

# The nonideological component of coalition preferences

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**Abstract**

Recent research on political attitudes has emphasized that coalition preferences determine electoral choices, prompting scholars to investigate the sources of coalition preferences. While it is not surprising that coalition preferences are strongly informed by spatial considerations, several studies have drawn attention to additional nonideological factors. Relying on this insight, the present study aims to systematically investigate the nonideological or valence component of coalition preferences. In order to decompose attitudes into their principal ideological and nonideological components, we apply a Bayesian unfolding model to coalition sympathy ratings. We find that coalitions differ strongly with regard to their valence component. This surplus cannot be reconstructed as a linear combination of the coalitions' constituent party valences and is predominantly structured by campaign valence.

**Keywords**

Coalition preferences, government competence, ideology, multiparty systems, valence

Political parties offer citizens' choices over alternative programmatic visions. Yet, the relationship between vote choices and the composition of government is frequently an indirect one in multiparty systems. When all parties fail to attain a parliamentary majority, an intermediate bargaining step is necessary to translate vote shares into government in the way of a coalition agreement that determines the orientation of governmental policy (Laver and Schofield, 1998). Policy-oriented voters should therefore be mindful of the potential coalition alternatives when casting their ballot. A number of recent studies have shown that coalition preferences do indeed influence voting behavior (Bargsted and Kedar, 2009; Bowler et al., 2010; Gschwend, 2007; Kedar, 2005; Meffert and Gschwend, 2010) and that voters' coalition preferences even impact the postelection government formation (Debus and Müller, 2013).

These observations have prompted scholars to consider whether voters exhibit coalition preferences that are at least partially independent of its constituent member parties, that is, whether coalitions are discrete political attitude objects (Huber, 2014; Plescia and Aichholzer, 2016). The empirical findings in this regard have been predominantly affirmative (Falcó-Gimeno, 2012; Meffert et al., 2009). This, in

turn, has engendered some interest in the sources of coalition preferences. First and foremost, several contributions have provided evidence that coalition preferences are strongly informed by spatial considerations (Debus and Müller, 2014; Falcó-Gimeno, 2012). Yet, electoral preferences are rarely determined by policy alone (Green and Hobolt, 2008). Only few studies have drawn attention to nonspatial determinants of coalition preferences like candidate attitudes (Plescia and Aichholzer, 2016) or coalition familiarity (Debus and Müller, 2014). This contribution aims to investigate the comprehensive effect that nonspatial considerations have on coalition attitudes.

By relying on the valence concept that has taken a prominent place in the recent literature on candidate and party preferences (Adams et al., 2011; Clarke et al., 2009; Johns et al., 2009; Sanders et al., 2011; Stone and Simas, 2010), it is shown that coalition preferences fall along two aggregate

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dimensions—an ideological and a nonideological dimension. This work is thus related to several recent contributions that have proposed moving beyond proxy measures of valence in favor of a more comprehensive view (Nyhuis, 2016; Shikano and Käppner, 2016).

In order to decompose coalition attitudes into an ideological and a nonideological component, we rely on a model introduced by Shikano and Käppner (2016). Shikano and Käppner apply a Bayesian unfolding model to sympathy ratings to capture a comprehensive estimate of the valence component of political preferences. The substantive application investigates data from the Austrian National Election Study (Kritzinger et al., 2014), which asked respondents for favorability ratings of several potential coalition governments. The results show that coalitions differ strongly with regard to their valence which cannot be reconstructed as a linear combination of the coalitions' constituent party valences, strengthening the proposition that coalitions are discrete attitude objects. Moreover, the nonideological component of coalition attitudes is predominantly related to characteristics of the campaign environment.

The findings reinforce the notion that ideological proximity is not the sole determinant of voter preferences, but that valence considerations also inform political object attitudes and coalition preferences more specifically. Both factors, ideological and nonideological, help citizens choose among the available alternatives. The results suggest that voters utilize elections not only to influence public policy by casting their ballots for a party that ensures the formation of a government closest to their ideological bliss point, but also to establish a coalition that is able to govern effectively. Recognizing the importance of nonideological factors in coalition-oriented voting introduces an additional facet of party strategy and political competition. As much as individual parties emphasize their nonspatial characteristics during election campaigns, parties can adopt accommodative tactics by not attacking potential coalition partners, thus highlighting their ability to work smoothly and effectively in a potential coalition government.

## Determinants of coalition preferences

Coalition governments are a common feature of multiparty systems. Scholars have recently emphasized that the intermediate bargaining step for translating electoral results into government creates uncertainty and potentially complicates the vote calculus considerably. This proposition has generated a substantial research interest in electoral behavior targeted at coalitions rather than parties (Bargsted and Kedar, 2009; Blais et al., 2006; Bowler et al., 2010; Duch et al., 2010; Gschwend, 2007; Hobolt and Karp, 2010; Indridason, 2011; Meffert and Gschwend, 2010; Pappi, 2007), tying into a broader research agenda that has considered whether and how citizens cast ballots with the goal

of ensuring favorable policy stances of coalition governments (Elff and Kosmidis, 2013; Gschwend, 2007; Herrmann, 2010; Kedar, 2005; Shikano et al., 2009).

If voters cast coalition-targeted ballots, it becomes crucial to understand voters' coalition attitudes. The first and fundamental component of coalition preferences is based on the seminal work by Downs (1957). In the Downsian framework, voters, parties, and candidates are assumed to hold a position in the ideological space. The utility of voters is determined by the proximity between themselves and the political attitude object—be it party or candidate. Debus and Müller (2014) show that a similar reasoning applies to coalitions where the perceived ideological distance between voters and coalition parties is a decisive factor in voters' preferences toward coalition agreements.

While policy preferences are a key component of coalition preferences, there are additional considerations at play. Several contributions have considered sources of coalition preferences beyond ideology. The primary focus in this body of work has been to assess whether attitudes toward coalitions can be treated as a combination of preferences for their constituent members or whether coalition preferences are more than the sum of their parts (Falcó-Gimeno, 2012; Meffert et al., 2009; Plescia and Aichholzer, 2016). Scholars have generally concluded that coalition preferences cannot be fully deconstructed into party preferences, such that coalitions are in fact discrete attitude objects (Huber, 2014). For instance, Plescia and Aichholzer (2016) show that leadership preferences structure coalition attitudes, while Debus and Müller (2014) demonstrate that *learned familiarity*—that is, the frequency with which a potential coalition has been realized in practice—increases its favorability. This last element of coalition preferences is clearly independent of ideological considerations: Voters' perceptions of the favorability of a coalition alternative increases for reasons unrelated to the coalition's policy profile.

Finding that nonideological considerations structure coalition preferences speaks to a large body of research which has considered the valence component of candidate and party preferences (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2000; Buttice and Stone, 2012; Enelow and Hinich, 1982; Groseclose, 2001; Schofield, 2003, 2004) and reverts back to the seminal contribution of Stokes (1963). In one of the most well-known critiques of the Downsian model, Stokes argues that political competition is frequently centered around issues that do not have a spatial component (cf. Stokes, 1992). When all competitors agree on the desired outcome, political competition shifts to perceptions of quality as the principal determinant of vote choices. In the wake of the work by Stone, scholars have frequently taken a two-dimensional view on political competition—an ideological and a nonideological or valence dimension—where candidates or parties move along both dimensions independently (Aragones, 2002; Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita,

2009; Bruter et al., 2010; Serra, 2010). This is to say that a high valence candidate can compensate a greater policy distance between herself and voters and still be considered a viable electoral alternative.

The present contribution holds that this insight into the possibility of decomposing candidate and party preferences into two overarching components is applicable to political object attitudes more generally. Moreover, it is argued that the previous findings regarding single nonideological determinants of coalition preferences can be integrated for analytical purposes as stemming from a comprehensive nonideological component of political preferences.

### The substance of nonideological considerations

While the ideological and valence components of candidates and parties are reasonably unambiguous, it needs to be explicated how they translate to coalitions as discrete attitude objects. The ideological component is a fairly straightforward quantity that resides in the literature on electoral behavior. It reflects voters' perceptions of potential coalitions' policy stances and the proximity to voters' own policy preferences. The valence component, on the other hand, refers to all nonspatial factors that can alter collectively shared perceptions of coalitions. A useful distinction to elaborate this notion has been proposed by Stone and Simas (2010). The authors differentiate between two dimensions of valence—*campaign valence* and *character valence* (cf. Adams et al., 2011). The former refers to nonspatial advantages that are tied to the campaign environment. The most frequently studied campaign valence indicator is the incumbency status (Carey et al., 2000; Cox and Katz, 1996; Eckles et al., 2014; Fowler and Hall, 2014) which grants an electoral premium independent of candidates' policy stances. To be sure, the incumbency status is a shorthand indicator for a number of factors like name recognition due to media exposure and a larger war chest. Character valence, on the other hand, refers to public perceptions of character traits that are perceived as advantageous for holding office.

Both aspects have an analog among collective actors. Transferring *campaign valence* from candidates to collective actors is comparatively straightforward. Just like individual candidates benefit from factors like name recognition, parties and coalitions benefit from exposure. With a specific view on coalitions, this is reflected in the empirical regularity uncovered by Debus and Müller (2014) who show that coalitions which were frequently realized in previous electoral cycles generate familiarity among voters that translates into a preference surplus. Voters might also incorporate election-specific factors, such as coalition signals sent out by parties during the campaign. Indeed, several scholars have found that likelihood

perceptions influence preferences in the way of a *bandwagon effect* (e.g. Bartels, 2002; Meffert et al., 2011).

While *character valence* has previously been studied mostly for candidates, it can be ascribed to collective actors (Green, 2007; Green and Jennings, 2012; Nadeau and Blais, 1990). In his analysis of the effect of valence on electoral outcomes, Clark (2009) shows that parties which are involved in events that are detrimental to public perceptions of their competence, integrity, or unity tend to lose votes in subsequent electoral cycles. Turning to perceptions of coalitions' character valence, competence might be reflective of features of individual coalition members (Meffert et al., 2009; Plescia and Aichholzer, 2016), but it could also be ascribed to coalitions in their own right. In most multiparty settings, voters have had the opportunity to learn how common coalition governments handle important issues (Armstrong and Duch, 2010; Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013). This second aspect speaks to the observation that coalitions appear to be more than the sum of their parts (Bowler et al., 2014; Meyer and Strobl, 2016). For example, Debus and Müller (2014) find that voters prefer coalition governments with a low degree of internal programmatic heterogeneity. As ideological congruence should mitigate frictions among coalition members, this observation indicates that voters are mindful of coalition effectiveness and competence.

The valence model of politics also emphasizes the importance of images and party identifications (Clarke et al., 2009, 2011), which serve as heuristic cues that enable voters to make choices in a complex political world. There is considerable evidence that voters rely on party leader images in order to select political personnel (Clarke et al., 2004). Therefore, leader attitudes should translate into a preference surplus for coalition arrangements that ensure the preferred prime minister (cf. Plescia and Aichholzer, 2016). To make electoral decisions, voters also rely on long-term party identifications, which result from affective social identities (Campbell et al., 1976). Strong party identifications translate into a partisan bias that is particularly evident in perceptions of character valence (Stone and Simas, 2010). We therefore expect that party identifications structure perceptions of coalition valence, such that party identifiers exhibit higher valence perceptions for coalitions that include the party they identify with. While we also expect differences across coalitions for nonidentifiers, this latter group of voters should exhibit attenuated differences when compared to identifiers, as no coalition enjoys a partisan surplus.

Based on these insights in the nonideological elements of coalition preferences, the present contribution aims to investigate the *comprehensive* policy and valence components of coalition preferences. In a first step, we decompose coalition preferences into their two principal components. In a second step, the study focuses on the valence component to assess whether there is an additional coalition

valence above and beyond the valence of its constituent members and what constitutes such a surplus. In particular, we consider specific coalition traits such as incumbency, internal programmatic heterogeneity, prevalence in the media, and perceived coalition likelihood as well as group-specific valence perceptions related to leader images and party identification. These latter two factors are likely to be distinct from ideology and related instead to coalition familiarity as voters are better acquainted with politicians and coalition arrangements that include the party they like.

### Modeling coalition preferences

In order to decompose coalition preferences into their two principal components, this study relies on a model introduced by Shikano and Käppner (2016). It treats political attitudes as a linear combination of an ideological and a valence component. The sympathy rating for coalition  $j$  by respondent  $i - y_{ij} \in [y^{\min}, y^{\max}]$ —is assumed to be a normally distributed random variable<sup>1</sup>

$$y_{ij}^* \sim N(\mu_{ij}, \sigma^2)$$

$$y_{ij} = \begin{cases} y^{\min} & \text{if } y_{ij}^* < y^{\min} \\ y_{ij}^* & \text{if } y^{\min} \leq y_{ij}^* \leq y^{\max} \\ y^{\max} & \text{if } y_{ij}^* > y^{\max} \end{cases}$$

The expected value of the coalition preference,  $\mu_{ij}$ , is composed of coalition  $j$ 's valence component,  $\alpha_j$ , and the one-dimensional distance between coalition  $j$ 's ideological position,  $\beta_j$ , and respondent  $i$ 's policy preference,  $x_i$ .<sup>2</sup>

$$\mu_{ij} = \alpha_j + v_i \sqrt{(\beta_j - x_i)^2} \tag{1}$$

where  $v_i$  is a respondent-specific weight that determines the strength with which the ideological component is related to the individual coalition preferences. As the only known quantities in the model are the coalition preferences, all other parameters are estimated.<sup>3</sup> This is done via Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation, where the respondent-specific weights,  $v_i$ , are restricted to negative values to ensure that the policy distance between the respondent and the coalition can only be negatively related to the sympathy score—or not at all. In order to guarantee a consistent orientation of the policy space, we enforce the order of the spatial party parameters to align with the order of the mean position perceptions in the survey. Additionally, we constrain the ideological coalition parameters to fall within the interval between the ideological positions of the constituent parties.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the valence parameters,  $\alpha_j$ , are truncated to values above the minimum value of the coalition preference, formally

$$v_i^* \sim N(\mu_v, \sigma_v^2)$$

$$v_i = \begin{cases} v_i^* & \text{if } v_i^* < 0 \\ 0 & \text{if } v_i^* \geq 0 \end{cases}$$

$$\alpha_j^* \sim N(\mu_\alpha, \sigma_\alpha^2)$$

$$\alpha_j = \begin{cases} y^{\min} & \text{if } \alpha_j^* < y^{\min} \\ \alpha_j^* & \text{if } \alpha_j^* \geq y^{\min} \end{cases}$$

$$x_i \sim N(\mu_x, \sigma_x^2)$$

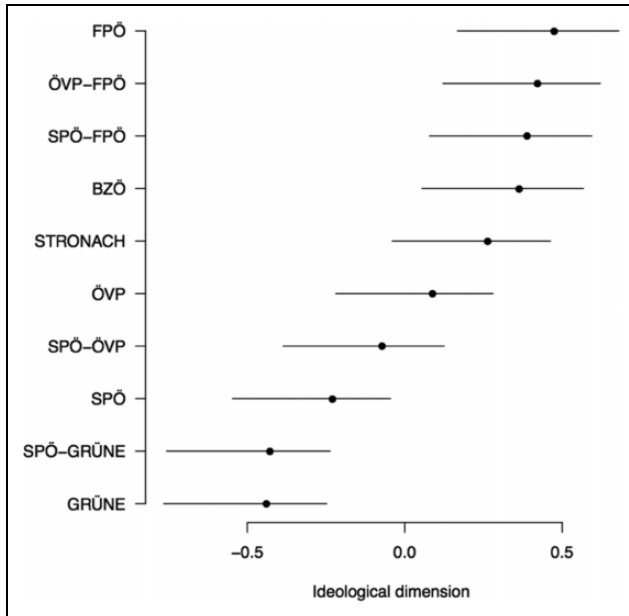
While the model estimates the aggregate valence perceptions among the public, we are also interested in how the valence component varies across groups. In particular, we distinguish between groups defined by leader images and party identification. This is done by letting the valence component vary by an additional group-level factor  $k$ .<sup>5</sup>

$$\mu_{ijk} = \alpha_{jk} + v_i \sqrt{(\beta_j - x_i)^2} \tag{2}$$

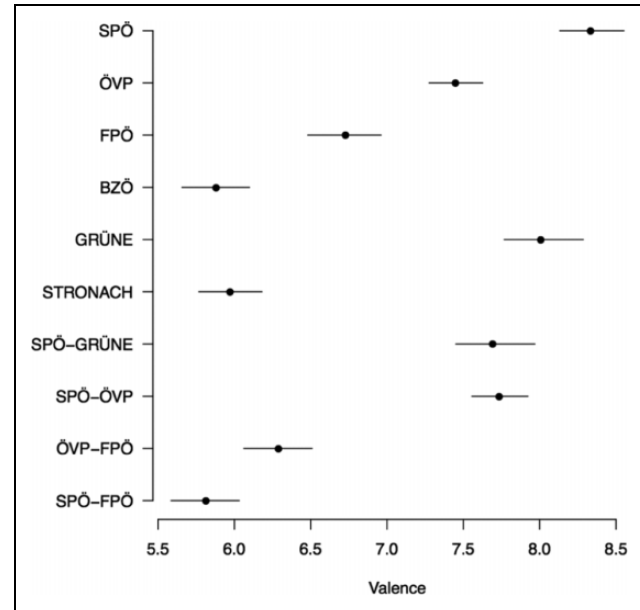
The survey evidence for the empirical analysis stems from the preelection survey that was collected under the auspices of the Austrian National Election Study during the 2013 Austrian federal election (Kritzinger et al., 2014). The survey asked respondents to indicate their coalition preferences on a 11-point scale. Specifically, respondents were asked to rate the incumbent coalition between Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ) and Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP), between ÖVP and Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), between SPÖ and Die Grünen BZÖ: Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (GRÜNE), as well as between SPÖ and FPÖ.<sup>6</sup> In the first model, we include party preference ratings as a point of reference. For the MCMC simulations, we run three chains with 5000 iterations as a burn-in and an additional 10,000 iterations in each chain to calculate the model parameters. Estimates are based on information from 1138 respondents.<sup>7</sup>

### Two components of coalition preferences

Figure 1 displays the estimated ideological component in a combined model of coalition and party preferences.<sup>8</sup> The party of the incumbent chancellor, SPÖ, has a fairly left-wing position; GRÜNE have an even more extreme left-wing policy stance. The junior coalition partner of the grand coalition, ÖVP, is estimated to have a fairly centrist position. The three remaining competitors are estimated on the right side of political spectrum; FPÖ with the most conservative stance among the three. Turning to the estimated policy positions of the coalitions, we find that their estimated positions cannot be recovered as a linear combination of their constituent member parties which is in line with previous research (Bowler et al., 2014; Meyer and Strobl, 2016). Specifically, the SPÖ-GRÜNE coalition is estimated to have a policy position closer to the location of the junior partner. In much the same way, the two coalition



**Figure 1.** The ideological component of coalition and party preferences. Note: The figure displays the estimated ideological preferences in a model of party and coalition preferences. The lines provide the 95% credible interval.



**Figure 2.** The valence component of coalition and party preferences. Note: The figure displays the estimated valence component in a model of party and coalition preferences. The lines provide the 95% credible interval.

options containing the right-wing FPÖ are estimated to be closer toward the policy preferences of the junior partner FPÖ. The best fit between the ideological location of the constituent coalition members and the respective coalition is in case of the incumbent SPÖ-ÖVP government. This finding might reflect the fact that voters are most familiar with this coalition and therefore have a better sense of its ideological orientation.

Figure 2 provides the associated valence component. The party of the incumbent chancellor, SPÖ, exhibits the highest systematic preference surplus that cannot be explained by ideological considerations. Interestingly, the opposition party GRÜNE is estimated to have the second highest valence component, higher even than the junior coalition partner ÖVP. At the low end of the scale, BZÖ and Team Stronach (STRONACH) exhibit the lowest valence components. On the whole, the observations are in line with previous research. Incumbency and the associated greater media coverage should be related to a preference surplus (Stone and Simas, 2010), such that the two smallest parties receive the least amount of media coverage. Moreover, STRONACH was a new entrant to the party system and could therefore rely least on name recognition.

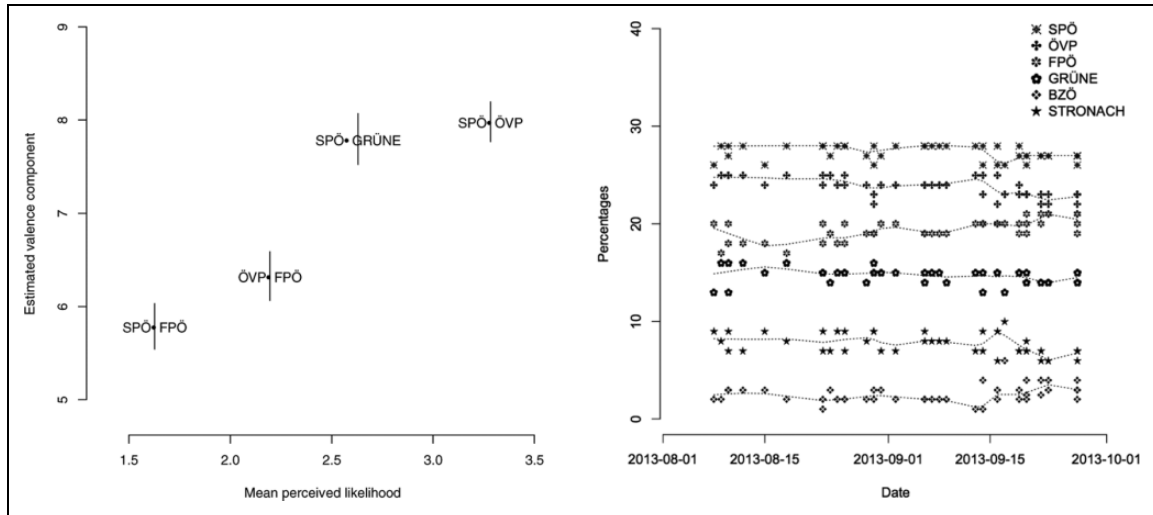
Regarding the estimated valence components for the coalitions, the incumbent coalition SPÖ-ÖVP, along with SPÖ-GRÜNE, exhibits the highest coalition-specific valences. The former observation is in line with previous research stressing a surplus for coalition arrangements that follow historical regularities (Debus and Müller, 2014). Conversely, while a coalition between SPÖ and GRÜNE

was realized in few instances at the regional level, a coalition between these two parties has no precedence at the federal level. This indicates that respondents did perceive a competence surplus for this coalition rather than a type of learned familiarity. The comparatively high valence component of the potential SPÖ-GRÜNE coalition is also well reflected in the high valence component of its two constituent member parties SPÖ and GRÜNE.

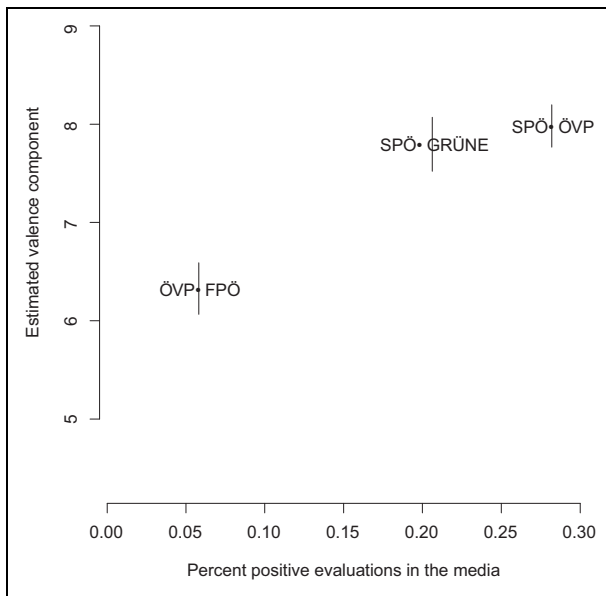
Note further that the low valence component of the SPÖ-FPÖ coalition indicates that the mere membership of the party with the highest individual valence component, SPÖ, does not suffice to provide this coalition option with a high valence component. This suggests that voters take into account the ideological range of a coalition—in this case, the fairly left-wing SPÖ and the right-wing FPÖ. It is plausible to assume that respondents perceive this coalition as potentially highly conflictual, which expresses itself in a low valence component. This would be in line with previous findings that voters favor coalition governments with a low degree of internal programmatic heterogeneity (Debus and Müller, 2014; Plescia and Aichholzer, 2016).

### Probing the nonideological component

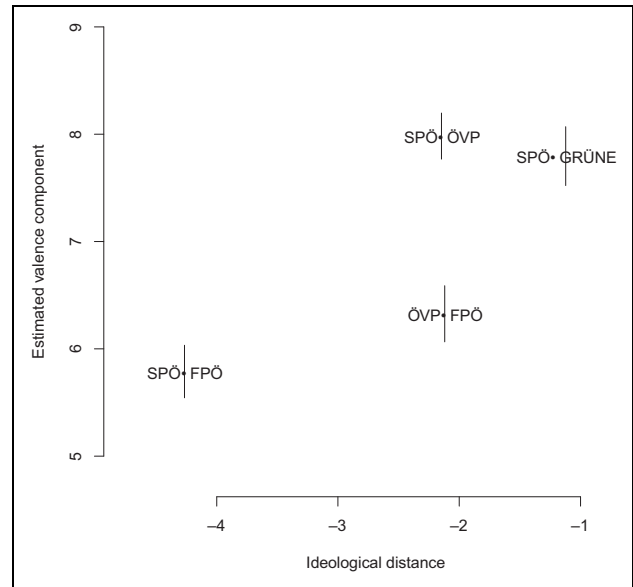
Having considered the overall structure of the coalition valences, we now consider factors that might be systematically related to these differences to validate the observed patterns. Specifically, we consider incumbency, perceived coalition likelihood, favorability in the media, and internal programmatic heterogeneity. First, the left panel of Figure 3 displays the



**Figure 3.** Perceived coalition likelihood and the valence component. Note: The left panel of the figure displays the mean perceived coalition likelihood and the estimated valence component from the model outlined above. The coalition likelihood was collected on a four-point scale. The scale was flipped for accessibility of the figure; high values indicate greater perceived likelihood. The vertical lines indicate the 95% credible interval of the parameter estimates. The right panel shows the results from the preelectoral polls that were published in daily newspapers in the weeks prior to the election. A local regression smoother was added to highlight trends in the data.

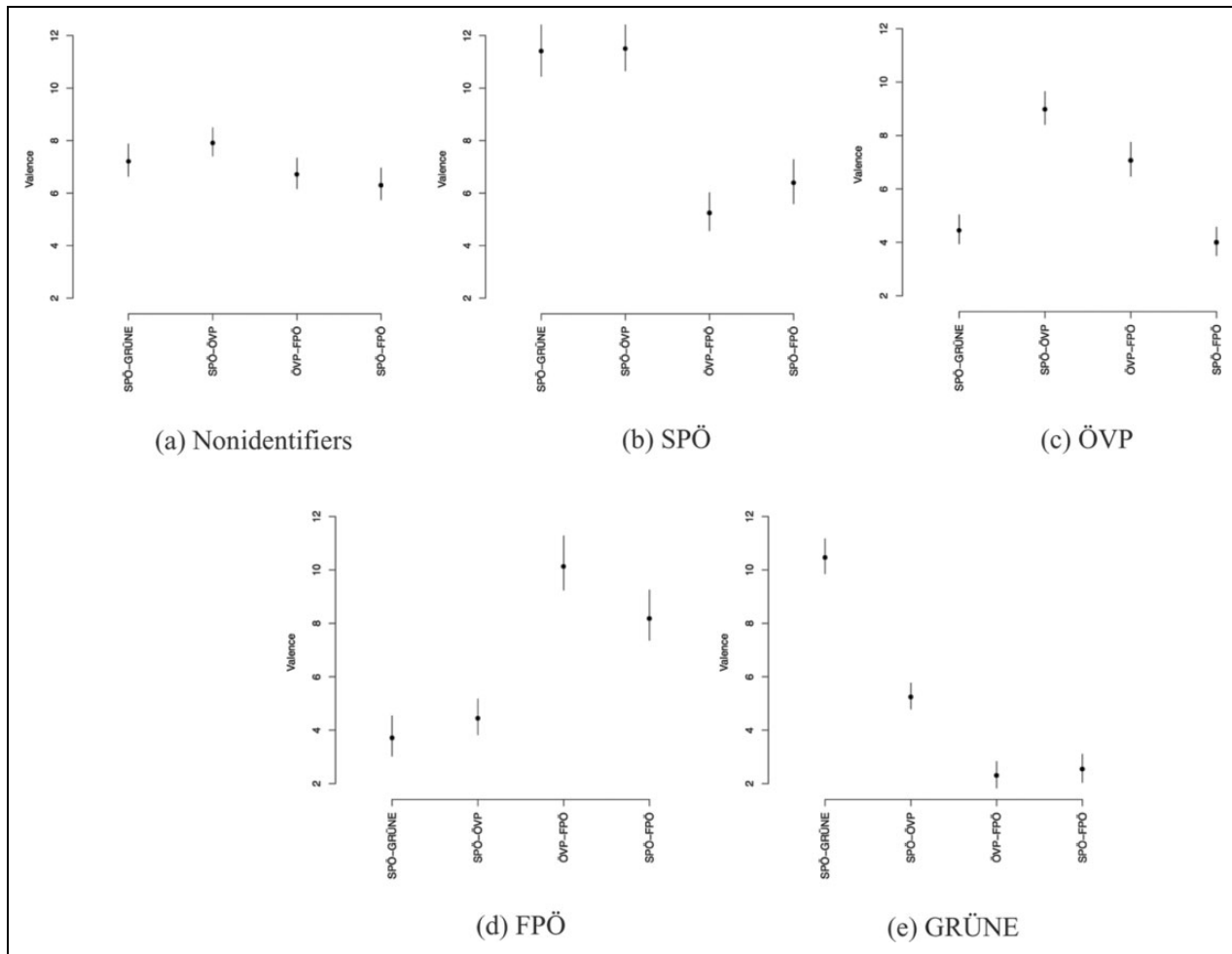


**Figure 4.** Media evaluation and the valence component. Note: The figure displays the evaluation of the coalition options in the media during the election campaign and the estimated valence component from the model outlined above. The figures provide the percentage of positive mentions relative to all evaluative mentions of the coalition. The media evaluation data is based on a manual content analysis of the Austrian media landscape performed by the Austrian National Election Study (Kleinen-von Königslöw et al. 2015). The SPÖ-FPÖ coalition is not displayed as there were too few observations in the dataset. The vertical lines indicate the 95% credible interval of the parameter estimates.



**Figure 5.** Internal programmatic heterogeneity and the valence component. Note: The figure displays the ideological distance of the coalitions and the estimated valence component from the model outlined above. The party positions are based on the mean party perceptions. Left-right placements were collected on a 10-point scale. The vertical lines indicate the 95% credible interval of the parameter estimates.

mean perceived likelihood and the estimated valence component from the model outlined above. There is a substantial degree of overlap between both values with SPÖ-ÖVP and SPÖ-GRÜNE scoring high on both dimensions, whereas



**Figure 6.** Party identification and the valence component. (a) Nonidentifiers. (b) SPÖ. (c) ÖVP. (d) FPÖ. (e) GRÜNE. Note: The figure displays the estimated valence component in a model of coalition preferences. The lines provide the 95% credible interval. The model assumes a one-dimensional structure of ideology. The model allows the valence component to vary across party identification. The data stem from the preelection cross section (split 1) that was collected under the auspices of the Austrian National Election Study.

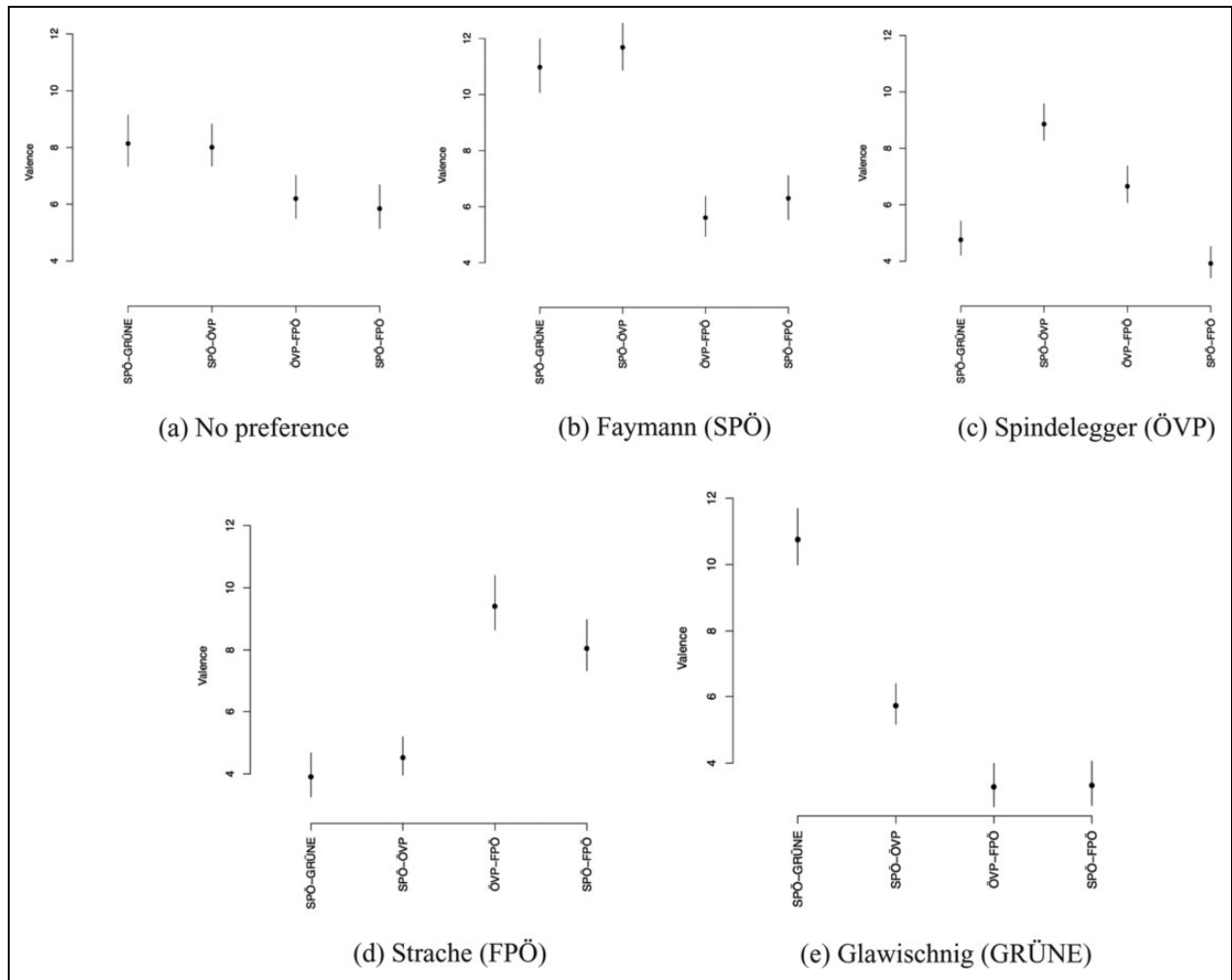
ÖVP-FPÖ and SPÖ-FPÖ score comparatively low. At first glance, this finding seems to indicate that beside an actual competence surplus—valence as character valence (Stone and Simas, 2010), respondents have also taken the coalition likelihood into account when providing their coalition preferences. In fact, however, this result says more about aggregate likelihood perceptions than about the nonideological component of coalition preferences (Meffert et al., 2011).

Consider the right panel of Figure 3 which displays all poll results that were published in daily newspapers prior to the election. All preelectoral polls placed the governing SPÖ consistently between 26% and 28% and GRÜNE between 13% and 15%. Even in the best of cases, this results in a vote total well below the threshold of a governing majority. This observation stands in stark contrast to a potential coalition between FPÖ and ÖVP which was *more likely* in terms of polling numbers. Therefore, despite well publicized polling numbers stating otherwise, voters rated the likelihood of an SPÖ-GRÜNE coalition much more

highly. Note also that the lower likelihood of an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition cannot be taken as indicating an unwillingness of either of the two potential coalition partners to join a coalition agreement should it be numerically feasible. In fact, both parties had been in a coalition at the federal stage between 2000 and 2006 and the coalition was a prominent option at the regional level in the intervening years.

Figure 4 provides evidence that media reporting is associated with the valence component of the coalition options. It displays the share of positive mentions of the coalition options among all evaluative mentions in the media during the election campaign. There is a clear association between the favorability of the media reporting and the size of the estimated valence component. In particular, the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition is characterized by the smallest share of positive statements in the media, further corroborating the low valence of this coalition arrangement.

It was suggested that voters are mindful of coalition effectiveness and are therefore more likely to prefer



**Figure 7.** Chancellor preferences and the valence component. (a) No preference. (b) Faymann (SPÖ). (c) Spindelegger (ÖVP). (d) Strache (FPÖ). (e) Glawischnig (GRÜNE). Note: The figure displays the estimated valence component in a model of coalition preferences. The lines provide the 95% credible interval. The model assumes a one-dimensional structure of ideology. The model allows the valence component to vary across preferred chancellor. The data stem from the preelection cross section (split 1) that was collected under the auspices of the Austrian National Election Study.

coalitions with little programmatic heterogeneity in order to decrease the degree of ideological friction in governmental operations (Debus and Müller, 2014). To validate this claim, Figure 5 displays the mean perceived ideological distance for the different coalition options and the estimated valences.<sup>9</sup> The figure indicates a fair association between the ideological congruence and the nonideological coalition component. The coalition with the greatest policy distance, SPÖ-FPÖ, exhibits the smallest valence component while two of three ideologically homogenous coalitions display high valence parameters.

In sum, while the valence component seems to be at least partially related to character valence aspects—measured as the programmatic distance between the two coalition partners, campaign valence factors of the potential coalitions—measured as incumbency and perceived

likelihood—are clearly able to explain the differences in the estimated coalition valences.

### Group-specific valence perceptions

To further probe the content of the valence component, this section turns to additional factors that are likely to drive systematic variation in the perception of coalition valences. Figure 6 provides the results from the first group-specific model, where the valence varies by party identification.<sup>10</sup> The results are in line with expectations. In general, party identifiers rate coalitions that contain their preferred party higher. There are several notable exceptions to this general rule that can be well explained by the valence factors outlined above. First, SPÖ identifiers exhibit a fairly low valence component for a coalition between SPÖ and FPÖ.



As before, this seems to suggest that respondents perceive a substantial ideological gap in this coalition, which might cause friction between the coalition partners, depressing the size of the valence component. A second noteworthy observation is the fact that—given the preferred party is a part of the potential coalition—respondents with a party identification generally show a higher valence component for the coalition option that is more likely. Consider in particular the case of ÖVP identifiers where the valence component is higher for the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition than for the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition. Despite the fact that the ÖVP would be the junior partner in the former coalition and the senior partner in the latter, the valence component among ÖVP identifiers is higher for the former coalition which is perceived as more likely. The results are also in line with expectations regarding the group of nonidentifiers, which exhibits the least amount of variation, such that no specific coalition arrangement enjoys a strong surplus. Nonetheless, even for nonidentifiers, the coalition with the highest valence component is the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition, followed by a coalition between SPÖ and GRÜNE, indicating that respondents did perceive a true competence surplus for both of these coalitions.

A similar observation can be made for chancellor preferences. The model results in Figure 7 let the estimates vary by preferred chancellor. Again, the coalition options that ensure the preferred chancellor receive a substantial surplus in the valence component that is structured in much the same way as above. Moreover, respondents that labeled themselves as having no preference for either of the candidates are estimated to exhibit much less variation in the valence component.

## Conclusion

An increasingly prominent literature suggests that coalition preferences factor into the vote calculus in contexts where governments are formed by coalitions. However, we still know little about coalition preferences in the first place and how citizens come to prefer certain coalition arrangements over others. The main objective of this contribution was to fill this gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive estimate of the ideological and nonideological component of coalition preferences and its underlying factors. Building on the notion that voters choose parties they perceive as most competent in solving salient problems, the findings suggest that coalitions can be characterized likewise.

This study indicates that potential coalitions differ strongly with regard to the estimated valence parameters. Yet, this surplus cannot be reconstructed as a linear combination of the constituent party valences but rather indicates inherent valence associated with the coalitions. In particular, the incumbent coalition between SPÖ-ÖVP, along with a potential SPÖ-GRÜNE coalition, exhibits the

highest coalition-specific valences. The former observation is in line with previous research stressing a preference surplus for incumbents or for coalition arrangements that follow historical regularities. This element of coalition preferences is clearly independent of ideological considerations and indicates a type of learned familiarity that translates into a preference surplus. The coalition between SPÖ and GRÜNE, on the other hand, had no precedence at the federal level and was not even likely to take place after the election. The high valence component associated with this coalition thus suggests that respondents did perceive a true competence surplus for this coalition—potentially due to the ideological similarity between the two parties. Conversely, the coalition between ÖVP and FPÖ is characterized by a comparatively low valence component mostly due to a perceived low likelihood as well as due to negative media reporting during the campaign.

In summary, the findings indicate that ideological proximity is not the sole determinant of voter preferences, but that valence considerations also inform political object attitudes such as coalition preferences. Voters seem to care whether coalition governments are able to govern effectively. Recognizing the importance of non-ideological factors in coalition-oriented voting introduces an additional aspect to party strategy and political competition. To increase their likelihood of being part of a governing coalition, parties can emphasize certain coalition options, thus easing voters' burden in deciding upon coalition majorities.

Querying coalition preferences is a fairly novel idea in election studies. As more election surveys integrate indicators of coalition sympathy, there is good reason to recast the present study as a comparative analysis in order to explore whether the findings hold in other countries. Indeed, the theoretical propositions do not specify marginal conditions; hence, we do believe that inherent valence is a common feature of coalitions in all systems that are characterized by coalition governments.

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## Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Notes

1. The empirical evidence was collected on an ordinal scale, while the model treats  $y_{ij}$  as normally distributed. Since a polytomous model variant yields similar results as the simpler model, this study assumes a non-polytomous-dependent variable.
2. While numerous contributions have shown that European policy spaces are structured by two overarching policy dimensions (Bornschier, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2006; Stoll, 2010), it is not evident that public coalition perceptions can be deconstructed into more than one ideological dimension.
3. The survey evidence that is applied for the empirical analysis contains voter self-placements on the left–right scale as well as coalition perceptions on the same scale. In principle, these could be included to substitute the  $\beta$  and  $x$  parameters. However, coalition placements on the left–right dimension are subject to well-known distortions and rationalizations (Drummond, 2011; Granberg and Brown, 1992; Merrill et al., 2001), which are likely to be dependent on coalition valence. Therefore, including these explicit measures might cause a downward bias in the estimated valence component.
4. Both the estimated valence and ideological component in a model without constraints for the spatial parameters are highly similar to the estimates presented here. Online Appendix Figures 1D and 1E in the Online Appendix provide two scatterplots of the estimates for the valence and ideology parameters in both model variants. Note that the posterior draws of the ideological parameters in the model variant without constraints on the spatial parameters are postprocessed for each iteration before calculating the quantities of interest. If the spatial parameter of FPÖ–ÖVP is negative, the spatial parameters are flipped. The spaces are normalized by subtracting the mean position from the spaces and dividing by the standard deviation.
5. We only introduce group-level variation in the valence component  $\alpha_{jk}$ , but not in the ideological component  $\beta_j$ . It is necessary to fix one component in order to ensure that the model is identified. While it would be possible to let the ideological party position rather than the valence component vary, it is reasonable to assume that additional factors structure the valence component.
6. The order of parties was switched for all coalition options except for SPÖ–GRÜNE for half of the respondents (random split), that is, ÖVP–SPÖ, FPÖ–ÖVP, and FPÖ–SPÖ. We only provide evidence for the first split. Note that the substantive conclusions are independent of the selected split. Table 1A in the appendix provides some descriptive statistics on the data.
7. We use noninformative priors for each of the model parameters.
8. Note that the question wording for the coalition and party preferences are slightly different. In the former case, respondents were asked to rate the sympathy of the different options (“Wie sympathisch sind Ihnen die politischen Parteien in Österreich?”), while respondents were asked how preferable the different coalition options are (“Wie sehr wünschen Sie sich eine Koalition zwischen den folgenden Parteien?”). Both questions applied an 11-point scale, ranging from 0 to 10. Although it is plausible to assume that both questions tap the same underlying dimension, we validate our approach by running two additional models where each category is estimated separately. The results from these models are provided in the Online Appendix Figures 1A and 1B. The parameter estimates in the separate models closely match the estimates in the comprehensive model.
9. The party positions were collected in a preelectoral survey by the Austrian National Election Study (Kritzinger et al., 2014) on a 10-point scale. The figure provides the distance of the mean party positions for each coalition option. The conclusion does not depend on whether we employ a measure of ideology that is internal or external to the model presented here. Figure 1C in the Appendix provides a similar figure as Figure 5, while exchanging the survey-based measure of ideology with the ideology parameters from the model.
10. Note that we only included respondents that have identified with the SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, GRÜNE, or have not identified with either party, as there not enough respondents that have identified with BZÖ or STRONACH. See Table 1A for descriptive statistics on the number of respondents per group. Note further that the model parameters of the ideological component are not displayed as they are similar to the results in Figure 1.

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