The Electoral Consequences of General Strikes in Western Europe

Kerstin Hamann
Department of Political Science
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32765, USA
Phone: 407-823-2608
e-mail: Kerstin.Hamann@ucf.edu

Alison Johnston
Political Science/School of Public Policy
Oregon State University
307 Gilkey Hall
Corvallis, OR 97331, USA
e-mail: Alison.Johnston@oregonstate.edu

John Kelly
Department of Management
Birkbeck College
Malet Street
London, UK
WC1E 7HX
e-mail: j.kelly@bbk.ac.uk
Abstract:

General strikes have occurred with increasing frequency across Western Europe since 1980. While the immediate function of general strikes is to express widespread protest against unpopular government measures, especially when made without consultation with labor unions, their existence, and governments’ willingness to offer concessions to unions in their wake, prompts the question as to whether these strikes produce electoral penalties. We analyze the electoral effects of general strikes for 16 West European countries (EU 15 plus Norway) from 1980-2012 by comparing their impact on changes in vote share relative to social pacts, a proxy of union inclusion. We find that incumbents suffer a significant decline in vote share if a general strike occurs under their tenure but enjoy a (weakly) significant vote share gain if they agree a social pact. We also find that left, right and (to a lesser extent) center/Christian Democratic incumbents are penalized in vote losses for general strikes, but only left and center/Christian Democratic incumbents are rewarded for social pacts. Our results suggest that unions, although organizationally weakened, retain the capacity to impose electoral costs on political parties.
Introduction

Across Western Europe, general strikes have retained a remarkable presence despite a widespread decline in economic strikes and in union density. These strikes signal popular opposition against governmental reform policies and union discontent with their exclusion from policymaking. But how effective are these strikes in holding governments to account when they propose or implement unpopular reforms? This paper assesses whether incumbent governments in Western Europe are punished when unions organize general strikes against them, and if so, whether the type of party in government matters for the electoral effects of general strikes.

Government’s decisions on including labor unions in negotiating policy reforms have resulted in a significant number of social pacts in Western Europe since the 1980s, which have provided the empirical basis for studies that attempt to understand what motivates government and social partners to cooperate (Avdagic, Rhodes, and Visser 2011; Hassel 2006). Much of the research has focused on “blame avoidance,” understanding pacts as a way in which governments attempt to ameliorate the potential electoral backlash to unpopular reforms (Afonso 2013; Hamann and Kelly 2011). Thus, governments possess electoral incentives to negotiate with unions as consensus-based policy change may blunt the impact of unpopular welfare reforms on economic voting. Yet, at the same time contentious policy reforms have also resulted in resistance from unions as they have organized general strikes against governments and their policies. Such strikes have occurred with remarkable frequency: between 1980 and 2012, 130 general strikes or strike threats against governments were recorded in 11 countries of the EU 15 plus Norway. Of these 130 strikes, 44 have occurred since the beginning of the European debt crisis in 2008, as governments across Europe press for unpopular welfare reforms to manage public spending. Unions also have been successful at securing concessions from governments after these general
strikes and have consistently secured reform alterations in roughly 40% of cases in the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s (Hamann, Johnston and Kelly 2013b).

Given unions’ well-documented organizational decline in industrialized countries, it is surprising that they have managed not only to stage these large scale protests with greater frequency over time, but have also motivated governments to offer concessions in their wake. General strikes, particularly when they involve large numbers of people, express widespread protest against unpopular government measures and serve as a highly visible means of holding governments accountable for unpopular policy reforms. We ask whether voters’ opposition to government policies as expressed in general strikes extends to electoral consequences. That is, do general strikes carry electoral penalties for incumbent governments, and if so, are all governments affected equally? We answer these questions by employing a panel study to analyze the electoral consequences of general strikes for general incumbents and mainstream left, right and center/Christian Democratic parties in Western European countries between 1980 and 2012. Because correlations between general strikes and electoral outcomes may be driven by the unpopularity of the reform rather than the strike itself, we select social pacts as a benchmark for strikes, enabling us to compare welfare reform instances where unions are excluded (strikes) against those where they are included (social pacts). Our results indicate that general strikes are associated with significant vote share decline for all types of incumbents (including rightist ones), while social pacts are associated with significant vote share gains for left and center/Christian incumbents only. Contrary to much of the literature on unions’ decline, our findings suggest that unions may continue to have the capacity to indirectly influence governments’ social policies, via general strike mobilization.
The next section introduces our analytical framework linking general strikes to elections. We then present our data and methodological approach and our results. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings.

**General Strikes, Policy Reforms, and Elections**

Contrary to social pacts, which have been identified as instruments of blame avoidance for unpopular policy reforms (Ebbinghaus and Hassel 2000; Hamann and Kelly 2011; Hassel 2006) and signals for inclusive policy platforms in electoral races (Ahlquist 2010), general strikes have not been directly linked, either empirically or theoretically, to electoral outcomes. Given the lack of attention paid to general strikes in the voting literature, we seek to provide a framework for how these types of mass protest influence electoral outcomes. A review of the general strikes literature defines “general strikes” and highlights the political determinants that have been associated with the rise of general strikes in Western Europe. We then use the economic voting and welfare reform literature as a bridge to link these politically motivated strikes to electoral outcomes.

**General Strikes in Western Europe**

In contrast to trends in the frequency in economic (or industrial) strikes targeting private employers, which have markedly declined in Western Europe since the 1980s (Vandaele 2011), general strikes have occurred more frequently during the same time period (see Figure 1). Our definition of general strikes follows Hyman’s (1989: 17) definition of a strike; we conceptualize a general strike as “a temporary, national stoppage of work by workers from many industries, directed against the executive or legislative arms of government, to enforce a demand or give voice to a grievance” (emphasis added by the authors). Scholarship on general strikes
predominantly focuses on the national level and for the most part excludes stoppages by public sector employees protesting against the government in its capacity as employer (i.e. over public sector wages or pensions), and national demonstrations against government policies that do not include a general workers’ strike (Hamann, Johnston and Kelly 2013a; Hyman 1989).

Since 1980, Western Europe has experienced a growing number of general strikes and strike threats: 19 in the 1980s, 36 in the 1990s, 39 between 2000 and 2009, and 36 between 2010 and 2012 alone. While the majority of Western Europe’s general strikes and strike threats have occurred within five countries (Greece, France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal), general strikes have also featured in countries with strong traditions of corporatism and industrial peace, including Austria (1 strike), Finland (4), Luxembourg (4), the Netherlands (2) and Norway (1). Only 5 countries have not experienced general strikes since 1980: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the UK (see Figure 1).

Typically, national union confederations organize general strikes to mobilize not just union members, but the population more generally, in protest against governmental policies or policy reform plans. These include reforms in the areas of pensions, welfare (unemployment, sickness and disability insurance), national wage policy (i.e. reform of minimum wages or the imposition of a national wage freeze), labor law, and economic policy, e.g. the privatization of national industries, taxation policy, or cuts to public expenditure (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013a). General strikes, therefore, deviate from economic strikes as they target policies and legislation that tend to be more universal in nature, rather than industry or firm-specific employment conditions, which may be more targeted towards specific groups of workers. The political salience of the programs they target may enhance public sympathies or support by larger groups of workers towards these forms of protest.
Declines in economic strikes, coupled with decreases in union density and membership, a declining wage share in national income (Stockhammer 2013), and in some cases also a drop in collective bargaining coverage, have been interpreted as indicators of an overall weakening of labor unions (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2013). Amidst the current European financial and fiscal crisis, others have extended these trends to the political arena, arguing that unions are no longer relevant political actors for governments, as their legitimacy and threats of economic protest have declined substantially (Culpepper and Regan 2013). While the claim that union power has decreased in the economic arena is thus supported by strong arguments and evidence, the frequency of general strikes raises the question whether these strikes enhance unions’ political clout by enabling them to penalize governments at the ballot box. General strikes are important because they are economically costly but they can also impose political costs.¹ Several studies have sought to explain what motivates the rising number of general strikes across countries and over time and these studies may therefore provide some clues about the potential electoral impact of general strikes and whether they are related to attributes of the government. These questions are motivated by the findings that link attributes of the government to the occurrence of general strikes as well as governmental responses to such strikes, thereby firmly anchoring such strikes as political phenomena that are tied to electoral outcomes and government composition.

The Political Determinants of General Strikes

¹ To illustrate the economic costs, the Spanish general strike of March 28, 2012, which was less popular than other strikes, resulted in a decline of 16% in energy consumption for the day (Minder 2012). With respect to the political cost, it seems that governments anticipate their political and economic costs when initiating reforms. Spanish Prime Minister Rajoy, for example, commented off the record that he expected that his labor market reforms would “cost” him a general strike (El Pais January 31, 2012).
Recent research on general strikes has emphasized political variables, and particularly those related to electoral outcomes, as well as industrial relations and macroeconomic variables, to explain the conditions under which general strikes are most likely to occur, and how governments react. Lindvall (2013) seeks to understand the occurrence of general strikes by focusing on industrial relations variables and finds that general strikes are most likely at moderate levels of union density compared to high and low levels. The logic fits cases such as Italy and Belgium, as well as the Scandinavian countries with high union density, but is less well suited for the case of France, whose exceptionally low density coexists with high general strike frequency. Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly (2013a) examine the political determinants of general strikes and report that they are more likely to be called against conservative, single-party majority governments that exclude unions from policymaking under conditions of high unemployment and low economic growth. Through general strikes, unions attempt to pressure governments to rescind or at least modify these reforms or reform plans. Increased reform pressures on governments in an age of retrenchment and the higher likelihood of reform can therefore account at least in part for why the frequency of general strikes has increased when union power in the marketplace has declined.

However, the mere existence of general strikes does not imply that they are effective tools in influencing policy making. Such strikes could be empty forms of protest and ignored by governments, a hypothesis that has recently been put forward regarding the futility of current austerity strikes within Europe’s southern periphery (Moffett, Brat, and Kowsmann 2012). Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly (2013b), in contrast, document that unions have secured concessions from governments in response to general strikes, in the form of alterations to reform policies, in 40% of cases, and that such concession rates have remained relatively constant over the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. The authors speculate that the motivations behind governments
making these concessions relate to electoral pressures, and therefore focus their analysis on factors related to the strength and type of governments as well as the party family of the main ruling party. They find that Christian Democratic/centrist governments ruling in coalition are more likely to change their policies in the wake of a general strike than their leftist or conservative counterparts.

While these studies provide some insight into the reasons why general strikes take place, and under what conditions governments attempt to make concessions to strikers, we know little about whether these strikes incur indirect costs to governments in the form of electoral penalties. The prospect of such penalties may help explain why governments engage in concertation with social partners on unpopular reforms: a more inclusive and consensus-based policymaking process may mitigate electoral penalties if governments use social pacts as a means of diffusing or avoiding blame for painful policy reforms. Such analyses have not been extended to general strikes, which have been strongly linked to union exclusion in policy making and the absence of social pacts (Hamann, Johnston and Kelly 2013a). Here, we argue that the effects of general strikes can transcend immediate policies and policy proposals and extend to affecting electoral outcomes.

*Holding Governments Accountable Through General Strikes*

Similar to the social pacts literature, we draw on the “accountability” hypothesis presented by the economic voting and welfare reform literature and reason that voters hold the government accountable for what may constitute painful and costly policy reforms for a large segment of the electorate (Pierson 1996; 1998; Castles 2004). We broaden this logic to include general strikes, and reason that they, too, can affect electoral outcomes by mobilizing popular dissent against policy reforms and economic management.
The broad literature on economic voting and welfare reform provides some evidence that voters act retrospectively when holding governments accountable for the state of the economy. Furthermore, research has assessed the extent to which voter behavior is responsive to overall government performance or governments’ welfare state reform records rather than just the state of the economy. Some studies find the reason for resilience of welfare states to lie in its wide public appeal (Brooks and Manza 2006; Pierson 1996). Kumlin (2007a: 366) points out that voters’ dissatisfaction with welfare state reform is a determining factor for voters’ political orientations and behavior. Similarly, Kumlin (2007b) posits that dissatisfaction with welfare state policies may hamper the likelihood of incumbent governments retaining their power. Vis (2009) outlines that incumbents will pursue unpopular reform if they encounter a declining socio-economic situation and a falling political position, but they will be more risk averse if they enjoy a more favourable political position.

The economic voting literature also outlines that voters punish governments for policies that deliver poor macroeconomic or general economic welfare performance. Some studies find that the electorate rewards incumbent governments for implementing welfare-improving policies (Levitt and Snyder 1997), although much of this literature emphasizes the myopic nature of voters who are more likely to reward recent policy benefits and penalize recent policy blunders (Achen and Bartels 2008; Bartels 2008; Fiorina 1978). Stokes (2001: 9) shows that newly elected governments can impose painful reforms early on in an electoral cycle in hopes that the reforms will have led to improvements in the economy by the time the next election approaches. Bechtel and Hainmueller (2011), on the other hand, outline that voter gratitude to welfare-improving policies may be longer-lived than previously believed.

---

2 We do not cite the large body of literature on economic voting here. Much of the existing literature has been aptly reviewed in Anderson (2007); Duch and Stevenson (2008); and van der Brug et al. (2007).
The economic voting and welfare reform literatures identify that governments face clear electoral challenges if they initiate reforms that target popular programs or produce adverse economic outcomes. Because general strikes serve as a medium to highlight unpopular reforms and hence may influence public sentiment, these forms of protest may provide a means for unions to influence governments’, and their policies’, longevity at subsequent elections. Research shows that political and electoral factors shape the likelihood that unions stage general strikes (Hamann, Johnston, Kelly 2013a). Similarly, these factors also influence the likelihood that governments grant concessions in response to general strikes. (Hamann, Johnston, Kelly 2013b). It thus seems logical that such factors, in turn, affect the extent to which voters hold governments to account in the wake of a strike, else governments would have little reason to grant concessions to unions. General strikes are relatively rare, and highly visible, events in reaction to reforms announced or implemented by the government, although their mobilization potential is high and can involve hundreds of thousands of workers. These reforms potentially affect the economic well-being of voters, such as declines in pension benefits and eligibility, reduced unemployment or social welfare benefits, or higher tax rates. The question is thus whether these mass mobilizations that highlight such reforms also influence voting behavior.

General strikes may affect electoral outcomes via several mechanisms. First, the fact that a large number of (potential) voters find it necessary to demonstrate against the government and its policies might signal to the general electorate that the government enacts policies that go against its aggregated preferences. Brooks and Manza (2006) outline that citizens’ aggregate policy preferences are a significant determinant behind welfare state persistence, and general strikes may serve as an important mechanism to highlight governments’ moves against these preferences. Second, general strikes can highlight the severity of the policy reforms and thereby heighten issue salience. These political events are highly visible, often most pronounced in
densely populated urban areas, and consequently gain widespread media coverage. A contentious reform may receive more attention on the part of the voters if unions call a general strike to highlight its terms, and that in turn may influence voters’ future electoral behavior. Finally, strikes may also suggest to voters that the government is incompetent since drastic measures and policy reforms, such as profound changes in labor market regulations or unemployment benefits, may indicate a reaction to a crisis that is not tied to the policy position of the government and therefore may have a valence effect (see Clark 2009).

Furthermore, we know from the economic voting literature that electoral responses to economic conditions depend on the party in power; existing studies on the conditions that favor the incidence of general strikes as well as studies that examine the conditions under which governments make concessions in response to strikes also identify party type and position as significant variables. Leftist (and to a lesser extent center/Christian Democratic) parties might be penalized more heavily for a general strike by voters since unions (and the preservation of the welfare state) have traditionally been more closely aligned to leftist parties rather than parties further to the right. When unions mobilize against the policies of leftist parties in government, we would expect their electoral base to be alienated from governmental policies. If, in turn, parties to the right announce or implement reforms that cut benefits to voters, we might reason that the vote choice of their electoral base is less affected because conservative parties have historically been less closely tied to unions and the welfare state. Therefore, supporters of conservative parties are less likely to have their vote choice swayed by a general strike organized by a union. On the other hand, conservatives may be just as susceptible to electoral penalties for

---

3 To illustrate, a study on the 2007 election in Australia found that a union campaign against the government’s Work Choices program “increased the salience of industrial relations to voters, that union activism jumped in the lead-up to the election, and that unionized voters voted against the government in record numbers” (Wilson and Spies-Butcher 2011: 306). This logic also holds when it comes to economic voting: Lewis-Beck, Martini, and Kiewiet (2013) find that voters who perceive that the economy has worsened are more likely to vote against the incumbent than those who do not hold that belief. Thus, convincing voters through general strikes that the government’s handling of a problem is inadequate might influence voters’ perceptions of the government and sway their votes.
general strikes as left governments as these incumbents are less trusted in maintaining the welfare state (Green-Pedersen 2002; Ross 2000) and are more prone to general strikes than left or center/Christian Democratic incumbents (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013a).

Our hypotheses are informed by the findings of existing research on economic voting and welfare reform. We expect that general strikes have a negative effect on the vote share of the incumbent party as they mobilize voters around reforms that have potentially adverse effects on their economic well-being. We also expect that the electoral effect of general strikes is larger the closer they are to the next election. When the memory of a general strike and the unpopular reforms that prompted it is fresh, we expect voters to be more likely to adjust their vote choice. Voters may have less vivid memories of mass mobilizations in protest against the government’s unpopular reforms if these events occurred early on in an electoral cycle. Finally, the electoral consequences of general strikes may exhibit different partisan effects; while all parties are susceptible to declines in vote share given that general strikes highlight unpopular reforms, left and center/Christian Democratic parties may be more heavily punished as these strikes may highlight policy inconsistencies with their ideological platforms.

Data, Variables, and Methods

To examine the influence of general strikes on governments’ reelection chances, we select election years as our unit of analysis. Our panel consists of the EU15 plus Norway from 1980 to 2012, and has a total of 139 election years; our country panels had, on average, eight election years within this 33-year period, with Denmark having the most (11) and Luxembourg the least (6). Because we are interested in whether the electorate penalizes governments for general strikes at the ballot box, we do not consider changes in governments that occur between elections, nor do we consider shifts to technocratic governments between elections.
While economic (industrial) strikes are frequently measured in number of working days lost, given that they are usually confined to one workplace/sector, data on the number of days lost or workers involved in general strikes are unreliable and not available for all our cases. Instead, we use frequencies to record general strikes (see also Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013a). Between 1980 and 2012, 130 general strikes (including 13 credible strike threats) occurred in the EU15 and Norway. We include general strike threats in our analysis because these actions can induce a response from government on policy reforms. A general strike threat is deemed credible if a union confederation’s leadership declares its intention to call a strike on a particular issue(s) and on a specific date, thereby indicating union grievances with a particular reform policy, and placing pressure on governments to revise their proposals. Although conceivably, general strike threats may skew our results in favor of governments’ reelection chances – as they are more likely to result in revised reform proposals – we also conducted our analysis below without including strike threats. However, the exclusion of threats left our findings largely unchanged, and we therefore do not present these results.

Of the 139 election years in our sample, 43 (38 excluding threats) witnessed general strikes under the incumbent’s most recent tenure. We select three manifestations of general strikes as our primary independent variable of interest. First we model the influence of strikes on electoral outcomes using the average number of general strikes per year within an incumbent’s tenure since the previous election (Table 1, column I). Second, we select a binary indicator for whether a general strike has occurred during a government’s tenure as our independent variable of interest; an election year receives a coding of 1 if a general strike occurred within the incumbent’s tenure since the previous election only, 0 if otherwise. This binary manifestation serves as the primary indicator used during our robustness checks and party electoral outcomes regressions (columns II-IV and VI-VII in Table 1 and columns I-VI in Table 2), although we
should emphasize that our general strikes per year variable, and the strikes proximity measure, also retain their signs and significance during similar robustness checks. Third, in order to determine whether strikes that are closer to elections prompt a greater electoral penalty for an incumbent government, we conducted regressions using the timing of the most recent general strike to a given election. We measured strike proximity in a similar manner as Ahlquist (2010) measures social pacts proximity – the number of months of the most recent general strike from the previous election divided by the country’s constitutionally mandated electoral term (column V, Table 1). The value of this variable is between 0 and 1 (i.e, if the most recent general strike occurred three-quarters into an incumbent’s term, it would take the value of 0.75).

While we are most interested in the electoral consequences of general strikes, we do not estimate their impact on election outcomes in isolation, as one could easily argue that it is the contentious policy reform, and not the strike attached to it, that is driving changes in an incumbent’s vote share. Consequently, a benchmark variable for general strikes is needed to detach the influence of the policy reform on electoral outcomes from the influence of a general strike. Although social pacts do not perfectly correct this spurious correlation problem, we include them in our analysis to serve as a benchmark for strikes. Social pacts, tripartite (and occasionally bipartite) national-level agreements between unions, employers and governments on policy reform, provide a convenient proxy of policy reform where unions are consulted and included in the reform process, as they have been identified by the literature as being negatively associated with general strikes (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013a) and serving as an instrument for blame avoidance on contentious welfare reforms (Ebbinghaus and Hassel 2000; Hassel 2006). Social pacts exhibit similar frequencies as general strikes in our sample; between

---

4 We only consider social pacts that have been accepted by all parties, most importantly unions. We do not consider social pact proposals by governments that are rejected by unions as these cases fail to adequately involve union concertation on policy reform.
1980 and 2012, 124 social pacts were concluded between unions and governments, 55 of these being concluded in the 1990s and 49 since 2000 (see Figure 2). Of the 139 elections, 68 were preceded by social pact agreements. In the regressions below, we control for social pacts using the same three manifestations as we do general strikes; average number per year within an incumbent’s tenure, a binary variable for whether a social pact occurred within an incumbent’s tenure (which serves as the primary manifestation for robustness checks), and the number of months of the most recent social pact from the previous election divided by the country’s constitutionally mandated electoral term.

[Figure 2 about here]

We select four dependent variables for our analysis; the incumbent government’s change in vote share from the previous election (results presented in Table 1), the (mainstream) left party’s change in vote share from the previous election (columns I-II, Table 2), the (mainstream) right/liberal\(^5\) party’s change in vote share from the previous election (columns, III-IV, Table 2), and the (mainstream) center/Christian Democratic party’s change in vote share from the previous election (columns V-VI, Table 2). We select center/Christian Democratic parties as a party family separately from the right given the center’s support of certain welfare programs, such as social insurance (Esping-Andersen 1990), their political orientation towards achieving consensus, and their greater tendency to award concessions in response to general strikes (see Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013b). For the first dependent variable, we aim to determine whether incumbent governments, regardless of partisanship, are penalized at the ballot box for the occurrence of a general strike within their tenure. For coalition governments, we define the

---

\(^5\) Within our 16-country sample, only Denmark possessed both a mainstream right and liberal party, which held the Prime Ministership. The results presented in Table 2 (Models III and IV) for changes in right/liberal vote shares are for those using the Danish Conservative Party. We also conducted identical regressions (not shown) using the Danish Venstre (Liberal) party as the right/liberal party. The outcomes, in terms of significance and the magnitude of the beta coefficients, are highly similar.
incumbent as the party that holds the Prime Ministership, in line with findings that voters often lack knowledge about cabinet composition in coalition governments (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013) and that voters tend to assign policy responsibility to the party with agenda-setting power and the largest vote share (Duch and Stevenson 2013), which generally is the party of the Prime Minister. In order to determine whether election penalties for general strikes carry partisan bias (i.e. whether their occurrence penalizes left or right parties more in terms of a decline in vote share), we use the second, third, and fourth dependent variables in an interaction model, estimating whether general strikes, when interacted with the left/right/center’s incumbent status, significantly influence the change in vote shares of these parties during election years.

We utilized an OLS, (country) fixed effects panel estimator for all regression models in order to gauge the impact of general strikes on incumbent and party vote shares. The baseline regression models for the change in incumbent vote share dependent variable can be summarized as follows:

$$\Delta VS_{i,t} = \alpha_{i,t} + \beta_1VS_{i,t-1} + \beta_2LeftIncb_{i,t} + \beta_2RightIncb_{i,t} + \beta_4(GS_{i,t}) + \beta_5(SP_{i,t}) + \Sigma\beta_kX_{k,i,t} + \Sigma\beta_mZ_{m,i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

where $\Delta VS_{i,t}$ is the change in vote share for the incumbent in country $i$ at election year $t$, $VS_{i,t-1}$ is the incumbent party’s vote share in country $i$ after the previous election, $LeftIncb_{i,t}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the incumbent is a left party, $RightIncb_{i,t}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the incumbent is a right or liberal party (hence the baseline for the model is a Center/Christian Democratic party), and $GS_{i,t}$ and $SP_{i,t}$ are the general strike and social pacts variables, respectively, in one of the three manifestations defined above. It is important to emphasize that election years can be preceded by both a general strike and a social pact (the two
events are not mutually exclusive, and hence their beta coefficients cannot be interpreted relative to each other as they would be with a standard multi-categorical dummy). We anticipate that general strikes will have a negative coefficient, given their use as a protest instrument against unpopular reforms agendas, while social pacts will have a positive coefficient, given their use to achieve consensus. All vote share data and party classifications were taken from Armingeon et al.’s Comparative Political Dataset (2012) and (for elections between 2010 and 2012) the Norwegian Social Science Data Service’s European Elections Database (NSD, 2013). Data on general strikes were taken from Hamann, Johnston and Kelly (2013a), Labour Research, and the European Industrial Relations Observatory. Data on social pacts were taken from Hamann and Kelly (2011, provided by the authors; the European Industrial Relations Review, and the European Industrial Relations Observatory.6

\[ \Sigma \beta_k X_{k,i,t} \] is a vector of economic controls that includes the average level of unemployment, inflation, net government lending (as a percentage of GDP) and GDP growth between election years. Regression models were also run with the average debt level between election years, yet this variable did not hold significance nor did it skew the general strike and social pact results; hence we do not show the model here. We anticipate that both inflation and unemployment will be negatively associated with changes in an incumbent’s vote share, while GDP growth and government lending will be positively associated with changes in the vote share. There was indication of collinearity between net government lending and the three other economic controls (pair-wise correlations between net lending and GDP growth, inflation and unemployment were 0.36, -0.24, and -0.52, respectively, with over 99% significance) across the sample, although the other three economic controls (inflation, unemployment and GDP growth) displayed no significant correlation with each other. Consequently, net government lending was

---

6 We also consulted the ICTWSS database (Visser 2011) but owing to its significant underreporting of pacts in several countries, notably Spain, we have not relied on it exclusively.
included as a control in a separate regression. Of the four economic controls, only unemployment and net government lending exhibited a significant correlation with the general strikes dummy (0.34, p-value=0.000, and -0.28, p-value=0.002, respectively). In the regression models for changes in the incumbency vote share (see below) unemployment and net government lending were not significant, a typical outcome of multicollinearity. Yet when models were run without the general strike variable, both economic controls remained insignificant. Inflation and GDP growth data was taken from the OECD. Unemployment and government net lending data was taken from the EU’s ECOFIN’s Annual Macroeconomic Database (AMECO).

$$\Sigma\beta_{mZ_{m,i,t}}$$ is a vector of political controls that include (n-1) incumbent “government type” dummies, i.e. minority government, single-party majority or coalition majority, the last of which is selected as the baseline. According to the “clarity of responsibility” hypothesis (Anderson 2007; Fisher and Hobolt 2010; Parker-Stephen 2013; Powell and Whitten 1993) some types of governments (single-party majorities) may be more prone to losing vote share between elections than others (coalition majorities) as it is easier to attach blame for unpopular policies to a single ruling party. Due to the fact that the incumbent’s previous election vote share was highly correlated with the single-party/coalition majority dummies, this variable was dropped from regressions when government type dummies were included. Data on government type was also taken from Armingeon et al (2012).

We were unable to obtain meaningful results when we re-coded our general strike variables to take into consideration whether concessions were granted to unions after the strike event. Only 88 of the 130 strikes included in our dataset had known outcomes. We applied a very broad approach to coding whether concessions were granted to unions after general strikes within an electoral cycle, but we encountered two problems: election years which possessed general strikes with missing outcome data had to be coded as missing values (reducing our
sample by nine election years and the number of election years with strike activity by 20%), and; various election cycles where concessions were granted also witnessed general strikes without concessions, making it difficult to distinguish separate voting effects. Consequently, our regressions (results not shown here) indicated that election cycles that contained general strikes without outcomes behaved similarly as election cycles that contained at least one strike with concessions – both circumstances were associated with significant reductions in vote share for incumbents, relative to electoral cycles where general strikes were absent.

Autocorrelation problems within panels appeared to be rectified by selecting the change in vote share as the dependent variable, as indicated by insignificant Wooldridge statistics for panel autocorrelation. Given significant likelihood ratio (LR) chi-squared statistics for panel heteroskedasticity across the baseline models for our four dependent variables, robust standard errors, clustered by country, were used. While panel-corrected standard errors (PCSEs) have become a popular method of controlling for panel heteroskedasticity (see Beck and Katz 1995), we were unable to use PCSEs given the lack of common election years across panels. Hence, we opted for country-clustered standard errors, which may provide more conservative standard errors (Rogers 2003). We opted for country fixed effects in order to control for omitted country-specific variables (such as electoral systems, systems of capitalism, and welfare regimes) that fail to exhibit variation over time. Though several have questioned the use of fixed effects with independent variables that are measured in terms of levels or display little variation over time across all or some panels (see Kittel and Winner 2005 and Plümper, Troeger and Manow 2005 for excellent critiques) our results for the strikes and pacts variables did not significantly differ if

---

7 The Wooldridge test statistic from the baseline model (Column I in Table 1) was 1.131 (p-value=0.304).
8 LR chi-squared statistics for Model I in Table 1, and Models I, III and V in Table 2 were 47.81 (p-value=0.000), 24.20 (p-value=0.062), 41.40 (p-value=0.000), and 25.96 (p-value=0.002), respectively.
9 This may be a problem for panels within our datasets where no strikes (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Sweden and the UK) or pacts (the UK) occurred between 1980 and 2012.
we used random effects – indeed the fixed effects estimator was more conservative, as our results for the general strike and social pact variables became more significant under a random effects estimator.

For the change in party vote shares, we used the following OLS, fixed country effects baseline regression:

\[
\Delta pVS_{i,t} = \alpha_{i,t} + \beta_1 pVS_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 Incb_{i,t} + \beta_3 (GS_{i,t}) + \beta_4 (SP_{i,t}) + \beta_5 (Inc_{i,t} \cdot GS_{i,t}) + \beta_6 (Inc_{i,t} \cdot SP_{i,t}) + \sum \beta_k X_{k,i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}
\]

where \( pVS_{i,t} \) is the change in left/right/center party vote share in country \( i \) at election year \( t \), \( pVS_{i,t-1} \) is the left/right party’s vote share after the previous election, \( Inc_{i,t} \) is a dummy variable indicating whether the left/right/center party is the incumbent in country \( i \) at election \( t \), and \( GS_{i,t} \) and \( SP_{i,t} \) are dummy variables indicating whether a general strike and social pact, respectively, have occurred since the last election (we use only the binary form of the general strike and social pact variables in these regressions). \( Inc_{i,t} \cdot GS_{i,t} \) and \( Inc_{i,t} \cdot SP_{i,t} \) are interaction terms accounting for whether a general strike and social pact, respectively, occurred while the party was an incumbent; it takes a non-zero value only if a general strike/social pact occurs when the left/right/center party holds the Prime Ministership. We do not anticipate general strikes and social pacts to have a significant influence on party vote share unless that party is in power at the time of the strike. Instead, we anticipate that \( \beta_5 \) and \( \beta_6 \) will hold a significant, negative and positive association, respectively, with the dependent variable.

The change in party vote share regressions only include unemployment and inflation as controls as well as their interaction with the incumbent dummy (inclusion of the other controls do not significantly influence the general strike results). As with the general strike and social
pacts hierarchal terms, we do not anticipate unemployment and inflation on their own to hold a significant, negative relationship with change in party vote share, given that electorates are less likely to penalize left or right parties for economic developments when they are out of government (indeed, there may be a slight positive relationship between these variables’ hierarchal terms and the party vote share dependent variables if the public rewards the opposition for the poor economic performance of an incumbent). If unemployment and inflation are valence issues, it is anticipated that their interaction with the incumbent dummy will be significantly negative; that is, left/right/center parties are only penalized for inflation and unemployment if they are in office. On the other hand, Wright (2012) provides convincing evidence that if unemployment is perceived as a partisan issue, with the left being more concerned about unemployment while the right is concerned about inflation, the interaction term on unemployment and the incumbent dummy may be positive for leftist parties, as these parties are perceived as better equipped to rectify unemployment.

**Results**

Results for the change in the incumbent’s vote share are presented in Table 1, while results for changes in left, right/liberal, and center/Christian Democrat party vote shares are presented in Table 2. Regardless of how general strikes are codified, their presence appears to have a significant association with declining vote shares for incumbent governments. The results from column I, Table 1, show governments that witness more general strikes under their tenure also witness larger declines in their vote shares between election years. All else equal, a government that witnesses one general strike per year on average will experience a 4.49% decline in their popular vote share. Likewise, if measured as a binary phenomenon, the presence of a general strike during the incumbent’s most recent term leads to, on average, roughly a 1.8-3.2% decline
in its vote share during an election year. This is equivalent to a drop of a third to a half of a standard deviation in an incumbent’s vote share change. We also conducted two further robustness checks in terms of selective sampling. For the first (column VI, Table 1) we exclude Greece and Italy; these countries not only have the highest strike incidence (61% of all strikes in our sample occurred within these two countries alone), but also along with Spain and Portugal, have been identified as displaying stronger trends towards economic voting than voters in Northern Europe (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2012). For the second (column VII, Table 1), we restrict the time period of the sample to before the European financial/fiscal crisis, as this period was prone to high strike activity and high government turnover. Even with the exclusion of these proto-typical cases/years, general strikes remain significantly associated with reduced incumbent vote share. While the use of random effects for the models in Table 1 did not significantly change the beta magnitude or sign on the strikes variable, they did render the strikes variable more significant; in Models II and VII (Table 1), for example, the general strikes variable was significant on a 95% rather than a 90% confidence level under a random effects estimator.

Finally, general strikes that are closer to the general election also appear to have more significant consequences for governments compared to strikes that are earlier within an incumbent’s tenure. Taking results from column V, Table 1, if the most recent general strike during an incumbent’s tenure takes place a quarter way into its term, it correlates with a 1.2% decline in its electoral vote share. If, on the other hand, the most recent general strike occurs three quarters into the government’s term, it correlates with a 3.5% decline in the incumbent’s vote share. The general strike indicators were widely robust, failing to lose significance below a 90% confidence level, regardless of the economic or political controls used.

[Table 1 about here]
Social pacts performed as expected, in terms of the sign of the beta coefficient, but the results were not as robust as those for general strikes. If measured in terms of an annual average across a government’s tenure (column I, Table 1), social pacts just lacked significance under the 90% confidence threshold (p-value=0.104) although if random effects was used for Model I, the pacts variable was significant at the 90% confidence level. The proximity manifestation of the social pacts variable was heavily insignificant, regardless of whether a fixed or random effects estimator was used. When measured as a binary phenomenon, however, social pacts were significantly associated with positive vote share gains between elections for incumbents in all five models. For the models where social pacts were manifested as a binary variable, it was associated with roughly a 2% increase in the incumbent’s vote share. Similar to the general strike results, the use of random effects enhanced the significance of the pacts variable, but did not alter the beta values.

GDP growth possessed the expected sign and was significantly associated with an increase in vote share for the incumbent government. Inflation was associated with an increase in vote share for the incumbent (contrary to what was expected), while unemployment and net government lending failed to exhibit significance (columns II and III, Table 1). The incumbent’s vote share prior to the election was significantly associated with declines in electoral vote shares, indicating a decline in popular support for incumbents over election years. Government type does not appear to significantly influence vote share (a nested F-test also confirmed that single party administrations do not perform significantly differently from minority governments).\(^\text{10}\)

Concerning industrial relations control variables (results not shown here), an interaction term between union density and the general strike dummies lacked significance implying that union

\(^{10}\) We also conducted regressions examining interactions between general strikes and government types, to determine whether single-party majority governments were more likely to be penalized by a general strike than their coalition (and minority) counterparts, yet the results were not significant.
density does not magnify or mitigate the electoral influence of a general strike. Thus, it seems that it is not the proportion of the labor force that is unionized that drives the electoral effects, but rather the general strikes, which speak not just to union members, but the larger electorate.

Dissecting the influence of general strikes on changes in the vote share along partisan lines (Table 2), we also find that general strikes have serious negative repercussions not only for left party incumbents and (weakly) for center/Christian Democratic incumbents, but also for right party incumbents. The hierarchical general strike variable is not significant, indicating that left, right, and center parties do not suffer vote share penalties if general strikes occur while they are out of office. For left parties, the interaction term between general strikes and an incumbent dummy is significantly associated with declines in vote shares (our estimates range from 4.8% to 8.2%) regardless of the economic control (unemployment or inflation) used. For right party incumbents, general strikes are also significantly associated with declines in vote share (by roughly 5% - interaction term between the incumbent dummy and general strike dummy, columns III-IV in Table 2). For center parties, the interaction effect is weaker, completely lacking significance when inflation is used as the main economic control, although the incumbent/strike interaction term in Model VI of Table 2 becomes significant at the 90% confidence level when random effects are used. However, if unemployment is used as the main economic control, general strikes are (weakly) significantly associated with roughly a 4% decline in vote share for incumbent center/Christian Democratic parties. Such results indicate that union mobilization via general strikes not only has important electoral consequences for labor’s traditional political ally (the left) but also their political adversary (the right).

Social pacts also display interesting partisan interactions. For right parties, accepted social pacts do not significantly influence their vote share, whether they are in office (evidenced by the lack of significance for the interaction term between incumbency and social pacts) or out
of office (evidenced by the lack of significance for the hierarchical pacts term). For left and center/Christian Democratic parties, however, social pacts significantly influence vote share gains between elections when they are incumbents. Evidenced by the lack of a significant pact hierarchical term (except for Model I) accepted pacts are not associated with significant vote share gain or decline for left or center/Christian Democratic parties if they are out of office. While the hierarchical accepted pacts variable is significantly associated with vote share decline for left parties (Model I, Table 2), this result is not robust if inflation is a control (Model II, Table 2) or if random effects are used. If, however, a social pact is signed when a left or center/Christian Democratic party is the incumbent, this action is significantly associated with a positive change in vote share (by roughly 4% to 5% - see the incumbent/social pact interaction effect in columns I-II and V-VI in Table 2). Taking these results together, right parties fail to experience electoral reward for pursuing policy reforms via social pacts, whereas for left and center/Christian Democratic parties, initiating reforms via social pacts with unions appears to present electoral payoffs.

[Table 2 about here]

Regarding economic controls, right and center/Christian Democratic parties did not experience significant changes in vote shares for high unemployment, whether they were in government or in opposition. High unemployment under a left incumbency (column I, Table 2) was significantly associated with a decline in vote share for left parties. Center/Christian Democratic parties appear to benefit electorally from higher inflation if they do not hold the Prime Ministership (column VI, Table 2); such electoral benefits accrue if they are either in government but do not hold the leadership position or if they are in the opposition.

Discussion and Conclusion
Government incentives to respond positively to general strikes may result from these strikes’ reach to protesters not affiliated with a union. Unlike industrial or economic disputes, which primarily involve union members and workplace issues, general strikes serve as protest vehicles against welfare and labor market reforms, which are more universal in their impact. Hence, non-members may hold more sympathy towards these types of protests as they are called against policy changes that act against their interests. Even if voters not affiliated with a union fail to participate in the strikes themselves, these instances of “protest solidarity” may motivate them to penalize incumbent governments at the ballot box in the subsequent election. Such political responses by voters, including those who are not union members or feel generally unrepresented by unions, are important for unions’ strategies. They suggest that despite membership decline and the costs of organizing general strikes, unions may be able to influence governments indirectly by mobilizing voters at post-strike elections.

Our results indicate that general strikes are of political, and especially electoral, importance, even during periods of union decline. While unions’ capacity to influence issues related to the workplace appears to be declining, unions have become more visible actors in national politics in Western Europe over the last three decades. They have played a prominent role in negotiating policy reforms through social pacts, but they have also expressed their – and many voters’ – opposition to other reforms by mobilizing protest through general strikes. Although social pacts electorally benefit only left and center/Christian Democratic incumbents, the electoral effects of general strikes have been felt by left, center/Christian Democratic, and, surprisingly, rightist incumbents.

At the same time, we need to interpret our findings with caution. While we attempt to decouple unpopular reforms from general strikes via the use of social pacts as an empirical benchmark, we lack precise data that would allow us to completely distinguish the electoral
effect of the unpopular reforms that was targeted by the general strike from the effect of the
general strike itself. That is, we cannot say with certainty whether voters react to the reforms
themselves when they vote (assuming that general strikes tend to target only major reforms that
are widely unpopular), whether the mobilization of large numbers of voters creates the electoral
effect or some interaction between the two as general strikes might amplify the effect of
contentious reforms on electoral outcomes. At this point, we cannot test for the effects of these
different mechanisms that might cause the electoral outcomes since we lack consistent data that
would allow us to completely disentangle these relationships, such as survey and other data
measuring the unpopularity or “severity” of reforms and the extent and mobilization of general
strikes. Yet, despite these limitations, our results show that the vote share of political parties in
office declines after general strikes occur, that all parties are vulnerable to electoral penalties in
the face of general strikes against unpopular welfare reform, and that these declines become
greater the closer the most recent strike to the general election – in line with the findings of some
of the electoral voting literature. Moreover, our results also suggest that when left and
center/Christian Democratic parties opt to pursue contentious policy reforms via social pacts,
including rather than excluding unions from the policymaking process, they experience
significant gains in vote share. Governments are held to account by voters, and general strikes
(and social pacts) can be part of the process of voter mobilization in opposition to governments.

Our findings can provide at least a partial answer to the question of why unions engage in
organizing general strikes. Previous research has shown that general strikes can be effective in
altering governmental policies or policy reforms. Here, we show that general strikes can also
exert influence by affecting electoral support for incumbents. This finding perhaps explains why
sometimes governments make concessions in response to unions’ announcements that a general
strike will be organized, despite unions’ organizational and economic decline. General strikes are
costly, not just economically, but also politically, and governments have incentives to minimize these costs.
Figure 1: General Strike Frequency in the EU15 plus Norway (1980-2012)

Source: Hamann, Johnston and Kelly (2013a) updated to 2012 from EIRO and Labour Research.
Figure 2: Social Pact Frequency in the EU15 plus Norway (1980-2012)

Sources: EIRO; EIRR; Hamann and Kelly (2011)
Table 1: Results for Incumbent’s Change in Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous Vote Share</strong></td>
<td>-0.25*** (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.33*** (0.000)</td>
<td>-0.30*** (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.26*** (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.25*** (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.31*** (0.000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Left Incumbent</strong></td>
<td>0.46 (0.636)</td>
<td>0.566 (0.649)</td>
<td>0.043 (0.969)</td>
<td>-0.609 (0.649)</td>
<td>0.683 (0.419)</td>
<td>0.851 (0.449)</td>
<td>1.193 (0.357)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Right Incumbent</strong></td>
<td>2.42** (0.032)</td>
<td>1.91 (0.205)</td>
<td>2.106 (0.103)</td>
<td>2.20* (0.064)</td>
<td>2.37** (0.021)</td>
<td>2.66** (0.041)</td>
<td>1.767 (0.230)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General strikes</strong> (average per year)</td>
<td>-4.49*** (0.000)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accepted Social Pacts</strong> (average per year)</td>
<td>3.186 (0.104)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General strikes during tenure (yes/no)</strong></td>
<td>-1.86* (0.071)</td>
<td>-3.22*** (0.008)</td>
<td>-2.69** (0.017)</td>
<td>-2.15** (0.039)</td>
<td>-1.978* (0.072)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accepted pacts during tenure (yes/no)</strong></td>
<td>2.48*** (0.006)</td>
<td>2.52** (0.040)</td>
<td>2.72* (0.067)</td>
<td>2.580* (0.082)</td>
<td>2.000* (0.059)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strike Proximity (fraction into an incumbent's term)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-4.72*** (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pact Proximity (fraction into an incumbent's term)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.682 (0.295)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inflation</strong></td>
<td>0.24** (0.026)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployment</strong></td>
<td>0.182 (0.302)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP Growth</strong></td>
<td>1.52*** (0.001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Government Lending</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.216 (0.394)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incumbent leads minority Government</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.059 (0.725)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incumbent leads single-party majority government</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.303 (0.422)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>4.94* (0.051)</td>
<td>0.854 (0.748)</td>
<td>6.80** (0.049)</td>
<td>-3.93*** (0.004)</td>
<td>5.31** (0.034)</td>
<td>4.132 (0.101)</td>
<td>6.761** (0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Observations</strong></td>
<td>138</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Excl GR and IT only 1980-2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R-squared (within)</strong></td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F-statistic</strong></td>
<td>13.5***</td>
<td>8.1***</td>
<td>7.9***</td>
<td>8.8***</td>
<td>10.6***</td>
<td>5.9***</td>
<td>12.9***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable is the change in the incumbent’s vote share between the current and previous election. Model used was an OLS estimator of (time invariant) election years from 1980 to 2012 for 16 countries (EU15 plus Norway). N-1 country dummies included but not shown. Robust p-values are in parenthesis (standard errors clustered by country). *, **, and *** indicate significance on a 90%, 95% and 99% confidence level.
Table 2: Results for Partisan Change in Vote Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Change in Left Party Vote Share</th>
<th>Change in Right Party Vote Share</th>
<th>Change in Center Party Vote Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Election Vote Share</td>
<td>-0.528*** (0.000)</td>
<td>-0.441*** (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.487*** (0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General strikes between election</td>
<td>0.446 (0.761)</td>
<td>0.135 (0.925)</td>
<td>0.689 (0.625)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(yes/no)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted Pacts between election</td>
<td>-2.037** (0.015)</td>
<td>-1.29 (0.173)</td>
<td>0.698 (0.482)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(yes/no)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Party Incumbent</td>
<td>-0.681 (0.752)</td>
<td>-2.48* (0.060)</td>
<td>3.039 (0.284)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Party Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Party Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Strike under Left Incumbent</td>
<td>-4.799* (0.067)</td>
<td>-8.169*** (0.000)</td>
<td>-5.281* (0.051)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Strike under Right Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Strike under Center Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted pact under Left Incumbent</td>
<td>4.522*** (0.005)</td>
<td>3.710*** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.367 (0.894)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted pact under Right Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted pact under Center Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-0.256 (0.371)</td>
<td>-0.012 (0.970)</td>
<td>-0.244 (2.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment * Incumbent Dummy</td>
<td>-0.500* (0.099)</td>
<td>-0.265 (0.438)</td>
<td>-0.391 (0.318)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation * Incumbent Dummy</td>
<td>0.133 (0.555)</td>
<td>0.098 (0.499)</td>
<td>0.431*** (0.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>20.27*** (0.000)</td>
<td>14.98*** (0.001)</td>
<td>12.07*** (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared (overall)</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.419</td>
<td>0.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistic</td>
<td>25.97***</td>
<td>48.51***</td>
<td>19.52***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable is the change in the party vote share between the current and previous election. Model used was an OLS estimator of (time invariant) election years from 1980 to 2012 for 16 countries (EU15 plus Norway). N-1 country dummies included but not shown. Robust p-values are in parenthesis (standard errors clustered by country). *, **, and *** indicate significance on a 90%, 95% and 99% confidence level.
References


