Putting the Gig Economy on the Party Agenda:

A Comparative Analysis of Party Responses to a New Issue Across Europe between 2018 and 2022

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vorgelegt von

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Note on Supervision

At its meeting on 19 October 2021, the Doctoral Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf appointed Professor Achim Goerres, Full Professor of Political Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen, as the principal supervisor for this PhD project. A written confirmation to this effect was received by email on 25 October 2021 by Johanna Plenter, Achim Goerres and the Doctoral Office of the Faculty of Philosophy.

Hinweis zur Betreuung

In seiner Sitzung am 19.10.2021 hat der Promotionsausschuss der Philosophischen Fakultät der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf Univ.-Prof. Dr. Achim Goerres, ordentlicher Professor für Politikwissenschaft an der Universität Duisburg-Essen, als Erstbetreuer dieses Promotionsvorhabens bestellt. Eine entsprechende schriftliche Bestätigung ist Johanna Plenter, Achim Goerres und dem Promotionsbüro der Philosophischen Fakultät am 25.10.2021 per E-Mail zugegangen.

Für Oma Ida und für Dennis

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Putting the Gig Economy on the Party Agenda: A Comparative Analysis of Party Responses to a New Issue Across Europe between 2018 and 2022

Abstract

Political parties are expected to respond to major socioeconomic transformations by addressing pressing issues and developing policy solutions. Yet one of the most profound changes in contemporary labour markets—the rise of the gig economy—has received surprisingly little attention in party politics. Why do some parties address the gig economy while others remain silent? What determines whether a new economic issue becomes politically relevant? And how do parties frame the opportunities and risks associated with gig work?

This dissertation investigates these questions in a comparative analysis across 23 European countries. More broadly, it addresses a central gap in research on party competition: While we know a lot about how parties compete over established political issues, we know much less about how new issues enter the political arena in the absence of major exogenous shocks or through actors such as challenger parties. Treating the gig economy as a gradually emerging issue, the dissertation develops a theoretical framework explaining when, why, and how parties incorporate such issues into their electoral strategies.

The theoretical argument combines insights from party competition, issue ownership, and issue-emergence research with theories of labour-market dualisation. It argues that the gig economy constitutes a new manifestation of the insider–outsider divide and therefore creates both electoral opportunities and strategic dilemmas for parties. Whether parties address the issue depends not only on their ideological orientation and organisational characteristics, but also on the economic and institutional contexts in which they compete.

The empirical analyses draw on a newly compiled dataset covering 188 election manifestos from 23 European countries between 2018 and 2022 (GIGPOL-Europe dataset). Combining quantitative text analysis, multilevel regression models, and qualitative content and sentiment analyses, the dissertation examines the salience of the gig economy in party manifestos, the factors driving issue attention, and the ways parties frame this issue.

The findings reveal a striking mismatch between the growing socioeconomic importance of the gig economy and its moderate political visibility. Only around one third of parties mention the issue in their manifestos. Where the gig economy is addressed, party ideology, economic performance, and labour-market institutions jointly shape political attention. Moreover, parties overwhelmingly portray the gig economy through a negative lens, focusing on precarious employment, labour-market regulation, and welfare-state implications, while rarely presenting it as a distinct policy issue in its own right. Rather than treating the gig economy as a transformative political challenge, most parties subsume it under existing debates about labour markets and social policy.

By explaining how a low-salience economic issue gradually enters party competition, this dissertation contributes to broader debates on issue emergence, democratic responsiveness, and the political consequences of technological change. More generally, it raises the question of whether party competition is capable of keeping pace with structural transformations of work—or whether political representation systematically lags behind economic change.

Putting the Gig Economy on the Party Agenda: A Comparative Analysis of Party Responses to a New Issue Across Europe between 2018 and 2022

Zusammenfassung

Von politischen Parteien wird erwartet, dass sie auf große sozioökonomische Veränderungen reagieren, indem sie drängende Probleme angehen und politische Lösungen entwickeln. Doch eine der tiefgreifendsten Veränderungen heutiger Arbeitsmärkte – der Aufstieg der Gig-Economy oder Plattformökonomie – hat im Parteiendiskurs überraschend wenig Beachtung gefunden. Warum setzen sich manche Parteien mit der Gig-Economy auseinander, während andere dazu schweigen? Was entscheidet darüber, ob ein neues wirtschaftliches Thema politisch relevant wird? Und wie stellen Parteien die mit Gig-Arbeit verbundenen Chancen und Risiken dar?

Diese Dissertation untersucht diese Fragen in einer vergleichenden Analyse von 23 europäischen Ländern. Im weiteren Sinne befasst sie sich mit einer zentralen Lücke in der Forschung zum Parteienwettbewerb: Während wir viel darüber wissen, wie Parteien um etablierte politische Themen konkurrieren, ist relativ wenig darüber bekannt, wie neue Themen ohne exogene Schocks oder durch Akteure wie Nischenparteien in die politische Arena gelangen. Die Dissertation betrachtet die Gig-Economy als ein sich allmählich herausbildendes Thema und entwickelt einen theoretischen Rahmen, der erklärt, wann, warum und wie Parteien solche Themen in ihre Wahlstrategien einbeziehen.

Der theoretische Rahmen verbindet Erkenntnisse aus der Parteienwettbewerbsforschung, *Issue Ownership* und *Issue Emergence* mit Theorien der Dualisierung des Arbeitsmarktes. Dabei wird argumentiert, dass die Gig-Economy eine neue Ausprägung der Insider-Outsider-Kluft darstellt und daher sowohl Wahlchancen als auch strategische Dilemmata für Parteien schafft. Ob Parteien das Thema aufgreifen, hängt nicht nur von ihrer ideologischen Ausrichtung und ihren organisatorischen Merkmalen ab, sondern auch von den wirtschaftlichen und institutionellen Kontexten.

Die empirischen Analysen stützen sich auf einen neu zusammengestellten Datensatz, der 188 Wahlprogramme aus 23 europäischen Ländern aus den Jahren 2018 bis 2022 umfasst (*GIGPOL-Europe*-Datensatz). Durch die Kombination von quantitativer Textanalyse, Mehrebenen-Regressionsmodellen sowie qualitativen Inhalts- und Stimmungsanalysen untersucht die Dissertation die Bedeutung der Gig-Economy in Parteiprogrammen, die Faktoren, die die Aufmerksamkeit für dieses Thema beeinflussen, und die Art und Weise, wie Parteien dieses Thema darstellen.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen ein auffälliges Missverhältnis zwischen der wachsenden sozioökonomischen Bedeutung der Gig-Economy und ihrer geringen politischen Sichtbarkeit. Nur etwa ein Drittel der Parteien erwähnt das Thema in ihren Wahlprogrammen. Wo die Gig-Economy thematisiert wird, prägen Parteideologie, nationale Wirtschaftsleistung und Arbeitsmarktinstitutionen die politische Aufmerksamkeit. Darüber hinaus stellen die Parteien die Gig-Economy überwiegend negativ dar und konzentrieren sich dabei auf prekäre Beschäftigungsverhältnisse, Arbeitsmarktregulierung und Auswirkungen auf den Sozialstaat, während sie selten als eigenständiges politisches Thema präsentiert wird. Anstatt die Gig-Economy als transformative politische Herausforderung zu behandeln, ordnen die meisten Parteien sie bestehenden Debatten über Arbeitsmärkte und Sozialpolitik zu.

Indem diese Dissertation erläutert, wie ein wirtschaftliches Thema mit geringer Sichtbarkeit allmählich in den Parteienwettbewerb Einzug hält, leistet sie einen Beitrag zu breiteren Debatten

über die Entstehung von Themen, demokratische Reaktionsfähigkeit und die politischen Folgen des technologischen Wandels. Allgemeiner betrachtet wirft sie die Frage auf, ob der Parteienwettbewerb in der Lage ist, mit den strukturellen Veränderungen der Arbeitswelt Schritt zu halten – oder ob die politische Repräsentation systematisch hinter dem wirtschaftlichen Wandel zurückbleibt.

Software and Assistance

This dissertation is written in British English spelling and grammar. All quotations are either given in their original (British or American English) spelling or translated to English by myself.

The dissertation was written in Microsoft Word 2019 and 2021. For Paper 1 (Chapter 2), I used Citavi 6 for reference management. For Paper 2 (Chapter 3), Paper 3 (Chapter 4) as well as the introductory and concluding chapter (Chapters 1 and 5), I used Endnote 2021/2025 for reference management. The reference list is written in Sage Harvard referencing style. For literature research, I used Web of Science (https://www.webofscience.com/) as well as the AI-based research tools Elicit (https://elicit.com/) and Jenni (https://jenni.ai/). Throughout the dissertation, the machine translation tool *DeepL* (https://www.deepl.com/de/translator) was used to translate my own thoughts and writing in certain places. All translations were manually revised and improved. Except for Chapter 2, all chapters of the dissertation were professionally proofread by John Revington, whom I would like to thank for his thorough service. Any remaining errors are, of course, my responsibility.

For the collection and compilation of different data sources, I was assisted by several research assistants of the Working Group of Empirical Political Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen. In this regard, I would like to thank Philipp Kemper, Noah Schulz, Robin Saßmannshausen and Nick Schlitter. Furthermore, Julika Ude supported the salience and content coding in Paper 3 (Chapter 4) as a second coder. Greta Löwe assisted in harmonising the reference list.

Each of the three individual studies has been presented at scientific conferences in Germany and abroad, such as the Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association (EPSA) in Glasgow 2023 and Cologne 2024, the General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in Dublin 2024, the ECPR's Joint Sessions of Workshops in Prague 2025, the Düsseldorf Graduate Conference on Party Research (GraPa) in Düsseldorf 2022 and 2025, or the Annual Conference of the Council for European Studies (CES) in Philadelphia 2025 and Dublin 2026. I am grateful to all participants and discussants for their valuable comments, which have substantially improved the papers.

All statistical analyses and the manual sentiment analysis in Paper 3 (Chapter 4) were conducted using *RStudio* in a project environment; the *RScripts* are programmed to run on R version 4.5.3 ("Reassured Reassurer"). At the end of each *RScript*, I cite all packages I use for the analysis. Most importantly, I used the base package (R Core Team, 2026), the tidyverse package (Wickham et al., 2019), the quanteda package (Benoit et al., 2018) and the ggplot package (Wickham, 2016).

The manual content analysis in Paper 3 (Chapter 4) was carried out using the MAXQDA coding software (version 26.0.0).

Furthermore, I used ChatGPT (Version GPT-5.5) to write and correct errors in my RCode, especially when creating plots with ggplot. In none of these cases did I directly copy code or generate any text from ChatGPT.

Replication Material

For the purpose of replicating the results of this dissertation, all RScripts containing the syntax and the MAXQDA project can be found in a project folder (ID: 3sr6p) within the Open Science Framework at the following URL: https://bit.ly/OSF-Repository-Plenter-PhD

All datasets used for the analyses are publicly available; the 'GIGPOL-Europe: European Gig Economy and Political Parties Dataset', which I created, has been uploaded to Harvard Dataverse (accessible via the following URL: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/29OZ5Z) and is also stored in the OSF repository alongside the translated election manifestos.

Data Usage

This dissertation is partially based on data from the Manifesto Project Database, which received funding from the German Science Foundation (DFG) from 2009 to 2024 as MARPOR (Manifesto Research on Political Representation). I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the project team for their work, which forms the basis of this invaluable data source.

The GIGPOL-Europe dataset contains publicly available data from various sources such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Eurostat. All data sources are cited in the reference list of this dissertation.

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
AIC	Akaike Information Criterion
CHES	Chapel Hill Expert Survey
EEA	European Economic Area
EPL	Employment protection legislation
EU	European Union
EWCS	European Working Conditions Survey
GAL/TAN	Green, Alternative, Libertarian—Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalistic
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIGPOL-Europe	European Gig Economy and Political Parties Dataset
ICC	Intraclass Correlation Coefficient
IRR	Incidence Rate Ratio
LLM	Large language model
LMP	Labour-market policies
MARPOR	Manifesto Project
MPD	Manifesto Project Database
MT	Machine translation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSF	Open Science Framework
pc	per capita
PPP	Purchasing power parity
SER	Standard employment relationship
USD	US Dollar
VAA	Voting Advice Application

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1 Introduction

The gig economy in the European Union is growing rapidly. According to official EU estimates, the number of gig workers was projected to reach 43 million by 2025 (European Commission, 2021); at the same time, around 60% of Europeans use gig economy services in their daily lives (Dimitri et al., 2025). Given these figures, the significance of the gig economy for the greater economy and for labour markets cannot be denied. Yet the issue is largely neglected in party-political agendas, with roughly one third of parties in Europe addressing the gig economy. So what explains this mismatch between the socioeconomic relevance and party-political attention? This dissertation addresses this puzzle from a political-science perspective at a time when the gig economy and its consequences are coming to the fore. This is important given that the growth of the gig economy causes both the number of gig workers and customers to rise, thus, the implications and the political regulation thereof are becoming increasingly relevant to a growing number of people—i.e., to voters.

Going forward, in Section 1.1, I therefore discuss the emergence of the gig economy, the significance of this development and, above all, its implications for party politics. Subsequently, in Section 1.2, I derive the research question underpinning this dissertation. Building on this, in Section 1.3, I discuss the current state of research and present my theoretical model, which describes the politicisation of the gig economy and the behaviour of political parties. In Section 1.4, I then present the empirical approach, before concluding in Section 1.5 with a summary of the three individual studies.

1.1 The Emergence of the Gig Economy and its Party-Political Implications

The global world of work has changed dramatically over the centuries. These changes were elicited by major economic advancements, which have fundamentally transformed the way in which we conduct business and work. While the 19th century was defined by the Second Industrial Revolution and the associated transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, the Third Industrial (or Digital) Revolution in the 20th century brought with it increasingly networked and digital production (Müller-Jentsch, 2017: 80). For several years now, a Fourth Industrial Revolution has been discussed under the buzzword of 'Industry 4.0'. Accordingly, in the third decade of the 21st century, we are experiencing another transformation of global capitalism with the advent and widespread implementation of robotics and artificial intelligence.

Regardless of how these developments are labelled, what they all have in common is not only the transformation of a country's economic production and labour market, but also a profound

impact on the social fabric of society. In capitalist societies, this happens through a dynamic co-evolution between technological change and institutional adaptation, particularly affecting labour relations, class consciousness, and citizenship rights. In fact, this connection continues to shape the European party system to this day through divisions between capital and labour, which ultimately manifest themselves along the left–right spectrum (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Therefore, these changes are accompanied by economic, societal as well as political opportunities and challenges that require regulation—or at least our collective attention.

One symptom of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is the emergence of the so-called 'platform' or 'gig economy'. The gig economy, which borrows its name from the music industry, where individual performances by artists are referred to as 'gigs', is characterised by "freelance work rather than formal, contracted, and lifelong employment" (Jamie and Musilek, 2025: 1). Online platforms or apps such as Uber, Just Eat, or TaskRabbit play a central role as intermediaries between gig workers and customers. Gig work is therefore often associated with bogus self-employment, as workers are legally classified as independent contractors, but they are highly dependent on these platforms or apps, which hold a monopolistic-like position in their respective sectors, e.g., the taxi or food delivery industries. The following two examples of gig workers illustrate the breadth of this working model and the associated living conditions.

"I have six jobs but only work 25 to 30 hours each week." This is the title *The Daily Telegraph* featured to tell the story of Michael Horsley (Lacey, 2025). He is a 63-year-old, highly qualified and experienced manager who works for six different employers or clients at the same time. After a long career, he made a conscious decision to take on gig or 'fractional' work to gain more flexibility and autonomy over his working hours and his job assignments. He sees another advantage in the fact that his work now has a real impact, as he has more influence on the success and development of different projects and companies. Because of his experience and skills, Horsley can be selective in choosing new projects or employers. Summarising, his decision to opt for a flexible working model was a personal win-win situation, as he achieved more flexibility and the same financial results with less work and less time investment.

For Leila Ouadad, gig work means mental stress, physical danger, and hard work. The story of the then-24-year-old was told in the 2021 documentary *The Gig Is Up*. She worked as an Uber and Deliveroo driver in Paris. In March 2020, a fellow rider died from the long-term effects of an accident. After his accident, Leila was unable to work for several days as it caused her distress. "People order and think we simply appear. But how do we get there? We blow through red lights, we put ourselves in danger, we pass trucks and trams, we ride up mountains. We don't just appear." (Leila Ouadad in *The Gig Is Up* by Shannon Walsh, 2021). For her, gig work is not

a form of personal or professional fulfilment, but rather a way, perhaps even the only way, to earn money.

These contrasting narratives exemplify the diverse nature of the gig economy, which simultaneously offers unprecedented flexibility and entrepreneurial opportunities for some, while engendering precariousness and exploitation for others. However, looking at the distribution of activities and the profiles of gig workers, it quickly becomes apparent which of the two realities is more likely to be the norm. For many gig workers, their job is a second source of income for which they are significantly overqualified and for which they often earn less than the minimum wage (Council of the European Union, 2024). Therefore, most assessments agree that it can be interpreted as a sign of further and progressive flexibilisation and precarisation of the labour market (Crouch, 2019; Montgomery and Baglioni, 2021; Vu and Nguyen, 2024).

This growing precarisation has far-reaching economic and political consequences that are evident at the global, national, and individual levels. Previous research has shown that it undermines social cohesion and political stability (Azzollini and Macmillan, 2023; Papadakis and Tzagkarakis, 2025), as it creates fragmented job structures that hamper exchange among workers and thereby restricts collective representation. In consequence, precarious workers are less likely to turn out to vote. At the same time, precarious employment increases social inequality and political exclusion (Corbetta and Colloca, 2013; Vallas and Prener, 2012; Wilson and Ebert, 2013). Following this argument, precarious workers do not have equal access to social protections, thereby exacerbating long-term macroeconomic disparities which impact their political representation. These far-reaching social consequences highlight the importance of a political debate on the issue, particularly among political parties, who are key actors in the aggregation and representation of interests. If such a debate fails to materialise or remains limited, it is also relevant to ask, from a political-science perspective, why this is the case.

Although I argue in this dissertation that political attention to the gig economy, particularly from parties, is rather limited, there have at least been some sociopolitical responses as well as wide academic interest. At the regulatory level, policy-makers' main focus has been on the classification of gig workers' employment status, the working conditions within the gig economy, as well as the use of algorithms, and the protection of personal data. In this vein, the adoption of the Platform Work Directive by the European Parliament in 2024 (Directive (EU) 2024/2831, 2024) has been a major milestone that reflects the realisation that political action is needed to address the complex challenges posed by the evolving nature of digital labour. At the academic level, research in areas such as economics, sociology, law, and geography has so far focused on the conditions and consequences of the gig economy for economic systems, labour markets and

gig workers' lives. In political science, however, the topic has only been dealt with peripherally thus far.

This dissertation aims to bridge this gap by investigating the gig economy from a political-science perspective, analysing how political parties respond to this new and complex issue. Accordingly, the dissertation is located at the intersection of party research, political communication, and comparative political economy. This approach recognises the gig economy not merely as an economic phenomenon but as a significant driver of regulatory shifts and political discourse, thus providing a more holistic analysis of its implications. Specifically, I explore which parties address the gig economy, why that is, and how their positions and proposed policy solutions are shaped. But why do the gig economy and these questions matter for parties and for political science?

I argue that the gig economy is a relevant issue for political parties for several reasons. First, as mentioned before, the gig economy is growing. Additionally, we can witness that its practices are transferring to the traditional labour market, e.g., shifting or replacing traditional employment relationships with independent contractors. Accordingly, the socioeconomic implications of this development will become relevant to an increasing share of the electorate. Second, the same mechanism applies to the potentially huge customer base, especially in urban areas. Since gig economy services are convenient and inexpensive for customers, they have a strong interest in keeping these services available (Culpepper and Thelen, 2020).

Ultimately, this creates a regulatory conflict, as the growing number of gig workers, who sometimes work under inhumane conditions, expect regulation. In his analysis, Colin Crouch even goes so far as to say that the questions and problems raised by the gig economy go beyond the individual worker. Instead, "[t]hey go to the heart of the changing relationship between those who use human labour and those who provide it, involve a wider range of precariousness than false self-employment, and have in no way left untouched the position of standard employees" (2019: 9). Thus, in a changing world of work, the dichotomy between risk-exposed gig workers and socially secure standard employees represents a new manifestation of the insider–outsider divide—a development highly relevant to the voter bases of parties (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Rueda, 2005; Schwander, 2019). At the same time, it is extremely important for parties to enable and promote economic innovation to maintain the competitiveness of the economy and consequently to maintain a society's standard of living. Therefore, political parties find themselves confronted with a potentially cross-pressuring environment.

From a political-science perspective, the question of why parties address the gig economy is relevant for three reasons. First, the gig economy can be seen as a new political issue that has come onto the agenda without any external shock or without the involvement of specific actors. Second, the gig economy is a multifaceted issue that can be viewed from a wide variety of perspectives. Therefore, it enables parties to link it to a range of debates and to use both positive and negative framings. Last, as discussed, there are at least two mismatches or contradictions regarding the gig economy: its socioeconomic relevance vs. political attention, and the strategic challenge of it being an insider vs. outsider issue. Against this backdrop, it is interesting to examine who addresses the issue, how, and why.

To answer this, I subsequently further discuss the scientific puzzle as well as the research question. I then review the literature and outline my theoretical framework in Section 1.3, before I delve into the empirical approach and methodological design in Section 1.4. In Section 1.5, I summarise the three papers that comprise this dissertation. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the dissertation constitute individual papers, presenting both a proof-of-concept study as well as two studies that address distinct facets of the gig economy's party-political implications. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a comprehensive conclusion, summarising the findings, outlining the contributions and limitations, as well as suggesting future avenues for research.

1.2 The Gig Economy as a New Issue: Puzzle and Overarching Research Question

Party competition—and especially party behaviour—lies at the heart of political-science research. Political parties are typically portrayed as rational, strategic actors pursuing at least three goals: winning votes, gaining office, and influencing policy outcomes (Strøm, 1990). While the relative importance of these goals may differ across parties and stages within the legislative cycle, the literature largely agrees that all parties follow these goals, albeit to varying degrees. Crucially, these objectives are not an end in themselves, but rather they inform a whole range of more nuanced party strategies within party and issue competition.

Not least since Green-Pedersen's contribution (2007), we know about the growing importance of issue competition. Within this realm, we already know a lot about party behaviour regarding established issues (Adams, 2001; Budge and Farlie, 1983; Budge et al., 1987; Greene, 2016; Klingemann et al., 1994; Otjes and Green-Pedersen, 2021; Seeberg, 2023). By comparison, much less is known about how new issues are introduced into party competition. This is particularly true when these new issues are not highly salient in public discourse, as is often the case with

external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural catastrophes, but rather emerge gradually.

The mechanism most frequently discussed regarding the emergence of new issues involves new or niche parties (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Harmel and Robertson, 1985; van der Brug and Berkhout, 2015; Zons, 2015). These new players in party competition, which are typically founded to put a specific issue on the agenda, can act credibly and with full focus on 'their' issue. In doing so, they exert pressure on established or mainstream parties to also formulate a position on that very issue, which often is not to the established parties' electoral advantage (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Meguid, 2005). Apart from this mechanism, however, we know surprisingly little about how new issues arise and establish themselves on the political agenda, and how the party system reacts to issue innovations.

This dissertation addresses this theoretical research gap by investigating the party competition and parties' strategic behaviour regarding the gig economy. In this vein, the gig economy is a prime example of a new issue coming onto the political agenda in the absence of niche or single-issue parties or exogenous shocks. Rather, it is a phenomenon that is gradually but steadily unfolding as an economic and labour model, and thus causing real-world challenges and opportunities that parties can attend to. The research question underlying this dissertation reads accordingly:

Which parties address the gig economy in their manifesto, why, and how?

This article-based dissertation consists of three individual studies that each contribute to answering parts of this overarching question. Figure 1-1 below provides a schematic overview of how the individual papers contribute to answering the overarching research question, how they build on one another, and what overall contribution this makes. While Paper 1 (Chapter 2) provides a methodological proof-of-concept study that shows that and how we can use translated election manifestos[1] for large-scale projects, Paper 2 (Chapter 3) aims to answer the question of who addresses the gig economy in their manifesto and which factors influence the likelihood of an uptake. Last, Paper 3 (Chapter 4) turns to the 'how' by investigating the framing and rhetoric parties use when talking about the gig economy.

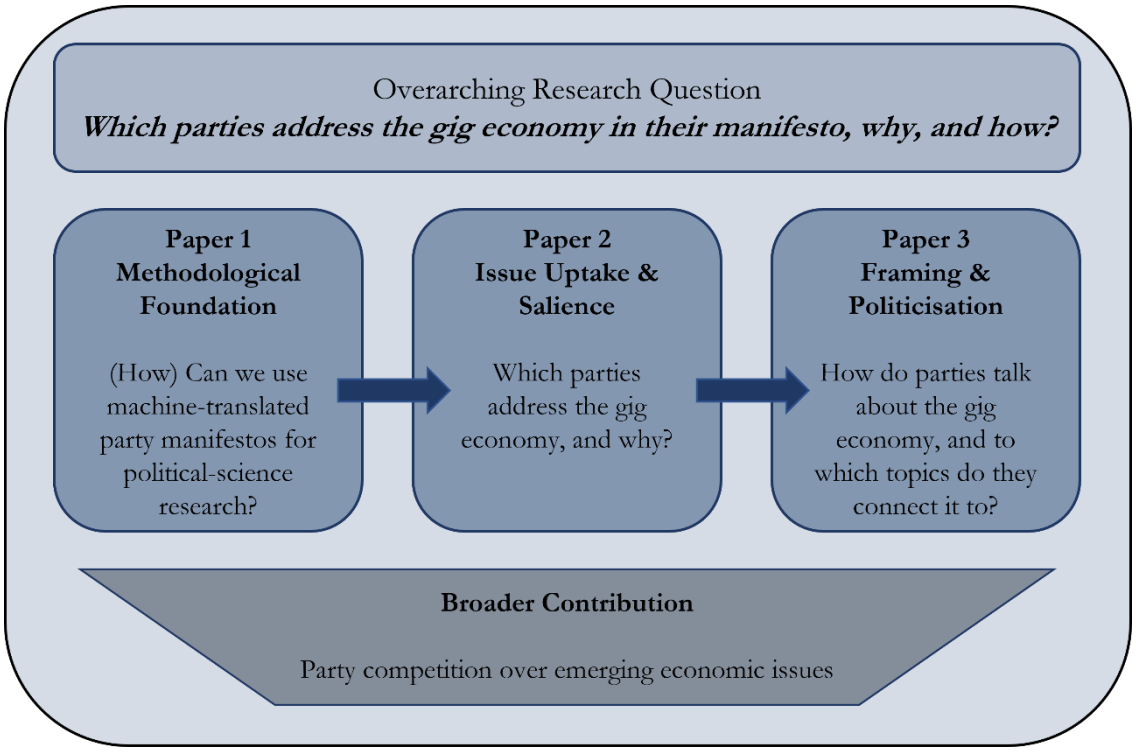
In addition to this overarching question, the individual analyses touch upon further questions that are relevant from a methodological or theoretical point of view. Thus, in light of the

[1] In this dissertation, I use the terms 'party manifesto' and 'election manifesto' synonymously and interchangeably. In (North) American English the terms 'party platform' or 'party program' are more commonly used, but they all describe a text document in which parties state their short- or medium-term policy positions and goals.

increasing methodological sophistication of the study of party agendas and manifestos, I ask in Paper 1 whether and how we can use machine translation (MT) in political-science research. It thereby also addresses the ethical question of how to deal with the growing use of artificial intelligence in social science. In Paper 2, I investigate the gig economy's salience within election manifestos and the party- and country-level factors that influence the number of mentions. I also dive into a discussion of when and why parties generally address (economic) niche issues, and what explains their behaviour regarding non-salient issues, like the gig economy. Finally, in Paper 3, I analyse political parties' sentiments and framing strategies regarding the gig economy. Treating the gig economy as an example of a new issue, this paper connects to a broader discussion of how new issues become politicised. When do parties regard it as worth their financial and organisational capacities to take on a topic, and which factors influence this decision? Further, I investigate to which broader topics parties attach the gig economy. This allows for more general assessments of issue-linkage strategies of parties.

Accordingly, the three individual studies build on one another not only in terms of their empirical findings, but also regarding the theoretical model explaining how and why new economic issues become politicised. Before this theoretical model is explained in more detail in the following section (Section 1.3), I first explain why we as a society should care about this overarching research question.

Figure 1-1: Overview of overarching research question and the paper's contributions



Addressing and answering these questions is relevant not only from a political-science perspective, but also from a societal point of view. This dissertation highlights broader themes, such as the interaction between technological change, labour-market transformation, and democratic processes. In this vein, a key normative question is whether political systems respond adequately to socioeconomic transformations. With this dissertation, I contribute to this debate by analysing whether parties inhabit a proactive or a reactive stance towards the gig economy, and whether the political debate keeps pace with technological change.

These debates matter not only at the party-system and system level, but also at the individual level, e.g., for voters. Previous research has shown that party communication about a certain issue shapes citizens' understanding thereof (Leeper and Slothuus, 2014; Somer-Topcu et al., 2020). Thus, analysing how parties communicate the evolution of the gig economy and its consequences helps us to understand how citizens perceive these developments. These perceptions, in turn, influence the formation of political opinions and policy preferences and, ultimately, voting behaviour.

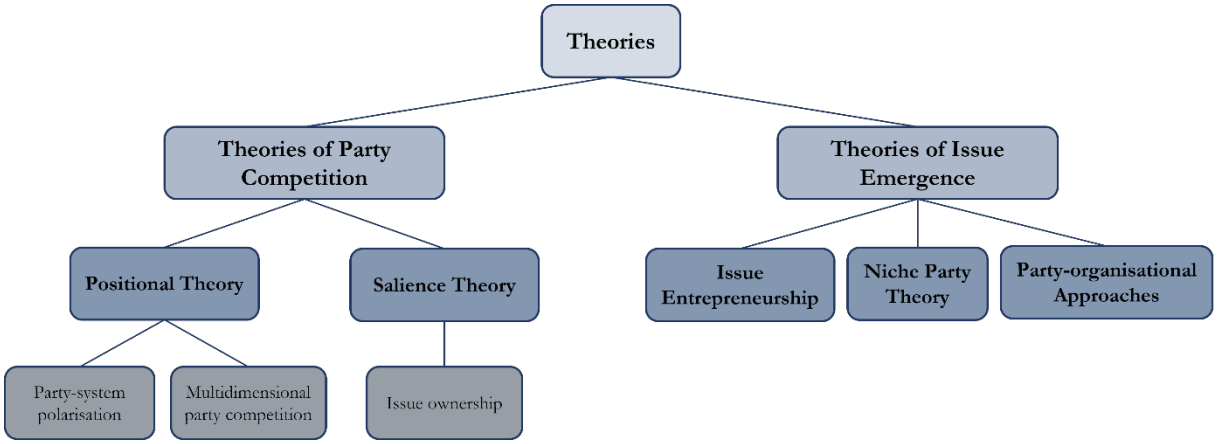
The gig economy also reflects a new manifestation of the insider–outsider divide. Yet, gig workers constitute a particularly difficult group to represent politically as their working conditions, livelihoods, and consequently their policy demands are rather heterogeneous (Chueri and Busemeyer, 2025). At the same time, governments across the globe are struggling to regulate platform companies and the digital labour markets, as this new and global business model challenges national-bound regulations. Understanding how parties discuss this issue and its implications, not just for the economy but for workers as well, informs our knowledge about the governance of the digital economy and the democratic responsiveness across diverse political and party systems comparatively.

1.3 State of Research and Theoretical Expectations

This dissertation sits at the intersection of party research, political communication, and comparative political economy. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of platformisation on both contemporary political discourse and strategic party behaviour. Most prominently, I draw on theories of party competition and combine them with approaches that explain the emergence of new issues. In general, the literature can be distinguished by (1) theories that explain how parties compete, and (2) theories explaining who raises new issues and why. Figure 1-2 gives an overview of the theories and approaches that I draw from to build the dissertation's theoretical framework that explains which parties address the

gig economy, why and how. In this context, I regard the gig economy as one such new political issue and base my argument on the assumption that it represents a shift in labour relations. Thus, the literature on labour-market transformations forms the starting point or baseline assumption for the politicisation of the gig economy. Accordingly, I assume that the gig economy represents a transformative process that is politically significant because it builds on existing lines of societal conflict—in particular the insider–outsider divide. This literature is therefore not discussed in the following review but is included in the theoretical framework (see Figure 1-3 and Section 1.3.3).

Figure 1-2: Overview of theories and approaches explaining party behaviour



1.3.1 Party Competition and Issue Attention: Positional Theory and Salience Theory

Central to understanding party responses to both established and emergent issues are theories of party competition, which examine how parties strategically position themselves to maximise their electoral success. These theoretical frameworks illustrate the mechanisms through which parties select and emphasise specific topics to differentiate themselves from competing parties and to appeal to (groups of) the electorate. As illustrated in Figure 1-2, the party-competition literature can generally be divided into two main strands: positional theory and salience theory (Spies and Franzmann, 2019: 318). Essentially, these theories address the question: Why do parties differ in their response to political issues?

Positional theories, rooted in the Downsian model (Downs, 1957), think of the political arena in spatial terms. Parties compete on a continuous one-dimensional ideological spectrum, which is traditionally understood as the left–right axis. In this predefined political space, parties move and position themselves in relation to both voters and competitors, aiming to maximise their

vote share. These models have been widely criticised for their high demand for information that is necessary for voters to be able to correctly place parties; for the assumption of a one-dimensional political space, and for their applicability in multi-party systems (Spies and Franzmann, 2019).

To address these concerns, further advancements of these theories have incorporated party-system polarisation as a measure for the "degree of ideological differentiation among political parties in a system" (Dalton, 2008: 900). The debate was fuelled in particular by Sartori (1976), who distinguishes between fragmentation and polarisation. While fragmentation concerns the numerical side of party systems—measured as the number of relevant parties—polarisation concerns the ideological perspective, i.e., the ideological distance between the parties. Consequently, party systems can be highly fragmented without being polarised; a state that Sartori calls "moderate pluralism". Party systems that are both fragmented and polarised, on the other hand, he labels "polarised pluralism" (Sartori, 1976: 126; cited in Wiesendahl, 2007: 415).

Both this distinction and the extension of positional theory matter for party strategies. For one, this extension reflects the empirical reality that most countries do not have a two-party system in which parties are incentivised to move to the centre, i.e., towards the median voter. For another, it also enables us to explain strategic shifts in parties' positions that are centrifugal, i.e., towards the left or right extreme. As a consequence, we expect parties operating in highly polarised systems to adopt more extreme stances and intensify the ideological debate. In highly fragmented systems, on the other hand, party positions can still be rather centrist if parties cluster ideologically.

A second advancement addresses the multidimensionality of political spaces, moving beyond the traditional left–right continuum to incorporate multiple salient issue dimensions, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of party positioning in complex political landscapes (Iversen and Goplerud, 2018; Rovny, 2012; Rovny and Edwards, 2012). However, there is no agreement on the number or nature of these dimensions. The two most important conceptualisations are (1) the centre–periphery dimension (Alonso, 2012), and (2) the GAL/TAN[2] dimension (Hooghe et al., 2002; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995), which capture social and cultural divides often intersecting with economic policy.

In contrast, in the second strand of the party-competition literature, salience theory moves beyond a spatial conception of party competition (Robertson, 1976). Instead, it posits that parties

[2] The abbreviation GAL/TAN stands for 'Green, Alternative, Libertarian—Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalistic'. It describes a sociocultural conflict line along which political parties can be positioned (Hooghe et al., 2002).

strategically emphasise certain issues that align with their strengths, thereby shaping the political agenda and influencing voter perceptions. This approach makes use of Stokes' (1963) distinction between position and valence issues, i.e., topics that are controversial versus those that are non-controversial. While positional theories primarily focus on the former, salience theory incorporates both types, as it argues that parties gain electoral advantage when issues they are competent at handling become salient in political discourse, irrespective of how contested these issues are. In doing so, parties have two goals as they both signal electoral importance by stressing issues they occupy while ignoring others, and they pressure rival parties to also position themselves on these topics, potentially forcing them into less advantageous positions (Budge, 2015; Budge and Farlie, 1983).

This mechanism also underlies the issue-ownership approach that stipulates that parties 'own' those issues that the electorate perceives them to have a credible capacity to address and consequently to have great problem-solving competences (Petrocik, 1996; Stubager, 2018). The strategic manipulation of issue salience by selective issue emphasis, therefore, becomes a critical tool for parties to define political competition and agenda-setting. In line with the 'issue yield' concept, parties select and emphasise those issues where they expect their highest electoral gain. As a consequence, different parties focus on or emphasise different topics at the same time, which is why salience theory is more compatible with multidimensional issue competition (Franzmann et al., 2020; Spies and Franzmann, 2019).

However, both the positional and the salience theories still focus primarily on how parties adopt positions within a fixed policy space or a given set of issues rather than exploring how new issues emerge and gain prominence on the political agenda. To understand how parties position themselves regarding new issues such as the gig economy, the next section dives into mechanisms explaining the emergence of new issues.

1.3.2 The Emergence of New Issues in Party Competition

How and why do new issues enter the political discourse and become subjects of party competition? Since I treat the gig economy as a prime example of a new issue, the second important area of literature that informs the theoretical framework underlying this dissertation is that on issue emergence and diffusion. This area of scholarship explores the dynamics by which novel policy concerns are introduced into the political arena, gain public and partisan attention, and subsequently become integrated into party competition. At least in Western party systems, most of this literature has focused on the EU integration (Helbling et al., 2010; Parsons and Weber,

2011; Senninger and Wagner, 2015), the rise of populist radical-right parties (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020; Atzpodien, 2020; Green-Pedersen, 2019), or environmentalism (Carter, 2013; Poguntke, 1987; Spoon et al., 2014). As illustrated in Figure 1-2, this literature mainly draws on three approaches: the issue-entrepreneurship framework, niche party theory, and party organisation.

Particularly influential in the study of issue emergence is the issue-entrepreneurship framework. This framework posits that parties strategically introduce new issues into political competition when they believe they can profit electorally (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015). This approach can be closely linked to salience theory as it analyses which issues are emphasised, but with a special focus on new issues. In this vein, we expect parties to choose issues that pressure their competitors or even drive a wedge between different internal party factions. This allows parties to differentiate themselves, particularly by identifying and championing politically untapped topics and thereby maximising their vote share. But are all parties equally capable of acting as an issue entrepreneur? Hobolt and de Vries (2015) argue that an entrepreneurial strategy can be risky, which is why they assume that previous electoral losses incentivise parties to engage in such behaviour as they have nothing to lose. For the same reason, challenger or niche parties are also more likely to adopt such a strategy and thereby alter the political agenda.

This observation leads neatly to a second mechanism that plays a decisive role in the politicisation of new issues, namely the influence of new or niche parties (Meguid, 2005; Poguntke, 1987; van der Brug and Berkhout, 2015; Zons, 2015). This strand of research stipulates that these parties are founded as a result of a representation gap in the party system. The new political actors then enter the party competition to close this gap and force mainstream and competitor parties to also take a position on the new issue. This dynamic often compels established parties either to accommodate the challenger's agenda or to risk electoral decline, a phenomenon extensively observed in the wake of green and radical-right party successes (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Williams and Hunger, 2022).

Lastly, the third mechanism driving issue emergence involves parties' organisational capacities and resources (Poguntke et al., 2016; Scarrow et al., 2017). Parties with greater resources are often better equipped to identify, frame, and promote new issues effectively, whereas resource-constrained parties may concentrate on their core competencies (Wagner and Meyer, 2014). This mechanism holds for both financial, human, and organisational resources. These resources in turn are influenced by both party size and by incumbency or governmental status and lead to two contradicting assumptions. On the one hand, larger parties and governing parties exhibit

more diverse internal structures, have more personnel, and have a bigger party base to engage with a wider variety of issues. Conversely, smaller parties focus their scarce resources more on issues they own and on which they possess greater credibility. On the other hand, mainstream parties are often more reluctant to take up new issues as they favour the status quo (Rovny and Edwards, 2012).

In summary, the emergence of new issues in party competition is multifaceted, driven by strategic entrepreneurship, the influence of challenger parties, and variations in party resources, all of which contribute to the dynamic evolution of political agendas. However, these mechanisms fail to explain the emergence of a new issue in the absence of a new single-issue party or a clear entrepreneurial strategy from an established party. In the following section, using the gig economy as an example, I therefore present the theoretical framework that builds on these existing frameworks from both the party-competition literature and the new issue literature, while adding a novel perspective on how parties respond to new political issues.

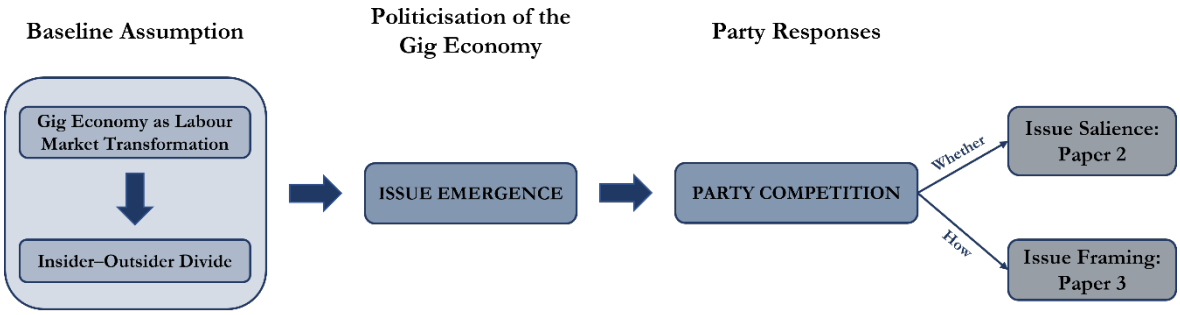
1.3.3 Theoretical Framework: The Politicisation of the Gig Economy

The overarching research question asks which parties address the gig economy in their election manifesto, why they do so, and how they frame the issue. Therefore, in the theoretical framework, I connect assumptions from the party-competition literature with those from the new issue literature. The combination of these two strands of argumentation acknowledges that issue competition generally follows stable mechanisms, but that both the novelty and the thematic diversity that the gig economy entails as a cross-cutting issue influence how parties react to its emergence. Thereby, this dissertation investigates a special type of issue, namely a low-salience economic issue that emerges following structural labour-market change. Before I present the theoretical expectations that I derive from this combination of literature strands, I lay the foundation of my argument.

As I argued earlier, I maintain that we can—and indeed must—interpret the gig economy, among other things, as a labour-market transformation. Consequently, the issue politically relates to at least one established societal conflict, namely the result of labour-market dualisation: the insider–outsider divide (Rueda, 2005). The distinction between regular employees and gig workers can be seen as an extreme form of this divide. As a result, the interests of secure insiders stand in opposition to those of vulnerable outsiders. This conflict serves as the baseline assumption for the politicisation of the gig economy, as it enables a political conflict and thereby fosters the issue emergence. Applied to party competition, it also explains why different parties react

differently to the emergence of the gig economy (Schwander, 2019). Figure 1-3 illustrates the theoretical model and how the arguments build upon one another. Building on this underlying argumentation framework, in the remainder of this chapter, I set out the specific theoretical expectations regarding party behaviour in relation to the gig economy.

Figure 1-3: Theoretical model of the politicisation of the gig economy



Expectations Built on the Positional Theories of Party Competition

First, and in line with the positional theories of party competition, I argue that the gig economy connects to the traditional economic left–right dimension. Specifically, parties' stances on platform labour regulations reflects long-standing ideological cleavages regarding state intervention in (labour) markets and the protection of workers' rights. Thus, right-wing parties are expected to focus on the gig economy's implications for economic innovation as well as on the freedom and flexibility offered to both workers and businesses. Left-wing parties, on the other hand, are expected to advocate for government regulation and worker protection.

Additionally, I expect the gig economy to be more likely to be discussed and more prominently discussed in countries that exhibit a high party-system polarisation. In such polarised contexts with many ideologically distinct competitors, parties are incentivised to differentiate themselves by adopting more extreme positions. Therefore, the higher the ideological distance between parties, the more strategically vital it becomes to frame the gig economy as an important issue to mobilise distinct electoral groups.

Lastly, these mechanisms are accompanied by the multidimensionality of the gig economy, as it intersects with both socioeconomic and sociocultural concerns. Consequently, when addressing the gig economy in their manifestos, parties can either focus on the economic dimension, thereby framing the gig economy as a matter of labour-market deregulation and flexibilisation, or they can prioritise the sociocultural dimension by focusing on its implications for the

environment or on the exploitation of migrant workers. I argue that this multidimensionality can be a cross-pressuring environment, especially for left-wing parties, as they must reconcile the protection of traditional labour standards with the potential of digital innovation to empower marginalised, non-standard workers. At the same time, however, they have to appeal to progressive urban voters who are potentially interested in retaining the convenient services that the gig economy provides.

Expectations Built on Salience Theory

Second, I build on salience theory, specifically on different issue-emphasis strategies, and on the issue-ownership approach. As the gig economy can be framed through various perspectives, I argue that parties emphasise those aspects of this phenomenon that they are perceived to be credible and competent about. Thus, liberal parties are expected to focus on the innovative characteristics and, more generally, on the opportunities of the digital economy. Conversely, (populist) radical-right parties stress the role and (negative) impact of migration; conservative parties focus on the impact on the economy, and left-wing parties are expected to focus on labour protection and workers' rights. This strategy differs from the left–right dimension in that parties place this emphasis based on their key issues—regardless of whether those issues are economic or connected to the sociocultural dimension.

Additionally, parties can alter the clarity or strength with which they address the gig economy. Specifically, parties can selectively emphasise an issue, blur their position, or avoid an issue altogether (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Han, 2022; Rovny, 2012). I argue that left-wing parties engage most clearly with issue emphasis because they can incorporate the prominent features of the gig economy neatly into their core ideology and narrative. Conversely, parties that cannot gain electorally by emphasising the gig economy are more likely to engage in a blurring or avoiding strategy. Moreover, I expect a spillover effect within party families, leading several, or even all parties in that family, to address the gig economy as soon as one of the others addresses it.

Expectations Built on the Issue-Emergence Literature

Third and most importantly, I connect the issue-emphasis arguments with mechanisms relating to new issues. Parties strategically introduce and emphasise new issues, such as the gig economy, when doing so creates an electoral advantage for them. Thus, I argue that different types of party are likely to introduce the gig economy into party competition in different ways. However, since previous research has produced ambiguous findings, I formulate competing assumptions. On the one hand, I comprehend mainstream and larger parties to be more likely to address the

gig economy because they have greater financial and organisational resources for attending to such a relatively low-salience topic. This expectation builds on insights from the party-organisational literature, which has shown party size and capacities to be decisive.

On the other hand, both the issue-entrepreneurship approach and the literature on multidimensional issue competition have demonstrated that mainstream parties are rather reluctant to challenge the status quo. Instead, niche and challenger parties are more likely to act as issue entrepreneurs and to introduce new issues. Thus, I expect small or newly elected parties to be more likely to address the gig economy and to formulate more extreme positions on this issue. As the gig economy is still a non-mainstream issue, it is attractive for niche parties to emphasise it to pressure their mainstream opponents to also develop a policy position that, in turn, is potentially harmful to those opponents at the ballot box.

1.4 Empirical Approach: Machine Translation, Election Manifestos, and Dataset

This dissertation consists of three individual studies: one proof-of-concept study (Paper 1, Chapter 2), and two empirical analyses of the party competition surrounding the gig economy (Papers 2 and 3, Chapters 3 and 4 respectively). For the empirical analyses of these three papers, I compiled a novel dataset of election manifestos and other data sources. Before I describe this dataset (Section 1.4.2), I first explain the methodological considerations underlying the selection of manifestos for the analyses in this dissertation.

1.4.1 Using Election Manifestos for the Estimation of Party Positions

One central goal of comparative party research is the estimation, analysis, and comparison of parties' policy positions to understand public policy developments. To this end, researchers can draw on various methods and data sources, such as mass surveys, expert surveys, party manifestos, or Voting Advice Application (VAA) data to name but a few (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2023; Gabel and Huber, 2000; Mair, 2001). In light of this plurality, there has been an almost equally long and intense debate about the respective advantages and disadvantages of these methods and sources, especially regarding their validity and reliability (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Ecker et al., 2022). While it is neither the aim nor within the scope of this dissertation to reproduce this discussion here, it is worth pointing out that there is no such thing as one perfect method for estimating policy positions. Instead, the decision for or against a data source should

be made with the research question and the aim of the analysis in mind, and its respective possibilities and limitations should be openly discussed.

Looking at the literature, we can observe that party or election manifestos are the most commonly used data sources for the estimation of parties' policy positions (Dinas and Gemenis, 2010; Gemenis, 2013; König et al., 2017). There are several reasons for this: For one, election manifestos are a readily available and reliable data source. This is particularly important for large longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses to ensure comparability and internal validity of the results. In addition to the fact that parties have a strong stake in making their programmes widely available, the Manifesto Project Database (MPD)[3] facilitates the collection, distribution, and analysis of manifesto data. Its continuously updated dataset already includes more than 1,300 parties from over 67 countries for the period since 1945, allowing for extensive analysis of these parties' policy positions.

Another reason is the authority of election manifestos regarding the parties' issue positions. Klingemann et al. (1994: 21) even go as far as to say that "the campaign document is the only statement of policy made with authority on behalf of the whole party". Even though we know surprisingly little about how parties draw up their manifestos—given that the internal structures of parties are essentially black boxes (Däubler, 2012; Harmel, 2018)—we can assume that many party members, groups, and committees are usually involved in drafting the manifesto. As a result, the positions expressed in the election programme reflect an internal party compromise that represents all factions and wings. This distinguishes manifestos from social media posts, parliamentary speeches, or press releases in terms of their scope and significance, and it makes them particularly suitable for the analysis of party positions.

This authority is linked to a third characteristic of election manifestos that makes them so intuitive for determining positions, namely their strategic sophistication. Manifestos are the product of weeks or even months of work, so the positions and formulations are strategically chosen. This is particularly relevant because campaign promises potentially bear high electoral costs (Matthieß, 2020) Addressing an issue in the manifesto therefore implies a commitment (Vestergaard, 2025). Nevertheless, with their short- to medium-term validity—usually for one election or legislative period—they are flexible enough to address new issues such as the gig economy.

[3] For further information on the Manifesto Project and database see its website: https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/

For these reasons, the empirical studies contained in this dissertation are also based on the analyses of manifestos, and they all follow some kind of text-as-data approach. Text-as-data methods represent one of the most significant methodological innovations in political science in recent years and remain an extremely dynamic field. As many concepts that are relevant to political-science analysis are only available in text form, these methods are central to our understanding of politics (Benoit, 2020; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). Consequently, a whole range of methods has emerged, such as discourse or content analysis, dictionary analysis, or scaling, and machine-learning techniques. The latest developments in this field include automated classification or content analysis using large language models (LLM), which make it possible to process vast amounts of textual data, even in different languages. Building on these methodological advances, I use text-as-data methods in this dissertation—especially dictionary, sentiment, and content analyses—to systematically evaluate the strategic salience and framing of the gig economy. Moreover, I also contribute to this dynamic field by demonstrating how machine translation can be integrated into the methodological toolkit of comparative party research.

1.4.2 Description of GIGPOL-Europe: The European Gig Economy and Political Parties Dataset

After establishing why the analyses rely on manifestos as the primary data source, in this section, I present the dataset, address issues relating to data ethics, and explain why the coded data from the Manifesto Project could not be used for the analyses.

For the analyses, I compiled the novel 'GIGPOL-Europe: European Gig Economy and Political Parties Dataset'[4]. The dataset essentially consists of three components. First, it comprises the election manifestos of 207 European parties. Second, this data is supplemented by a range of party, party-system, and macroeconomic indicators. Lastly, the dataset contains three different variables describing the salience of the gig economy in the respective manifestos. These variables indicate salience as (1) a binary measure (the gig economy is addressed: yes/no); (2) a frequency measure (absolute number of mentions), and (3) a relative measure (share of quasi-sentences addressing the gig economy relative to total number of quasi-sentences).

The novelty of the dataset lies in the fact that it brings together a wide range of variables and indicators, some of which I created and calculated myself, while others were collected from a variety of sources (details on variables and the data sources are provided in Table 1-1). The dataset thus enables analyses of the salience of the gig economy, of the influencing factors at

[4] The dataset is publicly available in the Harvard Dataverse following this URL: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/29OZ5Z

different levels of the political, economic, legal and social systems, and of party rhetoric regarding this issue. As the dataset does not rely on a predefined category- and coding scheme, it addresses the limitations of existing, general-purpose repositories like the Manifesto Project, which often lack issue-specific sensitivity or flexibility. Consequently, the GIGPOL-Europe dataset provides researchers with a robust infrastructure for examining party discourse on the gig economy and linking it to influencing factors on the party, party-system, and country levels. In other words, the dataset facilitates a more rigorous, comparative understanding of how institutional and macro-level constraints condition party responses to structural transformation.

The dataset covers a total of 207 parties from 23 European countries and their 188 election manifestos for national parliamentary elections from 2018 to 2022 (see Table A3-1 in Chapter Appendix 3.7 for a detailed description of the sample). This time span is a result of country-specific legislative cycles. For each of the countries, I included the most recent election manifestos of all parties elected to parliament in the respective election at the time of data collection (January to August 2022). The population underlying the selection of countries is the European Economic Area. This area comprises all EU countries as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, plus Switzerland and the United Kingdom—a total of 32 countries.

The majority of the election manifestos were taken from the Manifesto Project corpus (Version 2023-1; Lehmann et al., 2023). Manifestos not available there were collected individually from the parties' websites or requested directly from the parties. Despite all attempts to collect the election manifestos of all parties from the population, nine countries had to be excluded due to missing data: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Hungary, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Malta.

After collecting all available manifestos, I was confronted with a central challenge of comparative research: the multilingualism of the sample. Since parties usually only publish their election manifestos in the respective national language(s), my sample comprises more than 20 languages. However, as the research question of this dissertation explicitly addresses a new political topic, it was not possible to use the coding of the Manifesto Project, as this does not capture explicit mentions of the gig economy. The Manifesto Project employs native-speaking coders who analyse the original election manifestos based on the established coding scheme. Instead, to address the multilingualism, I make use of MT using *DeepL* to translate the entire sample to

English[5]. The exact procedure and its advantages and disadvantages are presented and discussed in Paper 1 (Chapter 2) in the form of a proof-of-concept study. Therein, I also validate the translation quality using four language combinations as examples: Estonian to English, German to English, Italian to English, and Polish to English.

Since one of the aims of the analysis is to examine the factors that influence why parties address the gig economy in their election manifestos, the dataset includes a range of contextual variables. On the one hand, the dataset contains additional party-level variables such as party ideology or position on the left–right scale. On the other hand, it includes a range of economic, legal, polity, and welfare-state variables, such as electoral system or welfare spending. Table 1-1 lists all additional variables and their respective data source.

Table 1-1: Overview of party, party system and macroeconomic variables contained in the GIGPOL-Europe dataset

Level	Variable	Description	Data Source
Party-level variables	Gig economy mentions	Three variables measuring the salience of the gig economy on different scales: 1. Binary: Party addresses the issue (yes/no) 2. Count: Absolute number of mentions 3. Share: Percentage of quasi-sentences in which the issue is addressed	Own aggregation
	Party family	Party family as assigned by the Manifesto Project	Lehmann et al. (2023: Version 2023-1)
	Party ideology	Three variables measuring the party ideology as assigned by the CHES: 1. Placement on the general left–right scale 2. Placement on the economic left–right scale 3. Placement on the GAL/TAN scale	Bakker et al. (2020: Version 2019.3)
	Seats in parliament	Number of seats in parliament won in the respective parliamentary election	Own aggregation
	Newly or re-elected party	Dummy (0/1) for newly or re-elected party into parliament	Own aggregation

[5] Since the release of dataset version 2024a and the Manifesto Corpus 2024-1, the latter now includes English translations of approximately 1.5 million quasi-sentences. However, as this version was not available at the time of data collection, I translated all manifestos included in GIGPOL-Europe dataset using *DeepL* (see Paper 1, Chapter 2 for further information).

Party-system variables	Party-system fragmentation	Effective number of electoral parties corrected for 'other'/independent parties	Bormann and Golder (2022: DES Version 4.1)
	Proportional electoral system	Dummy (0/1) for proportional electoral system	Bormann and Golder (2022: DES Version 4.1)
Country-level variables	Economic performance	Three variables measuring the economic situation: 1. GDP per capita: PPP at current international prices 2. GDP short-term change: Absolute and relative change score of GDP between election year and two years prior 3. GDP long-term change: Absolute and relative change score of GDP between election year and ten years prior	World Bank (2025); change scores are own aggregation
	Unemployment rate	Average unemployment rate of 12 months prior to election date	Eurostat (2023b)
	Underemployment incidence	Share of employees with involuntary part-time contracts as percentage of all employees	Eurostat (2025)
	Welfare state effort	Three variables measuring welfare spending: 1. Unemployment expenditure: Unemployment spending as percentage of GDP 2. Total welfare spending: Combined spending as percentage of GDP 3. Labour-market policies: Spending on LMP as percentage of GDP	OECD (2025); OECD (2023b)
	Employment protection legislation (EPL)	Two variables measuring the EPL: 1. Strictness of dismissal regulation for workers on regular contracts both individual and collective 2. Strictness of dismissal regulation for workers with temporary contracts	OECD (2022)
	Contracts & payment	Two variables measuring type of contract and payment 1. Involuntary temporary contracts: Share of employees with involuntary temporary contracts as percentage of all temporary employees 2. Minimum wage: Real annual minimum wages in 2022 constant prices at 2022 USD PPPs	Eurostat (2023a); OECD (2023a)

Collective action	Two variables measuring collective action indicators: 1. Union density: Percentage of employees in trade unions 2. Collective bargaining coverage: Percentage of employees with the right to bargain collectively	OECD (2021b); OECD (2021a)
Structure of population	Three variables measuring structural indicators of the population: 1. Working age population: Share of population aged between 15 and 65 years 2. Internet penetration rate: Share of population using the internet 3. Foreign-born population: Share of foreign-born citizens	OECD (2023d); World Bank (2023); OECD (2023c)
Citizenship index	Index measuring the ease of obtaining citizenship in respective country	Own construction based on European Migration Network (2020)
Public opinion on working conditions	Share of population stating that 'working conditions' is one of the two most pressing issues personally	European Commission (2022: Version 2.0.0)
COVID-19	Dummy (0/1) for election during the COVID-19 pandemic	Own aggregation
Election year	Year in which the election took place in respective country	Own aggregation

As with all empirical research, it is of paramount importance to consider the ethical implications of the whole research process, starting with the research design, through data collection and analysis, to data storage and replication. Data ethics goes beyond the legal issues of data protection, as it requires consideration of the consequences of data use for individuals and society. Even though the analyses in this dissertation are not based on individual human or animal data, but rather on a combination of text and macroeconomic data, it is essential to ensure the highest possible level of transparency and traceability so that the analyses can be replicated.

The ethical considerations regarding the GIGPOL-Europe dataset, therefore, primarily concern transparency, reproducibility, conceptual validity, and cross-national comparability. To address these issues, coding procedures, operational definitions, and data-processing decisions are documented in the respective methods sections of the individual papers. Furthermore, all translated

election manifestos as well as all RScripts have been uploaded to the OSF repository[6] to ensure that all analyses can be fully replicated and to enable further reuse of the GIGPOL-Europe dataset. All party-system and macroeconomic data listed in Table 1-1 are also ethically sound and freely accessible. It should be explicitly noted here that this is not self-collected data. Rather, the GIGPOL-Europe dataset combines all these variables from the cited data sources to enable a rigorous and holistic analysis.

Even though the data can generally be considered ethically unobjectionable, I acknowledge that concepts such as 'gig economy' and 'platform work' are politically contested and may be framed differently across countries and across ideological contexts (see Paper 2, Chapter 3 and Paper 3, Chapter 4 of this dissertation). Consequently, the findings of the analyses have implications for political actors and could be used strategically by parties to engage with gig workers and address them as an electoral target group.

1.5 Extended Summaries of Papers

This section presents the three individual studies that comprise this dissertation. To this end, each paper is summarised, its research question, theoretical and methodological framework, as well as its publication status is presented. The central findings are embedded in the broader context of the dissertation. Paper 1 is a research note that examines the methodological approach as well as the advantages and disadvantages of machine translation of election manifestos. Paper 2 analyses the salience of the gig economy in election manifestos and the factors that influence it. Building on this, Paper 3 analyses parties' rhetoric and framing and examines the extent to which the topic is discussed on its own or in connection with other topics.

Table 1-2 provides an overview of the title, research question, publication status, data, and method of data analysis for each of the papers. Paper 1 has been reformatted for inclusion in this work—the published version can be found in the appendix. Papers 2 and 3 are included in a marginally amended version compared with the versions submitted for peer review. The changes mainly consist of language corrections and the addition of single citations.

[6] Open Science Framework (OSF) repositories are free, open-source project folders for researchers to share data and replication materials. The repository connected to this PhD project (project ID: 3sr6p) can be accessed via the following URL: https://bit.ly/OSF-Repository-Plenter-PhD

Table 1-2: Overview of PhD papers and their status

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3
Title	Advantages and pitfalls of machine translation for party research: The translation of party manifestos of European parties using *DeepL*	The gig economy in party manifestos: Analysing the salience of a new issue across Europe	How parties talk about the gig economy: Exploring the rhetoric across 23 European countries between 2018–2022
Research questions	(How) Can we use machine-translated party manifestos for political-science research?	How salient is the gig economy in European party competition and what factors influence whether parties address the issue in their election manifestos?	How do parties discuss the gig economy in their manifestos? To which other policy domains do parties attach the issue?
Scope	Proof-of-concept study	Quantitative study	Mixed-methods study
Status of publication	Published in *Frontiers in Political Science*	Revise & Resubmit at *European Political Science Review*	Under review at *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*
Journal and paper metrics	Impact factor: 1.9 Number of citations: 7 Views: 5,000	Impact factor: 2.5	Impact factor: 1.6
Data and coverage	28 manifestos from Polish, Estonian, German and Italian parties	GIGPOL-Europe dataset	GIGPOL-Europe dataset
Method of data analysis	(1) Back translation of machine-translated manifestos; (2) Wordfish estimation of positions of original and translated manifestos	(1) Dictionary analysis; (2) Multilevel Poisson regression (negative binomial models)	(1) Sentiment analysis; (2) Manual content analysis

1.5.1 Paper 1: Advantages and Pitfalls of Machine Translation for Party Research: The Translation of Party Manifestos of European Parties Using DeepL[7]

As a proof-of-concept study, the first paper contributes to the methodological discussion within comparative party research. In this paper, I discuss the advantages and shortcomings of using machine-translated election manifestos for the estimation of party positions. Additionally, I present the technical procedure to implement machine translation (MT) into the research process, and evaluate the translation quality of four language combinations using the commercial translator *DeepL*.

The starting point for this consideration is the observation that the (text) analysis of election manifestos in large, cross-national studies is made particularly difficult by the multitude of different languages one is confronted with. This assertion is particularly relevant for qualitative content analysis studies that employ manual coding. In the field of quantitative text analysis, however, a number of approaches have become established in recent years that are applicable to at least some languages in multilingual settings (Licht, 2023). And despite the existence of research projects such as the Manifesto Project (see Footnote 3) or the Comparative Agendas Project[8], which gather documents and information to estimate party and policy positions from election manifestos, among other sources, these projects are necessarily limited in scope, continuity and timeliness. Consequently, translations are often used in political-science research, but so far without systematic evaluation.

Due to technical advances in recent years, MT has become increasingly popular as an alternative to resource-intensive human translation. While the advantages of using MT are obvious, a number of questions arise, particularly for scientific use. For one, it is questionable to what extent MT—compared to human translation—is able to recognise linguistic subtleties such as sarcasm or irony. For another, particularly for long-term time series comparisons, it is relevant to consider how MT tools handle language change or the new connotations of certain terms. In summary: How good and reliable is the translation quality, especially for political texts?

To answer this question, I not only present the technical implementation and integration of MT in large-scale research project, but I also evaluate the translation quality of four language combinations as examples. For this, I employ both back or re-translation and Wordfish analyses for the Estonian, German, Italian and Polish manifestos that were previously translated into English using *DeepL*. As a first step, I take the seven 2021 manifestos of German parties and re-translate

[7] Paper metrics: 7 citations; 5,000 views; 1,900 downloads
[8] For further information on the Comparative Agendas Project see its website: https://www.comparativeagendas.net/

the English versions back into German, and compare the back translations with the originals. I randomly selected 80 sentences from each election manifesto and manually coded them in terms of verbatim, synonymous, or obviously incorrect back translation. To further verify that the content remains identical, I performed a simple dictionary analysis. In the second step, I supplement this with a comparison of Wordfish analyses of the translated and original manifestos. Wordfish is an unsupervised scaling method to position texts onto a one-dimensional scale—e.g., the left–right scale—that is available for several languages (Slapin and Proksch, 2008). I argue that by comparing the positioning of the original (i.e., German, Estonian, Italian, or Polish) to the one of the English translations, one can assess the quality of the translation.

The findings of both the back translation and the Wordfish analysis show that, overall, *DeepL* seems to produce reliable, high-quality translations. This is apparent both in the small number of translation mistakes—an average of 3.4 mistakes per 80 sentences—and a share of more than 90% of the sentences being re-translated either verbatim or synonymously. Additionally, the dictionary analysis exhibited no major or systematic biases, as the distribution of the different concepts is similar in the original and in the re-translated manifestos. The results of the comparison of the Wordfish positionings further underscore these findings. For all four language combinations, the placements for the original and respective translated manifestos are closely aligned (see Paper 1, Figure 2-2). Furthermore, there is no systematic left–right bias in terms of language combinations and party ideology. Even though the positions for all languages and parties deviate slightly to the left or right, this is evenly and randomly distributed and therefore does not seem to depend on the original language or on the ideological positioning of the individual parties.

In summary, Paper 1 concludes that machine-translated political texts generally can be empirically analysed, e.g., to estimate party positions or to map the rhetoric of political actors. As pointed out, this is especially valuable for cross-national qualitative interpretations of texts. Thus, I contribute to the methodological advancement of party research by providing both a step-by-step guide on how to handle data processing and MT in large-scale research projects, and on how to evaluate the translation quality of automatically translated political texts.

1.5.2 Paper 2: The Gig Economy in Party Manifestos: Analysing the Salience of a New Issue Across Europe

As previously stated, to date there has been no research within party politics that addresses the role and salience of the gig economy in election manifestos. Paper 2 addresses this research gap

by exploring the salience and why parties are developing policy positions on the gig economy, given its novelty on the one hand and its social relevance on the other.

The paper starts off by defining the gig economy as a multifaceted phenomenon that is characterised by a high degree of flexibility, which affects contract length, working hours, wages, and even the job's location. Therefore, the gig economy is often described as a new form of precarious employment with significant protection gaps, for instance, in cases of illness or old age. These experiences of precarity have a significant impact on the sense of community or class identity among gig workers, which in turn has severe implications for their political representation by parties and unions (Azzollini and Macmillan, 2023; Però and Downey, 2022).

Based on this link between precarity and political representation, I argue that the emergence of the gig economy can be understood as an extreme form or an extension of the distinction between well-protected labour-market insiders and vulnerable outsiders. In line with the labour-market dualisation literature (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Rueda, 2005; Schwander and Häusermann, 2013), I posit that such an expansion of outsider groups has significant and well-researched consequences for political parties. For social democratic and left-wing parties in particular, this creates a potential conflict, as they traditionally represent both the interests of insiders and the concerns of outsiders (Schwander, 2019). For gig workers, this implies a potential representation gap, as they are harder to address due to their weaker group and class identification, and therefore parties might consequently decide to neglect the issue.

Further, I argue that the gig economy, as a new issue and an emerging business model, is relevant for party competition. From the literature on issue competition, we know that the decision to address a new (economic) issue in an election manifesto is influenced by several factors (Green-Pedersen, 2007). First, I expect that a country's economic conditions and labour-market characteristics will influence whether parties discuss the gig economy. It can be assumed that higher unemployment will have a positive influence on this probability, as parties will want to signal that they have recognised the problem and can offer solutions. Second, I assume that higher underemployment, i.e., the under-utilisation of the labour force, increases the likelihood of parties addressing the gig economy. Third, I expect that the corporatist structure of the labour market, primarily through strong institutionalised interest representation by trade unions, also positively influences whether parties address the gig economy.

Turning to the party-level factors, and in line with issue-ownership arguments, I assume both left-wing and liberal parties to be more likely to address the gig economy. Both of these party families can make the gig economy one of their central issues and, thus, signal competence to

their core electorate. Lastly, I expect new or young parties to take up the issue more frequently as they can operate more freely in the arena of issue competition, and electorally, they have more to gain than to lose.

The empirical analysis is carried out in two steps. First, the salience of the gig economy is determined using a manually validated, automated dictionary analysis. To this end, I draw on the novel GIGPOL-Europe dataset (for a detailed description see Section 1.4.2). In a second step, this dataset is used to estimate multilevel models to examine the party- and country-level factors that influence the number of mentions of the gig economy.

The results show that the gig economy is addressed in 60 of the 188 manifestos—a coverage of 31.9%. Overall, the issue was not discussed by any party in only five countries, while in the other 18 countries at least one party includes the gig economy in its manifesto. The descriptive salience estimation also points to the importance of national contexts because the keyword usage showed country- or language-specific patterns and, albeit to varying degrees, the entire party-ideological spectrum is represented among the parties that address the gig economy. This finding is also corroborated by the results of the multilevel analysis, as both the ICC and the Conditional R^2 of the models suggest that a significant proportion of the variance is explained at the country level. Looking at the individual predictors, it is primarily party ideology, the prevalence of underemployment, and the long-term trend in GDP that explain the number of mentions of the gig economy in parties' manifestos. While left-wing party ideology increases this number, both economic indicators negatively affect the number of mentions—a finding that contradicts the theoretical expectations.

Overall, Paper 2 establishes that both party- and country-level factors are important when explaining why parties address new economic issues, such as the gig economy, thus underlining the importance of a holistic perspective on party competition.

1.5.3 Paper 3: How Parties Talk About the Gig Economy: Exploring the Rhetoric Across 23 European Countries Between 2018–2022

While Paper 1 serves as a proof-of-concept study, and Paper 2 discusses the salience of the gig economy in election manifestos, Paper 3 examines how parties address the issue. Thus, in addition to the *who* and *why*, this paper provides an answer to the *how* of the overarching research question by analysing both the sentiment and content of the manifestos.

The starting observation is the fact that political parties—even from the same party family or ideological background—have widely diverging outlooks on the gig economy. These range from

extremely positive, i.e., the gig economy as an entrepreneurial opportunity for sustainable consumption, to overly negative, portraying the gig economy as a threat to traditional labour markets, workers' rights, and the welfare state. This observation is consistent with the findings of initial empirical analyses of media and political discourse on the gig economy. Marenco and Seidl (2021) and Pangrazio et al. (2023) have already shown in their studies of European and Australian newspaper reporting respectively that the argumentation patterns reflect the multifaceted nature of the gig economy, but that national differences can also be identified. Applied to party-political discourse, this raises the questions: (1) What arguments do parties use when they talk about the gig economy? and (2) What influences their choice?

Theoretically, this paper draws on the salience and issue-ownership theories as well as on organisational sociological approaches, especially party-organisation arguments. Previous research on emerging issues within party competition, such as EU integration, climate change and protection, or migration, has shown that party ideology is an important mechanism (de Vries and Edwards, 2009; Pollex and Berker, 2022; van Heerden et al., 2014). Accordingly, parties expand their positions by stressing those aspects of a new issue that align with their core ideology and competencies. In this vein, right-wing and liberal parties focus on aspects related to free markets, competition, and security, while left-wing parties emphasise the welfare state, equality, and social justice. A second influencing factor is the parties' organisational capacity, especially financial and organisational resources, as well as their size and governmental status. Following previous studies, it is thus expected that larger and mainstream parties favour the status quo, while smaller or niche parties rely on more extreme positions (Abou-Chadi and Orlowski, 2016).

I expand this argumentation by adding the literature on multidimensionality within party competition that stipulates that parties compete on several dimensions and have to align their stances to one convincing position (most notably Rovny and Edwards, 2012). I argue that because of its multifaceted nature, the gig economy is a prime example for showing how parties can tie new issues to at least two dimensions: On the one hand, parties compete on the traditional (economic) left–right axis. Thus, I expect liberal and right-wing parties to focus more on the entrepreneurial opportunities of the gig economy and left-wing parties to emphasise its threat to the traditional labour market, the welfare state, or to workers' rights. On the other hand, the gig economy also intersects with a sociocultural dimension, especially focusing on labour migration and its impact on the climate. I expect this to be a cross-pressuring environment for left-wing parties as they have to signal that they take care of the precarious gig workers and take an economically left position, while also appealing to their urban, progressive, high-skilled voter base that uses gig economy services and wants to retain these convenient services.

The empirical analysis follows a two-step strategy and, again, uses the GIGPOL-Europe dataset comprising 188 election manifestos from 23 European countries published for elections between 2018 and 2022. In the first step, I analyse the sentiment parties employ when talking about the gig economy. To this end, I manually code all sentences devoted to the gig economy as either positive, neutral, or negative. In the second step, using a theory-driven coding scheme, I explore the content of these statements with manual coding and the thematic linkages. The coding scheme consists of 11 codes assigned to three major categories: the gig economy as an opportunity, the gig economy as a threat, and party-political responses to the gig economy.

The findings of this explorative analysis indicate that left-wing parties are much more likely to address the issue and are significantly more negative about both the system- and personal-level consequences of the gig economy. Interestingly, positive framings of the gig economy are largely absent and if parties use them, they are almost always countered with negative interpretations in the same sentence or paragraph. Additionally, parties rarely treat the gig economy as a standalone topic, but rather they integrate it into the debate about the labour market and the welfare state. Thus, I conclude that parties make great use of issue-linking strategies to align the gig economy with their overall policy positions and ideological core values.

In conclusion, Paper 3 explores the framing and linking strategies that parties use when talking about the gig economy. It thereby contributes to our understanding of strategic party behaviour regarding new and multidimensional issues.

Having summarised the three individual papers and their main findings in this chapter, the subsequent Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present the respective papers in their published or submitted form. Finally, in the concluding Chapter 5, the results are discussed against the backdrop of the overarching research question, the contributions and limitations of this dissertation are explored, and a concluding outlook is provided on further research questions and the implications of the findings.

2 Advantages and Pitfalls of Machine Translation for Party Research: The Translation of Party Manifestos of European Parties Using DeepL[9]

Abstract

Parties are the central actors in representative democracies as they perform important democratic functions. Thus, the identification of party positions is a crucial concern. Party researchers mainly rely on party manifestos to estimate policy positions. However, the analysis of manifestos is accompanied by challenges—one of the biggest being cross-national comparisons because of different institutional settings and languages. This article discusses machine translation (MT) as a new option for party research, and reports on the author's experiences with the translation of more than 200 party manifestos using the commercial artificial intelligence (AI) translation tool *DeepL*. To make this approach widely applicable, the (technical) procedure, including its problems and workarounds for large-scale projects, is presented as a step-by-step guide using R. Additionally, drawing on the most recent German, Estonian, Italian and Polish parliamentary election manifestos this article evaluates the quality of the *DeepL* translations by applying both back translation and Wordfish analyses. The main findings indicate that *DeepL* offers high-quality translations as more than 90% of the checked sentences are reproduced word-for-word or at least synonymously and with stable positioning on the left–right scale of both original and English translation. The results have greater implications for political science research as they speak to the reliability of machine translation for political texts.

[9] The typeset and published version can be found in the Appendix.

2.1 Introduction

Parties are the central actors in representative democracies and electoral competition as they perform important democratic functions such as aggregating and articulating citizens' interests. To understand electoral processes or estimate party responsiveness, the identification of party positions is a crucial concern in electoral and party research—in fact, it has become a subdiscipline in its own right (Laver, 2001). There is a wide range of methodological approaches and types of data to determine party positions: They can be estimated with the help of expert or mass surveys, legislative voting behavior, media analyses, or based on texts (for a detailed discussion, see Mair, 2001). Within the text-based methods, a further distinction can be made between quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. In addition, text analyses can draw on various types of text data, e.g., parliamentary or candidate speeches (Atzpodien, 2020; Lauderdale and Herzog, 2016) as well as policy papers or coalition agreements (Benoit et al., 2005; Gross and Krauss, 2021). More frequently, however, election or party manifestos[10] are relied upon to estimate parties' policy positions (Bräuninger et al., 2020; Slapin and Proksch, 2008; Volkens et al., 2013).

Election manifestos are so well suited for an analysis of party positions as they are a fairly reliable and readily available data source. However, their analysis is also accompanied by challenges—one of the biggest being cross-national comparison because of the multitude of languages (Lucas et al., 2015: 255). Especially if the manifestos will be coded manually, either native-language coders/analysts have to be hired or the texts have to be translated[11]. When it comes to translation, there are two options: Professional translators or machine translation (MT). The latter method and its pros and cons will be examined in this article to identify opportunities and obstacles for the estimation of party and policy positions based on automatically translated manifestos. The article primarily concerns the MT tool *DeepL* and based on manifestos in four European languages it evaluates its translation quality using back translation and Wordfish analyses. The main results of this evaluation seem to confirm the company's promise of excellent quality: First, the back translation shows that more than 90% of the checked sentences are reproduced word-for-word or at least synonymously. Second, the Wordfish analysis shows that the

[10] In this article, the expressions "election manifesto", "election program" and "party manifesto" are used interchangeably and synonymously. Existing differences between these terms (see Klingemann et al. (1994, Chapter 2) for a discussion) are not relevant for this paper.

[11] If the data is to be processed quantitatively using machine learning and the results do not need to be validated or coded manually, recent developments in computational linguistics show that multilingual classifiers e.g., using multilingual sentence embeddings provide valid results (see e.g., Licht (2023)). Accordingly, no translation is necessary for these types of applications.

positioning of the automatic translation on the left–right scale is very close to that of the original text indicating that the translation did not change the tone, content, and political implications.

The remaining article is structured as follows: First, I discuss current developments and state-of-the-art MT methods to outline their benefits and shortcomings compared to human translation. Afterwards, I exemplify this by presenting a step-by-step guide to implementing MT with the commercial artificial intelligence (AI) tool *DeepL*[12] for large-scale projects. The added value of this section is that an evaluation of the translations is carried out to assess their quality as an attempt to open the black box of the AI machine translation algorithm. The subsequent conclusion summarizes the results and evaluates them against the backdrop of existing limitations.

2.2 Machine Translation: State-of-the-Art Methods in Comparison to Human Translation

In translation studies, machine translation is defined as "the automatic conversion of text from one natural language to another" and it is the "process in which the interlingual conversion of text is carried out by a machine, even if the proper functioning of that machine relies on human labor before, during or after run time" (Kenny, 2019a: 305–306). Even though machine translation has been used for several decades, the technical developments of the past years have led to a great surge of innovation, for example, the development of end-to-end neural machine translation (NMT), which has become the state-of-the-art method (Tan et al., 2020: 5). Neural machine translation is what is meant when we generally talk about translation with the help of AI or deep learning. It is neither the aim nor within the scope of this article to trace the development stages and technical aspects of MT[13], but rather to discuss its advantages for political science and especially party research. Nevertheless, it is worth briefly outlining its simplified functionality: Essentially, NMT works in the interaction of source to target language, in that the neural network predicts the translation word by word using word embeddings, i.e., the spatial representation of words that exhibit the semantic relationships among them. With increasing amounts of training data, the network "learns" and, thus, improves the quality of the translations. However, for commercial MT algorithms it is difficult to assess robustness and interpretability because these models are essentially black boxes as we know neither their training data nor coding. From Tan et al. (2020: 16), it can be concluded that "noisy inputs", i.e., erroneous spelling or incorrect usage of words, are a particular problem to the translation's robustness.

[12] *DeepL* is available at www.deepl.com; corporate headquarters of DeepL SE are in Cologne, Germany.
[13] See Kenny (2019b)for a detailed discussion of the historical developments of machine translation and/or Tan et al. (2020) for a review of NMT developments, methods, and tools.

Yet, it can be assumed that manifestos and other official documents published by political parties are likely to be almost free of errors, as they are usually well-curated and edited. This is one reason why, for translated text data, manifestos are superior to e.g., parliamentary speeches.

Machine translation has some decisive advantages and disadvantages compared to 'traditional' translation by humans. First, one of the most severe disadvantages is undoubtedly the fact that AI has no feeling for language and does not register sensitive language usage—especially if context is lacking. Examples of this are irony and sarcasm as well as idioms or (political) expressions established at a certain point in time, such as the NATO's 2% defense investment guideline, which in German is commonly referred to as the 'Zwei-Prozent-Ziel' (literal translation: 'two-percent-target'). As it is currently discussed, the term is well known among policy-makers, the media, and the informed public, but 20 years from now that might not be the case—making the term meaningless. Related to this point is a second drawback of MT, namely its handling of language change or evolution. That languages change over time is a normal and inherently unproblematic process. For MT, however, semantic change in particular can be a difficulty because the usage and connotation of certain terms changes. In English, for example, the use of the word 'gay' has changed at least three times (Lalor and Rendle-Short, 2007: 148; Shi and Lei, 2020: 35). Accordingly, the expression was first used with a positive connotation as a synonym for 'jolly' or 'happy', this changed to the neutral meaning 'homosexual', and more recently to a negatively connoted expression for 'boring' or 'lame'. A similar development can be observed with regard to the 'N-word' and the linguistic representation of Black people in general (Washington, 2023). Even though MT's handling of such cases has not yet been systematically evaluated in the literature, it can be assumed that incorrect or offending translations may occur—especially if the corpus spans several decades, i.e., potentially across semantic changes. As human translation still marks the gold standard, it can be expected that professionally trained translators better capture such language use because of their context knowledge. Bizzoni and Lapshinova-Koltunski (2021), however, find that translations from different translators are stylistically quite heterogeneous. This implies that the translation quality is highly dependent on the individual and their language and content knowledge. However, further research that investigates the comparability of different human translators is needed. Alternatively, computational linguistics research discusses the possibility of combining MT with human translation in order to use "the best of both worlds" (Li et al., 2023: 9511; Peña Aguilar, 2023). In this approach, human translations are fed into the training dataset of the MT algorithm to improve its quality. Accordingly, this approach requires access to the MT algorithm, which—at least for commercial software—is usually not available. Lastly, there may also be quite mundane obstacles when using

machine translation, e.g., the preferred MT does not offer all languages or is not available in a country. The opacity of AI tools described above also prevents outsiders from assessing how well which tool has been trained with which inputs and, above all, languages and language combinations. Since, however, these obstacles cannot be eliminated by the researcher(s), they must at least be considered as a limitation in a critical reflection.

On the other hand, one extremely significant advantage of MT compared to human translation is its resource efficiency. This is to be understood in two respects: For one, machine translation requires significantly less time, and for another, financial resources. This fact makes MT particularly interesting for research projects that have to get by without generous funding and/or a large team and must be completed within a foreseeable schedule. Another advantage of machine translation lies in the deep-learning approach of neural translation tools as with every translation, i.e., data input, they are continuously learning and improving. Consequently, MT algorithms draw on a constantly growing body of knowledge, whereas typically only one translator is hired per document, meaning that translation quality depends on that person.

In summary, when deciding between machine and human translation, the potentially poorer or more error-prone translation quality must be weighed against the significant time and money savings of real-time translation. For large corpora, human translation is just not feasible because of the sheer amount of text. In addition, the type of text to be translated and the time frame in which it was created are also decisive. For example, irony and sarcasm, which can be hard to grasp for a MT algorithm, play a much greater role in political speeches than in press releases and party manifestos. If the time period in which the texts were created spans several decades, it should also be reflected to what extent language change could influence the results. Moreover, Reber (2019: 118) points out that the "choice of method", i.e., full-text translation vs. translation of individual words/expressions, must be considered because MT algorithms rely on the context in which a word is used. He concludes that the translation of entire documents is more accurate and should, thus, be the first choice. Accordingly, a blanket recommendation for one or the other does not make sense; however, especially given further development, training, and evaluation of MT, it is expected that this method will become more and more established in (political science) research.

2.3 Machine Translation with *DeepL*

Unsurprisingly, machine translation has already been applied in political and communication science research and has also been evaluated (i.a. de Vries et al., 2018; Düpont and Rachuj, 2022;

Lucas et al., 2015). Furthermore, Lucas et al. (2018) provided the R package *translate*R, which enables translation with API integration. All of these applications have used Google Translate for the translation[14]. This article, in contrast, hereafter presents the application of the commercial AI *DeepL* and discusses the advantages of this MT tool. For this purpose, I will report on my experiences with translating current European manifestos. In addition to manifestos, there are many other possible applications of MT in party research, such as party statutes, social media posts, or speeches. However, the above-mentioned considerations and potential shortcomings must be assessed for different types of textual data. Before presenting the procedure, first, some brief explanations about *DeepL*.

DeepL is a translation AI by the same-named German company, which has been available since 2017 for an initial seven (exclusively European) languages. At the time of writing (July 2023), *DeepL* offers translations for 31 languages, which, according to the company's statements, significantly exceed the quality of other machine translations. This quality is said to have been evaluated both by "scientific tests" and "external professional translators" (DeepL: n.d.). However, these claims are difficult to verify because the sources of the tests and evaluations are neither published, provided, nor cited on the company's homepage. Yet, several technology magazines and media outlets generally confirm these statements (i.a. Coldewey and Lardinois, 2017; Wyndham, 2021). Additionally, first academic assessments seem to confirm the good translation quality. Hidalgo-Ternero (2020: 170) compares Google Translate and *DeepL* translations of Spanish idioms and concludes: "[O]verall, DeepL slightly outperforms Google Translate […][as] the global results exhibit an accuracy rate of 70% […] for Google Translate and 78% […] for DeepL". Also focusing on the Spanish-English language combination, Peña Aguilar (2023) finds that *DeepL* outperforms both Bing and Google Translate. Lastly, in his comparison of Google Translate and *DeepL*, Reber (2019: 117) concludes that both tools perform equally well for full-text translation. For my research, I chose *DeepL* partly because of this said translation quality. More importantly however, it was decisive that *DeepL*—in contrast e.g., to Google Translate or Amazon Translate—can process plain text files (txt format), which are the standard file format especially in scientific quantitative text analysis.

DeepL offers multiple usage options tailored to different needs. For one, there are both free and paid subscriptions; for another, *DeepL* features simple text translation in the web or app translator, translation of entire files and API integration. The *DeepL* API can also be integrated into R using the *deeplr*-package (Zumbach and Bauer, 2021), which is a good alternative to text or

[14] With *translate*R you can choose between the Google Translate API and the Microsoft Translator API.

file translation, in particular when the text to be translated is not exceedingly long. Up to 500,000 characters per month (approx. 280 standard pages) can be translated free of charge; in addition to a monthly fee, API Pro is billed according to actual consumption. So before deciding for or against API translation, it should be calculated how many characters the text to be translated comprises. In the following, I will concentrate exclusively on file translation which is offered for five file formats (docx, htm, html, pdf, pptx, txt), but as this guideline aims to make the translated manifestos accessible for (automated) text analysis, which requires machine-readable data, only text files (txt) are considered here. The code provided in the supplementary material, however, also includes API translation (see Reber (2019) for an exemplary application of the *DeepL* API).

Summarizing, again no general and universally valid recommendation can be made with regard to the selection of the MT tool. Rather, the decisive factors are the volume of the text data to be translated, the file format in which it is available, and the analyses that are to be performed following translation. For the aforementioned reasons, however, this article focuses only on *DeepL*.

2.3.1 Step-by-step Implementation with R

Turning to the data preparation for translation: After collecting all manifestos (or other documents) to be translated, in a second step, the files have to be converted to txt. One of the biggest challenges of file conversion, however, is that manifestos—more than party statutes or speech manuscripts—often exhibit an elaborate layout or include figures, pictures, quotes, and tables. Text recognition and extraction are particularly challenging when the text is set in columns. When converting such a file from pdf to txt, a lot of text can get lost or mixed up as it is read in lines and not columns. It would therefore be highly desirable if parties made all of their communication available as plain text documents and if database projects such as the Manifesto Project or OPTED[15] were further strengthened and funded. The current version of the Manifesto Corpus (Lehmann et al., 2023), available through the R package *manifestoR* (Lewandowski et al., 2020), already contains more than 3,000 machine-readable manifestos, so no separate file conversion is necessary for these. For file conversion of the additional election programs, I used the *tabulizer*-package (Leeper, 2018: n.d.) because it is capable to recognize text set in columns (see RScript in the supplementary material for instructions and code).

[15] For more information on the Manifesto Project see: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/ and for OPTED see: https://opted.eu.

As a third step, all converted files should be checked to see whether the text recognition has worked without errors or whether corrections need to be made. It appears that non-embedded fonts and special characters (i.e., not UTF-8 encoded) are problematic because the AI may not identify them as text (see Lucas et al. (2015: 256–257) for a detailed discussion). Depending on the amount of unrecognized text, manual post-processing of the files is possible but time-consuming. For the translation, the converted files must now be exported from R as txt files. The file translation function of *DeepL* can process several files simultaneously in both the browser and the app so the actual translation happens in real time. After translation, it is advisable to again check whether the entire file/text has been correctly recognized and translated. Figure 2-1 below briefly illustrates the workflow step by step.

Figure 2-1: Schematic step-by-step workflow of the translation of text documents with *DeepL*



Summarizing, it can be said that MT in general and *DeepL* in particular offer great benefits for party research, since the fast and cheap machine translation of e.g., manifestos makes it easy to analyze the entire text and its message. This enables statements about policy positions and issues that are not included in the Manifesto Project codebook or about the sentiments, i.e., framing, parties use. The biggest technical challenges in dealing with AI are certainly file format as well as the preparation and post-processing of the documents. Overall, the advantages outweigh the shortcomings and considering the self-learning infrastructure, it can be assumed that machine translation algorithms will further improve in the future.

2.3.2 Evaluation of DeepL Translation Quality

One of the biggest issues in translation studies is the assessment and evaluation of translation quality. Since the entire value of a translation hinges upon its quality, it is important to develop certain measurements and discuss their respective strengths and weaknesses. It should however be noted that the "concept of quality varies greatly, within and outside translation studies" (Colina, 2008: 98), which is why it is essential to define the aim of the evaluation beforehand. In the context of political science research, it is crucial to determine to what extent the original

and the translation correspond in terms of content. Word usage and tonality are central, especially when texts are used to determine party positions or framing. It can be argued that most political communication is drafted and tailored to the author's agenda irrespective of whether a party or a single candidate communicates. Thus, it is essential that the translation quality, i.e., the degree to which original and translation correspond, is extremely high. For this reason, in the following, I evaluate the quality of *DeepL* translations with two purely descriptive assessment approaches, namely back translation and Wordfish analyses. To this end, I draw on a subset of the Manifesto Corpus that comprises the most recent manifestos of parties from Germany, Estonia, Italy, and Poland. These four cases were selected for two reasons: First, the languages mainly spoken in these countries belong to different branches of the Indo-European or Uralic language family. While German as a Germanic language, Italian as a Romance language and Polish as a Slavic language are branches of the Indo-European language family, Estonian as a Finnic language belongs to the Uralic language family. Second, the four languages differ extremely in terms of their prevalence as measured by the number of native speakers. According to the Ethnologue, German is spoken as a native language by about 75 million people, Italian by 65 million, Polish by 40 million and Estonian by 1.2 million (Eberhard et al., 2023). Thus, the evaluation of the translation quality does not only look at one language family or branch, but takes several combinations into account. Additionally, it concerns both very common (i.e., German – English, Italian – English) and rarer (i.e., Polish – English, Estonian – English) language combinations. It seems plausible to assume that the language prevalence is correlated to the number of data inputs, i.e., the training, of these language combinations (de Vries et al., 2018: 419). However, since the algorithm is unknown to outsiders, this is purely speculative for *DeepL*.

The first evaluation uses back translation, also called re-translation, and only draws on the seven German manifestos. As the name indicates, back translation takes translated texts and translates them back to their source language to compare them with the original. Behr (2017) discusses the pros and cons of this method and concludes that back translation is very straightforward and, especially with machine translation, fast. However, the method lacks a clear conception of what is considered a mistake or 'poor quality'. In her empirical analysis, Behr (2017: 581–582) finds that back translation "can successfully identify errors […]; however, most of these issues were identified by actual translation assessment as well". She, therefore, concludes that this method should always be accompanied by other assessment approaches. Despite its shortcomings, back translation is still one of the most widely used methods for evaluating translation quality. For this reason, it is applied in this article as a first step.

To estimate the quality of the *DeepL* translations, I draw on the seven manifestos by German parties and re-translate them from English to German—again using *DeepL*. For each of these manifestos, 80 sentences of the back translation are manually coded and compared to the original. The manual coding classifies each sentence as either verbatim back translation or synonymous back translation; in addition, obvious errors are also marked.

Table 2-1: Results of the back translation of German manifestos

Party	No. of Errors	Verbatim sentences (in %)
AfD	4	17.50
CDU/CSU	3	25.00
FDP	2	26.25
SPD	4	20.00
Greens	3	20.00
SSW	3	18.75
The Left	5	22.50
Ø	**3.4**	**21.43**

Looking at Table 2-1, the most central result shows that on average roughly 21% of the sentences were re-translated in verbatim form. Additionally, it seems as if the back translation produces reliable results with an average of only 3.4 mistakes per document. The translations were coded as faulty when there was an evident change in meaning or when a technical error, e.g., double translation of a word/phrase, occurred. Most of the sentences, however, have been re-translated as a paraphrase of the original which reflects the content synonymously. Remarkably, both the number of errors and the share of verbatim sentences vary quite significantly between the seven manifestos. One reason for this might be that the parties use sentences of different lengths and, thus, complexity. The probability of re-translating short sentences verbatim is higher than for long sentences. Nevertheless, it can be stated that based on this exemplary check of the manifestos of German parties, the *DeepL* translations can be assessed as being of high quality. On average, more than 90% of the sentences were re-translated either word-for-word or synonymously, indicating a good quality of the initial German-to-English-translation.

In order to check whether the back-translation changes the text content, a dictionary analysis was also performed. For this purpose, the seven German manifestos were compared both in the original and the back-translated version by searching the texts for four concepts: economy, state, environment and social affairs. The results are presented in Table 2-2. Overall, the results confirm the good translation quality, as the number of hits in the original and the back translation are very similar. The largest deviations are found within the concept of social issues in the manifestos of the Greens (+9 hits) and the Left (+19 hits). In six cases, however, exactly the same number of hits was found in both documents. Therefore, the results of this small dictionary analysis can be interpreted as indicating that manifestos translated with the help of *DeepL* are suitable for empirical text analyses because they do not substantially change the text content.

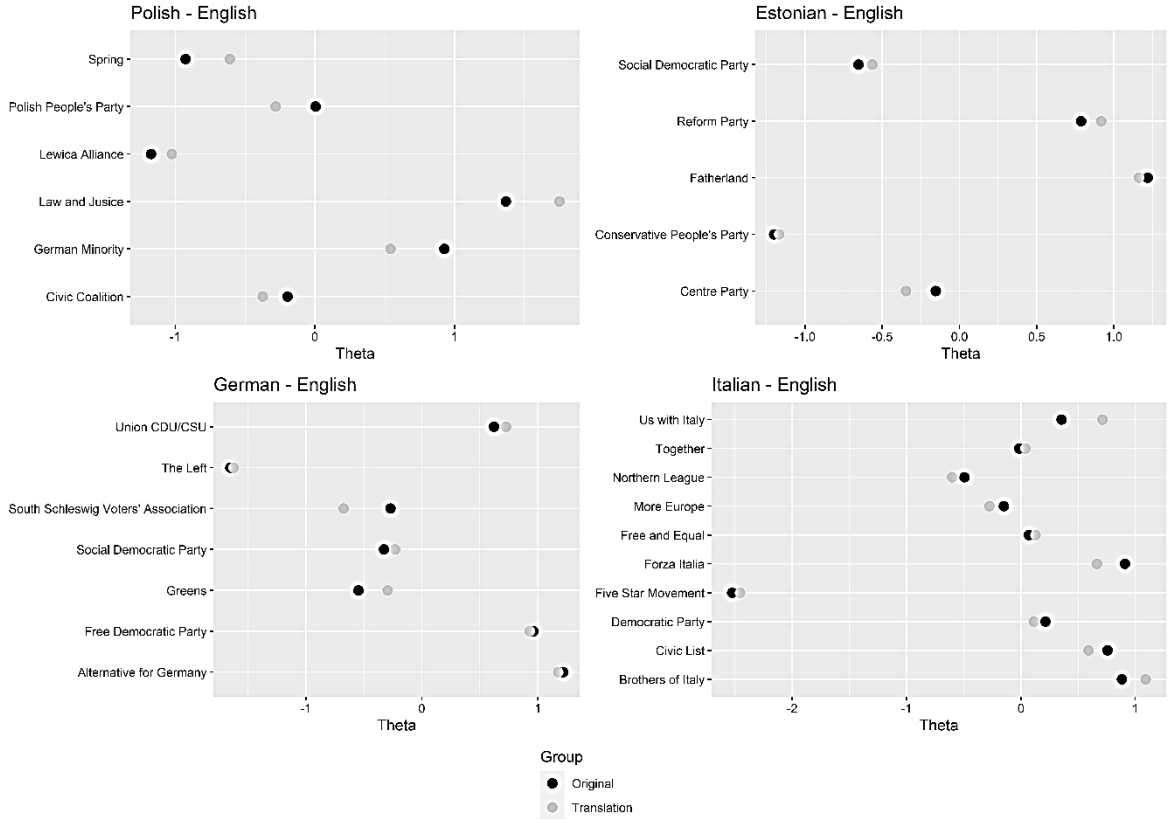
Table 2-2: Comparison of dictionary analysis of original and re-translated German manifestos

Party	Economy		State		Environment		Social affairs	
	Original	Back translation	Original	Back translation	Original	Back translation	Original	Back translation
AfD	17	20	24	27	8	6	33	30
CDU/CSU	46	43	54	54	8	9	42	47
FDP	25	27	37	37	6	6	21	20
SPD	16	18	10	10	10	9	47	48
Greens	42	42	45	49	28	33	78	87
SSW	12	10	9	9	9	8	26	25
The Left	51	57	21	20	25	28	206	225

In contrast to the back-translation approach, the second assessment method looks at the manifestos as a whole. To accompany the back translations, a Wordfish estimation was conducted. Wordfish is an unsupervised scaling technique developed by Slapin and Proksch (2008) that positions texts onto a one-dimensional scale, e.g., the left–right scale. The model does not require reference texts or other previous information but instead uses word frequencies, thus the parties' relative word usage, to place texts along this dimension and it assumes a Poisson distribution. To my knowledge, Wordfish has not yet been applied as a translation assessment method—probably because it was not designed for this purpose. However, I argue that it can

be useful for political texts in particular because all (party-)political communication is carefully drafted to convey only the intended message. Thus, I argue that the translation quality can be determined based on the correspondence or distance between the positions of the original and the translation. To assess the quality of the translation, I estimate and compare the relative positions of original (German/Estonian/Italian/Polish) and the translated manifestos (English). Figure 2-2 shows the results of the Wordfish placement of all manifestos.

Figure 2-2: Wordfish positioning of original and translated manifestos



Note: The figure is easier to read in the PDF version and in the published version of the paper, which is included in the Appendix.

At first glance, it is already apparent that the positioning of the originals and their translations vary in proximity depending on the language combination. While the combinations with Estonian, German and Italian largely produce highly congruent positionings, the Polish-English combination in particular seems to perform more poorly. Thus, the proximity of positions does not seem to depend on language family or language prevalence, i.e., number of native speakers. Overall, the result for all four combinations can be considered (very) satisfactory. The second important result of the review is that positional deviations can be observed for all languages and party families, both to the left and to the right. In each tested combination, about 50% of the

translations deviate slightly to the left and 50% deviate slightly to the right—regardless of whether the party itself is left or right. This indicates that there is no systematic left or right bias in the translations and/or language combinations.

One explanation for the deviations could be the significantly varying number of so-called document features in the respective languages. Due to linguistic differences between German, Polish, Estonian and Italian on the one hand and English on the other, this number is extremely reduced between original and translation. Consequently, the Wordfish algorithm has fewer word frequencies to rely on, implying that every feature becomes more influential. Overall, the Wordfish analysis confirms the results of the back-translation approach. As the placement of the original and translated manifesto is very similar, it can be concluded that the *DeepL* translation did not change the content of the manifestos and their political implications. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned at this point that neither back translation nor Wordfish allow a statement about the correspondence of the framing or the mood in the original and the translation.

The extent to which the results discussed here are transferable to other types of text depends on several factors and cannot be universally answered. On the one hand, the characteristics of the (political) text type play a role. In contrast to speeches, manifestos are considered "sober" (Hawkins and Castanho Silva, 2018: 31), since they address a different audience and must represent the interests of the entire party. It is therefore plausible to assume that this characteristic, reflected e.g., in the use of irony in the text, influences translation quality. On the other hand, the length of the texts and within them the length and linguistic complexity of the sentences and words are also decisive. These factors typically vary between types of political texts (Tolochko and Boomgaarden, 2019). For example, due to the character limitations alone, tweets are significantly less complex and exhibit different language usage than formal party communications—a fact that can also affect translation quality. Thus, all of these features and distinctions must be considered when transferring machine translation to other textual data.

2.4 Conclusion

The overall aim of this article was to discuss the benefits and pitfalls of machine translation, particularly using *DeepL*, for political science and party research. I present the process of automatically translating a large set of party manifestos with its difficulties and workarounds using R and *DeepL*. For large-scale cross-national studies, multilingual text data are a challenge that can be met using MT. The step-by-step guide presented here will assist other scholars with such projects, and the commercial translation AI *DeepL* offers a solution by providing high-quality

translations for 31 languages. The most tedious challenge within the workflow is the pre-processing of files, i.e., the text extraction, as manifestos exhibit an increasingly sophisticated layout and have grown in length. In general, it can be stated that the more complex the layout, i.e., the typesetting, of the source file, the more difficult the text extraction. To provide further added value to the technical implementation, in a second step I tried to open the black box of the MT algorithm a bit to evaluate the quality of the machine-translated texts. After all, translation quality and thus the tool's scientific trustworthiness is of central importance, especially for the analysis of party positions and rhetoric. Therefore, I performed an exemplary evaluation of the *DeepL* translations both by re-translating a set of manifestos of German parties and by determining the relative position on the left–right scale of German, Estonian, Polish and Italian manifestos using Wordfish analyses. The results of this evaluation indicate that *DeepL* offers high-quality translations, which do not significantly change the content and the positioning. The back translation revealed that *DeepL* re-translates 90% of the sentences either word-for-word or at least synonymously with an average error rate of 3.4 errors per 80 sentences. The subsequent Wordfish analysis showed for all language combinations that the relative positions of original and translation are very close and that there is no systematic right-left bias. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that most MT algorithms are black boxes that cannot be fully opened by the evaluation carried out here. Both future research and further development of the algorithms would be necessary to make MT an integral part of social science research.

In contrast to the approach presented here, there are recent developments to process and analyze multilingual corpora in their original language. New transformer models such as BERT (Devlin et al., 2019) or multilingual sentence embeddings (Licht, 2023) were enabled by advances in computational linguistics in the field of large language models (LLMs) and provide valid and reliable results. Which of the two approaches should be chosen in each individual case depends centrally on how the text data are to be processed in the further course of the research project. The central advantage of translated text data is that, on the one hand, the entire corpus can be examined in one analysis, e.g., a machine learning algorithm, and, on the other hand, that the results can be inspected by one researcher and further examined, e.g., with manual coding. This paper contributes to the validation of analyses using translated text data, as the main findings show that MT—and particularly *DeepL*—produces reliable and trustworthy results. The importance of this contribution is also underlined by the fact that, according to de Vries et al. (2018: 418), many authors either simply assume that MT provides reliable results or do not consider this issue at all.

While this article concentrates on party manifestos and policy positions, MT can be valuable for other types of textual data and analyses as well. In fact, the amount and availability of (political) textual data such as press releases, speeches, newspaper articles, and social media posts is growing every day and MT is one way to make this data accessible for automated comparative research. The added value of machine translation in general and *DeepL* in particular is that the entire text, including its framing and rhetoric, is made accessible for analysis. This allows for broader research perspectives that cannot be covered, for example, by existing coding schemes such as the Manifesto Project.

Concluding, all of this leaves us with the scientific-ethical question of whether such a further "algorithmization" of (social science) research is desirable and a trend worth supporting. Particularly in light of open science initiatives, this development must be critically questioned. This applies all the more to commercial software and algorithms like *DeepL*. In his opinion commentary, Arthur Spirling (2023: 413) therefore claims: "The rush to involve such artificial-intelligence (AI) models in research is a problem. Their use threatens hard-won progress on research ethics and the reproducibility of results. Instead, researchers need to collaborate to develop open-source LLMs that are transparent and not dependent on a corporation's favours." Consequently, it would be extremely desirable for companies to disclose their algorithms or for open-source MT tools to be developed that provide high-quality translations for a variety of language combinations. For such tools, it would then also be possible to combine human and machine translation—an approach that promises significant quality improvements of up to 28% (Li et al., 2023: 9512). Until such tools are available, however, I argue in this article that commercial AI tools such as *DeepL* are a good alternative. After all, MT tools can also contribute to making science more accessible and inclusive by enabling the analysis of countries that are not typically the focus of interest. Furthermore, machine translation enables scientists without large financial resources to participate in and contribute to the research on political parties.

3 The Gig Economy in Party Manifestos: Analysing the Salience of a New Issue Across Europe

Abstract

The gig economy, characterised by a hire-and-fire practice, is a fairly recent but fast-growing phenomenon in Europe. Despite its growing societal relevance, we know little about why parties develop a policy position on this issue. This paper therefore analyses (1) whether the entire ideological party spectrum addresses the issue, and (2) which party-level and country-level factors influence its salience. Theoretically, it draws on theories of party competition and combines them with the literature on new issues and labour-market risks. Empirically, it employs a dictionary and the multilevel analysis of 188 election manifestos from 23 European countries between 2018 and 2022. The findings show that the gig economy is addressed in approximately 32% of manifestos analysed, with notable between-country differences. Additionally, the analysis of influencing factors demonstrates that a combination of party ideology and macroeconomic factors, such as underemployment and trade-union density, significantly shapes the frequency of manifesto mentions. The results highlight how new labour-market developments are incorporated into party competition.

3.1 Introduction

On 10 July 2022, *The Guardian* published the so-called 'Uber files'—leaked documents showing the company's lobbying activities and attempts to circumvent the law in the United States and across Europe—sparking a wave of political outrage.[16] The revelations showed how Uber tried, and partly succeeded, to influence governments across the globe from 2013 to 2017. This case proves the enormous power of platform companies in shaping the political discourse and decision-making around the gig or platform economy. This raises the question of what the so-called 'gig economy' is.

The gig economy is one of the most prominent but still relatively new phenomena of the digitisation and globalisation of labour markets. It is characterised by a hire-and-fire practice, where workers are either employed for individual jobs based on short-term or zero-hour contracts, or they are bogusly self-employed, like Uber drivers and food-delivery riders. Most evaluations agree that the rise of the gig economy is yet another indication of the deregulation, precarisation, and flexibilisation of labour markets (Crouch, 2019; Friedman, 2014; Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020).

In light of its economic and societal implications, it is hardly surprising that in recent years the topic has already received a great deal of academic, media, and political attention (Masta and Kaushiva, 2024; Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018). Nevertheless, the gig economy has not yet been widely adopted in traditional political-science research fields such as electoral and party research. Not least, since Green-Pedersen's seminal contribution (2007), we know about the growing importance of issue competition in party competition. However, most research has focused on established issues, while research on the emergence and evolution of new issues is a rather new avenue. This applies in particular to new issues that emerge gradually and insidiously, rather than through exogenous shocks or the influence of niche parties. Using the gig economy as an exemplary new issue, this paper aims to contribute to this debate by asking:

How salient is the gig economy in European party competition, and what factors influence whether parties address the issue in their election manifestos?

But why should we and the political parties care about the gig economy? When assessing the gig economy's economic, societal, and thus political relevance, several perspectives become apparent. First, the European Union expects that the gig economy will continue to grow rapidly, so that there could be 43 million platform workers in the EU by the end of 2025 (Council of the European Union, 2024). Even if there are no precise figures on its economic output, the

[16] For further information on the Uber files see Lewis et al. (2022).

economic relevance of the gig economy is also indicated by this projection of platform workers becoming a substantial labour force. Second, as Rahman and Thelen (2019) argue, we need to consider consumers. As the gig economy is particularly strong at providing everyday services in the service sector, the number of potential consumers is huge, and they are interested in maintaining cheap and convenient services. A third perspective regards a potential spillover effect; in other words, the gig economy's influence on the traditional labour market, with the standard employment relationship (SER) as the norm (Bertolini, 2024). If the gig economy proves to be a successful business model in one sector—with its flexible or insecure work arrangements—it is likely that other sectors will also adopt it. Such a development has huge implications for the dualisation of labour markets—i.e., the division between protected insiders and risk-exposed outsiders (Rueda, 2005)—and the resulting shifts in class structures and policy preferences (Chueri and Busemeyer, 2025; Marx, 2014; Marx and Picot, 2013). In sum, the gig economy is significant not just for economic reasons, but also because it feeds into major social changes that directly affect the support bases of parties.

To analyse the salience of the gig economy and the factors that influence it, the exploratory two-step empirical analysis draws on election manifestos to perform a quantitative text analysis, and on party-level and country-level data to perform multilevel modelling. First, using a dictionary analysis, I determine which parties address the issue in their election manifesto. Second, I apply multilevel modelling to investigate which party-level and country-level factors explain or influence the parties' uptake of the issue. The sample comprises 188 manifestos from 23 European countries from 2018 to 2022 (see Table A3-1 for an extensive overview of the sample).

The findings show that the gig economy is addressed in approximately 32% of the election manifestos, and that centre-left parties address the topic significantly more often than centre-right parties. The gig economy was taken up by at least one party in 18 of the 23 countries examined. However, this salience must be assessed as moderate, since even when the topic is taken up by political parties, only a few, brief references are made. The analysis of the influencing factors reveals that a combination of party ideology and macroeconomic factors such as underemployment and trade-union density significantly shape the frequency of mentions in the manifestos. These findings contribute to our understanding of the agenda-setting process and the strategic behaviour of parties, particularly when they address new issues in their manifestos. Specifically, they underline the importance of party ideology as well as contextual characteristics as determining factors in the emergence, establishment, and politicisation of new issues.

3.2 The Gig Economy's Relevance for Party Competition

In democracies, political parties are the central actors in the aggregation and representation of citizens' interests. Consequently, party competition—the struggle of rivalling parties to win an election—is fundamental to the functioning of democratic processes. In recent years, the study of party competition has focused increasingly on its changing nature (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Spoon and Nonnemacher, 2026). This is reflected, among other things in the growing importance of (new) issues such as the gig economy.

Because of its diversity, the gig economy is difficult to understand and to define. There is a multitude of terms (e.g., sharing economy, platform economy, collaborative economy etc.) some of which are used synonymously, while others are contradictory. Generally, the gig economy involves freelance work that is mediated by apps or online platforms which connect customers with gig workers. We can distinguish tasks that are performed online (location-independent) and offline (location-bound) as well as high-skilled and low-skilled jobs (Johnston, 2020). One characteristic all gig jobs have in common is their (hyper-)flexibility that affects contract length, working hours, wages, and for remote jobs, location (Stewart and Stanford, 2017). This freedom and flexibility of the contractors is a key feature of the gig economy and can also be interpreted as insecurity or precarity.

Many studies describe the gig economy as a form of precarious employment, i.e., work that is "uncertain, unstable, and insecure and in which workers bear the risks of work […] and receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements" (Shin et al., 2023: 3). First, being classified as self-employed or a contractor means that gig workers are less likely to contribute to a country's social security system. Consequently, they cannot benefit from it, for instance in case of illness or old age. These protection gaps result in an increasing privatisation of social risks (Hacker, 2004). Second, due to the fragmented work practices in the gig economy, union representation and collective bargaining are particularly challenging (McCrystal and Hardy, 2021; Però and Downey, 2022). One possible social consequence of this is that a sense of community or class identity is less likely to develop among gig workers. This has significant implications for their political representation by political parties.

In line with the literature on labour-market dualisation, the emergence of the gig economy can be understood as an extreme form or an extension of the distinction between well-protected insiders and vulnerable outsiders (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Rueda, 2005; Schwander and Häusermann, 2013). Compared to workers with SER, gig workers are characterised above all by little to no social security, a lack of opportunities for collective action, and high levels of physical

and mental stress. Such an expansion of outsider groups has significant and well-known consequences for political parties. For social democratic and left-wing parties in particular, this creates a potential conflict, as they traditionally represent both the interests of insiders and the concerns of outsiders (Schwander, 2019). For gig workers, this implies a potential representation gap, as they are harder to address due to their weaker group and class identification, and parties might consequently decide to neglect the issue. However, this potential representation gap is not the only reason for parties to address the gig economy as an issue in their election manifestos.

First, the gig economy and gig work are no longer fringe phenomena. While on-demand work is not new, and day labouring has a long history in most economies, an SER with a permanent full-time contract between one employer and one employee has been and still is the norm. Data from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) shows that across the EU there was only a minimal overall decline in permanent employment between 2010 (80%) and 2021 (77%).[17] However, these figures must be interpreted with some caution, as respondents were only asked about their *main* employment status, while gig work often represents only secondary or tertiary employment (Stewart and Stanford, 2017: 423). Hence, the apparent stability and prevalence of SERs need not be at odds with the rise and expansion of the gig economy, thus making this new and potentially precarious form of work a relevant issue for political parties.

Second, the emergence of gig work is representative of changing labour markets and changes in the economy in general. Vallas and Schor (2020: 274) therefore describe the gig economy as an "entrepreneurial incubator" that not only transforms the traditional economy but also adds a new form of economic activity. This newness lies in the combination of processes like flexibilisation, globalisation, migration, and digitisation. Parties must respond to ensure that workers' rights, economic security, and social protection, as well as the national capacity for innovation and tax system, keep pace with these changes. This is particularly true because gig work often falls into legal grey zones. Depending on national legislation, gig workers are considered either employees, self-employed, freelancers, or independent contractors. These classifications have strong implications for the level of autonomy workers have, how their work is taxed, but also for their access to social protection and welfare programmes (Johnston et al., 2023). For political parties, this means a variety of connecting points and the ability to develop very different and distinct policy positions.

[17] See European Working Conditions Survey 2010, 2021. Question Q7 (2010)/Q11 (2021): 'What kind of employment contract do you have [2021 addendum: in your main paid job]?'. Answers: 'An indefinite contract'/'Contract of unlimited duration'; 'A fixed term contract'/'Contract of limited duration'; 'A temporary employment agency contract'; 'An apprenticeship or other training scheme'; 'No contract'; 'Other'.

Third, the gig economy and its regulation can also be regarded as a testing ground for new models of interest representation and collective bargaining. As the issue is not yet omnipresent nor very pressing, parties can show political leadership and act as so-called 'issue entrepreneurs'. Hobolt and de Vries (2015: 1161) define the concept of issue entrepreneurship as "a strategy by which parties mobilize issues that have been largely ignored in party competition and adopt a policy position on the issue that is substantially different from the mainstream status quo". The conditions under which such a strategy can be successful, and how it influences party competition in general, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Last, Vallas and Schor (2020) identify the institutional diversity of the gig economy as another peculiarity. Accordingly, the fact that the gig economy has many different organisational structures makes it special, in that it develops differently depending on the national framework such as the political, economic, and legal systems (Huang et al., 2020; Ilsøe and Söderqvist, 2022; Picot, 2022). The scope for parties to influence the gig economy's national profile is correspondingly large.

Overall, the gig economy is interesting not only from an economic, but also from a political stance as it can be summarised as a multifaceted issue at the intersection of labour-market, social, digital, and migration policies. As such a new and cross-cutting issue, it is particularly interesting to examine how the politicisation of this topic influences party competition.

3.3 How New Issues Emerge in Party Competition

Many researchers have already studied when parties discuss which topics (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Otjes and Green-Pedersen, 2021; Seeberg, 2022; Spoon et al., 2014). Most of this research has focused on established issues that have given structure to party competition for decades, whereas the emergence and politicisation of new issues is a rather recent avenue of research (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Green-Pedersen and Little, 2024; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015; König and Wenzelburger, 2019; Marks et al., 2002).

When formulating policy positions, political parties are faced with a utility dilemma, especially regarding emerging issues. According to Strøm (1990), parties follow three strategic goals to a greater or lesser extent: (1) vote-seeking, (2) office-seeking, and (3) policy-seeking. By addressing political challenges, they appeal to voters to maximise their vote share. For emerging issues, it is however difficult for parties to assess the utility of the issues to achieve this goal. For one, these issues tend to be non-salient in public discourse, which is why voters might not reward parties that engage with such an issue (König and Wenzelburger, 2019: 1681). Additionally,

Hobolt and de Vries (2015: 1161) argue that it can be electorally risky to focus on emerging issues because it can create intraparty conflict and scare away core voters or future coalition partners. For another, it is likely that parties do not know how to signal their competence over an emerging issue because the party-political framing is yet to be clarified. However, if parties decide to put a new issue on the agenda, and are successful in doing so, it can pay off electorally, because parties that have taken the lead as issue entrepreneurs are credited with the greatest competence (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012). Thus, it can be assumed that there is a variety of strategic considerations behind the decision of parties to address or not to address a new issue. In the following section, I draw on previous research to argue that this decision is influenced both by factors that are external and internal to the party system and party competition.

3.3.1 Influence Factors Outside Party Competition: Economic Situation and Labour-Market Characteristics

As the political arena is ideally a reflection of its context, national circumstances like economic performance and labour-market characteristics are central explanations for agenda-setting processes (Baumann et al., 2021; Otjes and Green-Pedersen, 2021; Williams et al., 2016). The gig economy is not only a new labour-market issue, it is also a new economic issue. This is why it is essential for parties to consider the economic circumstances, because they must react to both improvements and deteriorations. We already know from previous research that parties address economic issues in times of economic hardship, for instance when the unemployment rate is high (Baumann et al., 2021; Spoon and Williams, 2021). High levels of unemployment indicate a heightened problem perception regarding economic issues, both among the general public and in political discourse. It therefore seems plausible to assume that the topic should also be increasingly included in party communication. As discussed above, the gig economy represents a new way of doing business and of organising work; consequently, it is widely regarded as a labour-market innovation. Especially when unemployment is high, it can therefore make sense for parties to address the gig economy and present it as a possible solution to signal their awareness and competence.

Another facet of economic hardship is underemployment. This encompasses involuntary part-time work and working in unsuitable jobs regarding skills or pay. Such an under-utilisation of labour is interesting both economically and politically. A recent International Labour Organisation report shows that underemployment can be high, even when unemployment is low (ILO, 2026). Thus, on the surface, the economic situation often appears better than it actually is. Building on this political neglect, Amoretti (1999: 178) finds that for parties "underemployment

is politically free of cost and represents one of the easiest way out from the European unemployment labyrinth". By connecting underemployment to the gig economy, we can establish that gig work is a prime example of this under-utilisation and, because it weakens the connection between education and secure employment, the gig economy accelerates the prevalence of underemployment (Chesters and Wyn, 2019). For parties, this gives rise to two conflicting lines of argument: Either parties can present the gig economy as a solution for unemployment—despite its contribution to underemployment—or parties can politicise this connection precisely and portray the gig economy as a threat to the education–employment nexus.

Furthermore, we know from previous research that labour-market issues are increasingly addressed in countries with strongly institutionalised trade unions. Otjes and Green-Pedersen (2021: 621) argue that strong unions have a greater influence on the agenda-setting process, because they have easier access to political parties and can also exert greater influence on public opinion. This argument highlights the mechanism of the 'pecking order' (Dunlop, 2007), because actors with greater discursive power and better access to the system can put their topics on the agenda. Additionally, in corporatist systems, the relationship is even more pronounced as the exchange between parties and unions is a fundamental and systematic part of policymaking. Thus, in countries with strong institutional integration of unions into the policy process, labour-market issues, such as the gig economy, are addressed more frequently.

Therefore, I propose the following hypotheses:

H1: *The higher the unemployment rate in a country, the more likely parties are to address the gig economy in their manifestos.*

H2: *The higher the level of underemployment in a country, the more likely parties are to address the gig economy in their manifestos.*

H3: *The higher the union density in a country, the more likely parties are to address the gig economy in their manifestos.*

3.3.2 Influence Factors Within Party Competition: Issue Ownership, Party Ideology, and New Parties

In line with salience theory and issue ownership, much research has focused on the question of why parties take, avoid, or blur their position on certain topics (Elias et al., 2015; Rovny, 2012; Rovny and Edwards, 2012). One of the central arguments is that voters evaluate parties according to their ability to handle specific policy problems and vote for the party they assign the greatest competence to in that respective policy field (Petrocik, 1996; Robertson, 1976). It is generally agreed that social democratic and socialist parties have issue ownership of welfare state expansion and planned economy; liberal parties occupy (economic) freedom and digitisation,

whereas Christian and conservative parties 'own' market economy, military strength, and traditional values (Budge, 2015: 769, Table 2).

By applying the concept of issue ownership to emerging issues, it can be assumed that the attributed ownership of an issue and the party ideology behind it influence how parties address a new issue. Research that examines the attitudes of individuals helps us to understand the influence of ideology and issue ownership on positioning new issues. Wood and Vedlitz (2007: 555) suggest that new information is filtered through personal values, ideology, culture, and social norms, and based on this, a policy position is developed. Transferring this to party behaviour, I argue that party ideology in particular —and the associated issue ownership—explain how parties frame a new issue and evaluate its importance. Parties will generally try to address an issue so that it highlights the party's problem-solving competence within that respective policy field.

Since the gig economy is a multifaceted topic on which the party-political debate is still very much contested (Guglielmo, 2025; Marenco and Seidl, 2021), it allows parties to frame it differently and according to their agenda. It can therefore be assumed that social democratic and left-wing parties frame the gig economy against the background of flexibilisation and precarisation, and especially problematise the legal, health, or welfare situation of workers. In contrast, it can be expected that liberal parties will assess the gig economy as a phenomenon of liberal (labour) markets and digitisation and thus focus on the opportunities for gig workers, for businesses, and for the economy in general. Overall, it can be expected that parties will address the issue if they believe it will give them a competitive advantage for maximising their vote share. Depending on a party's ideology and its associated ownership of specific policy areas, this is correspondingly more likely for some party families than for others.

This allows the formulation of the following hypotheses:

H4a: *The further to the left a party is located on the left–right scale, the more likely it is to address the gig economy in its manifesto.*

H4b: *Liberal parties are more likely to address the gig economy in their manifestos than other centre-right parties.*

Lastly, new or challenger parties are another factor within party competition that influences the uptake and salience of issues. Previous research on the emergence and success of new parties generally agrees that "new parties are primarily the consequence of new issues or values ignored by existing parties" (Harmel and Robertson, 1985: 502). In an extensive empirical analysis, Zons (2015) was able to show that limited programmatic supply, rather than contextual factors such as electoral institutions, explain the establishment of new parties. In contrast to mainstream

parties, new parties are expected to stress their extreme positions to attract attention and to highlight policy differences and alternatives (Marks et al., 2002; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). Testing the argument on the issue of EU integration, Hobolt and de Vries (2015: 1177) show that "parties that lack office-holding experience, hold non-mainstream policy positions, and have suffered electoral defeat are most likely to act as issue entrepreneurs", i.e., address new issues.

Following these findings, I argue that the existence of programmatically new parties increases the overall salience of new issues—which these parties typically 'own'—because they force established parties to take a stance as well. New parties are able to push these issues because they have nothing to lose electorally, and they have to appeal to their core voter group. Transferring this argument on the party competition regarding the gig economy allows the formulation of the last hypothesis:

H5: *New parties are more likely to address the gig economy in their manifestos than established parties.*

3.4 Data and Methods

3.4.1 Data and Case Selection

The empirical analysis is carried out in two steps that utilise different types of data. First, I analyse the parties' election manifestos to determine whether the gig economy plays a role in party competition—i.e., which party addresses the issue. Afterwards, using macro-level data on the specific economic, legal, and welfare state context, the focus is extended to contextualise the findings from the party perspective.

The population on which the analysis is based consists of the countries of the European Economic Area (EEA). Exploring this research question in a European context is promising because these countries vary greatly in their political and economic circumstances, for instance, variance of their party, voting and government systems, economic and welfare systems, as well as their legal frameworks. Several studies have already demonstrated that the prevalence of the gig economy depends in particular on institutional frameworks, policy decisions, and the performance of the welfare state (Bonoli et al., 2025; Chueri and Törnberg, 2025; Picot, 2022). Consequently, this also influences individual gig workers' perceived experience of precariousness and their resulting policy preferences. The European context is particularly fitting for examining these mechanisms, especially when compared with the American context, as the

analysis can address different contexts and make more general statements regarding the influencing factors at both the party and country level.

Manifestos are especially well-suited for the analysis because they are a reliable and readily available data source, and they are usually published by all competing parties before an election. Additionally, manifestos can be considered the "only statement of policy made with authority on behalf of the whole party" (Klingemann et al., 1994: 21). Thus, they are often viewed as the primary vehicle for conveying policy positions. In contrast to parliamentary speeches, press releases, or social media communications, manifestos are a well-thought-out and tactical form of party communication that involves many actors and addresses a broad audience.

Due to different legislative cycles in the countries being studied, the analysis period ranges from 2018 to 2022. The sample includes the election manifesto of every party that won at least one seat in the national parliamentary election during this period. Some countries and parties had to be excluded from the EEA population due to problems of data availability, so the final sample includes 207 parties from 23 countries[18]. As some of these parties have formed electoral alliances that campaign on joint programmes, the number of manifestos is reduced to 188 (see Table A3-1 in the Chapter Appendix for an overview of the sample and all party-level variables). Before the analysis, all manifestos were translated into English using the machine translation tool *DeepL*. Examinations of the translation quality show that *DeepL* can be trusted to provide high-quality translations since neither content nor framing is significantly changed (Plenter, 2023). However, there remains a slight uncertainty as to whether the very specific terms associated with the gig economy are translated into English using the same terms in all European languages. The consequences of this uncertainty are discussed in the conclusion.

In the second analysis, the party-level perspective is accompanied by a country-level examination of the above-mentioned factors that influence the salience of the gig economy. Table 3-1 lists all variables and their description that are used to operationalise the previously discussed hypotheses and mechanisms. All data is considered for the respective election year or the next available date.

[18] Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

Table 3-1: Overview of party-level, country-level, and control variables for the multi-level regression analysis

	Variable	Description	Data Source
Party-level variables	General left–right placement	Parties' general left–right placement, as assigned by CHES 2019	Bakker et al. (2020)
	Economic left–right placement	Parties' ideological stance on economic issues, as assigned by CHES 2019	Bakker et al. (2020)
	GAL/TAN placement	Parties' stance on social and cultural values, as assigned by CHES 2019	Bakker et al. (2020)
	Liberal party	Dummy (1/0) for liberal party as subgroup of centre-right parties, as assigned by the Manifesto Project and CHES 2019	Bakker et al. (2020); Lehmann et al. (2023)
	New or re-election	Dummy (1/0) for a party's first or re-election to parliament	Own aggregation
	Seats in parliament	Number of seats won in the respective parliamentary election	Own aggregation
Country-level variables	Unemployment rate	Average of 12 months before the election date	Eurostat
	Underemployment incidence	Share of involuntary part-time employment as percentage of total employment	OECD
	Trade-union density	Percentage of employees in trade unions	OECD
Control variables	Party system fragmentation	Effective number of electoral parties	Bormann and Golder (2022: DES Version 4.1)
	Proportional electoral system	Dummy (0/1) for proportional electoral system	Bormann and Golder (2022: DES Version 4.1)
	GDP per capita	PPP at current international prices	World Bank (2025)
	GDP long-term change score	Absolute and relative change of GDP between election year and ten years prior	Own aggregation
	COVID-19	Dummy (1/0) for election during COVID-19 pandemic	Own aggregation

Note: CHES = Chapel Hill Expert Survey; GAL/TAN = Green, Alternative, Libertarian—Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalistic; PPP = Purchasing power parity

3.4.2 Dictionary Analysis

The aim of this paper is both to measure the prevalence of the gig economy and to analyse which factors influence a party's likelihood of addressing the issue. To identify which parties address the issue, I conduct a dictionary analysis. The logic behind dictionary analyses is quite straightforward: it uses "the relative frequency of *key words* to measure the presence of each category in texts" (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013: 274). To this end, a keyword dictionary is compiled a priori, which is then used to search for these keywords in the election manifestos. A dictionary analysis is therefore a useful exploratory tool for searching large text corpora to identify specific features, words, or concepts. To validate the results of this exploration, the context—the words used in proximity to each keywords—is also considered. This makes it possible to address one of the key weaknesses of dictionary analyses[19]: compiling a dictionary that is comprehensive enough to find all relevant text passages while also being precise enough to avoid false positives.[20] With the help of this context, the dataset is manually validated to check whether a hit is correct or is a false positive. For the present analysis, context windows of the 10 words before and after the actual dictionary keyword are displayed, so usually the entire sentence can be viewed during validation. Overall, because of its simplicity and straightforwardness, the manually validated dictionary analysis is well-suited to determining the salience of the gig economy in election manifestos.

As the gig economy is not uniformly defined, many terms—such as 'platform' or 'sharing economy'—are used synonymously, even though they sometimes describe different economic concepts (Frenken and Schor, 2017). However, since the gig economy is a new topic, especially in party competition, it can be assumed that parties do not systematically distinguish between these different forms and corresponding terms. Additionally, it seems plausible that the use of terms is country- or language-specific and therefore correspondingly diverse in the present sample. For this reason, the concept list and keyword dictionary also include terms that are not used exclusively to describe the gig economy; the dictionary also uses those that describe symptoms of this economic form, such as 'on-demand work' or 'micro-tasking'. Table 3-2 displays the five

[19] For a detailed discussion of the advantages, and especially the disadvantages, of dictionary analysis see for example Häffner et al. (2023) or Widmann and Wich (2023).

[20] A novel and innovative approach to constructing a dictionary that is as comprehensive and error-free as possible is the use of word embeddings for automatic dictionary expansion instead of a keyword dictionary that is constructed by the researcher. This approach was also tested for this analysis; however, it did not yield satisfactory results, likely due to the limited length of the statements parties use regarding the gig economy. Consequently, the conventional method of creating the dictionary a priori is employed here.

concepts and corresponding 33 keywords that are used to search the corpus to count how often these concepts occur in the manifestos.

Table 3-2: Overview of the concepts and entries/keys for the dictionary analysis

Concept	Dictionary Entry/Key
Gig economy	clickwork, crowdwork, freelance eco*, gig e*, gig w*, micro task*, micro work*
Platform economy	platform capitalism, platform eco*, platform work*,
Collaborative economy	collaborative eco*, sharing eco*
Contract status	contractor, digital nomad*, on-call work*, on-demand work*, task-based, zero-hour
Platform companies	99 Design, Deliveroo, DoorDash, Fiverr, Foodora, GigSmart, Instacart, Just Eat, MyHammer, Rover, TaskRabbit, Thumbtack, Uber, Uberization, Upwork

Note: The asterisk (*) is a wildcard character. It acts as a placeholder to capture all possible spellings, such as singular and plural. Entries are ordered alphabetically.

3.4.3 Multilevel Modelling

The second analysis takes a closer look at party ideology and the national context of the party competition surrounding the gig economy. Multilevel modelling is applied to determine which factors may influence parties in their decision to address the gig economy in their manifestos. For this, I use the count results of the dictionary analysis to construct the dependent variable 'validated absolute number of hits per manifesto'. All independent variables, which provide a broad view of both party and country characteristics, are listed in Table 3-1 (see Table A3-2 in the Chapter Appendix for descriptive statistics). To account for the vastly different scales and to ensure comparability, all macro-level variables were z-standardised prior to the analysis. Multilevel modelling is chosen due to the hierarchical data structure of parties being nested within countries.

The structure of the dependent variable (count data) implies that Poisson regression models must be fitted. As the variable exhibits overdispersion—i.e., the variance of the dependent variable is greater than its mean (var=6.11; mean=0.98)—I estimate negative binomial models. All reported models were tested for multicollinearity, dispersion, zero inflation and outliers. Due to the small number of upper-level clusters (23 countries), a 'leave-one-country-out' cross-validation was also used for Models 7 to 9 to test for potentially influential countries. As a further

robustness test, all party-level models were re-estimated as country-fixed-effects negative binomial models with cluster-robust standard errors. To account for the varying lengths of the manifestos, all reported models were also re-estimated using a metrically scaled share-dependent variable. To this end, the number of gig economy mentions was set in relation to the number of quasi-sentences in the manifesto, and a corresponding percentage of quasi-sentences devoted to the gig economy was calculated. A quasi-sentence is, as usual, understood as a shorter unit of meaning comprising a single statement. The results of these robustness tests show no significant deviations or biases. They are reported in the Chapter Appendix Tables A3-6 to A3-10.

3.5 Empirical Analysis

3.5.1 Salience of the Gig Economy in European Party Manifestos

The results from the dictionary analysis show that, overall, the gig economy is mentioned with a minimum of one keyword at least once in 60 of the 188 manifestos: a coverage of 31.9%[21]. The most frequent terms parties use to refer to the gig economy are the platform names such as 'Uber' or 'Deliveroo' as well as the terms 'platform economy' and 'sharing economy'. Table 3-3 displays the number of hits per keyword, as well as their distribution among the manifestos and countries (see Table A3-3 in the Chapter Appendix for a precise overview of country and party patterns).

Table 3-3: Results of the dictionary analysis in decreasing order of the number of hits

Keyword	Number of Hits	Number of Manifestos (Share in %)	Country Min	Country Mean	Country Max
Gig platforms	50	19 (10.11%)	0%[22]	9.23%[23]	45.45%[24]
Platform economy	41	20 (10.64%)	0%	8.41%	45.45%

[21] Figure A3-1 in the Chapter Appendix shows salience as a distribution of the share of quasi-sentences attributed to the gig economy.

[22] Interpretation example: The country minimum of 0% indicates that this keyword, i.e., the name of any gig platform, was not mentioned by any party in at least one country.

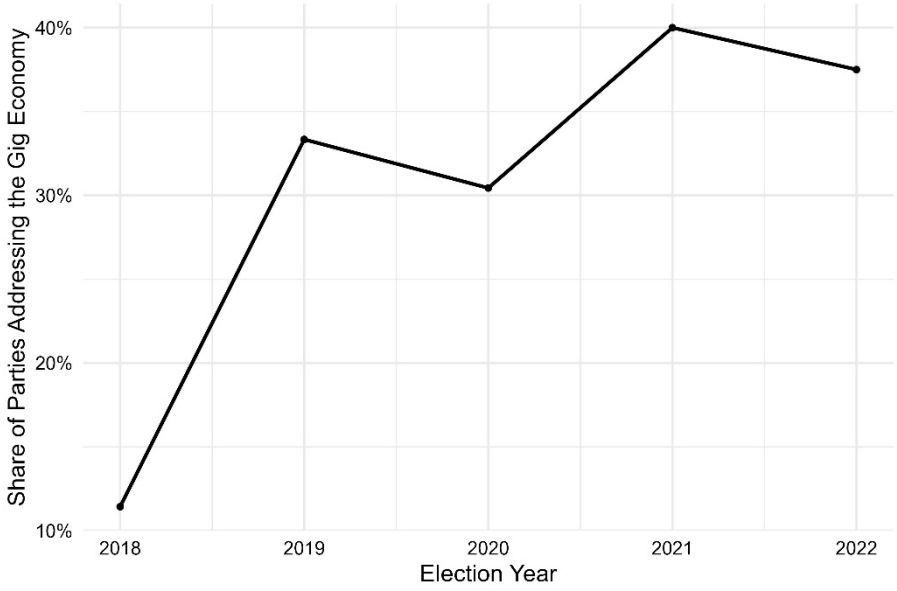
[23] Interpretation example: The country mean of 9.23% indicates the average party system penetration of this keyword across all 23 countries.

[24] Interpretation example: The country maximum indicates that the name of any gig platform was mentioned by almost half, i.e., 45.45%, of the parties in one country, and that this is the highest party system penetration of this keyword within the sample.

Sharing economy	31	22 (11.7%)	0%	9.36%	62.5%
Platform work	16	8 (4.26%)	0%	4.64%	25%
Collaborative economy	13	6 (3.19%)	0%	2.55%	18.18%
Zero-hour	12	8 (4.26%)	0%	3.7%	40%
Gig economy	10	7 (3.72%)	0%	3.15%	60%
Contractor	5	4 (2.13%)	0%	1.99%	14.29%
Crowdwork	5	4 (2.13%)	0%	2.98%	40%
Work on call	4	3 (1.6%)	0%	1.89%	20%
Platform capitalism	2	1 (0.53%)	0%	0.4%	9.09%
Clickwork	1	1 (0.53%)	0%	0.62%	14.29%
Freelance economy	1	1 (0.53%)	0%	0.4%	9.09%
Gig work	1	1 (0.53%)	0%	0.43%	10%
Work on demand	1	1 (0.53%)	0%	0.4%	9.09%
Overall	**193**	**60 (31.91%)**			

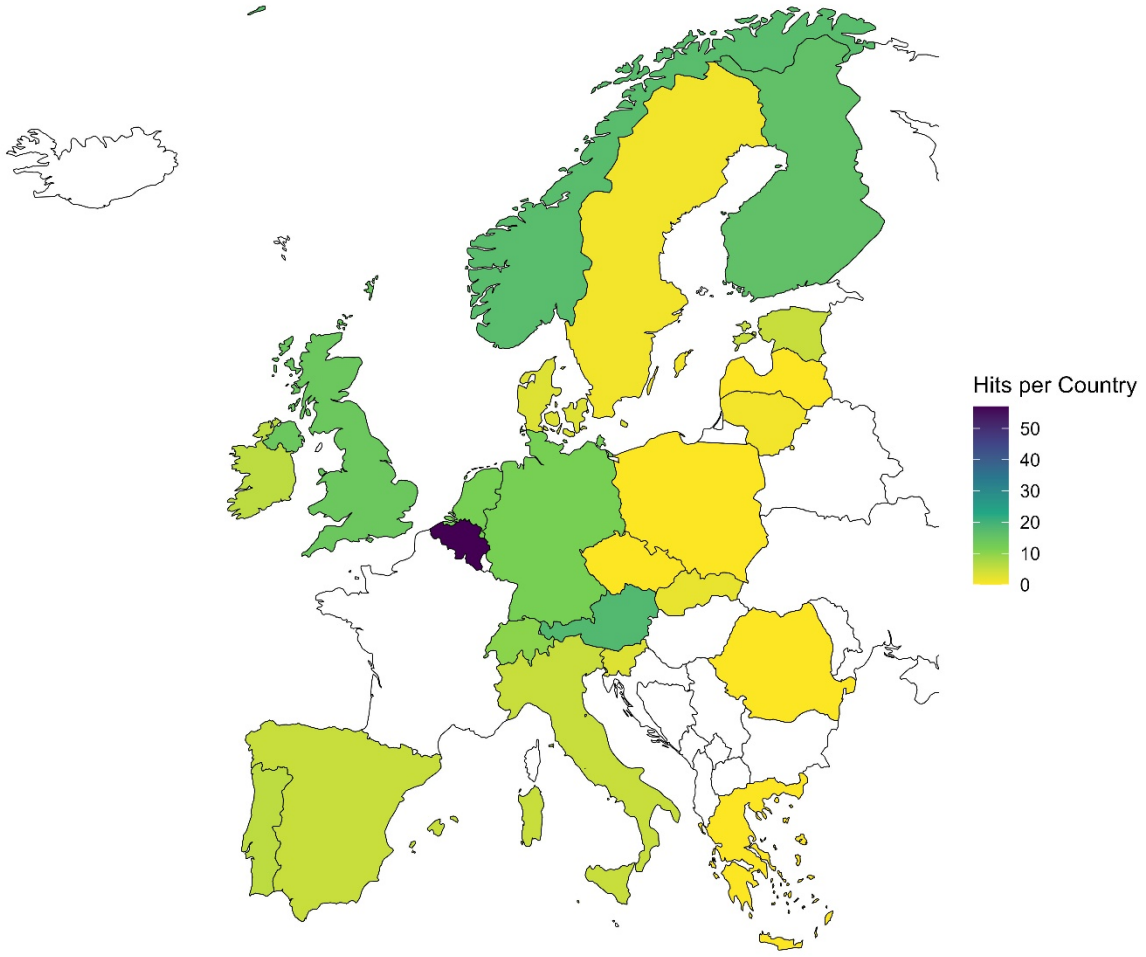
Due to variations in legislative cycles across the different countries, the analysis covers the period from 2018 to 2022. Looking at how the issue has evolved over time, Figure 3-1 shows that its salience has increased. While 11% of the parties addressed the gig economy in their manifestos in 2018, this figure rose to 33% in 2019 and rose as high as 40% in 2021. However, due to the small sample sizes for the respective years these numbers have to be interpreted cautiously as they only provide indicative evidence.

Figure 3-1: Share of parties addressing the gig economy per year



At the country level, it can be said that the gig economy was taken up by at least one party in 18 of the 23 countries examined. Only in Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia, Poland, and Romania do none of the parties address the issue. About two thirds of the parties that directly address the gig economy refer to the issue several times, i.e., with several keywords and/or more than once with the same keyword. Figure 3-2 displays the total number of hits per country across all parties. Accordingly, the gig economy is most salient in Belgium (57 mentions) and Austria (18 mentions), whereas it is least salient in Lithuania and Sweden (one hit each). In the vast majority of countries (19 of 23), not just one but several parties developed a policy position on the gig economy. In the Belgian case, for example, the 57 mentions are distributed among eight out of eleven manifestos.

Figure 3-2: Number of gig economy keyword mentions per country



Furthermore, the respective keyword usage also tends to be country- or language-specific, as it can be observed that parties from the same country use the same keywords to address the gig economy. This suggests that the national circumstances of party competition might have considerable influence on the development of party positions.

Looking at the distribution of mentions across party families, Figure 3-3 shows that the entire ideological party spectrum engages with the gig economy as a topic in their manifestos—albeit to varying degrees. The issue is most prominently discussed in the manifestos of social democratic parties (25% of mentions), conservative and left-wing parties (both 17.9% of mentions), and green parties (16.1% of mentions). Overall, the gig economy is more important in manifestos of centre-left parties. This finding is also underlined by the proportion of coverage within the party families.

Figure 3-3: Distribution of gig economy mentions across party families

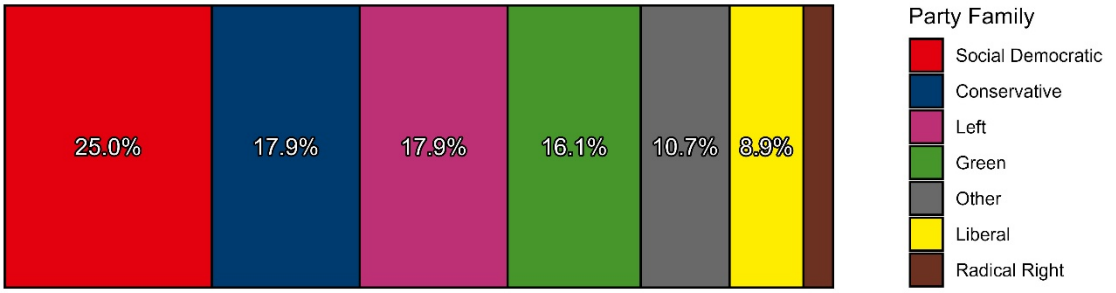
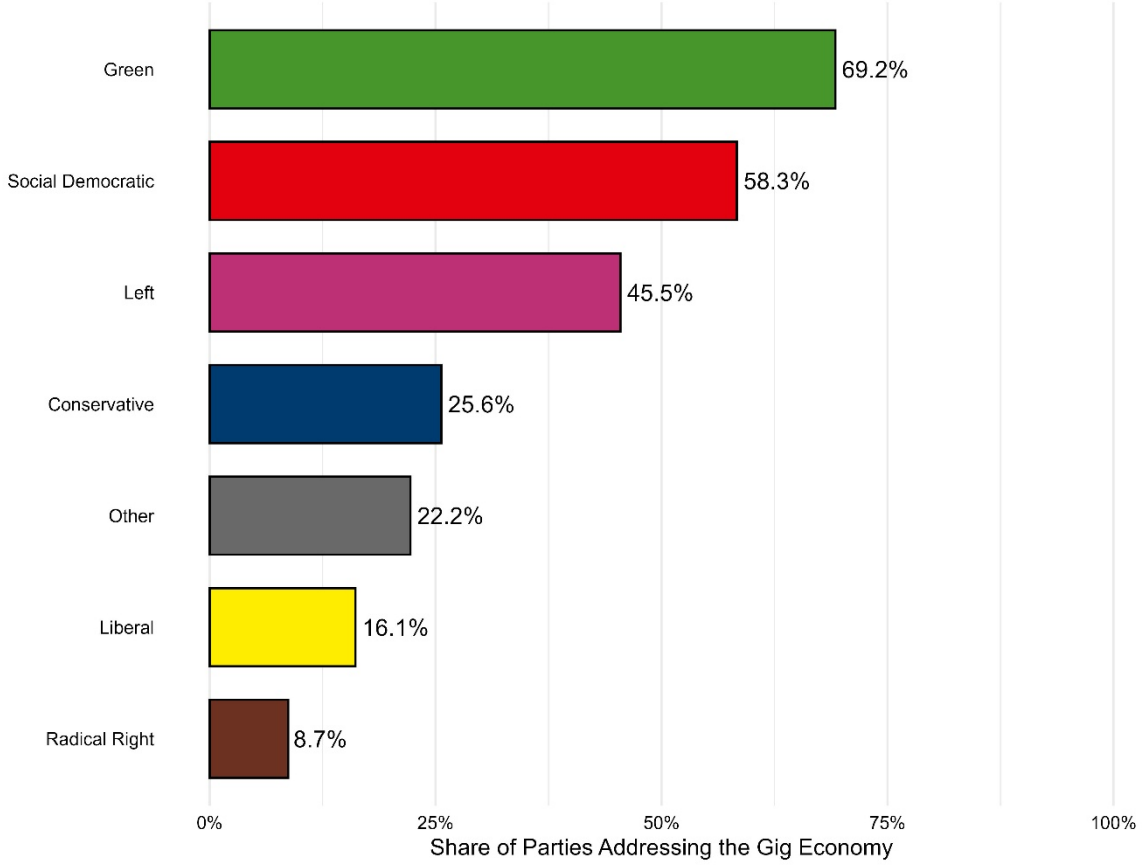


Figure 3-4 shows that just under 70%, 60% and 45% respectively of the green, social democratic, and left-wing parties in the sample address the issue. On the other hand, only 16% of liberal parties, and roughly 9% of right-wing parties, take up the gig economy as an issue.

Figure 3-4: Share of parties within each party family addressing the gig economy



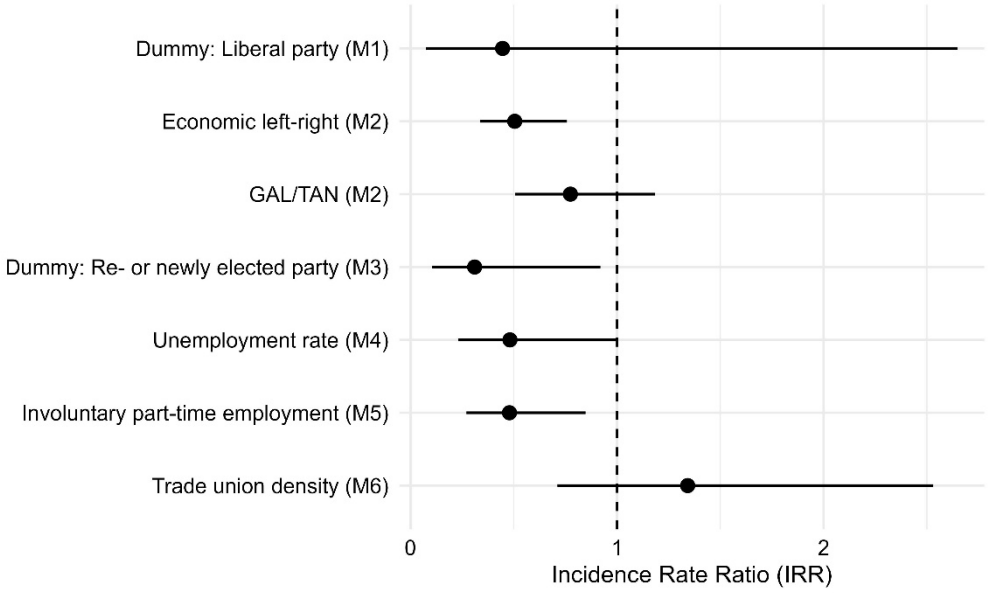
Taken together, the descriptive results from the text analysis exhibit an overall medium salience of the gig economy with large country or party-system differences. Several findings point to the importance of national circumstances for party competition regarding the gig economy. Therefore, in the next section, I dive deeper into the mechanisms underlying the factors that influence how each party addresses the gig economy.

3.5.2 Party Ideology and National Contexts

To gain a better insight into the influencing factors both at the party and the national level, several negative binomial multilevel models were estimated. The null model exhibits an intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.176. This means that 17.6% of the variance of the dependent variable can be attributed to the higher level, i.e., to the differences between the countries. Figure A3-2 in the Chapter Appendix displays the correlation matrix of all country-level and party-system-level variables that are used as independent or control variables (see also Table 3-1).

To test the mechanisms assumed in the hypotheses, Models 1 to 6 consider separate dimensions: party characteristics, economic situation, labour market, and collective action. The results of these bivariate relationships are plotted as Incidence Rate Ratio (IRR) in Figure 3-5 (see Table A3-4 in the Chapter Appendix for full regression table).

Figure 3-5: Coefficient plot of incidence rate ratios (Models 1 to 6)



Models 7 and 8 investigate the party and country level respectively, while Model 9 represents an overall model. Table 3-4 shows the results of these models. Again, for a more straightforward interpretation, estimates are displayed as IRRs.

Table 3-4: Results of negative binomial multilevel Models 7 to 9

Direct Address of the Gig Economy in Election Manifesto (DV=Number of hits)			
	M7	**M8**	**M9**
Predictors	*IRR*	*IRR*	*IRR*
Economic left–right placement	**0.501***** (0.103)		**0.440***** (0.097)
GAL/TAN placement	0.712 (0.158)		0.900 (0.206)
Dummy: Re-elected or newly elected party	0.302 (0.329)		0.522 (0.647)
Number of seats in parliament	1.354 (0.239)		1.325 (0.240)
Unemployment rate		2.638 (1.914)	2.830 (2.661)
Involuntary part-time employment		**0.207*** (0.134)	**0.156*** (0.131)
Trade-union density		1.188 (0.359)	1.094 (0.344)
Effective number of parties	1.490 (0.478)		1.072 (0.343)
Dummy: Proportional electoral system	1.220 (1.131)		0.790 (0.680)
Long-term percentage change in GDP		0.545 (0.195)	**0.431*** (0.164)
Dummy: Election during COVID-19 pandemic	0.968 (0.614)	0.719 (0.451)	0.659 (0.403)
Intercept	0.376 (0.331)	0.765 (0.248)	0.763 (0.577)
Random Effects			
Intercept variance (τ_{00})	1.11 $_{country}$	0.58 $_{country}$	0.40 $_{country}$
ICC	0.47	0.29	0.25
N	23 $_{country}$	18 $_{country}$	18 $_{country}$
Observations	169	161	137
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.296 / 0.625	0.286 / 0.493	0.554 / 0.666
AIC	404.115	407.265	352.246

*Notes: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001;*
Estimates of z-standardised coefficients displayed as incidence rate ratios (IRR).

Looking at the party level first, Model 2 and Model 7 show a highly statistically significant and negative relationship between party ideology, expressed as CHES economic left–right placement, and addressing of the gig economy (see both Figure 3-5 and Table 3-4). With each unit increase in the left–right score—i.e., the further to the economic right a party is located—the fewer mentions of the gig economy are to be expected in its manifesto. In other words, parties on the economic left address the issue more frequently in their manifestos than other parties do. The same pattern emerges when the parties' general left–right score or their GAL/TAN positioning is used, although the effect for GAL/TAN is not statistically significant. This finding also holds true when parties are clustered into larger left-wing, centre, and right-wing groups and compared against one another. Using centre parties as the reference group, left-wing parties have more mentions, while right-wing parties exhibit statistically significantly fewer mentions (see Table A3-5 in the Chapter Appendix for the regression table). This result aligns with the expectations of hypothesis H4a, according to which left-wing parties are more likely to address the gig economy in their manifestos than other parties do.

In contrast, in Model 1 (see Figure 3-5) the coefficient for liberal parties is negative and not statistically significant. It is not apparent that liberal parties—as issue owners over digitisation and liberal economy—attach greater importance to the gig economy. Instead, the analysis suggests that liberal parties raise the gig economy less frequently both compared both with centre-right parties and with all other parties. Hence, hypothesis H4b must be rejected.

Turning to the novelty of parties, Model 3 (see Figure 3-5) exhibits a statistically significant negative relationship between the number of gig economy mentions and a party's first election or re-entry into parliament. Contrary to the expectation set out in hypothesis H5—that new parties are more likely to address the gig economy than established ones—the results point in the opposite direction. However, this effect is not particularly robust, as its statistical significance disappears in both Model 7 and the overall Model 9 (see Table 3-4). Another indication that the gig economy is more likely to be taken up by established parties can be seen in the size of the parliamentary group. Although not statistically significant, the coefficients in Model 7 and Model 9 suggest that the number of gig economy mentions increases as the number of seats a party occupies in parliament rises. This indicates that the issue is more relevant to catch-all parties than to niche or single-issue parties. In view of the strategic considerations of mainstream versus challenger parties previously discussed, this result is surprising, as we would expect the opposite mechanism. One potential explanation for this phenomenon could be the resources available to parties. Larger parliamentary groups possess both greater financial and human

resources. These resources enable them to allocate attention to a broader range of issues, including those that are marginalised. Based on these results, however, hypothesis H5 must be rejected.

Moving to the county level, Models 4 to 6 and Model 8 consider the economic, labour-market and collective-action circumstances of party competition. First, the relationship between unemployment and the inclusion of the gig economy in the election manifesto, as posited in hypothesis H1, is tested. When considered in isolation, Model 4 (see Figure 3-5) shows a negative correlation. This indicates that as unemployment rises in a country, the number of mentions in the parties' election manifestos falls. However, when the effect of unemployment is considered in conjunction with other economic and labour-market factors (Model 8; see Table 3-4), the effect moves in the assumed direction. However, since the coefficients do not reach the conventional level of statistical significance, hypothesis H1 cannot be conclusively confirmed despite these indicative results.

Second, I examine the relationship between underemployment and the number of mentions of the gig economy to gain a closer look at the influence of labour-market characteristics. To this end, I operationalise the proportion of workers who are involuntarily working part-time. Both in the isolated (Model 5) and the larger model (Model 8), a clear negative and statistically significant association is evident. Thus, contrary to theoretical expectations, the number of mentions decreases as the incidence of underemployment rises. This finding is also supported by the fact that economic growth—measured as the long-term change in GDP—is negatively correlated with the number of gig economy mentions. Therefore, hypothesis H2 must be rejected.

As a last dimension, the analysis examines the effect of highly institutionalised corporatism—measured as trade-union density—and the probability of including the gig economy in the manifesto. Models 6 and Model 8 (see Figure 3-5 and Table 3-4 respectively) both exhibit a positive, but statistically non-significant effect, indicating that in countries with higher shares of employees representation in unions, parties pay more attention to the gig economy. Generally, this finding aligns with the theoretical expectations that in countries where unions are more closely involved in the policy-making process parties are more likely to pay attention to workers' concerns—in this case, their work in the gig economy. Because of the lack of statistical significance, this offers only tentative support for hypothesis H3.

Lastly, Model 9 presents an overall model that considers both party-level and macro-level variables. It is striking that the party variables remain virtually unchanged, even when the macro-level variables are considered. The direction, significance, and the effect size all remain the same

for party ideology, novelty, and size of parliamentary group. Again, these findings support hypothesis H4a.

When comparing all models, it should be noted that the COVID-19 dummy variable, as well as the party-system control variables for electoral system (proportional system) and party-system fragmentation (effective number of parties), are not significant in any of the models. It therefore does not seem to affect the frequency of addressing the gig economy, whether the election took place before or during the pandemic, in proportional or majoritarian electoral systems, or with a high number of competing parties. Regarding the model fit expressed by the Marginal and Conditional R^2, it is evident that both in the party-level model (Model 7) and the country-level model (Model 8) the predictor variables explain approximately 30% of the variance. The Conditional R^2 of Model 7 indicates that a significant proportion of the differences lies at the country level—a finding also reflected in the ICC of 0.47. The most striking value, however, is found in the overall model (Model 9). The predictors explain approximately 55% of the variance, and this value rises only moderately to 66% when the random effects are included. This indicates that the included variables already explain a large proportion of the previously unobserved country differences. However, these figures should be interpreted with some caution, as they are at least partly driven by the small sample size, particularly at the top level (i.e., the country level). This good model specification is also reflected in the significantly lower AIC (352.25 in Model 9 compared to values around 400 in Models 7 and 8), meaning that Model 9 best describes the data overall. Accordingly, it can be concluded that, above all, the combination of party ideology and macroeconomic context is decisive for addressing the gig economy in the election manifesto.

3.6 Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this article is to study how new political issues emerge in party competition: When and under which circumstances are parties incentivised to address new issues? Using the gig economy as an example, I analyse its salience as an issue in European election manifestos as well as the party-level and country-level factors that influence the probability of including the issue.

Drawing on the parties' manifestos to conduct a dictionary analysis, I show that the gig economy is addressed in roughly one third of the manifestos, and that parties use a wide range of keywords to refer to this new phenomenon. The distribution and prevalence of the issue varies greatly between countries. While the gig economy is particularly salient in the election

manifestos of Belgian and Austrian parties, it is not discussed at all by parties in the Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia, Poland, and Romania. Overall, its salience must be assessed as moderate, since even when the topic is taken up by parties, only a few, brief references are made. Nonetheless, this should not be overstated for two reasons: First, the analysis period of this study covered election programmes from 2018 to 2022, a period during which the gig economy emerged and expanded extensively. Thus, addressing such a new and niche issue is potentially an electoral risk for parties, because it is unclear what they might gain or under which thematic framework they should discuss it. Second, it is reasonable to expect that the gig economy will become increasingly relevant in the future, with the European Commission predicting that the number of gig workers will increase from 28 million in 2022 to 43 million by 2025 (Council of the European Union, 2024). So, while the salience of the gig economy was rather low in the period analysed, it can be assumed that it will increase significantly in the future, particularly due to its 'Covid boom'. Parties can therefore already establish themselves as issue entrepreneurs in this area and develop issue ownership (Hobolt and de Vries, 2015).

The dictionary analysis in this study implies that, in addition to party ideology, national contexts play an important role in the salience of the gig economy. This is evident both in the country-specific and the language-specific use of keywords, and in the fact that in most countries where the topic is discussed, there is not only one, but several parties that engage in the discussion. The results of the multilevel regressions confirm this impression: The frequency with which parties address the gig economy in their election manifestos is best explained by a combination of party-level and country-level predictors. A look at the individual influencing factors shows that economically left-wing parties are much more likely to address the issue than right-wing parties. However, contrary to the theoretical expectations, liberal party ideology does not positively influence how often parties address the gig economy. Furthermore, the analysis also revealed that established parties, both in terms of the number of seats in parliament and their relative newness, address the issue more frequently. This is possibly explained by the fact that large established parties have more financial and human resources available and can therefore address a wider range of topics. At the macroeconomic level, the analysis suggests that parties in countries with high rates of underemployment pay significantly less attention to the gig economy. Against the proposition found in the risk literature (Rueda, 2005), the politicisation of the gig economy seems not to be driven by labour-market distress in general, but rather by the collective organisation of interests. In other words, the issue becomes more prominent if there are actors—such as unions—who bring it to political attention.

This article is the first large cross-national study to assess the gig economy's salience and its importance for political parties. Therefore, the results have several implications for our understanding of party competition and behaviour. With emerging issues that tend to be non-salient in public discourse (König and Wenzelburger, 2019), it is difficult for parties to assess whether they will become electorally important—i.e., relevant for a critical number of voters. It is correspondingly challenging for parties to decide whether and how to address these issues. Using the gig economy as an example, I show that parties strategically combine these issues with their core competencies, i.e. issues they 'own', to emphasise their problem-solving ability in this area. For the analysis of campaign statements, political agendas, and policy change, this means that party ideology and affiliation to party families are still extremely important. These findings are in line with both the emerging issue and issue-ownership literature (e.g., Petrocik, 1996; Princen, 2011; Rovny and Edwards, 2012) as well as with the literature on party competition between niche and mainstream parties (e.g., Marks et al., 2002; Meguid, 2005).

Naturally, this study also has limitations. First, the most obvious limitation is that the analysis does not consider the actual size of the gig economy as a factor that might influence how often parties address the issue. This is partly because the size of the gig economy could be measured and defined in various ways, for instance as the share of GDP, as the number of clients, or as the number of gig workers. More importantly, however, none of these indicators is systematically monitored across Europe, meaning that we essentially do not know how large the gig economy in Europe is. Second, I only analyse manifestos and not parliamentary speeches or social media posts. Due to countries' different campaigning cultures, manifestos have a relevance in each country which is expressed in different ways, for instance, in the different length of the manifestos. As mentioned above, I use English translations of the original manifestos. Although the overall quality of the translations is very good, and this approach is common in comparative text analysis research, some hits may have been lost in translation. This limitation is especially problematic for the comparability of the results between countries. It could potentially result in an underestimation of the actual salience of the gig economy, but this must be accepted due to the large size of the corpus. This underestimation is likely reinforced by the fact that many gig workers are migrants without voting rights. Accordingly, from a short-term perspective, they are not an electoral target group, and thus not relevant to the political parties. A third shortcoming concerns the content of the statements on the gig economy, as this article only analyses whether the parties address the issue. A content analysis of these statements could be a future avenue to investigate if party ideology also informs the essence and framing.

3.7 Chapter Appendix

Additional Tables and Information

Table A3-1: Overview of all parties included in the analysis

Country	Election year	Party	Abbreviation	Party family (Manifesto Project)	CHES left–right score (0=extreme left; 10=extreme right)	CHES economic left–right score (0=extreme left; 10=extreme right)	CHES GAL/TAN placement (0=libertarian/post-materialist; 10=traditional/ authoritarian)	Seats in parliament	New- or re-elected
Austria	2019	Austrian Peoples Party	OVP	Christian democratic	6.9	6.90	7.10	71	No
Austria	2019	Social Democratic Party of Austria	SPO	Social democratic	4	3.60	3.80	40	No
Austria	2019	Freedom Party of Austria	FPO	Nationalist	9.1	6.50	8.90	31	No
Austria	2019	The Greens-The Green Alternative	Grune	Ecological	2.5	2.50	1.40	26	Yes
Austria	2019	NEOS-The New Austria and Liberal Forum	NEOS	Liberal	5.9	7.10	2.30	15	No
Belgium	2019	New Flemish Alliance	NVA	Ethnic or regional	7.92	7.92	6.09	25	No
Belgium	2019	Flemish Interest	VB	Nationalist	9.58	5.00	8.00	18	No
Belgium	2019	Reformist Movement	MR	*NA*	6.5	6.92	3.18	14	No
Belgium	2019	Ecolo	ECOLO	Ecological	2.08	2.50	1.08	13	No
Belgium	2019	Workers Party of Belgium	PVDA	Socialist or other left	0.33	0.33	4.58	12	No
Belgium	2019	Christian Democratic and Flemish	CDV	Christian democratic	5.58	5.58	6.25	12	No

Belgium	2019	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	OpenVLD	Liberal	6.58	7.17	2.45	12	No
Belgium	2019	Socialist Party Differently	SPA	Social democratic	3.08	3.08	2.75	9	No
Belgium	2019	Green	Groen	Ecological	2.42	2.67	1.17	8	No
Belgium	2019	Humanist Democratic Centre	CDH	*NA*	4.58	4.67	5.00	5	No
Belgium	2019	DeFI	Defi	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	2	No
Czech Republic	2021	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens	ANO	Liberal	4.69	4.50	5.73	72	No
Czech Republic	2021	Civic Democratic Party	ODS	Christian democratic	7.78	7.70	7.04	34	No
Czech Republic	2021	Mayors and Independents	STAN	Christian democratic	6.27	6.58	4.08	33	No
Czech Republic	2021	Christian Democratic Union - Czechoslovak Peoples Party	KDU-CSL	Christian democratic	5.89	5.54	7.78	23	No
Czech Republic	2021	Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura	SPD	Nationalist	8.85	4.67	9.37	20	No
Czech Republic	2021	Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09	TOP09	Christian democratic	7.41	7.33	4.85	14	No
Czech Republic	2021	Czech Pirate Party	Pirates	Ethnic or regional	4.28	4.35	1.00	4	No
Denmark	2019	Social Democracy	SD	Social democratic	4	3.71	5.00	48	No
Denmark	2019	Venstre Liberal Party of Denmark	V	Liberal	6.64	6.86	5.36	43	No
Denmark	2019	Radical Left-Social Liberal Party	RV	Liberal	5.07	5.64	1.36	16	No
Denmark	2019	Danish Peoples Party	DF	Nationalist	6.93	4.43	8.00	16	No
Denmark	2019	Socialist Peoples Party	SF	Socialist or other left	2.64	2.50	2.57	14	No
Denmark	2019	Unity List/Red-Green Alliance	EL	Socialist or other left	1	1.00	1.07	13	No
Denmark	2019	Conservative Peoples Party	KF	Christian democratic	7.07	7.57	6.07	12	No
Denmark	2019	The Alternative	A	Socialist or other left	2.5	3.21	0.93	5	No
Denmark	2019	Liberal Alliance	LA	Liberal	8	8.71	3.86	4	No

Denmark	2019	The New Right	NB	Nationalist	9	8.57	8.31	4	Yes
Estonia	2019	Estonian Reform Party	ER	Liberal	6.46	7.46	3.08	34	No
Estonia	2019	Estonian Center Party	EK	Liberal	4.46	3.77	4.62	26	No
Estonia	2019	Conservative Peoples Party	EKRE	Nationalist	8.46	4.69	9.54	19	No
Estonia	2019	Pro Patria and Res Publica Union/ Fatherland	IRL	Christian democratic	7.54	7.08	7.38	12	No
Estonia	2019	Social Democratic Party	SDE	Social democratic	3.08	3.38	1.69	10	No
Finland	2019	Social Democratic Party of Finland	SDP	Social democratic	3.14	3.21	3.29	40	No
Finland	2019	The Finns Party	PS	Nationalist	7.57	6.43	8.79	39	No
Finland	2019	National Coalition Party	KOK	Christian democratic	7.71	7.86	5.07	38	No
Finland	2019	Centre Party	KESK	*NA*	5.86	6.07	6.71	31	No
Finland	2019	Green League	VIHR	*NA*	3.71	4.14	0.93	20	No
Finland	2019	Left Alliance	VAS	Socialist or other left	1.5	1.57	1.50	16	No
Finland	2019	The Swedish Peoples Party of Finland	SFP	Ethnic or regional	6	6.21	2.71	9	No
Finland	2019	Christian Democrats	KD	Christian democratic	6.86	5.71	8.79	5	No
Finland	2019	Movement Now	LN	Liberal	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Germany	2021	Social Democratic Party of Germany	SPD	Social democratic	3.62	3.71	3.38	206	No
Germany	2021	Christian Democratic Union of Germany	CDU	Christian democratic	5.86	5.90	5.86	197	No
Germany	2021	Christian Social Union in Bavaria	CSU	Christian democratic	7.19	6.38	7.29	197	No
Germany	2021	Alliance 90/The Greens	Greens	Ecological	3.24	3.81	1.10	118	No
Germany	2021	Free Democratic Party	FDP	Liberal	6.43	7.90	3.43	92	No
Germany	2021	Alternative for Germany	AfD	Nationalist	9.24	7.00	9.52	83	No
Germany	2021	The Left	Left	Socialist or other left	1.43	1.29	2.81	39	No

Germany	2021	South Schleswig Voters' Association	SSW	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Greece	2019	New Democracy	ND	Christian democratic	7.11	7.22	7.44	158	No
Greece	2019	Coalition of the Radical Left	SYRIZA	Socialist or other left	2.33	2.22	2.44	86	No
Greece	2019	Communist Party of Greece	KKE	Socialist or other left	0.22	0.11	6.63	15	No
Greece	2019	Greek Solution	EL	*NA*	9	4.38	9.38	10	No
Greece	2019	European Realistic Disobedience Front [MeRa25]	MR25	*NA*	1.43	1.75	0.67	9	Yes
Greece	2019	Movement of Democratic Socialists	KIDISO	*NA*	4.2	4.80	3.20	2	No
Greece	2019	Panhellenic Socialist Movement	PASOK	Social democratic	4.33	4.22	3.89	2	No
Ireland	2020	Soldiers of Destiny	FF	Christian democratic	5.43	5.43	5.71	38	No
Ireland	2020	We Ourselves	SF	Ethnic or regional	2.57	2.14	4.43	37	No
Ireland	2020	Family of the Irish	FG	Christian democratic	5.86	6.43	4.29	35	No
Ireland	2020	Green Party	GP	Ecological	3.14	3.14	2.14	12	No
Ireland	2020	Social Democrats	SD	Social democratic	3	2.33	2.83	6	No
Ireland	2020	Labour	Lab	Social democratic	3.57	3.57	2.86	6	No
Ireland	2020	Solidarity-People Before Profit	PBP	Socialist or other left	0.8	0.40	2.00	5	No
Ireland	2020	Unite	Aontu	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Italy	2018	Five Star Movement	M5S	Ethnic or regional	4.78	3.21	3.74	227	No
Italy	2018	Northern League	LN	Nationalist	8.79	7.68	9.21	125	No
Italy	2018	Democratic Party	PD	Social democratic	3.21	3.58	2.26	112	No
Italy	2018	Forward Italy	FI	Christian democratic	6.95	7.84	6.84	104	No

Italy	2018	Brothers of Italy	FdI	Christian democratic	9.05	6.39	9.42	32	No
Italy	2018	Free and Equal	LeU	Social democratic	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	14	Yes
Italy	2018	South Tyrolean Peoples Party	SVP	Ethnic or regional	5.17	5.13	6.67	4	No
Italy	2018	Us with Italy - UDC	NcI	Christian democratic	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	4	Yes
Italy	2018	More Europe	PE	Liberal	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	3	Yes
Italy	2018	Popular Civic List	CP	Christian democratic	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	2	Yes
Italy	2018	Together	I	Socialist or other left	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Latvia	2018	Social Democratic Party "Harmony"	SDPS	Social democratic	3.45	4.00	6.27	23	No
Latvia	2018	Who owns the state?	KPV LV	Nationalist	5.7	5.00	5.50	16	Yes
Latvia	2018	New Conservative Party	JKP	Christian democratic	7.27	6.18	7.09	16	Yes
Latvia	2018	Development/For!	AP!	Liberal	5.82	5.90	1.91	13	Yes
Latvia	2018	National Alliance For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK	NA	Nationalist	8.45	6.09	8.09	13	No
Latvia	2018	Union of Greens and Farmers	ZZS	Ethnic or regional	5.82	5.45	7.64	11	No
Latvia	2018	Unity	V	Christian democratic	6.91	7.18	4.82	8	No
Lithuania	2020	Homeland Union	TS-LKD	Christian democratic	7.18	6.73	6.64	50	No
Lithuania	2020	Lithuanian Peasant Union	LVZS	Ethnic or regional	5.09	4.00	8.45	32	No
Lithuania	2020	Social Democratic Party of Lithuania	LSDP	Social democratic	2.36	2.82	2.73	13	No
Lithuania	2020	Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania	LRLS	Liberal	6.82	8.27	1.91	13	No
Lithuania	2020	Freedom Party	LP	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	11	Yes
Lithuania	2020	Labour Party	DP	Liberal	4.91	4.91	6.10	10	No

Lithuania	2020	Electoral Action of Lithuanias Poles	LLRA	Ethnic or regional	6.09	2.82	9.45	3	No
Lithuania	2020	Lithuanian Regions Party	LSDDP	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	3	No
Lithuania	2020	Lithuanian Green Party	LZP	*NA*	4	4.33	3.33	1	No
Netherlands	2021	Peoples Party for Freedom and Democracy	VVD	Liberal	7.62	8.15	5.00	34	No
Netherlands	2021	Democrats 66	D66	Liberal	5.15	6.23	1.38	24	No
Netherlands	2021	Party for Freedom	PVV	Nationalist	8.69	6.46	7.23	17	No
Netherlands	2021	Christian Democratic Appeal	CDA	Christian democratic	6.85	6.69	7.15	15	No
Netherlands	2021	Socialist Party	SP	Socialist or other left	1.38	1.38	4.31	9	No
Netherlands	2021	Labour Party	PvdA	Social democratic	3.62	3.62	3.08	9	No
Netherlands	2021	GreenLeft	GL	Ecological	2.31	2.38	0.85	8	No
Netherlands	2021	Forum for Democracy	FvD	Nationalist	9.54	9.08	8.33	8	No
Netherlands	2021	Party for the Animals	PVdD	Ethnic or regional	2.38	3.18	2.92	6	No
Netherlands	2021	Christian Union	CU	Christian democratic	5.08	4.31	8.15	5	No
Netherlands	2021	Think	DENK	Social democratic	4.36	3.50	7.55	3	No
Netherlands	2021	Reformed Political Party	SGP	Ethnic or regional	8.54	7.17	9.92	3	No
Netherlands	2021	JA21	JA21	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	3	Yes
Netherlands	2021	Volt Netherlands	Volt	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	3	Yes
Netherlands	2021	50PLUS	50PLUS	Ethnic or regional	5.08	4.45	5.60	1	No
Netherlands	2021	Farmer-Citizen Movement	BBB	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes

Nether-lands	2021	Together	BIJ1	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Norway	2021	Labour Party	Ap	Social demo-cratic	3.4	3.40	3.20	48	No
Norway	2021	Conservative Party	H	Christian dem-ocratic	6.7	7.30	5.40	36	No
Norway	2021	Centre Party	Sp	Ethnic or re-gional	4.8	4.50	6.60	28	No
Norway	2021	Progress Party	FrP	Nationalist	8.4	7.90	6.80	21	No
Norway	2021	Red Party	RV	Socialist or other left	0.5	0.40	1.40	8	No
Norway	2021	Liberal Party	V	Liberal	5.9	6.60	1.80	8	No
Norway	2021	Green Party	MDG	Ecological	3.8	3.90	1.90	3	No
Norway	2021	Christian Democratic Party	KrF	Christian dem-ocratic	5.6	5.00	7.80	3	No
Poland	2019	Law and Justice Party	PiS	Christian dem-ocratic	7.55	2.95	9.14	235	No
Poland	2019	Civic Platform	PO	Liberal	5.38	6.57	4.67	119	No
Poland	2019	Democratic Left Alliance	SLD	Social demo-cratic	3.38	3.90	3.57	24	No
Poland	2019	Polish Peoples Party	PSL	Christian dem-ocratic	5.29	4.33	7.10	20	No
Poland	2019	Spring	Wiosnia	Liberal	1.89	3.50	0.84	19	No
Poland	2019	Confederation Liberty and Inde-pendence	Konfederacia	Nationalist	9.53	9.06	9.53	11	Yes
Poland	2019	Modern	Nowo	Liberal	5.16	7.67	2.61	8	No
Poland	2019	Left Together	Lewica Razem	Social demo-cratic	1.28	1.29	1.22	6	No
Poland	2019	Kukiz 15	Kukiz	Nationalist	7.11	6.75	7.61	6	No
Poland	2019	Polish Initiative	PI	Liberal	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	4	No
Poland	2019	The Greens	PZ	Liberal	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	3	No
Poland	2019	German Minority	KWMN	Ethnic or re-gional	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	No

Portugal	2022	Socialist Party	PS	Social democratic	4.13	4.00	4.38	120	No
Portugal	2022	Social Democratic Party	PSD	Christian democratic	6.38	6.50	7.00	77	No
Portugal	2022	Enough	C	Nationalist	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	12	No
Portugal	2022	Democratic Unitarian Coalition	CDU	*NA*	0.88	0.63	5.13	6	No
Portugal	2022	Portuguese Communist Party	PCP	Socialist or other left	0.88	0.75	5.13	6	No
Portugal	2022	Left Bloc	Bloco	Socialist or other left	0.88	1.00	1.75	5	No
Portugal	2022	People-Animals-Nature	PAN	Ecological	3.43	3.83	4.00	1	No
Portugal	2022	Free	L	Ecological	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	No
Romania	2020	Social Democratic Party	PSD	Socialist or other left	3.67	3.38	8.25	110	No
Romania	2020	National Liberal Party	PNL	Liberal	7.07	7.25	6.00	93	No
Romania	2020	Alliance for the Union of Romanians	APUR	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	33	Yes
Slovakia	2020	Ordinary People and Independent	OLaNO	Christian democratic	6.57	6.00	6.79	53	No
Slovakia	2020	We are family-Boris Kollar	Sme	Nationalist	7.13	3.50	7.88	17	No
Slovakia	2020	For the People	Za Ludi	*NA*	6	6.63	5.00	12	Yes
Slovenia	2018	Slovenian Democratic Party	SDS	Christian democratic	8.64	7.50	8.73	25	No
Slovenia	2018	List of Marjan Sarec	LMS	Liberal	4.36	4.64	4.64	13	Yes
Slovenia	2018	Social Democrats	SD	Social democratic	2.57	3.07	2.53	10	No
Slovenia	2018	Party of Miro Cerar / Modern Centre Party	SMC	Liberal	4.79	5.14	4.07	10	No
Slovenia	2018	The Left	Levica	Socialist or other left	0.71	0.71	1.00	9	No
Slovenia	2018	New Slovenia-Christian Peoples Party	NSI	Christian democratic	7.5	7.36	8.00	7	No
Slovenia	2018	Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia	DeSUS	Ethnic or regional	3.77	3.29	5.07	5	No

Slovenia	2018	Party of Alenka Bratusek	SAB	Liberal	4.21	4.36	3.33	5	No
Slovenia	2018	Slovenian National Party	SNS	Nationalist	8.71	6.31	8.47	4	Yes
Spain	2019	Spanish Socialist Workers Party	PSOE	Socialist or other left	3.6	3.80	2.93	120	No
Spain	2019	Peoples Party	PPP	Christian democratic	8.07	7.93	8.00	89	No
Spain	2019	Voice (Latin)	Vox	Nationalist	9.71	9.33	9.67	52	No
Spain	2019	We Can	Podemos	Socialist or other left	1.93	2.13	1.33	35	No
Spain	2019	Republican Left of Catalonia	ERC	Ethnic or regional	3.2	3.40	2.87	13	No
Spain	2019	Citizens-Party of the Citizenry	Cs	Liberal	7.2	7.40	5.47	10	No
Spain	2019	Catalan European Democratic Party (Together for Catalonia partner)	PdeCat	Ethnic or regional	6.67	6.87	5.87	8	No
Spain	2019	Basque 6 Party	PNV	Ethnic or regional	6	5.80	5.67	6	No
Spain	2019	Basque Country Unite/Gather	EHB	Ethnic or regional	1.29	1.47	1.75	5	No
Spain	2019	More Country	Pais	Socialist or other left	2.73	2.80	1.67	3	No
Spain	2019	Canarian Coalition	CC	Ethnic or regional	6.71	6.36	6.31	2	No
Spain	2019	Popular Unity Candidacy	CUP	Ethnic or regional	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	2	Yes
Spain	2019	Teruel Exists	TE	Ethnic or regional	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Sweden	2018	Swedish Social Democratic Party	SAP	Social democratic	3.88	4.12	4.41	100	No
Sweden	2018	Moderate Party	M	Christian democratic	7.71	7.71	5.94	70	No
Sweden	2018	Sweden Democrats	SD	Nationalist	8.47	5.59	8.76	62	No
Sweden	2018	Center Party	C	Ethnic or regional	6.82	8.00	2.24	31	No
Sweden	2018	Left Party	V	Socialist or other left	1.71	1.76	1.94	28	No

Sweden	2018	Christian Democrats	KD	Christian democratic	7.82	7.19	6.95	22	No
Sweden	2018	Liberal Peoples Party	L	Liberal	6.53	7.12	3.24	20	No
Sweden	2018	Environment Party-The Greens	MP	Ecological	3.29	3.94	1.59	16	No
Switzerland	2019	Swiss Peoples Party	SVP	Nationalist	8.73	8.18	9.36	53	No
Switzerland	2019	Social Democratic Party of Switzerland	SP	Social democratic	1.36	1.64	1.36	39	No
Switzerland	2019	FDP. The Liberals	FDP	Liberal	7	8.09	5.00	29	No
Switzerland	2019	Green Party	GPS	Ecological	1.09	1.55	0.73	28	No
Switzerland	2019	Christian Democratic Peoples Party	CVP	Christian democratic	5.27	5.27	5.73	25	No
Switzerland	2019	Green Liberal Party	GPL	Ecological	4.91	6.09	2.36	16	No
Switzerland	2019	Conservative Democratic Party	BDP	Christian democratic	5.82	5.80	6.09	3	No
Switzerland	2019	Evangelical Peoples Party	EVP	Christian democratic	5.82	4.33	7.09	3	No
Switzerland	2019	Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland	EDU	Nationalist	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes
Switzerland	2019	Ticino League	LdT	Ethnic or regional	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	No
Switzerland	2019	Swiss Party of Labour	PdAS	Socialist or other left	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	No
United Kingdom	2019	Conservative Party	CONS	Christian democratic	7.12	7.06	6.18	365	No
United Kingdom	2019	Labour Party	LAB	Social democratic	1.94	1.94	2.29	203	No
United Kingdom	2019	Scottish National Party	SNP	Ethnic or regional	3.5	3.44	2.67	48	No
United Kingdom	2019	Liberal Democratic Party	LIBDEM	Liberal	4.24	4.47	1.53	11	No
United Kingdom	2019	Democratic Unionist Party	DUP	Ethnic or regional	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	8	No

United Kingdom	2019	We Ourselves	SF	Socialist or other left	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	7	No
United Kingdom	2019	Party of Wales	PLAID	Ethnic or regional	3.09	3.36	3.00	4	No
United Kingdom	2019	Social Democratic and Labour Party	SDLP	Social democratic	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	2	Yes
United Kingdom	2019	Green Party	GREEN	Ecological	2	2.12	0.81	1	No
United Kingdom	2019	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	APNI	Liberal	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	1	Yes

Table A3-2: Summary of descriptive statistics of independent variables

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	SE
General left–right placement (0=extreme left; 10=extreme right)	169	5.14	2.43	0.22	5.27	9.71	0.19
Economic left–right placement (0=extreme left; 10=extreme right)	169	4.9	2.22	0.11	4.69	9.33	0.17
GAL/TAN placement (0=libertarian/postmaterialist; 10=traditional/authoritarian)	169	4.86	2.65	0.67	4.85	9.92	0.2
Liberal party	179	0.17	0.38	0	0	1	0.03
New or re-election	199	0.15	0.35	0	0	1	0.03
Seats in parliament	199	30.88	49.55	1	13	365	3.51
Unemployment rate (in percent)	185	6.8	3.78	2.95	5.7	18.68	0.28
Share of involuntary part-time employment	199	23.08	19.71	3.7	14	66.4	1.4
Trade-union density (share of employees in union)	172	27.71	19.76	6	16.3	67	1.51
Effective number of parties	199	6.26	2.1	3.23	6.48	10.96	0.15
Proportional electoral system	199	0.85	0.36	0	1	1	0.03
GDP per capita (PPP at current international prices)	199	53455.34	16936.66	29817.8	49911.16	98866.42	1200.61
GDP long-term change (absolute)	199	17778.34	9467.47	1979.59	18043.65	55649.43	671.13
GDP long-term change (in percent)	199	32.72	10.95	6.2	31.39	56.29	0.78

Table A3-3: Distribution of hits across manifestos and countries

Keyword	Number of matches	Number of manifestos	Country	Party (Number of hits)
Gig platforms	50	19	Austria	SPÖ (9)
			Belgium	CDV (1), Ecolo (5), MR (1), PVDA (12), spa (2)
			Germany	Left (1)
			Italy	M5S (1)
			Netherlands	CDA (1), DENK (1), SP (2)
			Norway	RV (2), Sp (2)
			Portugal	Bloco/PDE (2)
			Slovakia	Sme (1)
			Spain	Podemos (1)
			Switzerland	CVP (1), GPS (1), PdAS (4)
Platform economy	41	20	Belgium	CDV (6), Ecolo (2), Groen (1), NVA (1), spa (3)
			Denmark	SF (1)
			Finland	PS (2), SDP (6)
			Germany	CDU/CSU (2), Greens (1), SPD (1)
			Netherlands	CDA (2), CU (2), PvdA (1), SP (1)
			Norway	AP (4), RV (1)
			Spain	Pais (1), Podemos (1)
			Switzerland	GPS (2)
Sharing economy	31	22	Belgium	CDV (4), Ecolo (1), PVDA (1), spa (1)
			Denmark	SF (2)
			Estonia	EK (1), SDE (2)
			Finland	KD (1), SDP (1)
			Italy	LeU (1), M5S (1)
			Lithuania	LSDDP (1)
			Norway	Hoyre (2), MDG (1), RV (1), Sp (2), V (2)
			Slovakia	ZL (1)
			Slovenia	SD (1)
			Sweden	L (1)
			Switzerland	GPL (1)
Platform work	16	8	Austria	SPÖ (5)
			Belgium	spa (2)
			Estonia	EK (1)
			Finland	SDP (2)
			Germany	Left (1)
			Netherlands	PvdA (2)
			Portugal	Bloco/PDE (2), PS (1)
Collaborative Economy	13	6	Belgium	DeFi (2), MR (5)
			Italy	M5S (2)
			Portugal	Livre (1)
			Slovenia	SD (1)
			Spain	ERC (2)

Zero-hour	12	8	Belgium	spa (1)
			Finland	SDP (4)
			Ireland	Aontu (2), PBP (1)
			United Kingdom	Alliance (1), Labour (1), LibDem (1), SNP (1)
Gig economy	10	7	Ireland	Labour (2)
			United Kingdom	Alliance (1), Cons (1), Green (2), LibDem (2), SDLP (1), SNP (1)
Contractor	5	4	Belgium	PVDA (2)
			Germany	Greens (1)
			Ireland	SF (1)
			United Kingdom	LibDem (1)
Crowdwork	5	4	Austria	Greens (1), SPÖ (2)
			Germany	CDU/CSU (1), Greens (1)
Work on call	4	3	Austria	SPÖ (1)
			Belgium	spa (1)
			Germany	Left (2)
Platform capitalism	2	1	Belgium	PVDA
Clickwork	1	1	Germany	Left
Freelance economy	1	1	Belgium	CDV
Gig work	1	1	United Kingdom	Green
Work on de-mand	1	1	Switzerland	PdAS

Table A3-4: Results of negative binomial multilevel Models 1 to 6

Direct Address of the Gig Economy in Election Manifesto (DV=Number of hits)						
	M1	**M2**	**M3**	**M4**	**M5**	**M6**
Predictors	*IRR*	*IRR*	*IRR*	*IRR*	*IRR*	*IRR*
Dummy: Liberal party	0.446 (0.405)					
Economic left–right placement		**0.505*** ** (0.105)				
GAL/TAN placement		0.774 (0.168)				
Dummy: Re- or newly elected party			**0.311*** (0.172)			
Unemployment rate				0.482 (0.181)		
Involuntary part-time employment					**0.479*** (0.139)	
Trade-union density						1.342 (0.434)
Effective number of parties	1.824 (0.574)	1.281 (0.423)	1.218 (0.375)			
Dummy: Proportional electoral system	1.727 (2.601)	0.919 (0.887)	0.837 (0.732)			
Long-term percentage change in GDP				0.716 (0.237)	0.715 (0.206)	0.782 (0.277)
Dummy: Election during COVID-19 pandemic	2.824 (2.008)	1.050 (0.706)	0.858 (0.534)	0.871 (0.551)	0.970 (0.550)	1.054 (0.715)
Intercept	0.139 (0.199)	0.470 (0.429)	0.809 (0.671)	0.599 (0.210)	0.596 (0.190)	0.678 (0.241)
Random Effects						
Intercept variance (τ_{00})	0.00 $_{country}$	1.32 $_{country}$	1.12 $_{country}$	0.97 $_{country}$	0.79 $_{country}$	1.03 $_{country}$
ICC	0.00	0.51	0.43	0.39	0.34	0.42
N	23 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	21 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	19 $_{country}$
Observations	88	169	199	185	199	172
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.259 / 0.259	0.220 / 0.617	0.072 / 0.470	0.130 / 0.473	0.171 / 0.454	0.068 / 0.455
AIC	135.367	404.610	478.183	445.857	474.929	439.654

*Notes: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001; Estimates of z-standardised coefficients displayed as incidence rate ratios (IRR).*

Table A3-5: Results of negative binomial multilevel Model 10

Direct Address of the Gig Economy in Election Manifesto (DV=Number of hits)	
	M10
Predictors	*IRR*
Party Ideology: Left-leaning	2.195 (0.942)
Party Ideology: Right-leaning	**0.364*** (0.170)
Effective number of parties	1.295 (0.424)
Dummy: Proportional electoral system	0.857 (0.824)
Dummy: Election during COVID-19 pandemic	1.007 (0.671)
Intercept	0.567 (0.534)
Random Effects	
Intercept variance (τ_{00})	1.30
ICC	0.51
$N_{country}$	23
Observations	169
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.210 / 0.610
AIC	406.570

*Notes: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001;*
Estimates of z-standardised coefficients displayed as incidence rate ratios (IRR).

Figure A3-1: Salience of gig economy as share of quasi-sentences per manifesto

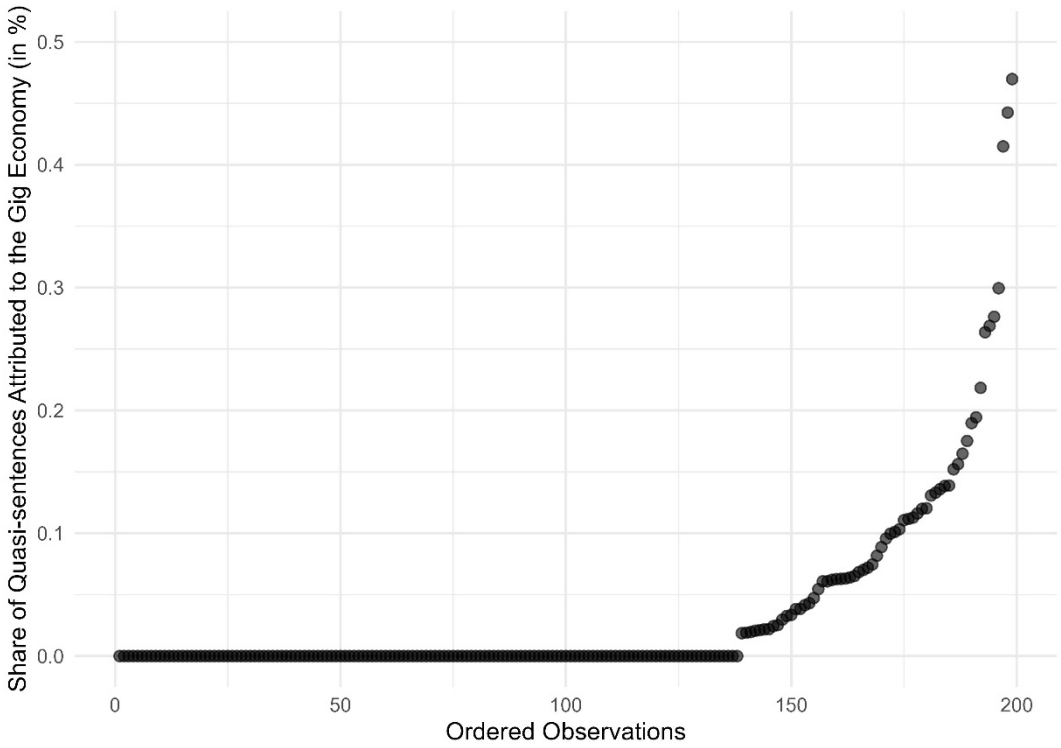
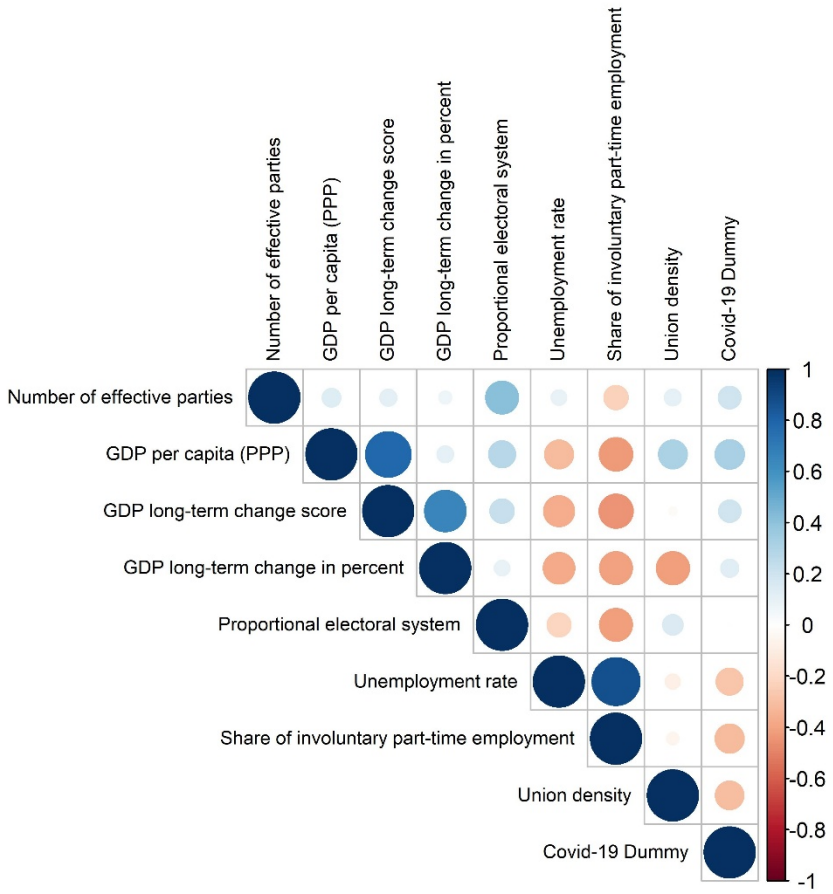


Figure A3-2: Correlation matrix of all country-level independent and control variables



Robustness Checks

Table A3-6: Results from leave-one-country-out re-estimation of Model 7

	Economic left–right placement	GAL/TAN placement	Number of seats in parliament	Dummy: Re- or newly elected party	Effective number of parties	Dummy: Proportional electoral system
Original Estimate	-0.690	-0.340	0.303	-1.197	0.399	0.199
Omitted Country						
Austria	-0.631	-0.344	0.307	-0.961	0.582	-0.201
Belgium	-0.708	-0.352	0.284	-1.051	0.008	0.407
Czech Republic	-0.665	-0.353	0.3	-1.217	0.423	0.233
Denmark	-0.661	-0.347	0.295	-1.223	0.389	0.256
Estonia	-0.7	-0.357	0.323	-1.156	0.448	0.112
Finland	-0.625	-0.424	0.275	-1.21	0.35	0.139
Germany	-0.683	-0.365	0.218	-1.225	0.459	-0.041
Greece	-0.713	-0.31	0.294	-1.072	0.257	0.437
Ireland	-0.697	-0.343	0.306	-1.213	0.397	0.244
Italy	-0.66	-0.308	0.204	-1.211	0.358	0.266
Latvia	-0.684	-0.322	0.301	-0.946	0.452	0.203
Lithuania	-0.693	-0.317	0.251	-1.155	0.605	-1.1
Netherlands	-0.658	-0.466	0.327	-1.244	0.37	0.252
Norway	-0.756	-0.337	0.334	-1.17	0.475	0.053
Poland	-0.693	-0.327	0.312	-1.246	0.241	0.492
Portugal	-0.705	-0.28	0.286	-1.175	0.388	0.18
Romania	-0.696	-0.325	0.317	-1.19	0.401	0.24

Slovakia	-0.711	-0.344	0.31	-2.269	0.37	0.23
Slovenia	-0.698	-0.312	0.294	-1.036	0.444	0.189
Spain	-0.675	-0.329	0.317	-1.217	0.41	0.248
Sweden	-0.724	-0.322	0.319	-1.217	0.382	0.295
Switzerland	-0.713	-0.314	0.302	-1.183	0.398	0.206
United Kingdom	-0.768	-0.301	0.579	-1.085	0.602	1.608

Table A3-7: Results from leave-one-country-out re-estimation of Model 8

	Unemployment rate	**Involuntary part-time employment**	**Trade-union density**	**Long-term percentage change in GDP**
Original Estimate	0.970	-1.577	0.173	-0.607
Omitted Country				
Austria	0.971	-1.461	0.227	-0.527
Belgium	0.649	-1.218	0.097	-0.586
Czech Republic	0.609	-1.265	0.137	-0.568
Denmark	0.759	-1.418	0.511	-0.487
Estonia	0.958	-1.535	0.221	-0.656
Finland	1.134	-1.791	0.019	-0.644
Germany	1.061	-1.567	0.252	-0.514
Greece	0.97	-1.577	0.173	-0.607
Ireland	1.065	-1.786	0.06	-1.056
Italy	1.532	-2.399	0.209	-0.497
Latvia	0.853	-1.437	0.114	-0.578

Lithuania	1.023	-1.565	0.184	-0.544
Netherlands	1.237	-1.911	0.083	-0.733
Norway	1.002	-1.667	-0.005	-0.66
Poland	0.461	-1.199	0.107	-0.482
Portugal	0.97	-1.577	0.173	-0.607
Romania	0.97	-1.577	0.173	-0.607
Slovakia	0.974	-1.59	0.161	-0.622
Slovenia	0.97	-1.577	0.173	-0.607
Spain	1.708	-1.934	0.09	-0.65
Sweden	0.768	-1.425	0.381	-0.664
Switzerland	0.97	-1.577	0.173	-0.607
United Kingdom	1.165	-1.639	0.254	-0.526

Table A3-8: Results from leave-one-country-out re-estimation of Model 9

	Economic left–right placement	**GAL/TAN placement**	**Number of seats in parliament**	**Dummy: Re- or newly elected party**	**Unemployment rate**	**Involuntary part-time employment**	**Trade-union density**	**Effective number of parties**	**Dummy: Proportional electoral system**	**Long-term percentage change in GDP**
Original Estimate	-0.820	-0.106	0.281	-0.651	1.040	-1.861	0.09	0.07	-0.236	-0.842
Omitted Country										
Austria	-0.75	-0.105	0.273	-0.02	0.983	-1.682	0.155	0.168	-0.49	-0.729
Belgium	-0.908	-0.064	0.225	-0.462	0.888	-1.522	0.037	-0.288	0.219	-0.817
Czech Republic	-0.801	-0.134	0.263	-0.845	0.396	-1.28	-0.018	0.202	-0.013	-0.837
Denmark	-0.854	-0.069	0.319	-0.109	1.429	-2.157	0.595	-0.112	-0.217	-0.567

Estonia	-0.856	-0.106	0.295	-0.522	0.906	-1.718	0.162	0.144	-0.31	-0.947
Finland	-0.726	-0.194	0.266	-0.586	1.646	-2.494	-0.036	-0.079	-0.594	-0.826
Germany	-0.819	-0.118	0.221	-0.631	1.05	-1.845	0.112	0.086	-0.359	-0.834
Greece	-0.82	-0.106	0.281	-0.651	1.04	-1.861	0.09	0.07	-0.236	-0.842
Ireland	-0.812	-0.089	0.269	-0.638	1.186	-2.123	0.002	0.058	-0.318	-1.219
Italy	-0.767	-0.073	0.136	-0.675	1.327	-2.327	0.069	-0.022	0.057	-0.851
Latvia	-0.813	-0.103	0.272	-0.454	0.76	-1.572	0.016	0.154	-0.112	-0.833
Lithuania	-0.822	-0.069	0.266	-0.442	1.409	-1.984	0.218	0.116	-1.089	-0.5
Netherlands	-0.822	-0.186	0.276	-0.776	1.082	-1.991	-0.027	0.184	-0.295	-0.961
Norway	-0.986	-0.058	0.435	-1.054	0.373	-1.509	-0.285	0.398	0.029	-1.007
Poland	-0.836	-0.096	0.304	-0.825	0.571	-1.466	0.012	0.038	0.185	-0.743
Portugal	-0.82	-0.106	0.281	-0.651	1.04	-1.861	0.09	0.07	-0.236	-0.842
Romania	-0.82	-0.106	0.281	-0.651	1.04	-1.861	0.09	0.07	-0.236	-0.842
Slovakia	-0.844	-0.095	0.289	-1.912	1.168	-1.972	0.119	0.026	-0.247	-0.827
Slovenia	-0.82	-0.106	0.281	-0.651	1.04	-1.861	0.09	0.07	-0.236	-0.842
Spain	-0.788	-0.103	0.278	-0.723	1.968	-2.288	0.023	-0.062	0.002	-0.868
Sweden	-0.826	-0.1	0.288	-0.778	0.841	-1.668	0.318	-0.012	0.204	-0.898
Switzerland	-0.82	-0.106	0.281	-0.651	1.04	-1.861	0.09	0.07	-0.236	-0.842
United Kingdom	-0.875	-0.069	0.514	-0.457	1.273	-2.027	0.161	0.13	0.042	-0.734

Table A3-9: Results of linear multilevel Models 1 to 9 (Re-estimation with share-dependent variable)

Direct Address of the Gig Economy in Election Manifesto (DV=Share of quasi-sentences)									
	M1	**M2**	**M3**	**M4**	**M5**	**M6**	**M7**	**M8**	**M9**
Predictors	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*	*Estimates*
Dummy: Liberal party	-0.004 (0.010)								
Economic left-right placement		**-0.014*** (0.006)					**-0.014*** (0.006)		**-0.022**** (0.007)
GAL/TAN placement		-0.009 (0.006)					-0.009 (0.006)		-0.000 (0.006)
Dummy: Re- or newly elected party			-0.012 (0.015)				-0.018 (0.024)		-0.007 (0.027)
Number of seats in parliament							0.001 (0.006)		-0.002 (0.006)
Unemployment rate				**-0.015*** (0.007)				0.008 (0.017)	0.017 (0.019)
Involuntary part-time employment					**-0.019**** (0.007)			-0.026 (0.016)	**-0.040*** (0.018)
Trade-union density						0.000 (0.010)		0.001 (0.008)	-0.001 (0.008)
Effective number of parties	0.002 (0.005)	0.004 (0.008)	0.002 (0.008)				0.005 (0.008)		-0.002 (0.008)

Dummy: Proportional electoral system	0.007 (0.014)	0.003 (0.024)	-0.006 (0.023)				0.004 (0.024)		-0.017 (0.020)
Long-term percentage change in GDP				-0.005 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.011)		-0.009 (0.009)	-0.016 (0.009)
Dummy: Election during COVID-19 pandemic	0.001 (0.009)	-0.012 (0.016)	-0.018 (0.017)	-0.014 (0.013)	-0.017 (0.015)	-0.016 (0.020)	-0.014 (0.016)	-0.018 (0.016)	-0.016 (0.016)
Intercept	0.007 (0.014)	0.035 (0.023)	0.047* (0.022)	0.035*** (0.007)	0.040*** (0.008)	0.045*** (0.010)	0.036 (0.023)	0.040*** (0.008)	0.056** (0.020)
Random Effects									
Intercept variance (τ_{00})	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$	0.00 $_{country}$
ICC	0.00	0.11	0.11	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.10	0.06	0.02
N	23 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	21 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	19 $_{country}$	23 $_{country}$	18 $_{country}$	18 $_{country}$
Observations	88	169	199	185	199	172	169	161	137
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.010 / 0.012	0.077 / 0.176	0.013 / 0.125	0.039 / 0.104	0.059 / 0.118	0.012 / 0.119	0.080 / 0.171	0.061 / 0.116	0.177 / 0.196

*Notes: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001;*
Estimates of z-standardised coefficients.

Table A3-10: Results of negative binomial country-fixed effects Models 1, 2, 3 and 7

Direct Address of the Gig Economy in Election Manifesto (DV=Number of hits)				
	M1	**M2**	**M3**	**M7**
Dummy: Liberal party	-0.815			
	(1.098)			
Economic left–right placement		**-0.701*** **		**-0.710*** **
		(0.158)		(0.163)
GAL/TAN placement		-0.155		-0.201
		(0.171)		(0.185)
Dummy: Re- or newly elected party			**-1.077***	-0.969
			(0.505)	(1.168)
Number of seats in parliament				0.222
				(0.168)
Observations	39	130	163	130
R^2	0.097	0.150	0.099	0.156
AIC	107.7	370.3	446.9	371.8
Standard Errors: Cluster-robust	X	X	X	X
Fixed Effects: Country	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$*

4 How Parties Talk About the Gig Economy: Exploring the Rhetoric Across 23 European Countries Between 2018–2022

Abstract

The rise of platform-mediated work—a prime example of the digital revolution—creates new challenges for parties by increasing individualisation and precarisation. Since we do not know how political parties deal with these uncertainties, this article asks how they frame the gig economy, and whether they subsume it under existing policy domains. Using theories of issue politicisation, issue linking and party competition, a novel, sequential mixed-methods design is employed that pairs a dictionary analysis of 188 manifestos from 23 European countries (2018–2022) with manual sentiment and content coding. The results show that parties systematically subsume the gig economy under pre-existing domains, particularly under the labour market and the welfare state. Regardless of ideology, the gig economy is portrayed as a threat to labour markets and working conditions, with few positive references to its opportunities. Understanding these discursive strategies illuminates how parties legitimise or contest novel economic phenomena within established policy frameworks.

4.1 Introduction

Robots, artificial intelligence and machines will take over much of the work we know today. These developments are amazing! […] The sharing and platform economy have the potential to contribute to more sustainable consumption…
2019 Election Manifesto of the Socialist People's Party[25] (SF)—Denmark

All these zero-hours contracts put pressure on the prevailing wage and working conditions and displace real, unadulterated, full-time employment. There is a word for this: social dumping.
2019 Election Manifesto of the Workers' Party of Belgium (PvdA)—Belgium

These quotes from election manifestos exemplify the range of framing of both content and sentiment that parties use when talking about the gig economy. While the first quote points out the positive aspects of the gig economy, such as sustainable consumption, the second quote is a pronounced condemnation of its exploitative labour practices. Comparing the most important issues in the election campaigns in both countries, the economic situation only featured moderately in the election campaign in Belgium, whereas in Denmark there was even less coverage (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2020; Rihoux et al., 2020). The election results achieved by both parties at 7.7% (Danish SF) and 8.6% (Belgian PvdA) are, however, comparable. These divergent perspectives and thematic linkages—even within the same party family—raise the question of whether parties have the same ideas about the platform economy and to what extent these ideas are influenced by national circumstances or by party characteristics. In sum, the quotes highlight the complex and contested nature of gig work within political discourse (Marenco and Seidl, 2021).

Digital technologies are rapidly changing the way we live our daily lives, organise our economies, and manage our labour markets. Platform-mediated work and the so-called 'gig economy' are a prime example of this digital revolution. Hence, it is no surprise that the gig or platform economy—characterised by flexible short-term engagements, platform-mediated job allocation, and an overall high degree of flexibility and insecurity—is increasingly discussed in political discourse. This emergent economic model presents both opportunities for innovation and challenges to workers' protection and social rights, thus prompting intense litigation, legislative proposals, and critical analysis across the European Union (Aloisi, 2022). However, despite its possibly pervasive economic and societal transformation, digitalisation, and thus the gig economy, has remained a relatively marginal topic in electoral contexts, with political parties demonstrating

[25] Since 2022 the English name for The Socialist People's Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti*) is Green Left.

varied levels of engagement with its implications (König and Wenzelburger, 2019; Siewert and König, 2019).

Even if party political attention is still low, I argue that for several reasons the gig economy is highly relevant to political parties. First, gig economy customers are voters. Survey data shows that roughly 60% of European citizens use gig economy services at least occasionally (Dimitri et al., 2025)[26]. Culpepper and Thelen (2020) show that consumers are interested in obtaining these practical and cheap everyday conveniences. Second, the quotes above show that the gig economy has the potential to be negotiated as an issue across several dimensions of party competition. As a labour-market issue, it clearly concerns the traditional left–right economic dimension of issue competition. However, since it also raises questions relating to the environment, migration, and EU integration, it is conceivable that the gig economy will be negotiated under the sociocultural dimension. As such, it is particularly relevant for left-wing actors, who may be especially cross-pressured to cater both to their main voter group, i.e., the traditional working class, and to other non-privileged groups, i.e., gig workers. This can lead to a conflict between the economic and cultural dimension of party competition, thus challenging the parties' traditional strategies.

In this regard, it can also be questioned whether the gig economy is something distinctly new—and therefore a novel challenge for parties and their established frameworks—or whether it represents a new manifestation of pre-existing socioeconomic challenges, and is thus simply newly politicised. Previous research on the politicisation of digitalisation reveals that the framing varies drastically between parties, and that parties adapt their established ideological positions to emerging digital issues, often framing them through the lens of existing socioeconomic conflicts (Guglielmo, 2025; König and Wenzelburger, 2019). Additionally, parties link their framing of the digital economy to national and institutional circumstances to reflect the respective political, legal, and welfare reality and consequently to reflect public sentiment (Marenco and Seidl, 2021).

Even if the gig economy receives increasing academic interest from various fields (Vadavi and Sharmiladevi, 2024), it is still a widely neglected topic within party research. This study addresses this gap by empirically investigating how parties across Europe discuss the gig economy in their manifestos, examining both the content and sentiment of their rhetoric. Specifically, I examine how parties across the ideological left–right spectrum articulate their positions by linking this

[26] The survey was conducted in 2025 in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

new issue to established policy domains and existing ideological tenets. Additionally, the differences between left-wing and right-wing rhetoric are investigated to unravel how their discursive strategies are shaped by their core ideologies.

I argue that the gig economy is a prime example of issue linking, i.e., a novel or newly politicised topic that a party connects to another established topic and that can therefore be framed differently depending on the party's stance towards this carrying topic. Theories of issue politicisation, issue linking, and frame extension are used to explain the variation in how parties integrate the gig economy into their agendas in a multidimensional policy space. To test these theoretical claims empirically, a novel, sequential mixed-methods approach is employed, combining quantitative text analysis—to estimate the issue's overall salience—with qualitative sentiment and content analysis—to explore the argumentation and framings adopted by different parties. The sample comprises 188 election manifestos of parties across 23 European countries from 2018 to 2022.

The main findings indicate that (1) left-wing parties are much more likely to address the issue and are disproportionally more negative about the system-level and personal-level consequences of the gig economy compared to right-wing parties; (2) positive framings are largely absent, and (3) that the rhetoric exhibits issue-linking strategies, as it is generally not discussed as a standalone topic but mostly through a labour-market and welfare-state lens. These results have important implications as the article has three contributions: First, the analysis constitutes the first descriptive mapping of the gig economy as an issue in party communications. Second, the argumentative patterns are explored to show that positive framing of the gig economy as an opportunity for labour markets and workers is virtually non-existent, and that the gig economy is perceived rather as a threat to traditional welfare systems. The third contribution is methodological. The article uses machine-translated election manifestos for both quantitative and qualitative text, and content analysis to investigate parties' framing and communications strategies. Understanding these discursive strategies provides insight into how political actors legitimise or contest novel economic phenomena like the gig economy within established policy frameworks.

4.2 Theoretical Background: Agenda-Setting, Issue Salience, Framing, and Issue Linking

Why do parties address certain issues in their communications while they neglect others? This question has been widely studied regarding parties' agenda-setting, salience, and framing strategies. It explores how political parties prioritise topics and construct narratives to shape both

public opinion and electoral outcomes (Adams et al., 2014; Slothuus, 2010; Spies and Franzmann, 2019). To this end, parties have a variety of strategies at their disposal, such as position taking, position blurring, or issue avoidance. This article builds on this literature by focusing on how parties strategically frame and link a novel, multidimensional issue—the gig economy—within their manifestos.

Following previous research, several factors and mechanisms have been identified which influence when, how, and why certain issues gain prominence in manifestos or why parties avoid certain issues. These factors can generally be distinguished by their party-level or system-level causes as well as external by external events and influences. Party-level determinants often include party ideology, party and/or faction size, as well as internal party structures and organisation (Abou-Chadi and Orlowski, 2016; Sio and Lachat, 2020; van der Brug and Berkhout, 2015; Wagner and Meyer, 2014). This article will focus on these aspects, examining how party ideology and organisation impact the framing of the gig economy to allow for a more nuanced understanding of their impact and their importance in the strategic behaviour of parties.

Additionally, the nature of the issue itself significantly shapes how parties integrate it into their programmatic beliefs and communications strategies. One example is the topicality and novelty of a topic (Green-Pedersen and Little, 2024). An important distinction can be made between issues that are long-established and politicised in party competition, and those that are emergent or newly introduced, and that demand novel—or at least adapted—discursive strategies. Another example is how the complexity and heterogeneity of an issue further influences how parties address and frame it (Castelli Gattinara, 2019). Thus, if a topic has many layers, parties may strategically emphasise certain aspects while ignoring others.

4.2.1 Party-Level Influences: Party Ideology and Party Organisation

One of the central, if not the most fundamental, factors influencing a party's policy orientation—and thus also its agenda-setting and framing strategies—is its ideology. This mechanism underlies both the salience theory and the issue-ownership approach (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996). The argument is straightforward: Parties primarily focus their attention and resources on issues they 'own', i.e., issues for which the electorate considers them to have great credibility and problem-solving competences. Especially during election campaigns, the primary goal of parties is to maximise their vote share. Therefore, they emphasise those issues that are most important to them and on which they have a comparative advantage over rival parties.

Research investigating the politicisation of new issues, such as digitalisation, highlights the importance of existing ideological frameworks and national contexts (Guglielmo, 2025; König, 2019; Marenco and Seidl, 2021). Previously, the terms 'issue bundling' (Iversen and Goplerud, 2018; Koehn, 2008), 'issue subsuming' (Elias et al., 2015), 'issue linking' (Dolan, 2021; Dunlop, 2007; Wettestad, 2025) or 'frame extension' (Mos, 2024; Oswald et al., 2021; Rose, 2011) have been used to describe the strategic linking of new issues with existing ones. While these concepts originate from different strands of the literature, they all describe strategies that parties or policy makers use to integrate novel issues into existing ideological and programmatic frameworks. Specifically, this means that, when discussing new issues, right-wing and liberal parties emphasise aspects such as free market economy, competition, or internal security, whereas social democratic and left-wing parties focus more on the welfare state and on social justice. Essentially, they link one facet of a new or emerging issue to their established policy domain to gain electoral advantage or credibility.

As obvious and convincing as this heuristic may be, it neglects the multidimensionality of issue competition. Thus, to fully understand party strategies with regard to new issues, it is not sufficient to consider only the left–right economic dimension. Rather, as Rovny and Edwards (2012) show, new issues increase dimensionality and complexity of issue competition, thus opening up different strategies for parties. Generally, they argue that mainstream parties favour the status quo, while niche and challenger parties may emphasise new issues to differentiate themselves, attract new voters, and challenge established parties. First, this implies that for a comprehensive analysis a more sophisticated understanding of the policy space is needed. Second, it indicates that the party's ideology intersects with its organisational characteristics.

In the same vein, party characteristics such as party size, resource capacity, the role in government or opposition, or the internal organisation of decision-making processes are also decisive for their agenda-setting strategies. These internal structures often dictate the speed and agility with which a party can formulate and adapt its policy positions. The effect of these party characteristics can, however, run in two opposite directions: On the one hand, larger mainstream parties prefer to maintain the status quo, and consequently do not emphasise new or conflictual issues, while smaller challenger parties may strategically leverage emergent issues to gain salience and to differentiate themselves from competitors (Abou-Chadi and Orlowski, 2016; Gilardi et al., 2022; Wagner, 2012). On the other hand, well-established parties usually possess greater financial and organisational resources and are therefore better equipped for drawing attention to new issues. Thus, mainstream parties are able to "ride the wave" of current topics, while

niche parties have to focus their scarce resources on their most important issues (Wagner and Meyer, 2014).

By studying parties' strategic behaviour regarding new issues, de Vries and Hobolt (2012) have coined the phrase 'issue entrepreneurship' to describe when and how parties focus on new issues to differentiate themselves from rival parties, with the aim of gaining electoral advantage. This entrepreneurial approach often involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in communications—a process also known as 'selectively emphasising' or 'framing'. For political parties, framing a given issue is crucial for shaping the public's perception of the issue and to align it with the general party stances (Senninger and Wagner, 2015).

In the next section, to derive expectations about parties' communication strategies, I apply these arguments to the novel issue of the gig economy.

4.2.2 The Gig Economy in Party Competition: Issue Linking and Issue Avoidance

The gig economy can be seen as a new, or at least recently politicised issue. Due to its many facets and points of reference, it is ideally suited to demonstrate strategies such as selective emphasis, framing, issue linking, and issue avoidance. First, the gig economy allows for the consideration and thus development of policy positions from different perspectives. Among other things, it can be perceived and addressed as a labour-market issue; an issue of economic and entrepreneurship promotion; a welfare-state and employee-rights issue; an environmental issue, or a migration issue. Parties can therefore strategically link the gig economy to other established topics they own. Left-wing parties are expected to focus on the threats that the gig economy poses for the traditional labour market, while right-wing and liberal parties are likely to stress the economic and entrepreneurial opportunities. Second, the gig economy is not such a major phenomenon that parties would be forced to develop a position on the issue due to public pressure or to the public's awareness of the problem. This is also evident from the fact that there is currently no single-issue gig economy party in any European country. Given that there have been several new parties founded in recent years to address supposed niche issues—such as the Pirate Parties focusing on digitalisation and digital rights, or the Dutch Party for the Animals focusing on animal rights and welfare—this can be seen as an important sign of the perceived importance of the gig economy issue. Thus, the gig economy allows for strategic disregard or avoidance of the issue.

Issue avoidance, a strategic manoeuvre employed by some parties, involves deliberately sidestepping or downplaying specific topics within the political discourse. Whether parties avoid a

certain topic depends on a number of factors, such as the topic's complexity or its fit with the overall policy positions of the party. Since the topic of the gig economy is both highly versatile and complex, and it also allows for various party-ideological approaches, it is argued that failure to address it is a conscious and strategic decision on the part of parties.

The first empirical studies on the framing of the gig economy underline the thematic diversity, regarding both content and sentiment. Pangrazio et al. (2023) analysed the discursive construction of the gig economy in three Australian newspapers and found 13 distinct frames that they grouped into five broader categories: demographic of workers; working conditions; workers' rights and entitlements; resistance and regulation; and change and disruption. In general, they conclude that a "narrative of inevitability [is] used to describe changes to work and life brought about by technology" (2023: 616). In a cross-national study comparing the discourse on the gig economy, Marenco and Seidl (2021) demonstrate the importance of politico-economic differences and country-specific institutions. They show that depending on the policymaking style (collaborative vs. conflictual) and the country's general perception of digitalisation (opportunity vs. threat), the gig economy is framed as (1) something to embrace; (2) something that requires compensation for traditional workers and businesses; (3) something that benefits society, although actors have divergent aims or opinions, or (4) something to reverse. Regarding the content, Marenco and Seidl (2021: Table 7 in the Appendix) identify 60 different topics and aggregate them into six content categories: digital industrial policy; status platform workers; digital manufacturing; automation and compensation; digital investments, and taxation.

Building on the arguments previously discussed by König (2019) and by König and Wenzelburger (2019), Guglielmo (2025) expands the empirical examination of the digital economy discourse about parties. Specifically, he explores how views on digitalisation reshape parties' core ideologies. He argues that the digitalisation discourse ultimately has the potential to alter the traditional left–right cleavage in a way that "ideas on the digital economy tend to move centre-left parties to the right and that Liberal Democratic parties shift towards conservativism on issues surrounding digital politics" (Guglielmo, 2025: 723).

Building on these empirical results, I argue that the complexity of the gig economy allows for a highly differentiated and multidimensional positioning that goes beyond the traditional economic right–left categorisation. For this reason, in the next section, I present a coding scheme for the exploratory content analysis.

4.3 Data and Methods

4.3.1 Case and Data Selection

To empirically assess the argumentation patterns that parties use in their communications regarding the gig economy, this article draws on party election manifestos from across Europe. The sample comprises 188 manifestos from 23 European countries between 2018 and 2022 (see Table A4-1 in the Chapter Appendix for further description of the sample). This extensive dataset allows for a comprehensive cross-national analysis which spans a wide range of political and party systems as well as diverse economic, labour-market, and legal conditions. The timespan was selected to capture the widespread emergence and drastic expansion of the gig economy in many European countries. The population comprises countries belonging to the European Economic Area (EEA) as it provides a good context for comparative analyses for two reasons. First, these countries offer a broad range of socioeconomic, political, legal, and institutional contexts that influence both policy choices and the development of the gig economy. Second, despite this diversity, the countries are linked by the regulatory and legislative framework of the EU, which, especially for economic topics, also affects the countries of the EEA. Therefore, this shared regulatory environment—particularly concerning labour laws and digital-market policies—creates a unique setting to observe how parties in different national contexts adapt their manifestos and policy solutions while operating under a common overarching framework.

Election manifestos were chosen as the primary data source for this study because they serve as a crucial indicator of a party's policy preferences and strategic priorities. Manifestos are subject to extensive internal deliberation and represent the party's official stance on a topic after all factions or wings of the party have reached a consensus. Therefore, it can be argued that manifestos are highly strategic and carefully drafted documents. This distinguishes them from press releases, parliamentary speeches, or social media posts. For the analysis, all election manifestos were translated into English using DeepL machine translation software. The use of machine translation, especially for manual analysis of text data, is standard practice and its quality has been evaluated (Plenter, 2023).

4.3.2 Methods: Sentiment and Content Analysis

This article employs a novel, sequential empirical approach. It combines both quantitative and qualitative text analysis techniques to systematically identify, extract, and analyse references to

the gig economy in the manifestos and in the parties' related rhetorical strategies. First, a dictionary analysis is employed to identify the prevalence of the gig economy in the manifestos. The list of keywords and expressions is determined a priori, building on theoretical considerations (see Table A4-2 in the Chapter Appendix for the full list). It is therefore a non-reactive method of quantitative text analysis (Welbers et al., 2017). The aim of this approach is to systematically map the explicit mentions of the gig economy across selected European party manifestos to subsequently explore these manifestos in more detail.

In a second step, the tone or sentiment of these statements is coded as either positive, neutral, or negative. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how parties frame the gig economy beyond its mere salience and content. Only one of the three sentiment labels can be assigned per sentence. If a sentence contains both a positive and negative reference, the two 'balance each other out', so that the sentence is coded as neutral. The sentiment analysis relies on manual coding of those sentences that were determined by the dictionary analysis. Manual coding is used for three reasons: First, the text passages dedicated to the gig economy are not exceedingly long, so that manual coding is feasible. Second, van Atteveldt et al. (2021) show that manual coding of sentiment is superior to all currently available technical solutions in terms of both performance and accuracy. Therefore, manual coding is still considered the gold standard. This is likely to be reinforced by the fact that the text passages on the gig economy are very short, so that not much context is available. Third, and related to this, manifestos are generally regarded as a "sober" form of party communication compared to parliamentary speeches (Hawkins and Castanho Silva, 2018: 31), so it can be assumed that manual coding recognises subtle nuances in tone better than a machine learning algorithm or a large-language model classification.

In a third analysis, the previously identified mentions of the gig economy are then manually coded. This coding determines the thematic categories and the explicit or implicit connections that parties forge with broader policy domains, thus allowing a comprehensive understanding of the parties' framing strategies. The content analysis follows the typical paradigm of selection or unitising, sampling, coding, and the interpretation of the text data (Hutter, 2019: 841). The development of the coding scheme follows a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive methods: A preliminary set of codes was derived from the existing literature on the gig economy, its role in the political discourse, and its implications. Table 4-1 displays the theory-driven system comprising three categories with a total of 11 codes used for the manual content analysis of the framing of the gig economy. Subsequently, this coding scheme is inductively expanded on the data. The extension is used to capture the topics discussed in connection with—i.e., preceding or following—the gig economy. This allows us to determine whether the gig economy is a

standalone issue for parties, or conversely, with which other issues it is negotiated (see Table A4-3 in the Chapter Appendix for the 19 codes that were derived on the material). This process, which combines inductive and deductive coding techniques, enhances the rigour of the analysis by allowing for the emergence of novel themes directly from the manifesto texts while ensuring that foundational theoretical concepts are adequately covered (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Codes are thus both theory-driven and empirically suitable.

Table 4-1: Category and coding scheme of gig economy framing

Category	Code	Definition and Exemplary Indicators	Example Quotes
Gig economy as opportunity	**GEO1**: (Economic) Innovation	Emphasis on the positive impact of the gig economy on (economic) innovation Indicators: 'innovation', 'entrepreneur', 'new jobs', 'digital hub'	"The Swiss economy and population are benefiting from this change. Amazon, Uber, Airbnb have created jobs, simplified the search for a flat, brought about low-cost alternatives." (CVP, Switzerland)
	GEO2: Flexibility & Autonomy	Emphasis on freedom and flexibility Indicators: 'work when you want', 'flexible hours', 'fit around family', 'autonomy', 'scheduling'	"We scrapped exclusivity clauses in zero hours contracts to give workers more flexibility." (Conservatives, UK)
Gig economy as threat	**GET1**: Threat to the labour market	Claims about the negative impact of the gig economy on the (regulation of the) traditional labour market (system level) Indicators: 'labour-market change', 'low-skilled labour', 'automation', 'replacement of jobs'	"The global shift towards Industry 4.0 […] will create enormous price pressure on manufacturers. This will translate into an accelerated need to automate and replace low-skilled labour." (Sme, Slovakia)
	GET2: Workers' status & Rights	Claims about legal employment status and social/welfare entitlements of individual gig workers (personal level) Indicators: 'employment status', 'contractor', 'sick leave', 'unemployment insurance', 'bogus self-employment'	"However, changes in technology and the nature of employment have outgrown the existing system of employment rights and protections." (LibDem, UK)
	GET3: Precarity & Working conditions	Focus on bad working conditions, the material insecurity and precarity of the gig economy for individual gig workers (personal level) Indicators: 'income volatility', 'minimum wage', 'low pay', 'insecure wage', 'wage differences', 'insecurity', 'precarity'	"Mini jobs are outsourced - reviews of products in online mail order - and only measurable performance is paid." (SPÖ, Austria)
	GET4: (Algorithmic) Control & Work management	Claims about working hours, pressure and surveillance of gig workers (personal level) Indicators: 'working hours', 'change in working hours', 'pressure', 'algorithmic management', 'surveillance'	"Contracts of employment which provide for an employment relationship but do not entitle the worker to working hours create situations which are unacceptable from a human point of view." (SDP, Finland)

Party political responses to (aspects of) the gig economy	**POLCOMP1**: Regulation & Governance	Statements on laws, law enforcement, taxation or accountability of the gig economy and gig economy businesses Indicators: 'regulation', 'taxation', 'transparency', 'supervision of platforms'	"Switzerland should support the introduction of a European digital tax for companies in the platform economy." (GPS, Switzerland)
	POLCOMP2: Collective action	Mentions of unions, strikes, litigation and collective bargaining Indicators: 'union', 'strike', 'collective bargaining', 'court ruling'	"When at least 20 percent of the workers join a union, they should have a right to collectively bargain with their employer through their chosen union." (PBP, Ireland)
	POLCOMP3: Change & Disruption	Descriptive claims about structural change, automation and disruption caused by the gig economy Indicators: 'disruption', 'digital revolution', 'industry 4.0', 'artificial intelligence'	"The development of the platform economy has changed the structure of working life, with previously salaried tasks being produced in multiple assignments." (SDP, Finland)
	POLCOMP4: Actors & Blame allocation	Mentions of responsible actors and attributing political blame Indicators: explicit actor mentions and verbs assigning responsibility ('must act', 'regulate')	"The Conservatives have not done enough to support workers as they are sucked into insecure, poorly paid jobs; Labour's dogmatic, backward-looking approach would destroy flexible jobs that people value and harm the economy." (LibDem, UK)
	POLCOMP5: Migrant workers & Exploitation	Claims about (the protection of exploited) migrant workers in the gig economy Indicators: 'migrant workers', 'exploitation'	"We want the unfair competition on wage costs between Dutch employees and migrant workers to stop, for example by making shadowy flex- and revolving-door constructions and deductions from wages impossible." (CU, Netherlands)

4.4 Empirical Analysis

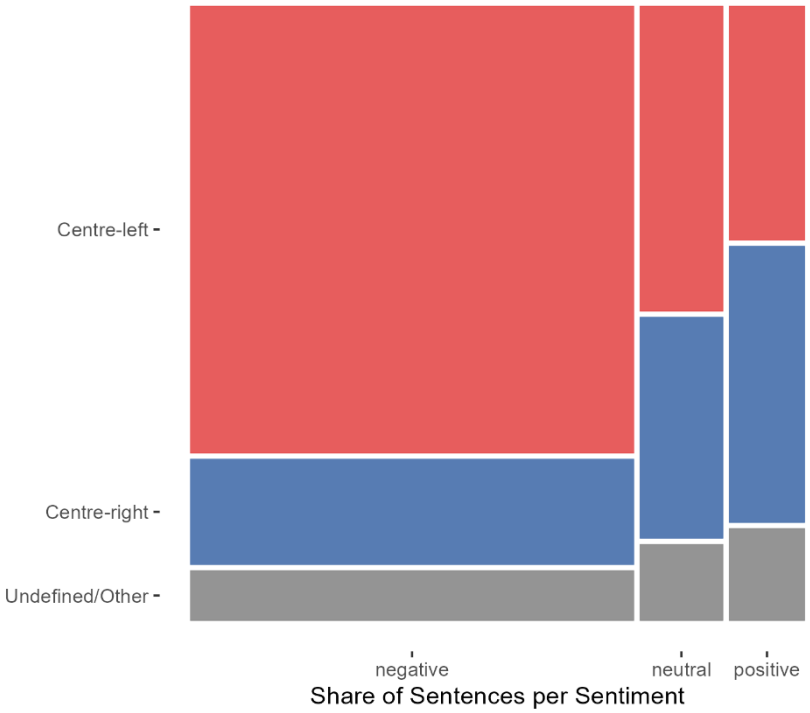
To explore how parties talk about the gig economy and how they link the issue to other topics strategically, the prevalence of this issue in party discourse has first to be determined. The results of the dictionary analysis indicate that the gig economy features rather moderately in the party manifestos. Overall, the topic is addressed with at least one of the keywords in 83 of the 188 manifestos analysed (coverage of 44%). Therein, a total of 308 hits—i.e., sentences—were devoted to the gig economy directly, meaning that at least one of the keywords appears. Furthermore, it is striking that the salience of the topic varies significantly between the individual party manifestos. For example, 23 manifestos contain just a single direct reference to the gig economy, while there are only six manifestos that contain ten or more references. The average across the 83 election manifestos is 3.7 hits per manifesto, with a standard deviation of 4.8 (min value = 1, max value = 37).

4.4.1 Parties' Sentiment Towards the Gig Economy

The sentiment analysis of the manifesto statements reveals how parties express approval, criticism, or neutrality regarding the gig economy, offering insights into their underlying ideological stances and policy inclinations. To this end, all of the 308 sentences identified through the dictionary analysis were manually coded as either positive, neutral, or negative. After removing false positive hits and adding false negatives from the context sentences, a total of 573 sentences from 83 manifestos were analysed for their tonality. Looking at the distribution, a clear pattern emerges, indicating an overwhelmingly negative framing of the gig economy across the sampled manifestos: The vast majority of party statements (422 sentences, 73.6%) describe the gig economy as something negative; 79 sentences (13.8%) convey neutral sentiment and just every eighth statement is positive (72 sentences, 12.6%)[27]. Diving deeper into the party differences, Figure 4-1 displays the relative distribution of sentiments across party families.

[27] For both the manual sentiment and content analysis, about 20% of the sample was re-coded by a second coder. The calculation of intercoder reliability yielded a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.51 for the sentiment analysis (weighted estimation) and 0.4 for the content analysis. According to Landis and Koch (1977: 165) these values indicate moderate or acceptable agreement.

Figure 4-1: Relative distribution of sentiments by party family



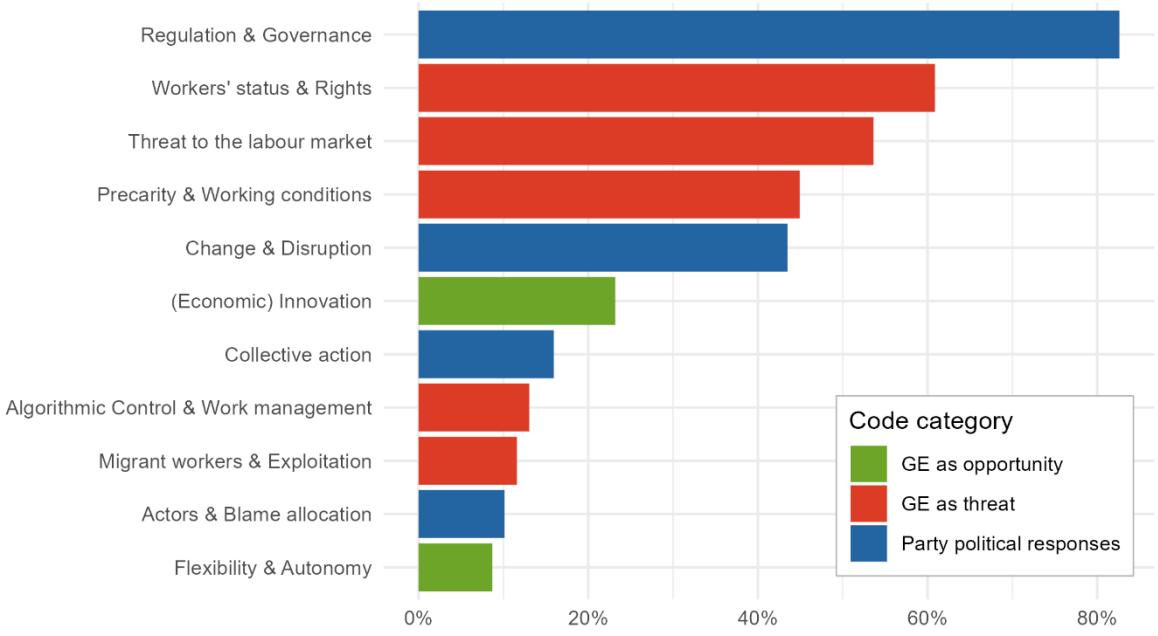
Note: Based on the MARPOR party families, I classified social democratic, ecological, socialist, and other left parties as centre-left; Christian democratic, conservative, liberal, and nationalist parties as centre-right. I subsumed all remaining party families (special issue, regional and ethnic, agrarian) as Undefined/Other.

First, Figure 4-1 shows that the gig economy is addressed significantly more often by centre-left parties than by centre-right parties. Second, there also appears to be a link between party ideology and sentiment. Around three quarters of all negative statements (74.2%) can be found in the manifestos of centre-left parties. By contrast, the positive statements are split more equally between both party families (38.9% centre-left vs. 45.8% centre-right). This shows that while both party families may acknowledge the gig economy's relevance for political regulation, and they therefore address the issue, their evaluative framing diverges considerably, with the left exhibiting a pronounced critical perspective. These numbers also indicate that parties seemingly do not describe the gig economy in neutral terms by weighting its chances and challenges equally, but rather they convey a clear position on the issue. These party differences and this assumption will both be examined in more detail in the content analysis to evaluate the rhetorical framing and the thematic associations parties employ.

4.4.2 Parties' Framing and Linking Strategies of the Gig Economy

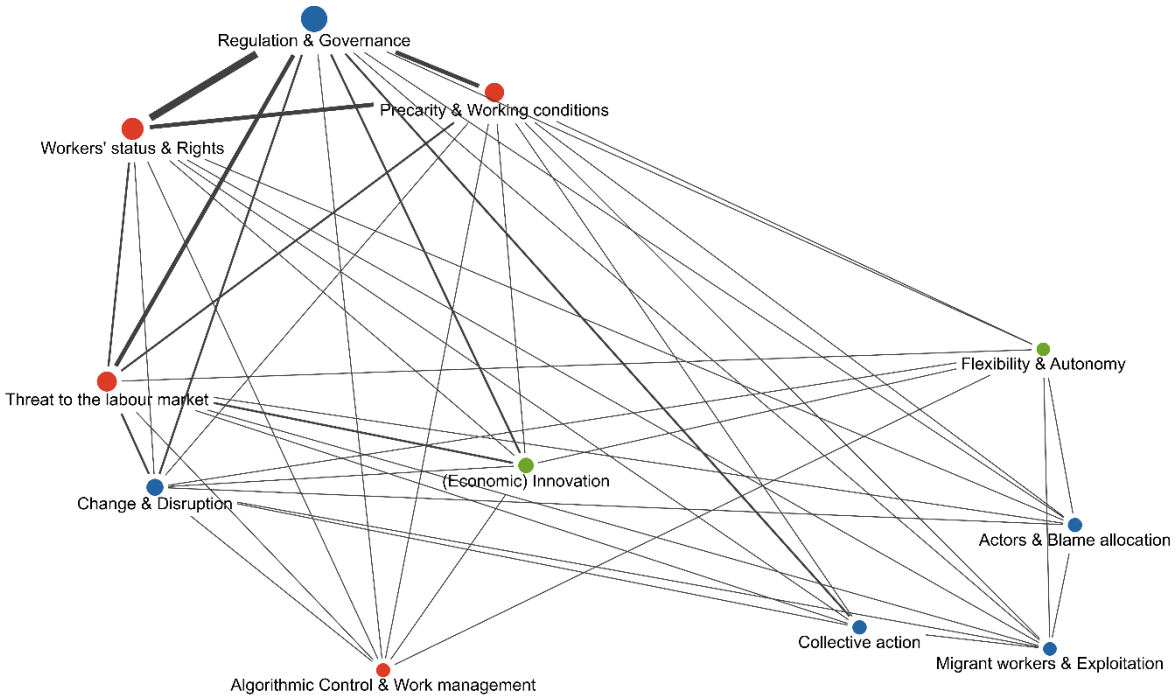
The aim of the content analysis is to analyse both the rhetorical framing parties use when they talk about the gig economy as well as the thematic context in which the parties discuss the topic, i.e., which other topics are discussed before or after mentioning the gig economy. To this end, the content of the detected sentences and their context is analysed according to the coding scheme presented in Table 4-1. First, the results from the framing analysis are presented. The descriptive frequencies of the codes—shown in Figure 4-2—reveal several interesting patterns.

Figure 4-2: Frequency of framing codes in manifestos (coverage in percent)



The coding of all references to the gig economy in the election manifestos reveals a highly structured rhetoric that exhibits four analytical patterns that are discussed below: (1) negative *worker-centred* frames; (2) negative *system-level* frames; (3) explicit regulatory demands, and (4) embedded positive frames. Figure 4-3 shows these patterns and co-occurrences by displaying both the proximity of codes and the strength of their relation. The figure shows three clusters of related codes (top, bottom left, and bottom right), which reflect these four analytical patterns. Each cluster represents codes that are frequently used in close proximity to each other—a maximum of five sentences apart. The thicker the line between the codes, the more frequently they were used in connection. For a line to be drawn between two codes, they must appear together at least three times. The colours of the dots indicate the code category (see Table 4-1), while the size indicates the frequency of the code. The length of a line is not meaningful.

Figure 4-3: Relations, proximity and co-occurrence of codes



The first and most prominent result is that parties overwhelmingly portray the gig economy through negative *worker-centred* frames (GET2 to GET4, red nodes). They consistently portray platform work as destabilising employment standards and thereby influencing the entire labour market. This result reflects the view that the gig economy can be regarded as a race to the bottom. The two most used frames in this connection are GET2 (Workers' status & Rights) and GET3 (Precarity & Working conditions). These frames stress the legal misclassification of gig workers as self-employed, the associated implications for welfare access, and the overall precarious working conditions in the gig economy. The Belgian Worker's Party is particularly explicit both in their tonality and their framing: "Temporary contracts, temporary work, flexi-jobs: yesterday an exception, today the norm. (Pos. 25) […] They [platform firms] are icebreakers who put the whole of social protection at risk." (Belgium PVDA, Pos. 136). Less salient, in contrast, are Algorithmic control & Work management (GET4), and Migrant workers & Exploitation (POLCOMP5).

In the same vein, a second finding highlights that many parties connect this *worker-centred* perspective with a negative *system-level* framing, and they display the gig economy as a threat to the labour market (GET1). For one, parties outline the potential spillover effect of gig economy practices such as bogus self-employment or the decline in permanent contracts on the traditional

labour market. For another, this negative system-level view is often paired with a description of the change-provoking and disruptive nature of the gig economy (POLCOMP3). This underscores the fact that the political and social relevance of the gig economy does not lie in its actual current size or the number of gig workers. Rather, it shows that parties are abstracting from both the platforms like Uber and Airbnb and the individual workers to focus on the major transformations that this business model potentially entails for the economy and for labour relations generally.

The third finding is that it is particularly striking that parties are using the agenda-setting function of manifestos to link this negative portrayal of the gig economy with a proposal for state intervention. Across almost all manifestos (82.6%), the gig economy appears to be an issue that demands regulation and governance (POLCOMP1). Regardless of party ideology or country, the regulatory claims are remarkably consistent as they call for a clarification of the employment status of gig workers, especially by combating bogus self-employment, ensuring minimum labour standards, and creating EU-level frameworks. "We introduce an EU-wide ban on 0-hour contracts […] including digital jobs." (Belgium sp.a, Pos. 8–9) "We convert false self-employment contracts into employee contracts." (Belgium PVDA, Pos. 152). In this way, parties are attempting to communicate their proposed solutions and thereby demonstrate their problem-solving abilities.

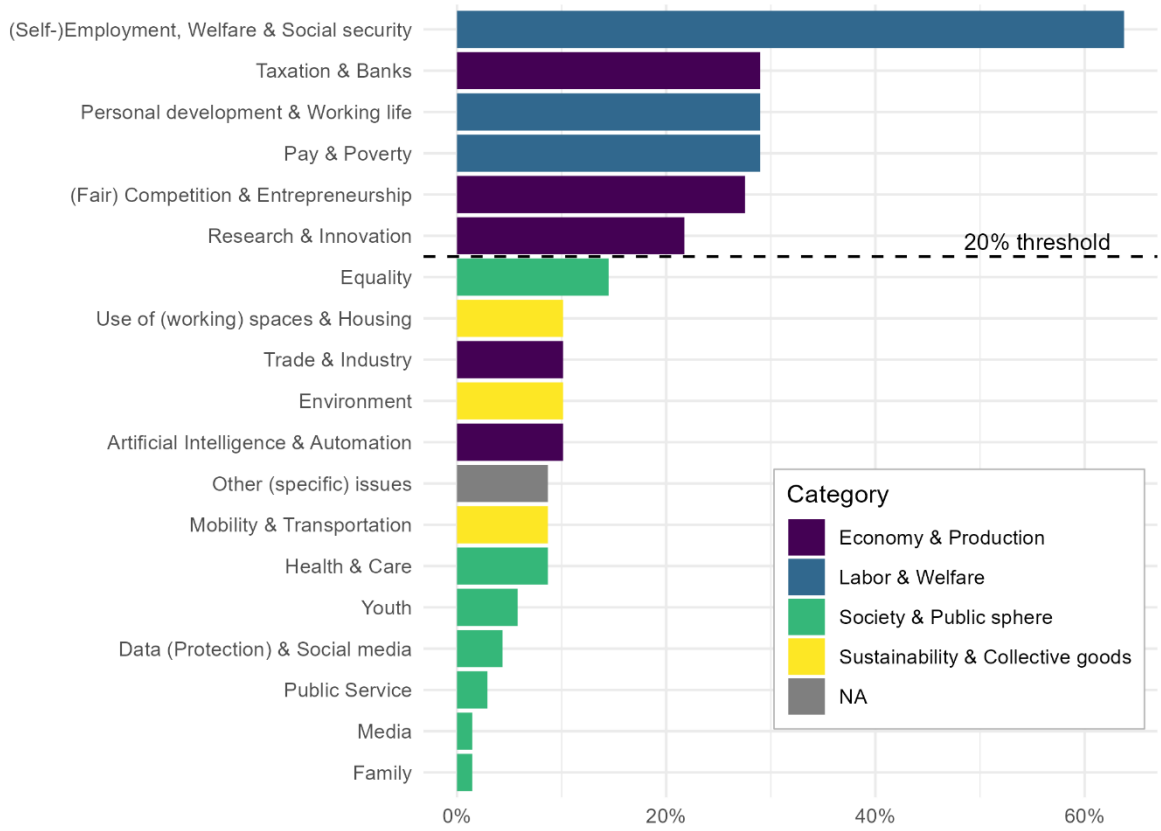
Lastly, positive evaluations of the gig economy (GEO1 and GEO2) are rare and, where they appear, they are typically confined to brief references to innovation, entrepreneurship, or flexibility. Importantly, these positive frames are frequently embedded into negative threat or governance perspectives within the same sentence or paragraph. This suggests that parties see the opportunities but they rather focus on regulation and their active role therein. Centrist or economically liberal actors occasionally emphasise innovation, but usually in non-committal form. For example, Belgium's CD&V notes that "flexible forms of work can also be a boost for creativity and entrepreneurship" (Belgium CD&V, Pos. 7). Similarly, references to platform companies as innovative economic actors are often accompanied by caution: "Innovative companies such as Airbnb and Uber are feared competitors for established companies." (Belgium CD&V, Pos. 64; coded as GEO1 and GET1). The co-occurrence of this positive mentioning with a negative one shows that innovation is framed as being disruptive for incumbents rather than being beneficial for workers. This becomes even more apparent when parties highlight the potential for worker autonomy, as these claims are often embedded in warnings. Austria's social democrats acknowledge that digitalisation enables "more self-determined and flexible working", however, later in the same sentence: "…but on the other hand they can also lead to all the risks

being passed on to the employees and to them having to be available on call at low pay." (Austria SPÖ, Pos. 76; coded as GEO2 and GET3). This strong pattern of positive and negative frames in the same segment or sentence indicates that parties do not articulate a coherent 'pro-gig' narrative. Rather, positive mentions function rhetorically as concessions, not as programmatic positions.

An additional aim of the content analysis was to understand how the parties situate the topic within their manifestos, i.e., how they connect it to other policy fields. These connections provide an important window into how parties make sense of platform work. Overall, parties rarely discuss platform work as an autonomous domain. Instead, they embed gig work into narratives about the changing labour market, the organisation of employment, and the welfare state. References to the gig economy, therefore, often appear nested within broader narratives of digital and economic disruptions, such as 'Industry 4.0' or the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' (Müller-Jentsch, 2017: 82). In other words, rather than a standalone issue, gig work is interpreted through adjacent domains that are already central to party competition. This supports the assumption that parties treat the gig economy as a linking issue that is added to pre-existing political agendas and topics. The CONNECT category of the coding scheme reveals these connections (see Figure 4-4 and Table A4-3 in the Chapter Appendix for an overview of the categories and CONNECT codes).

First, it should be noted that parties address a whole range of issues before and after they mention the gig economy, and a connection between the individual issues is not always established. However, it is evident that the gig economy is discussed as a labour-market and welfare-state issue: "The platform economy, the sharing economy and the changing world of work challenge the development of elements of job security, such as social security or pension systems. But they do not remove the fact that all workers will continue to need security in the future in the event of sickness, ageing or unemployment." (Finland SDP, Pos. 39-40) The gig economy is rhetorically aligned with debates on social-insurance gaps; sustainability of contributions; the definition of employment, and the future of universal protections: "We ensure that new workers—whose work and assignments are digitally controlled and organised—receive the necessary security and protection as any other employee." (Belgium sp.a, Pos. 34)

Figure 4-4: Frequency of CONNECT codes in manifestos (coverage in percent)



By linking gig work to social protection, parties fold the issue into one of the most historically charged arenas of party competition: labour-market dualisation, employment protection, and redistributive welfare-state politics. Since there are clear issue-ownership relationships in this policy field, left-wing parties especially can build on their proven framing and thus underline their problem-solving abilities in this area. In doing so, they are not only attempting to address gig workers as a new electoral target group, but they are also sending a signal to their main voter base.

4.4.3 Discussion and Normative Implications

One of the key findings of this study is that political parties that address the gig economy in their election manifestos do so primarily as a labour-market and welfare-state issue. Considering that more left-wing than right-wing parties are taking up the issue, this is not particularly surprising. Left-wing parties hope to gain more electoral capital from this approach, or at least they hope to gain greater credibility in their area of expertise. On the other hand, it is difficult for liberal or right-wing parties to subsume the gig economy into their areas of expertise, such as the economy, digitalisation, or criticism of migration.

However, this result raises at least two normative questions: First, does the thematic linkage do justice to the socioeconomic importance of the gig economy? Considering the large potential customer base—especially in urban areas (Culpepper and Thelen, 2020)—and a possible spillover effect of gig economy practices into the traditional labour market, the gig economy has a significant positive impact on the development of precarious employment. This should be of interest to us as a society, but especially to political parties, because precarious workers have a significantly lower propensity to vote (Azzollini and Macmillan, 2023) and are also significantly underrepresented in other forms of organisation, such as trade unions (Lewchuk, 2021).

The second normative question asks: Can the gig economy be seen as a harbinger of many economic and social developments related to artificial intelligence? It can be assumed that the increased use of AI in the world of work will lead to further precariousness and individualisation, provoking new political demands. Initial empirical analyses show that workers who fear their jobs might be replaced by AI have distinctly different preferences regarding the welfare state, such as demanding a robot tax (Chueri, 2026). The gig economy can be understood as a kind of intermediate stage: The market, consumers, firms, and governments alike have already accepted a range of changes, such as fragmented work, the shift of risk-bearing from employers to workers, and monopolisation. All these processes are being accelerated by AI, or to put it provocatively: The gig economy socialised us into an AI-ready framework before AI was even there. If this process is not accompanied by regulatory measures from parties and policymakers, it could have far-reaching negative social and ethical consequences, such as a de-skilling of the workforce; compromised cybersecurity; increased workplace surveillance, or undermined human rights (Cebulla et al., 2023).

4.5 Conclusions

This study examines how political parties across Europe address the gig economy in their election manifestos. For this, both the sentiment, content, and the thematic links to other topics were investigated. The analysis was guided by two objectives: First, to identify the prevalence and specific characteristics of gig economy discourse within these manifestos and discerning whether parties primarily adopt positive, negative, or neutral perspectives. Second, to explore the issue-linking strategies of political parties by elucidating the thematic connections they draw between the gig economy and broader policy domains, and revealing how this novel form of work is integrated into established political narratives.

The findings reveal two important aspects: First, the gig economy is framed predominantly through lenses of threat and governance, with parties using overwhelmingly negative sentiment and rhetoric. Positive evaluations of the gig economy are virtually non-existent. This effect is most pronounced for left-wing parties. Accordingly, parties in particular underline the necessity to regulate and limit its disruptive potential to protect both gig workers and the traditional labour markets. This result is particularly noteworthy in light of the policymaking aspirations and function of parties. Liberal and conservative parties in particular would be expected to adopt a clearly opportunity-oriented framing that emphasises the positive effects and economic possibilities. However, the few positive arguments that can be found in the manifestos are almost always linked to dangers or obstacles. This gives the impression that the parties' sole objective is to regulate or completely ban the gig economy and symptoms such as bogus self-employment. In light of the ongoing debate about Europe's lack of innovation, this is an important finding.

The second finding concerns how parties contextualise the gig economy within existing policy frameworks. Instead of treating it as a discrete policy domain, parties frequently integrate it into discussions about the future of work, social welfare systems, and taxation. This result stands in stark contrast to the potential economic, and thus societal, relevance of the gig economy today and into the future. By addressing the gig economy as a standalone topic, parties could present themselves as issue entrepreneurs and thereby establish issue ownership (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012).

This article makes three important contributions: theoretical, empirical, and methodological. Drawing on the concept of issue linking in particular, the theoretical contribution lies in refining the understanding of how an emergent economic and digitalisation phenomenon such as the gig economy is discursively integrated into party manifestos. I argue that the gig economy is a prime example of issue linking, i.e., the use of other, established topics as a vehicle for a new political issue. This is due to its multifaceted nature that speaks to various policy fields such as digitalisation, economic innovation, welfare and labour rights, and environmental or migration policies. The empirical contribution consists of the first large-scale comparative mapping of the framing of the gig or platform economy in European party manifestos. Accordingly, the study shows not only that parties are talking about the gig economy, but also which parties. It also shows how they talk about it and in connection with which topics. Lastly, the methodological contribution lies in the combination of machine-translated manifestos with both quantitative and qualitative text analysis. This approach provides a robust framework for the comparative analysis of complex political discourse across countries and languages, and offers nuanced insights beyond what single-method studies could achieve.

Naturally, this analysis is not without limitations. One such limitation stems from the inherent constraints of cross-national manifesto analysis, such as their differing length and differing functions (Merz and Regel, 2013), their "sober" communication (Hawkins and Castanho Silva, 2018: 31), or their country-specific relevance and usage. Future research should therefore aim to disentangle the impact of these contextual factors on the discursive construction of the gig economy. This could potentially be done through in-depth case studies or comparative analyses of specific policy debates. The second limitation is that the list of keywords for the dictionary analysis was defined a priori. Although the dictionary is based on theoretical considerations and covers a wide range of terms, it cannot be ruled out entirely that some search terms might be missing. As a result, the actual salience of the topic could be underestimated.

Overall, this study provides a foundational understanding of how political parties are beginning to grapple with the multifaceted implications of the gig economy, and it highlights areas for more granular future investigations. It thus ties in with both the new issue literature (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Green-Pedersen and Little, 2024; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015) and those studies that examine the discursive construction of the gig economy (Marenco and Seidl, 2021). As the gig economy can be seen as representing a new, digitalised form of business and work models, it is both interesting and relevant to observe and understand the strategic behaviour of the political parties.

4.6 Chapter Appendix

Table A4-1: Sample overview: List of countries, election years and parties included in the analysis

Country	Election Year	Parties
Austria	2019	Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) The Greens – The Green Alternative (Grüne) NEOS-The New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS) Austrian Peoples Party (ÖVP) Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ)
Belgium	2019	Humanist Democratic Centre (CDH) Christian Democratic and Flemish (CDV) DeFI (Defi) Ecolo (ECOLO) Green (Groen) Reformist Movement (MR) New Flemish Alliance (NVA) Workers Party of Belgium (PVDA) Socialist Party Differently (SPA) Flemish Interest (VB) Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (OpenVLD)
Czech Republic	2021	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) Christian Democratic Union - Czechoslovak Peoples Party (KDU-CSL) Civic Democratic Party (ODS) Czech Pirate Party (Pirates) Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura (SPD) Mayors and Independents (STAN) Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP09)
Denmark	2019	The Alternative (A) Danish Peoples Party (DF) Unity List/Red-Green Alliance (EL) Conservative Peoples Party (KF) Liberal Alliance (LA) The New Right (NB) Radical Left-Social Liberal Party (RV) Social Democracy (SD) Socialist Peoples Party (SF) Venstre Liberal Party of Denmark (V)
Estonia	2019	Estonian Center Party (EK) Conservative Peoples Party (EKRE) Estonian Reform Party (ER) Pro Patria and Res Publica Union/ Fatherland (IRL) Social Democratic Party (SDE)
Finland	2019	Christian Democrats (KD) Centre Party (KESK) National Coalition Party (KOK) Movement Now (LN) The Finns Party (PS) Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP) The Swedish Peoples Party of Finland (SFP) Left Alliance (VAS) Green League (VIHR)

Germany	2021	Alternative for Germany (AfD) Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) Free Democratic Party (FDP) Alliance 90/The Greens (Greens) The Left (Left) Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) South Schleswig Voters' Association (SSW)
Greece	2019	Greek Solution (EL) Movement of Democratic Socialists (KIDISO) Communist Party of Greece (KKE) European Realistic Disobedience Front [MeRa25] (MR25) New Democracy (ND) Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)
Ireland	2020	Unite (Aontu) Social Democrats (SD) Soldiers of Destiny (FF) Family of the Irish (FG) Green Party (GP) Labour (Lab) We Ourselves (SF) Solidarity-People Before Profit (PBP)
Italy	2018	Popular Civic List (CP) Brothers of Italy (FdI) Forward Italy (FI) Together (I) Free and Equal (LeU) Northern League (LN) Five Star Movement (M5S) Us with Italy - UDC (NcI) Democratic Party (PD) More Europe (PE) South Tyrolean Peoples Party (SVP)
Latvia	2018	Development/For! (AP!) New Conservative Party (JKP) Who owns the state? (KPV LV) Social Democratic Party "Harmony" (SDPS) Unity (V) Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS)
Lithuania	2020	Labour Party (DP) Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA) Freedom Party (LP) Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS) Lithuanian Regions Party (LSDDP) Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP) Lithuanian Peasant Union (LVZS) Lithuanian Green Party (LZP) Homeland Union (TS-LKD)

Netherlands	2021	50PLUS (50PLUS) Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) Together (BIJ1) Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) Christian Union (CU) Democrats 66 (D66) Think (DENK) Forum for Democracy (FvD) GreenLeft (GL) JA21 (JA21) Labour Party (PvdA) Party for the Animals (PVdD) Party for Freedom (PVV) Reformed Political Party (SGP) Socialist Party (SP) Volt Netherlands (Volt) Peoples Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)
Norway	2021	Labour Party (Ap) Progress Party (FrP) Conservative Party (H) Christian Democratic Party (KrF) Green Party (MDG) Red Party (RV) Centre Party (Sp) Liberal Party (V)
Poland	2019	Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacia) Kukiz 15 (Kukiz) German Minority (KWMN) Left Together (Lewica Razem) Modern (Nowo) Polish Initiative (PI) Law and Justice Party (PiS) Civic Platform (PO) Polish Peoples Party (PSL) The Greens (PZ) Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) Spring (Wiosnia)
Portugal	2022	Enough (C) Democratic Unitarian Coalition (CDU) Free (L) People-Animals-Nature (PAN) Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) Left Bloc (Bloco) Socialist Party (PS) Social Democratic Party (PSD)
Romania	2020	Alliance for the Union of Romanians (APUR) National Liberal Party (PNL) Social Democratic Party (PSD)
Slovakia	2020	Ordinary People and Independent (OLaNO) We are family-Boris Kollar (Sme) For the People (Za Ludi)
Slovenia	2018	Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS) The Left (Levica) List of Marjan Sarec (LMS) New Slovenia-Christian Peoples Party (NSI) Party of Alenka Bratusek (SAB) Social Democrats (SD) Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) Party of Miro Cerar / Modern Centre Party (SMC) Slovenian National Party (SNS)

Spain	2019	Canarian Coalition (CC) Citizens-Party of the Citizenry (Cs) Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) Basque Country Unite/Gather (EHB) Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) More Country (Pais) Catalan European Democratic Party (Together for Catalonia partner) (PdeCat) Basque 6 Party (PNV) We Can (Podemos) Peoples Party (PPP) Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) Teruel Exists (TE) Voice (Vox)
Sweden	2018	Center Party (C) Christian Democrats (KD) Liberal Peoples Party (L) Moderate Party (M) Environment Party-The Greens (MP) Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) Sweden Democrats (SD) Left Party (V)
Switzerland	2019	Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) Christian Democratic Peoples Party (CVP) Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (EDU) Evangelical Peoples Party (EVP) FDP. The Liberals (FDP) Green Liberal Party (GPL) Green Party (GPS) Ticino League (LdT) Swiss Party of Labour (PdAS) Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (SP) Swiss Peoples Party (SVP)
United Kingdom	2019	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) Conservative Party (CONS) Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Green Party (GREEN) Labour Party (LAB) Liberal Democratic Party (LIBDEM) Party of Wales (PLAID) Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) We Ourselves (SF) Scottish National Party (SNP)

Table A4-2: List of keywords used in the dictionary analysis

Concept	Keyword
Gig Economy/Work	gig economy, gig work
Platform Economy/Work	Platform economy, platform work
Contract Status	Flexi job, crowdwork, clickwork, zero hour, on demand work, on call work, independent contractor
Platform Companies	Upwork, Uber, Deliveroo, Foodora, TaskRabbit
Employment Status	Bogus self-employment, false self-employment, pseudo self-employment
Digital Revolution	Industry 4.0, fourth industrial revolution

Table A4-3: Categories and codes of connecting topics derived on the material

Category	Code	Definition & Exemplary Indicators
Economy & Production	**CONNECT1:** Artificial Intelligence & Automation	The previous or following topic is artificial intelligence and/or automation
	CONNECT2: Trade & Industry	The previous or following topic is trade or industry
	CONNECT3: Research & Innovation	The previous or following topic is research and/or innovation
	CONNECT5: (Fair) Competition & Entrepreneurship	The previous or following topic is a (fair) competition, its enforcement through anti-trust legislation and/or entrepreneurship
	CONNECT10: Taxation & Banks	The previous or following topic is taxation and/or the role and responsibility of banks
Labour & Welfare	**CONNECT7:** (Regulation of) (Self-)Employment, Welfare & Social security	The previous or following topic is a the (regulation of) (self-)employment, welfare and/or social security
	CONNECT9: Pay & Poverty	The previous or following topic is pay, wages and/or poverty
	CONNECT11: Personal development & working life	The previous or following topic is the workers' personal development and/or working life
Society & Public sphere	**CONNECT8:** Equality	The previous or following topic is equality/equal rights
	CONNECT12: Health & Care	The previous or following topic is health and/or care
	CONNECT14: Youth	The previous or following topic is youth
	CONNECT15: Data (Protection) & Social Media	The previous or following topic is data (protection) and/or social media
	CONNECT16: Family	The previous or following topic is family
	CONNECT17: Public Service	The previous or following topic is public service/state organization
	CONNECT18: Media	The previous or following topic is media
Sustainability & Collective goods	**CONNECT4:** Use of (working) spaces & Housing	The previous or following topic is a new way of organizing and using (working) spaces and/or housing
	CONNECT6: Environment	The previous or following topic is a the (protection of the) environment/environmentally friendly economy
	CONNECT13: Mobility & Transportation	The previous or following topic is mobility and/or transportation
	CONNECT19: Other (specific) issues	The previous or following topic is very specific to the party/country (e.g., gambling, Brexit, …)

5 Conclusions: Why party competition does not operate in a void

The overall aim of this dissertation is to comparatively analyse political-party competition concerning the gig economy across Europe. In light of its socioeconomic relevance as an emerging business and labour model, I ask: Which parties address the gig economy in their election manifesto, why, and how? The three individual studies that comprise this dissertation each contribute to this aim by focusing on different aspects of this overarching research question. Before I turn to the contributions, limitations, and the future outlook of this field of research, let me briefly recapitulate the main findings of these three papers.

Paper 1 (Chapter 2) serves as a proof-of-concept study and provides the methodological foundation for the analyses in Paper 2 and Paper 3. In it, I demonstrate, for one, how machine translation (MT) tools can be used in large-scale projects. For another, using election manifestos as a case study, I examine the quality and potential biases in the translation of political texts. The results are promising in both respects: The implementation of MT using *DeepL* and *RStudio* is feasible even in research projects that have to manage without significant financial and organisational resources. Furthermore, the evaluation of translation quality for various language pairs shows that there are no systematic biases regarding left–right positioning and that the same thematic clusters are found in both the original and the translation. In summary, translation quality is sufficiently high and MT translations are therefore suitable as a data source for political science-research such as quantitative text analysis.

Building on this, Paper 2 (Chapter 3) addresses the first part of the overarching research question, namely: Which parties address the gig economy in their manifesto and which factors influence its uptake? An analysis of the salience of the issue shows that around one third of the parties examined (based on 188 manifestos from 23 countries between 2018 and 2022) address the gig economy directly in their manifestos. Both country-specific patterns and patterns relating to party families and party ideologies are evident. The subsequent multilevel analysis confirms this finding.

The frequency of mentions of the gig economy is best explained by a combination of party factors and contextual factors. Of particular significance are (left-wing) party ideology, long-term GDP growth, and trade-union density. Contrary to my theoretical expectations, the gig economy features more in party competition in economically strong countries such as Belgium and Austria. Parties therefore address the gig economy when the economic situation is favourable, and not—as hypothesised—as a solution to economic hardship, such as high unemployment or high underemployment. Looking at new versus mainstream parties, the opposite effect

of what is theoretically expected becomes apparent, as it is generally the established parties that address the gig economy. Accordingly, it appears that rather than an issue-entrepreneur strategy, it is a logic of greater organisational and financial resources that is at play here.

Finally, Paper 3 (Chapter 4) examines the rhetorical strategies that parties use to address the gig economy and the already established topics to which they connect the issue. Thus, this paper focuses on the last part of the overarching research question, while it also investigates whether the gig economy constitutes a distinct standalone topic for parties, or whether it is integrated into established conflict lines within party competition. The findings reveal an overwhelmingly negative framing of the gig economy as a threat to both labour markets and working conditions. This is particularly pronounced in the manifestos of left-wing parties, whereas those of centre-right parties also contain scattered positive references to the gig economy's opportunities. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the gig economy is not viewed as a standalone issue, but is instead subsumed within a broad range of existing debates, particularly those concerning the labour market and the welfare state.

Overall, the central takeaway from this dissertation is that party competition involving the gig economy does not operate in a void. Rather, parties' strategies are influenced by an interplay of party-level influences, especially parties' ideological position and most important issue domains; by party-system dynamics, such as the mainstream-challenger-party differentiation, and by country-level influences, particularly the degree to which unionisation is taking place. These findings shed light on patterns of party competition that reach beyond the gig economy. They both advance our knowledge about strategic party behaviour and have practical as well as ethical implications, for instance, for party officials and precarious workers. In the remainder of this Conclusions chapter, I outline the contributions of this dissertation; position the findings in the literature; address the limitations and scope conditions of the analyses to give an outlook on avenues for future research. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the societal implications of this dissertation.

5.1 The Overarching Contributions of this Dissertation

With this dissertation, I make five different types of contributions, namely theoretical, methodological, empirical, literature, and data contributions.

Theoretical Contributions

At a theoretical level, the results of this dissertation advance our understanding of strategic party behaviour regarding low-salience issues. By combining the issue-competition literature with arguments from the literature on new issues, I provide a theoretical framework that explains who addresses such an issue, why that is, and how they do so. For one, previous research has already extensively discussed how parties behave regarding established issues and dimensions, such as the economic left–right divide (Budge et al., 1987; Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Laver and Hunt, 1992), and for another, how niche or challenger parties introduce new issues into party competition (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Meguid, 2005; Williams and Hunger, 2022; Zons, 2015). However, these models lack an explanation of how a party system reacts to gradually emerging issues that are not pushed onto the political agenda by one actor, or reacts to issues that result from exogeneous shocks, such as economic crises, natural catastrophes, or social movements. I address this gap in the framework by analysing how parties react to the rise of the gig economy, a topic that has emerged from structural labour-market change.

In this vein, I formulate competing assumptions in the theoretical expectations regarding the influence of party resources on their positioning strategy. While, on the one hand, it is reasonable to assume that smaller and fringe parties employ issue-entrepreneurship strategies because they have nothing to lose electorally, on the other hand, it can also be argued that larger mainstream parties are more likely to have the financial and organisational resources to address a low-salience issue. The results, particularly in Paper 2, clearly point in the direction of the second line of argument, as they indicate that the gig economy, as a low-salience economic issue, is more likely to be addressed by large parties. However, it must be assumed that this mechanism will only remain effective until the representation gap surrounding the respective issue is filled by a niche or a single-issue party. Overall, these findings help to refine our theoretical understanding of party competition in relation to new issues. It can therefore be assumed that, as long as there is a representation gap, we would expect well-resourced parties to address the issue before single-issue parties do.

Second, I claim that the easier parties can integrate a new topic into their general party agenda, the more likely these parties are to address it. Specifically, when incorporating new topics, parties emphasise those aspects that fit best with their ideological position. This claim is supported by the findings of both Paper 2 and Paper 3, thereby underlining the importance of party ideology and strategies such as issue emphasis, avoidance, and position blurring. Overall, (left-wing) party ideology is the single most important influence factor when analysing the likelihood and frequency of parties addressing the gig economy. Left-wing parties are, however, not just more

likely to take up this issue, they are also more negative in their framing, and they connect it most intensely to welfare issues. In conclusion, party ideology generally remains a strong predictor for the integration of low-salience issues, particularly if parties can accommodate the topic easily into their core beliefs. This finding is in line with current research on issue emergence (Green-Pedersen and Little, 2024), and it underlines the importance and transferability of established heuristics within party competition.

Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, I contribute in particular to party research by advancing the field of multilingual comparative analysis of party communications. First, I exemplify how MT can be used for large-scale projects as an alternative to both costly human-translation and native-language coders. By translating the entire text of political documents such as election manifestos, the method makes them available for cutting-edge text-as-data analysis. To this end, I provide a step-by-step guide on how to extract text from pdf files using *RStudio* and how to translate this text using *DeepL*. Second, I also evaluate the quality of the *DeepL* translations using both back translation and the unsupervised scaling technique Wordfish (Slapin and Proksch, 2008). To the best of my knowledge, this is the first application of Wordfish positioning to compare and thus evaluate the quality of translations. In doing this, I make use of the fact that Wordfish is a scaling technique available for multiple languages. For the evaluation, I therefore placed the manifestos in their original languages and the MT versions on a one-dimensional scale and compared the estimates of the manifestos' political positions. This has expanded the scope of Wordfish to include a further application, thereby broadening the text-as-data methodological canon.

In summary, Paper 1 shows that we can use MT as a cost-efficient but also high-quality alternative for political texts, as the evaluation does not exhibit any significant biases regarding the ideological positioning of the translation compared to the original. I therefore expect machine translation to increasingly become a central approach in comparative text-as-data studies. As a result, this greatly increases the amount of textual data that is available for both quantitative and qualitative analyses of party communications. Implementing MT applications can also lower the barriers for multilingual text analysis in general, as researchers do not have to grapple with more complicated methods such as multilingual embeddings (see Licht and Lind (2023) for a comprehensive overview of different strategies as well as their advantages and challenges).

Empirical Contributions

This dissertation also makes empirical contributions, as it is the first large-scale, comparative, descriptive mapping of the party competition on the gig economy. The analyses incorporate 207 parties from 23 European countries and draw on 188 election manifestos. Through this extensive and broad dataset, I incorporate a diverse set of party, electoral, legal, welfare, and economic systems, thus allowing for a nuanced understanding of how institutional constraints and socio-economic contexts affect the salience of the gig economy across diverse national arenas. This diversity is again reflected in the methodological approach, which leverages a mixed-methods design, using cutting-edge text-as-data methods, multilevel regression designs, and qualitative content analysis to bridge the gap between large-scale pattern identification and the granular understanding of strategic rhetoric.

The findings of the analyses indicate that the gig economy is addressed moderately frequently in the election manifestos of European parties. In Paper 2, I show that the overall salience is roughly 30% across the sampled manifestos, indicating that while the gig economy is far from peripheral, it has not yet reached the prominence of established socioeconomic debates. Building on the analysis of the order in which parties address issues—i.e., in parliament, on social media, in their election manifestos (Poljak, 2025)—the significance of this salience should not be underestimated. In this vein, the findings can be interpreted as a strict test for the theoretical assumptions, as parties usually do not introduce new issues in their manifesto as the first arena, but rather in parliament or in social media posts.

Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of party-level characteristics in explaining the variations in salience. Accordingly, left-wing parties are more likely to take up the issue and feature it more often compared to both centre-right and liberal parties. The second important aspect in the explanation of variation in issue salience are country-level factors such as union density, underemployment incidence, and the long-term growth of GDP. Taken together, these findings suggest that the uptake of a new economic, low-salience issue is best explained by a combination of both party-level and country-level influences. Thus, the strategic imperatives of party competition do not occur in a void; rather they are embedded in national welfare regimes and institutional frameworks. These empirical patterns contribute particularly to the issue-competition and organisational-sociology literature of party research.

Looking at the parties' framing strategies, the evidence suggests that parties navigate digital transformation by aligning platform-related policy stances with their core ideological principles, rather than treating the gig economy as a standalone topic. I argue that because of its low

salience, the gig economy is a prime example of an issue that parties attempt to internalise or accommodate within existing ideological frameworks to minimise the need for costly programmatic shifts—a process called 'issue linking'. By linking the gig economy to established topics, parties can make use of their existing discursive strategies and view them through their respective ideological lens.

In this vein, I demonstrate how left-wing parties, especially, connect the gig economy to other labour-market and welfare policies. For these parties, it is easy to integrate platform-related concerns with their long-standing advocacy for worker protections and robust social safety nets. Overall, what stands out is that parties rarely focus on the positive or innovative aspects of digitalisation, or if they do, they embed these into a greater narrative of the risks of precarious employment and the erosion of standard social contracts. This is additionally underlined by the result that all parties overwhelmingly use negative sentiment when addressing the gig economy. Connecting this to the finding that mainstream or larger parties are more likely to address the gig economy, it suggests that these actors attempt to contain the regulatory discourse within their established economic dimensions to safeguard their traditional political agenda.

Literature Contributions

Taking these findings together, this dissertation contributes most clearly to party literature, because no other study has yet examined how parties address the gig economy in their communications. I contribute to this literature by demonstrating that the strategic management of new, disruptive issues is inherently constrained by the path-dependency of established party ideologies and resources. More generally, the findings indicate that both party- and country-level factors are significant in the decision to address the gig economy. This conclusion is in line with the finding that Marenco and Seidl (2021) draw from their cross-national analysis of the gig economy media discourse, which revealed that national institutions are influential in explaining the framing.

Another contribution lies in the connection of different research areas. This dissertation connects the literature on issue competition, labour-market transformations, and party communication to explain how a low-salience issue that emerges through structural technological change, such as the gig economy, is addressed by parties. Combining these literature strands into one theoretical framework enables a holistic perspective, and consequently a more granular analysis of these developments.

Data Contributions

Last, with the collection and publication of the novel 'GIGPOL-Europe: European Gig Economy and Political Parties Dataset', this dissertation entails contributions of data. The dataset, which is used in all analyses of this dissertation, contains 188 translated election manifestos of parties from 23 European countries; three different measures of the salience of the gig economy within each of these manifestos, and a whole range of party, party-system, and macroeconomic variables collected from diverse sources (for further description of the dataset refer to Chapter1 Section 1.4.2).

The dataset enables analyses of the political discourse surrounding the European gig economy; the factors influencing the issues' salience at different levels of the political, economic, legal and social systems, and the analysis of party rhetoric regarding this issue. To facilitate the usage of this dataset by other researchers for future studies, the dataset is openly available through the Harvard Dataverse[28] and an OSF repository (see Footnote 6).

The reach of the GIGPOL-Europe dataset extends beyond the study of the gig economy itself. By providing three different comparative measures of party discourse on a rapidly emerging socioeconomic phenomenon, the dataset enables scholars to investigate how political actors respond to structural labour-market transformations that cut across established policy domains. In contrast to general-purpose datasets with fixed coding schemes—such as the Manifesto Project—its issue-specific design allows researchers to capture emerging debates that may otherwise remain unobserved. The dataset therefore contributes to a broader political-economy research and party-politics research agenda dealing with the political representation of economic change. It thereby offers new opportunities to examine how both institutional and macro-level factors shape party responses to novel challenges.

5.2 Limitations of this Dissertation and Avenues for Future Research

Despite these important contributions, this dissertation and the analyses are not without limitations that warrant careful consideration and provide fruitful avenues for further research on the politicisation of the gig economy.

[28] The Harvard Dataverse is an open-source platform for sharing, archiving, citing, accessing, and exploring research data. Link to this dataset: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/29OZ5Z

The Size of the Gig Economy

The first and most obvious limitation is that the analyses do not account for the actual size of a country's gig economy. This is primarily due to data-availability issues, as there are no comparable European estimates of its size. This, in turn, may be a result of the fact that the gig economy is a highly multifaceted phenomenon, and it is therefore unclear what should be included in such an assessment. Furthermore, a wide variety of approaches to measuring its size are conceivable; these include the share of the gig economy in GDP; the number of gig workers; the number of customers, and the revenue generated by the gig economy.

Nevertheless, it would be very useful for future analyses if such indicators were systematically collected and given consideration. Theoretically, it is to be expected that parties will address the issue primarily in contexts where the gig economy is economically relevant. The findings of this dissertation already provide tentative support for such a mechanism, as long-term positive economic development has a positive influence on the frequency with which the issue is addressed.

Manifestos and Missing Data

The second limitation stems from election manifestos as a database, especially in cross-national research. As previous research has pointed out, manifestos serve several purposes and—among other things—these vary between countries (Kavanagh, 1981; Merz and Regel, 2013). Specifically, in the analysis, I assume that all parties treat their election manifesto and its purpose equally. However, the manifestos included in the dataset differ in their length, level of detail, and strategic function, depending on the (national) specific incentives or electoral traditions of the party system. Consequently, while these documents provide a standardized baseline for cross-national comparison, they may obscure nuances in how parties balance their ideological commitments against the tactical requirements of a given national campaign. In shorter manifestos, parties prioritise their main ideological core messages, which is why they potentially omit peripheral issues or emerging topics, such as the gig economy.

These factors bring with them a further limitation, namely, missing data. While I constructed an extensive dataset encompassing a broad range of contexts, the reliance on document availability can lead to systematic gaps. As a result, some countries had to be excluded from the analysis because manifestos simply do not play a (major) role in the country—as in Hungary—or because parliamentary elections are rather second-order elections—as in France. Additionally, individual parties in some countries had to be excluded from the sample as they either had no manifesto or did not make it publicly available. Therefore, in the final sample, I include 207 parties from across 23 European countries that published a total of 188 manifestos.

Moreover, the construction of manifestos can be regarded as a black box process, as most of the internal processes during drafting, writing, and editing remain largely opaque (Budge et al., 1987; Däubler, 2012). As for most parties, a large variety of actors is involved in the process. The final manifesto can be regarded as a collective compromise or the 'lowest common denominator' that balances the viewpoints of different party wings, groups, and orientations. Thus, ultimately, we do not know the extent to which the observed absence of the gig economy in specific party documents reflects a deliberate strategic choice to deprioritise the issue, or whether it is a by-product of internal constraints and resource limitations during the manifesto production cycle.

Finally, while this dissertation emphasises election manifestos as key documents of political parties' agenda-setting, it is important to acknowledge that parties might address gig-related issues through alternative avenues, such as press releases, social media posts, or parliamentary debates. Previous research in this area has shown that political parties' communication strategies vary across different channels and influence issue salience as well as the order in which channels are used (Ivanusch, 2025; Poljak, 2025). Accordingly, we would expect parties wishing to introduce the gig economy as a new issue to address it first in parliamentary debates and then via their social media channels, before they ultimately include it in the manifesto. Therefore, the analyses in this dissertation can also be interpreted as a strict test or least likely case and are particularly relevant.

One way to meet these constraints in future research is to expand the scope of the textual analysis beyond election manifestos by incorporating social media posts, press releases, and parliamentary debates. In this way, the analysis shows a more nuanced picture of party communication strategies in general and their variance across channels and in sequence in particular. Furthermore, the analysis could distinguish the different forms of communication regarding their respective tone, framing, and salience. Such a multi-channel approach mitigates both the data-availability problem and the constraints imposed by the static nature of election manifestos.

A second way of addressing these limitations should not only include alternative data, but also alternative methodological approaches for analysing salience, influencing factors, and framing of the gig economy. While dictionary-based text analysis, multilevel modelling, and manual content analysis provide a theoretically grounded and methodologically sound approach, alternative methods such as topic modelling, supervised machine learning, process tracing, as well as survey and panel analyses could offer further insights. The application of these methods allows, for instance, the examination of voter–party linkages, or the causal relationships between salience of the gig economy and the mechanisms producing it. Extending the analysis to include voters

is a very worthwhile and logical extension of the analyses in this dissertation, as it shifts the focus from the supply side to the demand side. First empirical studies of gig worker's preferences regarding employment status, collective representation, or welfare policies show that gig workers differ significantly from both standard employees and other atypical workers (Chueri and Busemeyer, 2025; Martindale et al., 2024; Piasna and Drahokoupil, 2021). Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate whether these preferences transfer to distinct party identification and voting behaviour.

Temporal Constraints

A fourth limitation stems from the temporal constraints of the dataset and the analyses. The dataset includes one election per country and accordingly one manifesto per party. Considering that the emergence of the gig economy as a political issue is a dynamic process, the static snapshot provided by my sample may fail to capture the shifts in salience that occur as parties react to evolving electoral incentives or legislative developments. Therefore, the analyses do not allow for any conclusions about the temporal course of the salience, the rhetoric, or the framing of the gig economy in manifestos. Thus, the analyses also do not estimate when parties address the issue for the first time. Presumably, it is, for example, possible that parties incorporated the gig economy in previous manifestos and then dropped the issue again. On the other hand, it is also conceivable that some parties have not yet addressed the issue in their manifestos, but have rather discussed it via other channels, following the sequential logic outlined by Poljak (2025).

To address this temporal limitation, future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs that track manifesto content over several election cycles, thus allowing for the identification of shifts in issue salience as the gig economy matures. The analysis would thereby facilitate the answer as to whether parties respond to exogenous shocks or gradual socioeconomic change, and provide further insights into how an issue-entrepreneurial strategy can evolve over time. In addition, a longitudinal study could give insights into how media coverage or social movements (temporarily) influence the agenda-setting strategies of parties regarding the gig economy.

Untested Assumptions

Taken together, these limitations result in several untested assumptions that should be kept in mind. For one, I assume that the content of an election manifesto mirrors the strategic decisions of the respective party. This is to say, that I interpret issue avoidance of the gig economy, i.e., a 'non-address', as a deliberate strategic decision. However, this interpretation may overlook the possibility that parties shift their communication strategies across different forums, potentially raising contentious topics in less formal contexts while intentionally excluding them from the

standardised, written record of a manifesto. Future research should address this assumption, for example, by using single-country case studies that provide the necessary depth to open the black box of manifesto production and give insights into the internal deliberation process. Such qualitative investigations would explain the underlying motivations of political actors and parties for adopting specific discursive frames, or for avoiding them altogether. Both in-depth country comparisons and 'most-similar' and 'most-different' systems designs could help to foster a better understanding of causal mechanisms and institutional contexts. Furthermore, integrating expert interviews with party strategists, party researchers, policy activists, and party representatives could yield valuable insights into the specific mechanisms through which platform-related issues are negotiated and filtered during the manifesto drafting process.

By analysing manifestos from national parliamentary elections, I also infer that this is the level within the European multilevel governance at which parties address the issue. However, it could also be the case that the gig economy is rather addressed at the subnational, i.e., local or regional level, or at the supranational level, i.e., the European Union. It would be valuable to address this assumption by involving other regulatory levels of the European multilevel governance system. Specifically, future inquiries might examine whether political actors prioritise the regulation of the gig economy at the supranational level. The EU has already initiated such a regulation with the Platform Work Directive.

Last, the study of the politicisation of the gig economy could be significantly advanced by integrating the demand side of party competition. Specifically, future research could analyse how both gig workers and standard employees perceive the regulation of digital labour; what policy preferences they hold, and whether collective-action efforts could enhance the political representation of precarious workers. Initial empirical studies suggest that gig workers—compared to standard employees—do indeed have different policy preferences by demanding more social investment policies (Chueri and Busemeyer, 2025). Therefore, it would be highly relevant to study whether a (mis-)alignment between voter priorities and party rhetoric exists, or whether political actors are genuinely responding to the socioeconomic grievances of the platform-mediated workforce.

5.3 Societal Implications of the Dissertation's Findings

The emergence of the gig economy and the spread of precarious employment in general can be seen as part of broader social trends. These transformations can be discussed in the context of growing economic, social, and political inequalities, which in turn might affect the loss of

subjective status. Over the past decade, political science debates have frequently discussed these factors as critical drivers of the rise of right-wing populism across Western democracies (Gidron and Hall, 2017; Im et al., 2023; Nolan and Weisstanner, 2022). Although the precise causal mechanisms and empirical patterns at the individual level remain unclear in some respects (Oesch and Vigna, 2022), it can generally be observed that the concerns of the working class are no longer the focus of political attention. The resulting sense of relative deprivation and a lack of political self-efficacy have far-reaching consequences for our democracies. Thus, in this section, I discuss the political and societal implications of my findings.

Overall, the results reveal an interesting puzzle. One of the most visible transformations of modern capitalism receives comparatively little party-political attention, despite its growing socioeconomic relevance. This ultimately poses the question: What can we learn from these findings about the economy of the 21st century; about economic and political inequality, or about the functioning of democracies? Or in other words: Which societal implications do these results entail?

The fact that parties do not automatically respond to emerging socioeconomic transformations inevitably affects democratic representation. While platform work has become an increasingly relevant feature of contemporary labour markets, it has not yet become a central issue of party competition. Given that with the advent of artificial intelligence, the next revolution of the labour markets—and perhaps even capitalism as a whole—is already upon us, this raises broader questions about the capability of democratic institutions to keep pace with these changing realities.

Furthermore, failing to address the gig economy also means that gig workers—who make up an ever-growing proportion of society and the electorate—are not politically represented. Following the argument of the so-called 'democratic regression' put forward by Armin Schäfer and Michael Zürn (2021), such a representation gap is problematic because it fosters political alienation. As a consequence, gig workers as alienated citizens may doubt that democratic institutions represent their interests equally. This in turn can undermine trust in democracies and increase support for anti-establishment actors.

Another implication is that political institutions may be more path-dependent than many accounts of technical disruption, such as the modernisation theory, imply. At their core, every form of modernisation theory assumes that socioeconomic developments go hand in hand with changes in culture, values, and the political sphere (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005: 19). Yet the results—particularly those from Paper 3—show that parties interpret the gig economy through

existing categories of labour-market and welfare politics. In other words, parties would rather domesticate a novel phenomenon—or avoid the issue altogether—than generate new ideological conflicts. Consequently, existing left–right divisions remain highly relevant as established positions, and political cleavages continue to structure parties' responses to this new issue (see also Green-Pedersen and Little, 2024).

Last, and connected to this, is the enduring centrality of labour politics even in 21st-century capitalism. Despite narratives about the emergence of a new economy, the results underline the importance of traditional distributive conflicts and, in turn, the resilience of class politics and class struggles (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Goldthorpe, 2002). In fact, there is even a dedicated theoretical debate as to whether precarious workers constitute a social class in their own right: the so-called 'precariat' (Savage et al., 2013; Standing, 2011; Wright, 2016). While the findings of this dissertation do not speak to this question, it is nonetheless noteworthy that, if this were the case, parties have not (yet) targeted this social group as a distinct electoral group.

In light of these perspectives and debates, it remains to be seen how party-political attention towards the gig economy develops. Representation gaps and unequal responsiveness of political systems may exacerbate existing voter cynicism, as citizens increasingly perceive that their material anxieties are shielded from meaningful policy deliberation. In times of democratic backsliding and the electoral successes of far-right parties and politicians, this neglect of precarious-labour risks can be consequential and dangerous for the long-term stability of democratic governance.

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Appendix

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Advantages and pitfalls of machine translation for party research: the translation of party manifestos of European parties using *DeepL*

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Parties are the central actors in representative democracies as they perform important democratic functions. Thus, the identification of party positions is a crucial concern. Party researchers mainly rely on party manifestos to estimate policy positions. However, the analysis of manifestos is accompanied by challenges—one of the biggest being cross-national comparisons because of different institutional settings and languages. This article discusses machine translation (MT) as a new option for party research, and reports on the author's experiences with the translation of more than 200 party manifestos using the commercial artificial intelligence (AI) translation tool *DeepL*. To make this approach widely applicable, the (technical) procedure, including its problems and workarounds for large-scale projects, is presented as a step-by-step guide using R. Additionally, drawing on the most recent German, Estonian, Italian and Polish parliamentary election manifestos this article evaluates the quality of the *DeepL* translations by applying both back translation and Wordfish analyses. The main findings indicate that *DeepL* offers high-quality translations as more than 90% of the checked sentences are reproduced word-for-word or at least synonymously and with stable positioning on the left-right scale of both original and English translation. The results have greater implications for political science research as they speak to the reliability of machine translation for political texts.

KEYWORDS

party manifestos, machine translation, text as data, *DeepL*, translation quality

1 Introduction

Parties are the central actors in representative democracies and electoral competition as they perform important democratic functions such as aggregating and articulating citizens' interests. To understand electoral processes or estimate party responsiveness, the identification of party positions is a crucial concern in electoral and party research—in fact, it has become a subdiscipline in its own right (Laver, 2001). There is a wide range of methodological approaches and types of data to determine party positions: they can be estimated with the help of expert or mass surveys, legislative voting behavior, media analyses, or based on texts (for a detailed discussion, see Mair, 2001). Within the text-based methods, a further distinction can be made between quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. In addition, text analyses can draw on various types of text data, e.g., parliamentary or candidate speeches (Lauderdale and Herzog, 2016; Atzpodien, 2020) as well as policy papers or coalition agreements (Benoit et al., 2005; Gross and Krauss, 2021). More frequently,

however, election or party manifestos[1] are relied upon to estimate parties' policy positions (Slapin and Proksch, 2008; Volkens et al., 2013; Bräuninger et al., 2020).

Election manifestos are so well suited for an analysis of party positions as they are a fairly reliable and readily available data source. However, their analysis is also accompanied by challenges—one of the biggest being cross-national comparison because of the multitude of languages (Lucas et al., 2015, p. 255). Especially if the manifestos will be coded manually, either native-language coders/analysts have to be hired or the texts have to be translated.[2] When it comes to translation, there are two options: professional translators or machine translation (MT). The latter method and its pros and cons will be examined in this article to identify opportunities and obstacles for the estimation of party and policy positions based on automatically translated manifestos. The article primarily concerns the MT tool *DeepL* and based on manifestos in four European languages it evaluates its translation quality using back translation and Wordfish analyses. The main results of this evaluation seem to confirm the company's promise of excellent quality: first, the back translation shows that more than 90% of the checked sentences are reproduced word-for-word or at least synonymously. Second, the Wordfish analysis shows that the positioning of the automatic translation on the left-right scale is very close to that of the original text indicating that the translation did not change the tone, content, and political implications.

The remaining article is structured as follows: first, I discuss current developments and state-of-the-art MT methods to outline their benefits and shortcomings compared to human translation. Afterwards, I exemplify this by presenting a step-by-step guide to implementing MT with the commercial artificial intelligence (AI) tool *DeepL*[3] for large-scale projects. The added value of this section is that an evaluation of the translations is carried out to assess their quality as an attempt to open the black box of the AI machine translation algorithm. The subsequent conclusion summarizes the results and evaluates them against the backdrop of existing limitations.

2 Machine translation: state-of-the-art methods in comparison to human translation

In translation studies, machine translation is defined as "the automatic conversion of text from one natural language to another" and it is the "process in which the interlingual conversion of text is carried out by a machine, even if the proper functioning of that machine relies on human labor before, during or after run time" (Kenny, 2019b, p. 305–306). Even though machine translation has been used for several decades, the technical developments of the past years have led to a great surge of innovation, for example, the development of end-to-end neural machine translation (NMT), which has become the state-of-the-art method (Tan et al., 2020, p. 5). Neural machine translation is what is meant when we generally talk about translation with the help of AI or deep learning. It is neither the aim nor within the scope of this article to trace the development stages and technical aspects of MT,[4] but rather to discuss its advantages for political science and especially party research. Nevertheless, it is worth briefly outlining its simplified functionality: essentially, NMT works in the interaction of source to target language, in that the neural network predicts the translation word by word using word embeddings, i.e., the spatial representation of words that exhibit the semantic relationships among them. With increasing amounts of training data, the network "learns" and, thus, improves the quality of the translations. However, for commercial MT algorithms it is difficult to assess robustness and interpretability because these models are essentially black boxes as we know neither their training data nor coding. From Tan et al. (2020, p. 16), it can be concluded that "noisy inputs" i.e., erroneous spelling or incorrect usage of words, are a particular problem to the translation's robustness. Yet, it can be assumed that manifestos and other official documents published by political parties are likely to be almost free of errors, as they are usually well-curated and edited. This is one reason why, for translated text data, manifestos are superior to e.g., parliamentary speeches.

Machine translation has some decisive advantages and disadvantages compared to "traditional" translation by humans. First, one of the most severe disadvantages is undoubtedly the fact that AI has no feeling for language and does not register sensitive language usage—especially if context is lacking. Examples of this are irony and sarcasm as well as idioms or (political) expressions established at a certain point in time, such as the NATO's 2% defense investment guideline, which in German is commonly referred to as the "Zwei-Prozent-Ziel" (literal translation: "two-percent-target"). As it is currently discussed, the term is well-known among policy-makers, the media, and the informed public, but 20 years from now that might not be the case—making the term meaningless. Related to this point is a second drawback of MT, namely its handling of language change or evolution. That languages change over time is a normal and inherently unproblematic process. For MT, however, semantic change in particular can be a difficulty because the usage and connotation of certain terms change. In English, for example, the use of the word "gay" has changed at least three times (Lalor and Rendle-Short, 2007, p. 148; Shi and Lei, 2020, p. 35). Accordingly, the expression was first used with a positive connotation as a synonym for "jolly" or "happy", this changed to the neutral

1 In this article, the expressions "election manifesto", "election program", and "party manifesto" are used interchangeably and synonymously. Existing differences between these terms (see Klingemann et al., 1994, Chapter 2 for a discussion) are not relevant for this paper.

2 If the data is to be processed quantitatively using machine learning and the results do not need to be validated or coded manually, recent developments in computational linguistics show that multilingual classifiers e.g. using multilingual sentence embeddings provide valid results (see e.g., Licht, 2023). Accordingly, no translation is necessary for these types of applications.

3 *DeepL* is available at www.deepl.com; corporate headquarters of DeepL SE are in Cologne, Germany.

4 See Kenny (2019a) for a detailed discussion of the historical developments of machine translation and/or Tan et al. (2020) for a review of NMT developments, methods, and tools.

meaning "homosexual", and more recently to a negatively connoted expression for "boring" or "lame". A similar development can be observed with regard to the "N-word" and the linguistic representation of Black people in general (Washington, 2023). Even though MT's handling of such cases has not yet been systematically evaluated in the literature, it can be assumed that incorrect or offending translations may occur—especially if the corpus spans several decades, i.e., potentially across semantic changes. As human translation still marks the gold standard, it can be expected that professionally trained translators better capture such language use because of their context knowledge. Bizzoni and Lapshinova-Koltunski (2021), however, find that translations from different translators are stylistically quite heterogeneous. This implies that the translation quality is highly dependent on the individual and their language and content knowledge. However, further research that investigates the comparability of different human translators is needed. Alternatively, computational linguistics research discusses the possibility of combining MT with human translation in order to use "the best of both worlds" (Li et al., 2023, p. 9511; Peña Aguilar, 2023). In this approach, human translations are fed into the training dataset of the MT algorithm to improve its quality. Accordingly, this approach requires access to the MT algorithm, which—at least for commercial software—is usually not available. Lastly, there may also be quite mundane obstacles when using machine translation, e.g., the preferred MT does not offer all languages or is not available in a country. The opacity of AI tools described above also prevents outsiders from assessing how well which tool has been trained with which inputs and, above all, languages and language combinations. Since, however, these obstacles cannot be eliminated by the researcher(s), they must at least be considered as a limitation in a critical reflection.

On the other hand, one extremely significant advantage of MT compared to human translation is its resource efficiency. This is to be understood in two respects: for one, machine translation requires significantly less time, and for another, financial resources. This fact makes MT particularly interesting for research projects that have to get by without generous funding and/or a large team and must be completed within a foreseeable schedule. Another advantage of machine translation lies in the deep-learning approach of neural translation tools as with every translation, i.e., data input, they are continuously learning and improving. Consequently, MT algorithms draw on a constantly growing body of knowledge, whereas typically only one translator is hired per document, meaning that translation quality depends on that person.

In summary, when deciding between machine and human translation, the potentially poorer or more error-prone translation quality must be weighed against the significant time and money savings of real-time translation. For large corpora, human translation is just not feasible because of the sheer amount of text. In addition, the type of text to be translated and the time frame in which it was created are also decisive. For example, irony and sarcasm, which can be hard to grasp for a MT algorithm, play a much greater role in political speeches than in press releases and party manifestos. If the time period in which the texts were created spans several decades, it should also be reflected to what extent language change could influence the results. Moreover, Reber (2019, p. 118) points out that the "choice of method", i.e., full-text translation vs. translation of individual words/expressions, must be considered because MT algorithms rely on the context in which a word is used. He concludes that the translation of entire documents is more accurate and should, thus, be the first choice. Accordingly, a blanket recommendation for one or the other does not make sense; however, especially given further development, training, and evaluation of MT, it is expected that this method will become more and more established in (political science) research.

3 Machine translation with *DeepL*

Unsurprisingly, machine translation has already been applied in political and communication science research and has also been evaluated (i.e., Lucas et al., 2015; de Vries et al., 2018; Düpont and Rachuj, 2022). Furthermore, Lucas et al. (2018) provided the R package *translateR*, which enables translation with API integration. All of these applications have used Google Translate for the translation.[5] This article, in contrast, hereafter presents the application of the commercial AI *DeepL* and discusses the advantages of this MT tool. For this purpose, I will report on my experiences with translating current European manifestos. In addition to manifestos, there are many other possible applications of MT in party research, such as party statutes, social media posts, or speeches. However, the above-mentioned considerations and potential shortcomings must be assessed for different types of textual data. Before presenting the procedure, first, some brief explanations about *DeepL*.

DeepL is a translation AI by the same-named German company, which has been available since 2017 for an initial seven (exclusively European) languages. At the time of writing (July 2023), *DeepL* offers translations for 31 languages, which, according to the company's statements, significantly exceed the quality of other machine translations. This quality is said to have been evaluated both by "scientific tests" and "external professional translators" (DeepL, 2022). However, these claims are difficult to verify because the sources of the tests and evaluations are neither published, provided, nor cited on the company's homepage. Yet, several technology magazines and media outlets generally confirm these statements (i.e., Coldewey and Lardinois, 2017; Wyndham, 2021). Additionally, first academic assessments seem to confirm the good translation quality. Hidalgo-Ternero (2020, p. 170) compares Google Translate and *DeepL* translations of Spanish idioms and concludes: "[O]verall, DeepL slightly outperforms Google Translate [. . .][as] the global results exhibit an accuracy rate of 70% [. . .] for Google Translate and 78% [. . .] for DeepL." Also focusing on the Spanish-English language combination, Peña Aguilar (2023) finds that *DeepL* outperforms both Bing and Google Translate. Lastly, in his comparison of Google Translate and *DeepL*, Reber (2019, p. 117) concludes that both tools perform equally well for full-text translation. For my research, I chose *DeepL* partly because of this said translation quality. More importantly however, it was decisive that *DeepL*—in contrast e.g., to Google Translate or Amazon Translate—can process plain text files (txt format), which

5 With *translateR* you can choose between the Google Translate API and the Microsoft Translator API.

are the standard file format especially in scientific quantitative text analysis.

DeepL offers multiple usage options tailored to different needs. For one, there are both free and paid subscriptions; for another, *DeepL* features simple text translation in the web or app translator, translation of entire files and API integration. The *DeepL* API can also be integrated into R using the *deeplr*-package (Zumbach and Bauer, 2021), which is a good alternative to text or file translation, in particular when the text to be translated is not exceedingly long. Up to 500,000 characters per month (∼280 standard pages) can be translated free of charge; in addition to a monthly fee, API Pro is billed according to actual consumption. So before deciding for or against API translation, it should be calculated how many characters the text to be translated comprises. In the following, I will concentrate exclusively on file translation which is offered for six file formats (docx, htm, html, pdf, pptx, txt), but as this guideline aims to make the translated manifestos accessible for (automated) text analysis, which requires machine-readable data, only text files (txt) are considered here. The code provided in the Supplementary material, however, also includes API translation (see Reber, 2019 for an exemplary application of the *DeepL* API).

Summarizing, again no general and universally valid recommendation can be made with regard to the selection of the MT tool. Rather, the decisive factors are the volume of the text data to be translated, the file format in which it is available, and the analyses that are to be performed following translation. For the aforementioned reasons, however, this article focuses only on *DeepL*.

3.1 Step-by-step implementation with R

Turning to the data preparation for translation: after collecting all manifestos (or other documents) to be translated, in a second step, the files have to be converted to txt. One of the biggest challenges of file conversion, however, is that manifestos—more than party statutes or speech manuscripts—often exhibit an elaborate layout or include figures, pictures, quotes, and tables. Text recognition and extraction are particularly challenging when the text is set in columns. When converting such a file from pdf to txt, a lot of text can get lost or mixed up as it is read in lines and not columns. It would therefore be highly desirable if parties made all of their communication available as plain text documents and if database projects such as the Manifesto Project or OPTED[6] were further strengthened and funded. The current version of the Manifesto Corpus (Lehmann et al., 2023), available through the R package *manifestoR* (Lewandowski et al., 2020), already contains more than 3,000 machine-readable manifestos, so no separate file conversion is necessary for these. For file conversion of the additional election programs, I used the *tabulizer*-package (Leeper, 2018) because it is capable to recognize text set in columns (see RScript in the Supplementary material for instructions and code).

As a third step, all converted files should be checked to see whether the text recognition has worked without errors or whether corrections need to be made. It appears that non-embedded fonts and special characters (i.e., not UTF-8 encoded) are problematic because the AI may not identify them as text (see Lucas et al., 2015, p. 256–257 for a detailed discussion). Depending on the amount of unrecognized text, manual post-processing of the files is possible but time-consuming. For the translation, the converted files must now be exported from R as txt files. The file translation function of *DeepL* can process several files simultaneously in both the browser and the app so the actual translation happens in real time. After translation, it is advisable to again check whether the entire file/text has been correctly recognized and translated. Figure 1 below briefly illustrates the workflow step by step.

Summarizing, it can be said that MT in general and *DeepL* in particular offer great benefits for party research, since the fast and cheap machine translation of e.g., manifestos makes it easy to analyze the entire text and its message. This enables statements about policy positions and issues that are not included in the Manifesto Project codebook or about the sentiments, i.e., framing, parties use. The biggest technical challenges in dealing with AI are certainly file format as well as the preparation and post-processing of the documents. Overall, the advantages outweigh the shortcomings and considering the self-learning infrastructure, it can be assumed that machine translation algorithms will further improve in the future.

3.2 Evaluation of *DeepL* translation quality

One of the biggest issues in translation studies is the assessment and evaluation of translation quality. Since the entire value of a translation hinges upon its quality, it is important to develop certain measurements and discuss their respective strengths and weaknesses. It should however be noted that the "concept of quality varies greatly, within and outside translation studies" (Colina, 2008, p. 98), which is why it is essential to define the aim of the evaluation beforehand. In the context of political science research, it is crucial to determine to what extent the original and the translation correspond in terms of content. Word usage and tonality are central, especially when texts are used to determine party positions or framing. It can be argued that most political communication is drafted and tailored to the author's agenda irrespective of whether a party or a single candidate communicates. Thus, it is essential that the translation quality, i.e., the degree to which original and translation correspond, is extremely high. For this reason, in the following, I evaluate the quality of *DeepL* translations with two purely descriptive assessment approaches, namely back translation and Wordfish analyses. To this end, I draw on a subset of the Manifesto Corpus that comprises the most recent manifestos of parties from Germany, Estonia, Italy, and Poland. These four cases were selected for two reasons: first, the languages mainly spoken in these countries belong to different branches of the Indo-European or Uralic language family. While German as a Germanic language, Italian as a Romance language and Polish as a Slavic language are branches of the Indo-European language family, Estonian as a Finnic language belongs to the Uralic language family. Second, the four languages differ extremely in terms of their prevalence as measured by the number of native

6 For more information on the Manifesto Project see: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/ and for OPTED see: https://opted.eu.

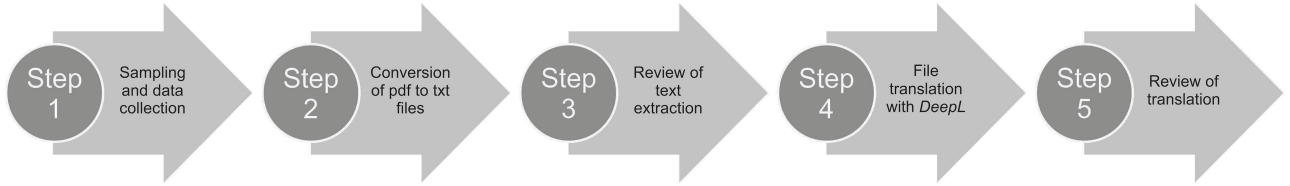

FIGURE 1
Schematic step-by-step workflow of the translation of text documents with *DeepL*.

speakers. According to the Ethnologue, German is spoken as a native language by about 75 million people, Italian by 65 million, Polish by 40 million and Estonian by 1.2 million (Eberhard et al., 2023). Thus, the evaluation of the translation quality does not only look at one language family or branch, but takes several combinations into account. Additionally, it concerns both very common (i.e., German—English, Italian—English) and rarer (i.e., Polish—English, Estonian—English) language combinations. It seems plausible to assume that the language prevalence is correlated to the number of data inputs, i.e., the training, of these language combinations (de Vries et al., 2018, p. 419). However, since the algorithm is unknown to outsiders, this is purely speculative for *DeepL*.

The first evaluation uses back translation, also called re-translation, and only draws on the seven German manifestos. As the name indicates, back translation takes translated texts and translates them back to their source language to compare them with the original. Behr (2017) discusses the pros and cons of this method and concludes that back translation is very straightforward and, especially with machine translation, fast. However, the method lacks a clear conception of what is considered a mistake or "poor quality". In her empirical analysis, Behr (2017, pp. 581–582) finds that back translation "can successfully identify errors [...]; however, most of these issues were identified by actual translation assessment as well". She, therefore, concludes that this method should always be accompanied by other assessment approaches. Despite its shortcomings, back translation is still one of the most widely used methods for evaluating translation quality. For this reason, it is applied in this article as a first step.

To estimate the quality of the *DeepL* translations, I draw on the seven manifestos by German parties and re-translate them from English to German—again using *DeepL*. For each of these manifestos, 80 sentences of the back translation are manually coded and compared to the original. The manual coding classifies each sentence as either verbatim back translation or synonymous back translation; in addition, obvious errors are also marked.

Looking at Table 1, the most central result shows that on average roughly 21% of the sentences were re-translated in verbatim form. Additionally, it seems as if the back translation produces reliable results with an average of only 3.4 mistakes per document. The translations were coded as faulty when there was an evident change in meaning or when a technical error, e.g., double translation of a word/phrase, occurred. Most of the sentences, however, have been re-translated as a paraphrase of the original which reflects the content synonymously. Remarkably, both the number of errors and the share of verbatim sentences vary quite significantly between the seven manifestos. One reason for this might be that the parties use sentences of different lengths and, thus, complexity. The probability of re-translating short sentences verbatim is higher than for long sentences. Nevertheless, it can be stated that based on this exemplary check of the manifestos of German parties, the *DeepL* translations can be assessed as being of high quality. On average, more than 90% of the sentences were re-translated either word-for-word or synonymously, indicating a good quality of the initial German-to-English-translation.

TABLE 1 Results of the back translation of German manifestos.

Party	No. of errors	Verbatim sentences (in %)
AfD	4	17.50
CDU/CSU	3	25.00
FDP	2	26.25
SPD	4	20.00
Greens	3	20.00
SSW	3	18.75
The Left	5	22.50
Average	**3.4**	**21.43**

The bold values are column averages.

In order to check whether the back-translation changes the text content, a dictionary analysis was also performed. For this purpose, the seven German manifestos were compared both in the original and the back-translated version by searching the texts for four concepts: economy, state, environment, and social affairs. The results are presented in Table 2. Overall, the results confirm the good translation quality, as the number of hits in the original and the back translation are very similar. The largest deviations are found within the concept of social issues in the manifestos of the Greens (+9 hits) and the Left (+19 hits). In six cases, however, exactly the same number of hits was found in both documents. Therefore, the results of this small dictionary analysis can be interpreted as indicating that manifestos translated with the help of *DeepL* are suitable for empirical text analyses because they do not substantially change the text content.

In contrast to the back-translation approach, the second assessment method looks at the manifestos as a whole. To accompany the back translations, a Wordfish estimation was conducted. Wordfish is an unsupervised scaling technique developed by Slapin and Proksch (2008) that positions texts onto a one-dimensional scale, e.g., the left-right scale. The model does not

TABLE 2 Comparison of dictionary analysis of original and re-translated German manifestos.

Party	Economy		State		Environment		Social affairs	
	Original	Back translation	Original	Back translation	Original	Back translation	Original	Back translation
AfD	17	20	24	27	8	6	33	30
CDU/CSU	46	43	54	54	8	9	42	47
FDP	25	27	37	37	6	6	21	20
SPD	16	18	10	10	10	9	47	48
Greens	42	42	45	49	28	33	78	87
SSW	12	10	9	9	9	8	26	25
The Left	51	57	21	20	25	28	206	225

require reference texts or other previous information but instead uses word frequencies, thus the parties' relative word usage, to place texts along this dimension and it assumes a Poisson distribution. To my knowledge, Wordfish has not yet been applied as a translation assessment method—probably because it was not designed for this purpose. However, I argue that it can be useful for political texts in particular because all (party-) political communication is carefully drafted to convey only the intended message. Thus, I argue that the translation quality can be determined based on the correspondence or distance between the positions of the original and the translation. To assess the quality of the translation, I estimate and compare the relative positions of original (German/Estonian/Italian/Polish) and the translated manifestos (English). Figure 2 shows the results of the Wordfish placement of all manifestos.

At first glance, it is already apparent that the positioning of the originals and their translations vary in proximity depending on the language combination. While the combinations with Estonian, German and Italian largely produce highly congruent positionings, the Polish-English combination in particular seems to perform more poorly. Thus, the proximity of positions does not seem to depend on language family or language prevalence, i.e., number of native speakers. Overall, the result for all four combinations can be considered (very) satisfactory. The second important result of the review is that positional deviations can be observed for all languages and party families, both to the left and to the right. In each tested combination, about 50% of the translations deviate slightly to the left and 50% deviate slightly to the right—regardless of whether the party itself is left or right. This indicates that there is no systematic left or right bias in the translations and/or language combinations.

One explanation for the deviations could be the significantly varying number of so-called document features in the respective languages. Due to linguistic differences between German, Polish, Estonian and Italian on the one hand and English on the other, this number is extremely reduced between original and translation. Consequently, the Wordfish algorithm has fewer word frequencies to rely on, implying that every feature becomes more influential. Overall, the Wordfish analysis confirms the results of the back-translation approach. As the placement of the original and translated manifesto is very similar, it can be concluded that the *DeepL* translation did not change the content of the manifestos and their political implications. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned at this point that neither back translation nor Wordfish allow a statement about the correspondence of the framing or the mood in the original and the translation.

The extent to which the results discussed here are transferable to other types of text depends on several factors and cannot be universally answered. On the one hand, the characteristics of the (political) text type play a role. In contrast to speeches, manifestos are considered "sober" (Hawkins and Castanho Silva, 2018, p. 31), since they address a different audience and must represent the interests of the entire party. It is therefore plausible to assume that this characteristic, reflected e.g., in the use of irony in the text, influences translation quality. On the other hand, the length of the texts and within them the length and linguistic complexity of the sentences and words are also decisive. These factors typically vary between types of political texts (Tolochko and Boomgaarden, 2019). For example, due to the character limitations alone, tweets are significantly less complex and exhibit different language usage than formal party communications—a fact that can also affect translation quality. Thus, all of these features and distinctions must be considered when transferring machine translation to other textual data.

4 Conclusion

The overall aim of this article was to discuss the benefits and pitfalls of machine translation, particularly using *DeepL*, for political science and party research. I present the process of automatically translating a large set of party manifestos with its difficulties and workarounds using R and *DeepL*. For large-scale cross-national studies, multilingual text data are a challenge that can be met using MT. The step-by-step guide presented here will assist other scholars with such projects, and the commercial translation AI *DeepL* offers a solution by providing high-quality translations for 31 languages. The most tedious challenge within the workflow is the pre-processing of files, i.e., the text extraction, as manifestos exhibit an increasingly sophisticated layout and have grown in length. In general, it can be stated that the more complex the layout, i.e, the typesetting, of the source file, the more difficult the text extraction. To provide further added value to the technical implementation, in a second step I tried to open the black box of the MT algorithm a bit to evaluate the quality of the machine-translated texts. After all, translation quality and

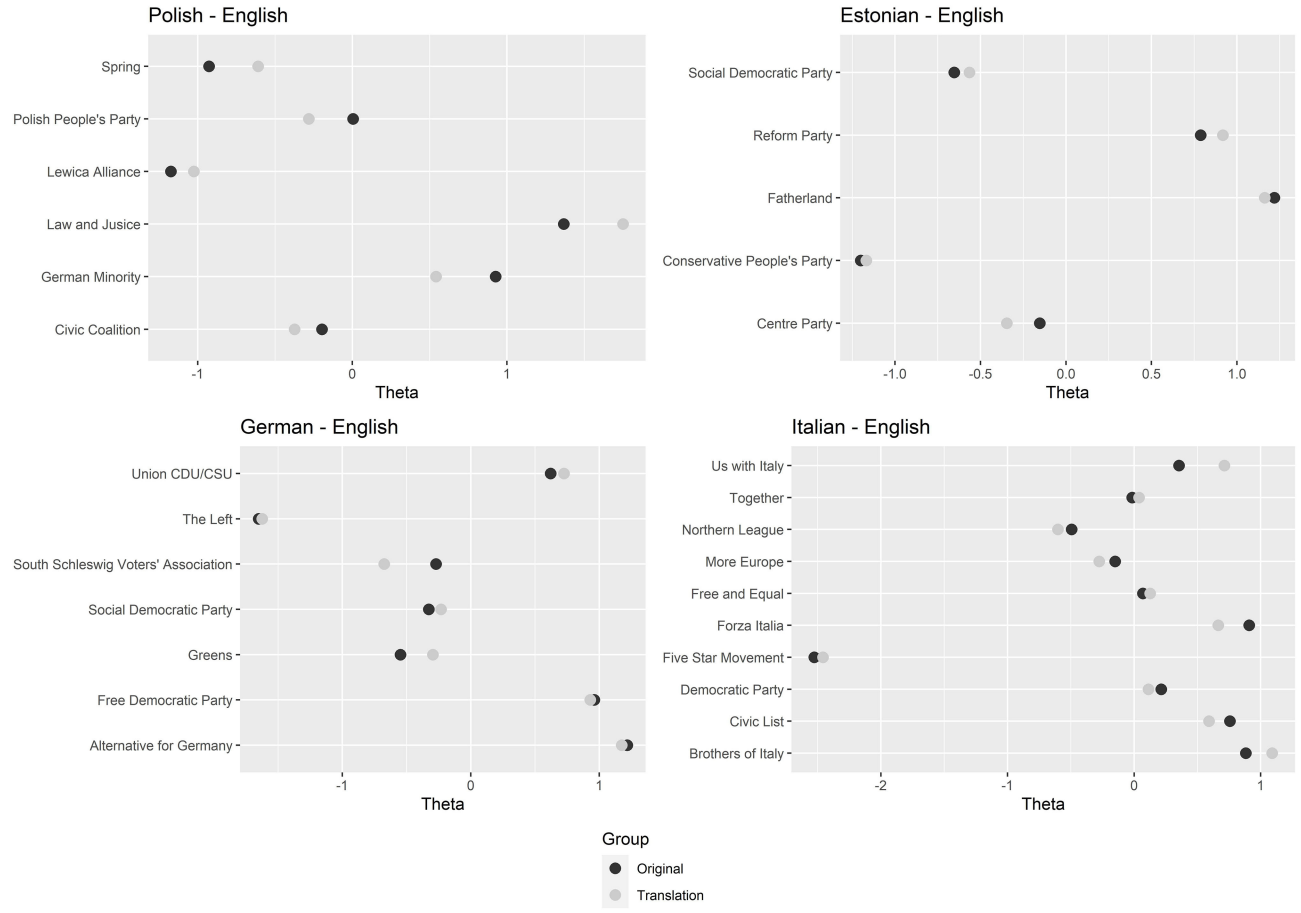

FIGURE 2
Wordfish positioning of original and translated manifestos.

thus the tool's scientific trustworthiness is of central importance, especially for the analysis of party positions and rhetoric. Therefore, I performed an exemplary evaluation of the *DeepL* translations both by re-translating a set of manifestos of German parties and by determining the relative position on the left-right scale of German, Estonian, Polish and Italian manifestos using Wordfish analyses. The results of this evaluation indicate that *DeepL* offers high-quality translations, which do not significantly change the content and the positioning. The back translation revealed that *DeepL* re-translates 90% of the sentences either word-for-word or at least synonymously with an average error rate of 3.4 errors per 80 sentences. The subsequent Wordfish analysis showed for all language combinations that the relative positions of original and translation are very close and that there is no systematic right-left bias. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that most MT algorithms are black boxes that cannot be fully opened by the evaluation carried out here. Both future research and further development of the algorithms would be necessary to make MT an integral part of social science research.

In contrast to the approach presented here, there are recent developments to process and analyze multilingual corpora in their original language. New transformer models such as BERT (Devlin et al., 2019) or multilingual sentence embeddings (Licht, 2023) were enabled by advances in computational linguistics in the field of large language models (LLMs) and provide valid and reliable results. Which of the two approaches should be chosen in each individual case depends centrally on how the text data are to be processed in the further course of the research project. The central advantage of translated text data is that, on the one hand, the entire corpus can be examined in one analysis, e.g., a machine learning algorithm, and, on the other hand, that the results can be inspected by one researcher and further examined, e.g., with manual coding. This paper contributes to the validation of analyses using translated text data, as the main findings show that MT—and particularly *DeepL*—produces reliable and trustworthy results. The importance of this contribution is also underlined by the fact that, according to de Vries et al. (2018, p. 418), many authors either simply assume that MT provides reliable results or do not consider this issue at all.

While this article concentrates on party manifestos and policy positions, MT can be valuable for other types of textual data and analyses as well. In fact, the amount and availability of (political) textual data such as press releases, speeches, newspaper articles, and social media posts is growing every day and MT is one way to make this data accessible for automated comparative research. The added value of machine translation in general and *DeepL* in particular is that the entire text, including its framing and rhetoric, is made

accessible for analysis. This allows for broader research perspectives that cannot be covered, for example, by existing coding schemes such as the Manifesto Project.

Concluding, all of this leaves us with the scientific-ethical question of whether such a further "algorithmization" of (social science) research is desirable and a trend worth supporting. Particularly in light of open science initiatives, this development must be critically questioned. This applies all the more to commercial software and algorithms like *DeepL*. In his opinion commentary, Arthur Spirling (2023, p. 413) therefore claims: "The rush to involve such artificial-intelligence (AI) models in research is a problem. Their use threatens hard-won progress on research ethics and the reproducibility of results. Instead, researchers need to collaborate to develop open-source LLMs that are transparent and not dependent on a corporation's favors." Consequently, it would be extremely desirable for companies to disclose their algorithms or for open-source MT tools to be developed that provide high-quality translations for a variety of language combinations. For such tools, it would then also be possible to combine human and machine translation—an approach that promises significant quality improvements of up to 28% (Li et al., 2023, p. 9512). Until such tools are available, however, I argue in this article that commercial AI tools such as *DeepL* are a good alternative. After all, MT tools can also contribute to making science more accessible and inclusive by enabling the analysis of countries that are not typically the focus of interest. Furthermore, machine translation enables scientists without large financial resources to participate in and contribute to the research on political parties.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

JP: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

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Seit November 2020	**Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin** am Lehrstuhl für Politische Ökonomie (Politik IV), *Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf*
Mai 2020 – Juli 2020	**Praktikantin** am *Center for Advanced Internet Studies* (CAIS), Bochum
Juni 2019 – Dezember 2020	**Wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft** am Lehrstuhl für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft und Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung, *Universität Münster*
April 2016 – September 2018	**Studentische Hilfskraft** am Institut für Politikwissenschaft, *Bergische Universität Wuppertal*

Ausbildung

Seit April 2021 (voraussichtlicher Abschluss Oktober 2026)	**Doktorandin** Politikwissenschaft an der Philosophischen Fakultät der *Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf,* Mitglied der Graduiertenschule *philGRAD* Titel der kumulativen Dissertation: „ Putting the Gig Economy on the Party Agenda: A Comparative Analysis of Party Responses to a New Issue Across Europe between 2018 and 2022".

Oktober 2018 – März 2021	**Master of Arts (M.A.)** Politikwissenschaft, *Universität Münster* Titel der Abschlussarbeit: „Living in Self-Centred Reality—Perception of Social Inequality in European Comparison".
Oktober 2014 – September 2018	**Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)** Politikwissenschaft & Anglistik und Amerikanistik, *Bergische Universität Wuppertal* Titel der Abschlussarbeit: „European Legislation in a Revolutionised Economic Order—How Transnational Corporations Influence Democracy in the European Union".

Veröffentlichungen

Zeitschriftenartikel (peer reviewed)

Plenter, Johanna I. (2023): "Advantages and Pitfalls of Machine Translation for Party Research: The Translation of Party Manifestos of European Parties Using *DeepL*". Frontiers in Political Science 5. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2023.1268320.

Weitere Veröffentlichungen

Plenter, Johanna I. (2024): „Ein Teil der Arbeiter:innenklasse? Analyse des Klassenbewusstseins prekär und atypisch Beschäftigter in Deutschland". Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. ISBN: 978-3-98628-562-3.

In Arbeit & Vorabdrucke

Plenter, Johanna I. (2026): "The Gig Economy in Party Manifestos: Analysing the Salience of a New Issue Across Europe". Revise & Resubmit bei European Political Science Review.

Plenter, Johanna I. (2026): "How Parties Talk About the Gig Economy: Exploring the Rhetoric Across 23 European Countries Between 2018-2022". Im Reviewprozess bei Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties.

Neudorfer, Natascha S. & Plenter, Johanna I. (2026): "When Speaking About Corruption Costs Votes: The Electoral Risks of Anti-Corruption Appeals". Work in progress.

Plenter, Johanna I. (2025): "Why the Gig Economy Is Not Politicised in the Netherlands". Work in progress.

Plenter, Johanna I. (2022): "Addressing Gig Workers as Voters: The Development of a Typology of Party Strategies". OSF Preprints. May 2. doi: 10.31219/osf.io/fhwm2.

Akademische Selbstverwaltung

Seit Oktober 2021	Vertreterin der Doktorand*innen und Postdocs der Politikwissenschaft im Vorstand des Instituts für Sozialwissenschaften, *Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf*

Lehre

Lehre in deutscher und englischer Sprache zu folgenden Themen:

- Politik prekärer Beschäftigung (SS 2026, WS 2025/26, WS 2024/25, SS 2024)
- Wohlfahrtsstaatenforschung (WS 2025/26, WS 2023/24, WS 2022/23, SS 2021)
- Wahlforschung (SS 2023, WS 2021/22)
- Korruptionsforschung (SS 2026)
- Soziale Ungleichheit (SS 2021)
- Computergestützte Datenanalyse mit *RStudio* (SS 2025, WS 2022/23)
- Computergestützte Datenanalyse mit Python (SS 2025, SS 2024, SS 2023)

Lehrpläne und Evaluationsergebnisse verfügbar unter: www.johannaplenter.de/teaching

Konferenzen & Summer Schools

Teilnahme und Präsentation von Forschungsergebnissen an folgenden nationalen und internationalen Konferezen:

- *Düsseldorfer Graduiertenkonferenz für Parteienforschung, GraPa* (2025, 2022)
- *CES-Konferenz* (2026, 2025)
- *EPSS-Konferenz* (2026)
- *EPSA-Konferenz* (2024, 2023)
- *ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops* (2025)
- *ECPR-Konferenz* (2024)
- *DVPW-Kongress* (2024)
- *DVPW-Sektionstagung Politische Ökonomie* (2023)
- *DVPW-Sektionstagung Parteienforschung* (2023)
- *Mittagsseminar für Vergleichende Politische Ökonomie* (2022)
- *ECPR-Summer School Parteienforschung* (2022)

Öffentlichkeitsarbeit & Medien

Juli 2025	Blog: „Warum ‚soziale Klasse' heute noch zählt". Über Politik aus der Wissenschaft.
April 2024	Blog: „Die Europäische Gig Economy – Warum wir uns als Politikwissenschaft und Gesellschaft dafür interessieren sollten". Über Politik aus der Wissenschaft.
Januar 2024	Blog: „Python in der sozialwissenschaftlichen Methodenlehre: Motivation und Erfahrungsbericht eines Lehrprojekts". Über Politik aus der Wissenschaft (zusammen mit Jonas Elis, Jakob Kemper und Paul Vierus).
Juli 2023	Podcast: „poolgespräche – Vernetzung unter Gleichgesinnten: von Schreibgruppen bis philFAELTIG". was mit promotion – der podcast.

Eidesstattliche Versicherung

Ich versichere an Eides statt, dass die Dissertation von mir selbständig und ohne unzulässige fremde Hilfe unter Beachtung der „Ordnung über die Grundsätze zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis an der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf“ erstellt worden ist.

Düsseldorf, 30. Juni 2026

"The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways;

the point is to *change* it."

— Karl Marx (1845): Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach.