appealing less the politicized, class constituencies in particular, and explore what might be taking their place as target groups.

Long-term trends in parties' group appeals

Do parties appeal as much to groups now as they did in the 1960s when the group basis of electoral politics was at its high? As group appeals serve the same critical functions in electoral campaigns, I expect that parties continue to appeal to categories of citizens. We can analyze this two ways. In absolute terms, the number of appeals identified in each of the 14 elections covered is simply counted. In relative terms, this number is adjusted for growing manifesto size and standardized on a scale between 0 and 1 to make trends more apparent.[6]

Figure 1 presents the two trends in parties' group appeals. The left-hand side, displaying the number of group appeals, shows that parties have appealed more often to groups over the years. Whereas roughly 200 appeals were identified for both the Conservatives and Labour in 1964 this number is five times higher in 2015. Even if election manifestos have grown in size

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[5] A replication file containing all recoding decisions is available from the author.
[6] Specifically, the number of group appeals is divided by the number of words in a given manifesto and further divided by the highest observed value. I describe this measure as the *density* of group appeals.

during the same period, the rise in group appeals is important to note because the two are endogenous. While we cannot tell empirically, it is likely that election manifestos have grown *because* parties make more appeals. Nonetheless, the right-hand side of figure 1 adjusts for size and presents the density of group appeals. Results strongly suggest that group appeals remain a prominent feature in British party competition. Holding size constant, group appeals have become slightly *more* numerous since the 1960s. The most notable change sets in from the mid-1980s and onwards.
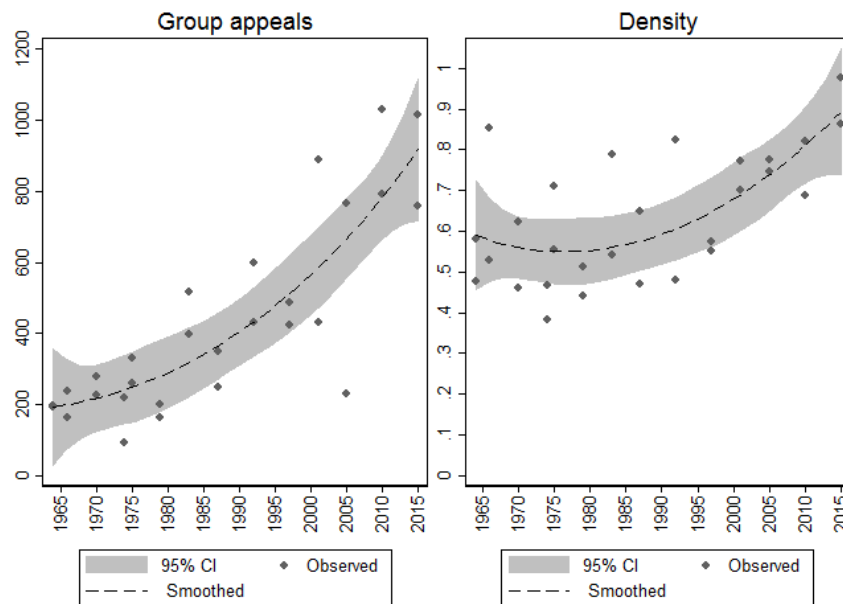

Figure 1. The extent of group appeals in Britain.

Note: On the left, the absolute number of group appeals found in the Conservative and Labour election manifestos is shown. On the right, the standardized density (appeals / words / highest observed value) of group appeals is shown. *Dots* show the observed value for each party-year observation. *Dashed line* shows the smoothed trend based on kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions. *Shaded band* shows the 95% confidence interval around the trend. N=28.

In this light, partisan dealignment and "the extension of the electoral market-place in the UK" (Webb 2004: 24) might actually have served to heighten parties need to explicate links to categories of citizens in their political communication as they can no longer take voters' support for granted.

But are parties intensifying appeals to the same group categories, or are they widening their appeals across more different groups? Parties might even respond to changes in the electorate by narrowing their appeals though this is not what I expect. Figure 2 displays the number of unique group categories that each party appeals to in a given year. The possible range is 0-99. Patterns are very similar across the two parties. We observe a general increase in the number of group categories being targeted.
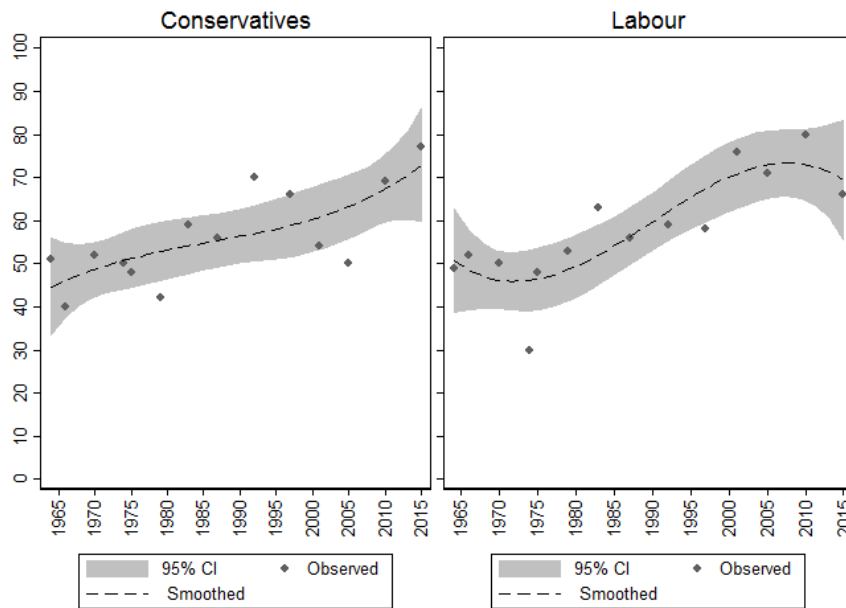

Figure 2. The range of group appeals across parties in Britain.

Note: On the left, the range of group categories found in Conservative election manifestos is shown. On the right, the range of group categories found in Labour election manifestos is shown. *Dots* show the observed value for each party-year observation. *Dashed line* shows the smoothed trend based on kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions. *Shaded band* shows the 95% confidence interval around the trend. N=14.

The smoothed trend line increases from around 45 in the mid-1960s to 70 in 2015 for the Conservative Party and from 50 to more than 60 for the Labour Party. As expected, on both sides of the spectrum, parties are widening their appeals. It should be noted, however, that the range of groups targeted varies considerably from election to election. For instance, Labour has displayed both narrower and broader ranges in several years lying between the end points. This suggests that parties retain room for short-term maneuvering in spite of the pressure to adjust in the long run.

We can further evaluate the widening of appeals by considering the diversity across categories as measured by the normalized version of Shannon's H (see Boydstun et al. 2014). Here, diversity refers to how emphasis is distributed over the range of group categories for a given party in a given year. The higher the score, the more evenly appeals are distributed (1 indicates equal emphasis of all categories). Figure 3 shows the trend in diversity over time. Perhaps surprisingly, trends for both parties are nearly flat. If anything, patterns exert a slight drop in recent years. Considering the incentive for political parties – particularly social democratic ones like Labour (Przeworski & Sprague 1986) – to widen their appeal beyond traditional constituencies, we would have expected to see increasing diversity in group appeals. However, parties seem content with referencing a greater variety of groups. Rather than distributing their appeals more evenly, they still focus their attention on particular groups in particular elections. Perhaps even more than they used to.

Thus, as we observe more appeals targeting more different groups but with the same or less diversity, the group basis of party competition seems to fit the idea of "selective emphasis" (Budge & Farlie 1983) known from studies on changes in party policy (Green 2007; Green-Pedersen 2007; Green & Hobolt 2008). Parties are adapting to competition from alternative

forms of representation and to the changing group basis of voting behavior, but they still compete in elections by stressing ties to certain groups at the expense of others.

Group appeals and traditional constituencies

Which groups are parties appealing to? So far analyses have concerned group appeals at the general level; but what about particular group categories? As argued, the rise of "new politics" in Britain and other Western European countries, leads to the expectation that parties in Britain devote less appeals traditional class constituencies, and more appeals to groups not associated with parties in public perception.

Figure 4 shows the percentage group appeals targeting four group categories: workers, poor people, tenants, and businesses. All four are well-described, traditional constituencies in British party politics (Butler & Stokes 1974; Denver et al. 2012) and other class-based party systems (Lipset 1960; Dalton 2013). Considering appeals to "workers" in the upper-left plot, results reflect early class-party alignments. In the 1960s and 1970s Labour notably more emphasis on workers in their election manifestos than did the Conservative Party. I find no comparable pattern for the other three group categories, suggesting that occupational class is really where parties were once clearly distinguishable in terms of who they claim to represent. Since the 1970s, however, Labour's worker emphasis has drop significantly to the point where the two parties are now indistinguishable. Looking at "poor people" in the upper-right corner, we also see a general decline. Parties are adjusting to changing electorates the way we expect. In this case, change is most evident for the Conservatives, while Labour shows more fluctuations. Comparing *panel a* and *panel b* suggests an interesting dynamic. In the 1960s and 1970s, when class voting was still pronounced, whenever Labour emphasized workers in their appeals,
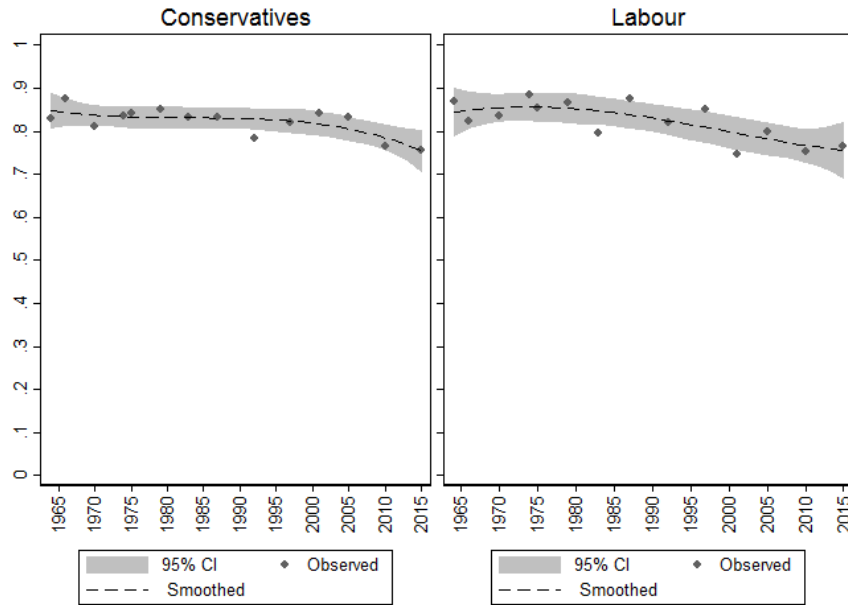
Figure 3. The diversity in group appeals across parties in Britain.

Note: On the left, the diversity across group categories in Conservative election manifestos is shown. On the right, the diversity across group categories in Labour election manifestos is shown. Diversity is measured by Shannon's H (normalized) with 1 indicating the most even spread. *Dots* show the observed value for each party-year observation. *Dashed line* shows the smoothed trend based on kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions. *Shaded band* shows the 95% confidence interval around the trend. N=14.

Conservatives emphasized the poor. The explanation could be that they did so to put cross-pressure on the poor workers and possibly undermine Labour's working-class support. Appeals to "tenants", in the lower-left corner, have generally decline in the long-term, though they did initially rise well into the 1980s, when literature on a new "housing cleavage" also emerged. Since, tenants have become a less popular target in parties' group appeals. For "businesses" the pattern is reverse of the previous three group categories. The lower-right panel shows that both parties now devote 4-5 percent of group appeals to businesses. As with appeals to poor people, the Conservative Party displays the most consistent trend, while Labour changes its business appeal from one election to the next.
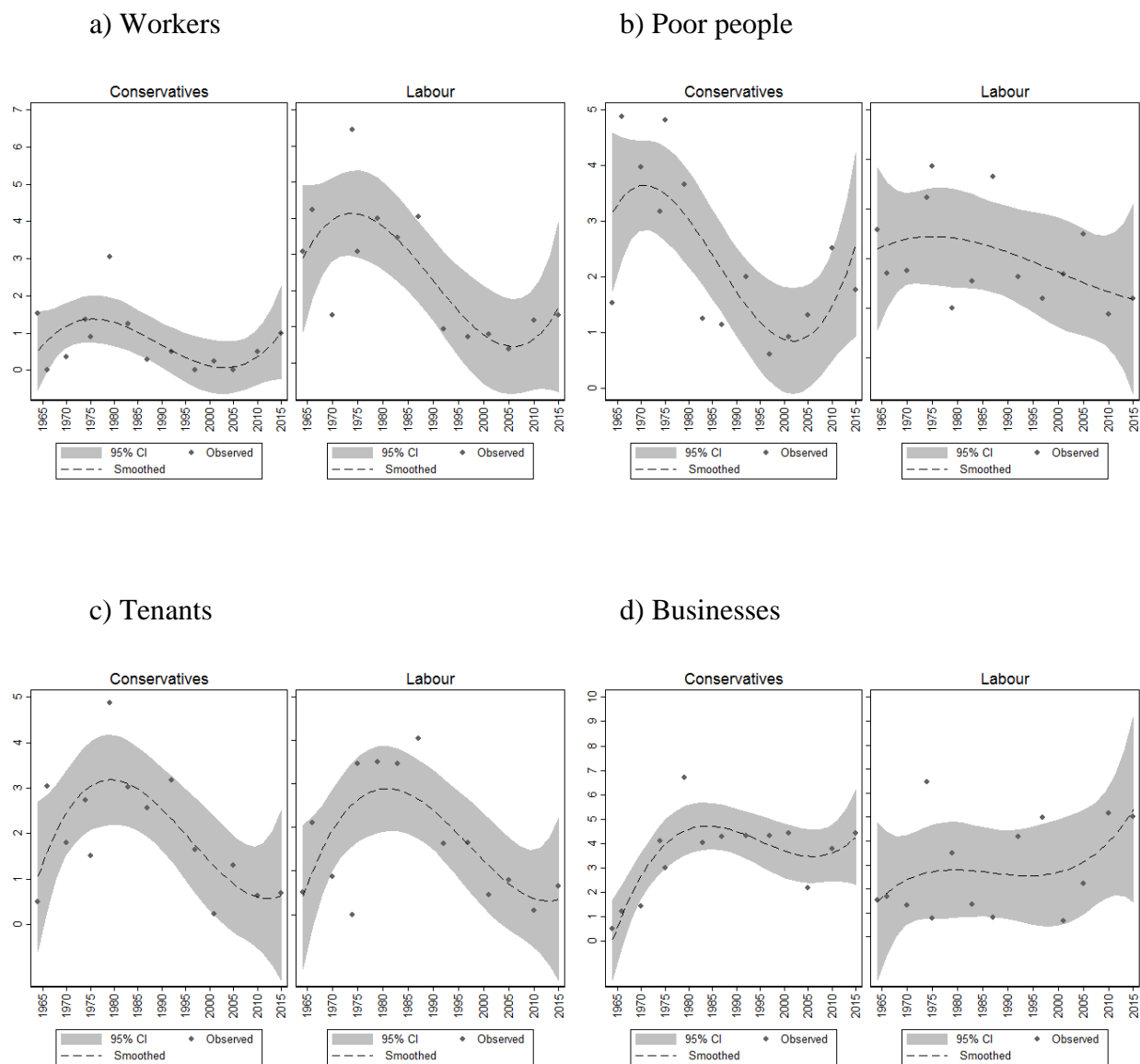
a) Workers   b) Poor people

c) Tenants   d) Businesses

Figure 4. Percentage group appeals targeting workers, poor people, tenants and businesses.

Note: Panels show the percentage of all group appeals targeting four selected group categories: a) workers, b) poor people, c) tenants, d) businesses. In each panel, the left-hand side concerns Conservatives, the right-hand Labour. Note that scales vary between panels. *Dots* show the observed value for each party-year observation. *Dashed line* shows the smoothed trend based on kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions. *Shaded band* shows the 95% confidence interval around the trend. N=14.

It is evident from figure 4 that while the group basis party competition remains; parties have taken stock of a changing electoral market by adjusting which groups they appeal to. If Labour simply continued emphasizing workers to the same extent, it would run the risk of undermining

efforts to become a catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1966; Evans et al. 1999). As traditional, class constituencies are emphasized; public perception of politics and parties is reoriented along historic alignments. In the long run, electoral change has driven political parties away from this.

All this begs the question: what is replacing traditional, politicized group categories as targets in parties' appeals? Based on several explorative analyses, it is not the group categories that comparative political research argues structure electoral politics outside Britain (Lipset and Rokkan 1969; Rose 1974; Lijphart 1979; Dalton et al. 1984; Inglehart 1990; Franklin et al. 1992; Lane and Ersson 1999; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Brooks et al. 2006; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Dalton 2013). Categories referring to ethnicity, age, gender, religion or place do not show notable rise in emphasis.[7]

Instead, figure 5 shows two new popular target groups: families and parents. Notice how the trends are virtually opposite of those found for workers, poor people and tenants. British parties are increasingly appealing to families and to parents. While we presently lack a theoretical basis on which to understand these thoroughly, such group categories seem to fit well with parties need to communicate in persuasive ways whilst moving beyond traditional constituencies. Results also corroborate studies showing that US electoral campaigns have recently been highly targeted at parents (see Klar 2013). However, more research is clearly needed on these "new" target groups.

Conclusions

Although Pulzer (1967: 98) famously noted, that "class is the basis of British party politics: all else is embellishment and detail" no evidence have so far existed on which to evaluate if party competition is still group-based in Britain and elsewhere. In spite of extensive research on the

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[7] Figures will be displayed in the appendix.

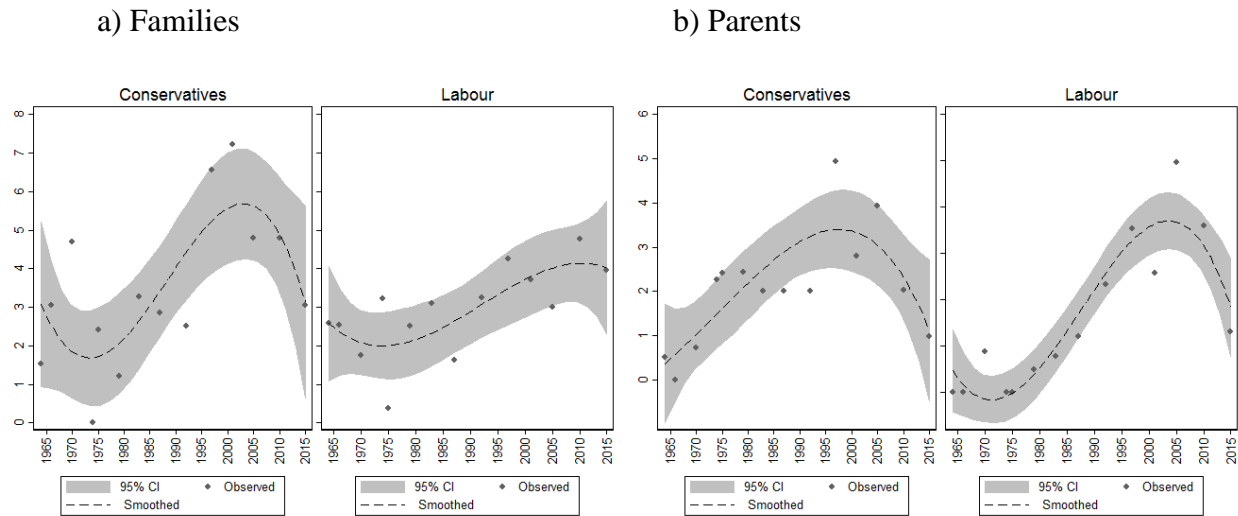a) Families   b) Parents

Figure 5. Percentage group appeals targeting families and parents.

Note: Panels show the percentage of all group appeals targeting two group categories: a) families, b) parents. In each panel, the left-hand side concerns Conservatives, the right-hand Labour. Note that scales vary between panels. *Dots* show the observed value for each party-year observation. *Dashed line* shows the smoothed trend based on kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions. *Shaded band* shows the 95% confidence interval around the trend. N=14.

changing group basis of voting behavior (Dalton et al. 1984; Franklin et al. 1992; Thomassen 2005), this article has provided the first study on changes in parties' group appeals. I find that British party competition remains characterized by extensive group appeals. Based on nearly 12.000 recorded appeals, results show that group appeals have become more substantial in the two major parties' election manifestos. I have argued that political parties use group appeals to communicate with voters in "user-friendly" ways with the ultimate goal of securing their vote. As party competition is increasingly centered on a growing pool of "available voters" (Webb 2004), this task has become ever more important.

However, political parties have also adjusted which group categories they target. Findings show that both Labour and Conservatives are appealing to groups other than the ones they were previously aligned with. Thus, in the long-term perspective, class-related categories as workers, poor people and tenants are crowded out by categories as parents or families. The

explanation given is that parties deliberate avoid making long-standing party images too salient because this runs the risk of undermining needs to widen support bases.

Findings contribute to our understanding of how electoral politics is changing in Britain (Butler and Stokes 1974; Heath et al. 1992; Goldthorpe 1999; Webb 2004; Clarke et al. 2009). Contrary to studies implying the complete demise of group-based politics (Clarke et al. 2004), this article suggest that, at the party level, groups continue to play a role. Findings further add to classic research on party strategies employed to widen electoral appeal – by social democratic parties (Przeworski and Sprague 1986) and political parties more generally (Mair et al 2004). Parties do a wide range of things to change "the face" they present to voters (Janda et al. 1995: 171). In addition to changing *how* they are organized and *what* their policies are, they also change *who* they appeal to.

Also, results are relevant to studies on the changing nature of party competition (Green-Pedersen 2007, Green 2007). Most of the dynamics suggested by this literature are found also when considering group appeals instead of policy appeals. For example, parties in Britain appeal to an increasing range of groups with higher frequency most likely reflecting what Green-Pedersen (2007: 611) has described as the growing capacity and complexity political agendas. This speaks more generally to a long-standing criticism of party competition theories (see Achen and Bartels 2016 for a recent example). There is wide-spread consensus in research on voter decision-making that citizens are guided more by group sentiments than by policy preferences. Thus, the party competition literature might employ misguided assumptions, when it focusses on party policy (Adams 2012). While the present article has attempted to deal with this, results mostly support existing work. Even if group appeals and policy appeals have different effects on voters, and even if the two are distinct electoral strategies (Dickson and Scheve 2006),

conclusions drawn here suggest they sometimes reflect the same underlying competitive dynamics. More research is needed to determine, why political parties pursue one strategy over the other, and what effects this might have on electoral politics more generally. For now, this study has sought to reorient comparative political research by establishing the long-term group basis of British party competition.

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