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Title: Mixed-Methods Analysis of Political Parties' Manifesto Discourse on Rail Transport Policy: Westminster, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Elections 1945-2011

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Abstract: This study addresses a key lacuna by exploring the role of electoral politics in shaping public policy on rail transport in (quasi-)federal systems of governance. Attention centres on issue-salience and policy framing in party manifestos in state-wide and regional elections. The findings reveal a significant rise in issue-salience in parties' Westminster election programmes; with Right - and Left-of-centre parties increasingly advocating mixed economy approaches to rail transport as part of the wider rise of 'valence politics'. The analysis also reveals how devolution may lead to the territorialisation of rail transport policy. In contrast to parties' Westminster programmes, regional manifesto discourse evidences a general rejection of neo-liberalism and stronger support for state control and/or not-for-profit rail operators. Overall, the findings underline the formative nexus between political representation and public policy - and show how, in the wake of state decentralisation, policy framing is contingent on 'regional' socio-economic factors and party politics, including state-building by civic nationalist parties.



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Professor Greg Marsden,
Editor, *Transport Policy*

24th May, 2014

Dear Professor Marsden,

I am pleased to submit my revised paper entitled: 'Mixed-Methods Analysis of Political Parties' Manifesto Discourse on Rail Transport Policy: Westminster, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Elections 1945-2011' - for consideration for publication in *Transport Policy*.

I am grateful to the referees for their helpful and constructive comments – I have carefully and systematically addressed all of their points and I have up-loaded an accompanying note 'Author's response to referees' comments' detailing the changes made.

Yours sincerely,

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Chaney'.

Paul Chaney
Chaneyp@cardiff.ac.uk

Author Response to Referees' Comments

I am very grateful to the two referees for their helpful and constructive comments. I've listed below the ways in which I've addressed each point. Apologies if it looks a little long-winded - I wanted to explain how I've carefully and systematically addressed every point. The paper is improved as a result and I have added an acknowledgement at the end of the paper. Once again - thank-you.

(Note to editors: the following are the only changes made - otherwise the revised paper is the same as that reviewed by the referees).

Reviewer #1:

This paper analyses election material from the main political parties since 1945, to see both whether the emphasis given to rail policy has changed over time and whether devolution of rail decisions to Scotland and Wales has affected coverage of rail policy. However, it must be said that many of the statements analysed are of broad philosophical approach (e.g. it is good to involve the private sector) rather than specific proposals. It finds that attention to rail policy has increased over time and that what each political party says does vary between countries since devolution. However, it must be said that many of the latter differences either may be because of geographical differences (HSR may have more relevance to Scotland than to Wales) or because they deal with details (e.g. availability of discounted fares, wifi) rather than broad approach.

Author Response

I am very grateful to the reviewer for the helpful and constructive comments and suggestions. Regarding the first point: 'many of the statements analysed are of broad philosophical approach... rather than specific proposals'. Yes, the aim here is to use a well-established methodology (applied across a broad range of other policy areas, and issues - but not, to date, rail policy) of looking at the language parties use in attempting to appeal to voters. This offers insight into the political origins of policy and the underpinning motivations behind state policy on rail transport (seen as an aspect of social welfare/ affordable transport for all - or environmentally beneficial - or means of boosting economic development through improved infrastructure, etc. This complements traditional analyses of policy implementation for example. I've taken care to summarise the importance of this approach on the first page in the following section:

Specifically, electoral politics, mandate-seeking and understanding the way that parties envision rail transport as they seek voters' backing at the ballot box. It is a lacuna that matters in a number of regards. Not least because: 1. manifestos provide substantive details of future government (and opposition) parties' policies; 2. They...etc.

Re. 'many of the latter differences either may be because of geographical differences (HSR may have more relevance to Scotland than to Wales) or because they deal with details (e.g. availability of discounted fares, wifi) rather than broad approach' - this I really helpful - thanks. I've amended the text to underline this point. I'd respectfully say 'some' rather than 'many' of the differences may be because of geographical differences...'. But it's a valuable point and I've revised the text to emphasize that not all of language on rail policy is down to different political visions/priorities - rather it is also locally contingent.

Added section

... This illustrates the historically and spatially contingent nature of the re-scaling of policy-making on regional lines. It is a point worth re-emphasizing that not all of language on rail policy is down to different political visions/priorities - rather it is also shaped by local circumstances (for example, giving HSR more relevance to Scotland than to Wales). This is illustrated here for the heightened level of attention afforded to the frame in Northern Ireland in turn reflects historical line closures and the under-developed nature of the network; in part a function of the civil conflict (Casserley, 1974; Neill and Gordon, 2001).

Some of the jargon could do with clarification, starting with the title - something much clearer to a broad audience of transport professionals would be more appropriate for this journal.

Author Response

Apologies - I've revised the title for less academic jargon as follows:

**Mixed-Methods Analysis of Political Parties' Manifesto
Discourse on Rail Transport Policy: Westminster, Scottish,
Welsh and Northern Irish Elections 1945-2011**

There is a curious quote on page 14 about the regulator having been captured by the freight industry. This is presented as if it is fact, rather than a very controversial viewpoint, and it is unclear what it means. The regulator is responsible for regulating access to the infrastructure and capture by the freight industry might imply that he was favouring freight operators. But the reference to the failure to claw back subsidies for non performance suggests that this is a reference to the Department for Transport and its grants to promote rail freight transport. DfT is a very different body from the independent regulator referred to in the previous quote. This needs clarifying.

Author Response

This is really helpful - I've amended the text to clarify as the reviewer suggests, as follows:

... as Stittle (2004, p.) observes: 'failure... to insist on rail freight growth targets or to impose any claw-back of the subsidies for non-performance is a tribute to weak political and legislative control over regulatory mechanisms'. This raises questions about the Department for Transport and its grants to promote rail freight transport. However, such concerns over regulation and effective governance pre-date privatisation ...

On P18 there is a reference to Keynesian attitudes to state intervention in transport, but I am not sure there is anything Keynesian about the policy advocated in the quote. Keynes believed in state intervention to prevent recessions but did he advocate state intervention to favour public transport?

Author Response

Again this is really helpful - I've revised the text (removing the reference to Keynesianism) to fully address the point as follows:

... This again reflects their propensity towards state intervention in transport (Visser, 2000). For example, 'Labour believes that public transport, road and rail, must play the dominant

Reviewer #2:

This article makes a useful contribution to our understanding of the post-war electoral politics of railways in the UK and the three constituent territories with devolved authority for transport. The analysis is unlikely to surprise anyone who is familiar with the relationship between the state and railways since 1945, but nevertheless it is good - and I am not damning with faint praise - to have one's impressions confirmed by this study of the principal parties' manifestos. While I am not competent to judge the techniques used to code the texts, in general terms I found the methodology convincing and so have a high degree of confidence in the results. In terms of policy analysis, the author(s) suggests that this study offers a 'discursive benchmark' against which to evaluate the parties' practice once in power, and I agree. In short, I recommend that the article be published, subject to some minor revisions.

Author Response

I am very grateful to the reviewer for their helpful and constructive comments. I've addressed each point in turn as follows.

- (1) The discussion of the existing literature on the politics of rail policy needs strengthening. There is too much reliance on authors such as Wolmar, Jackson, and Wragg who are (the first at least by his own admission) more knowledgeable commentators than academic authorities. In terms of the post-war period, I should expect to see, for instance,

mention of Terry Gourvish, *Britain's Railway, 1997-2005: Labour's Strategic Experiment* (Oxford UP, 2008) and Charles Loft, *Government, the Railways and Modernization of Britain: Beeching's Last Trains* (Routledge, 2006); Loft is much better on the Whitehall and electoral politics than Faulkner and Austin, and offers a cogent analysis of how political rhetoric and policy practice can diverge markedly. Mark Casson, *The World's First Railway System: Enterprise, Competition, and Regulation on the Railway Network in Victorian Britain* (Oxford UP, 2009) gives a good overview of the long C19th (and an extensive bibliography, should this be needed). There is no scholarly monograph for the inter-war period, but articles such as Gerald Crompton, "'Good business for the nation?' The railway nationalization issue, 1921-47", *Journal of Transport History* 3rd ser. 20/2 (Sep. 1999) cover the ground well. On the narrower topic of elections, see I. McLean and C. Foster, 'The political economy of regulation: interests, ideology, voters and the UK Regulation of Railways Act 1844', *Public Administration* 70 (1992): pp. 313-31.

(2)

Author Response

I am indebted to the reviewer - this is really helpful - thanks. I've added the authors/ references suggested (these are really excellent texts - apologies for earlier oversight). I've then used selective quotes from the added references to supplement/develop the discussion.

Added text linking the discussion with the suggested texts:

"As Gourvish (2008, p.1) states: 'few people have had kind words for the privatized rail structure constructed so hastily - yet laboriously by John Major's Conservative Government from 1992'. Notwithstanding the Conservatives' pledge that: 'a new Rail Regulator - will ensure that all companies...;

"In turn, Labour's dominance reflects a longstanding view that emerged as far back as the end of the nineteenth century that 'railways should act more as public corporations than as profit-making businesses. The main thrust of course came from the Labour movement' (Gourvish, 1987, p.13)";

"As Loft (2006, p.14) notes by the 1964 election 'modernization' was an emerging trope in the political discourse: 'both parties sought to present themselves as modernizers. The use of modernization as a universal panacea for British problems reflects the wider national fascination with modernity'. Despite its popularity amongst party policy makers...";

"This reflects the party's traditional view of rail as a social

policy intervention (Wilson, 1964) and fury in some quarters that, as (Loft, 2006, p.5) observes Beeching era 'closures were not subject to detailed social cost benefit analyses'.

"As Crompton's (1999) insightful work outlines, it is a topic that has been the centre-point of intense political debate practically from the outset of the railways..."

"This has largely focused on: state grants and subsidies as an electoral issue (Else, 1996); the electoral dimension to rail regulation (McLean and Foster, 1992); the influence of state-trades union relations on voting patterns (Howell, 1999); parties' programmes on competition and regulation (Charlton et al, 1997); electoral debate on nationalisation (Pagoulatos, 2005); policy actors' attitudes to aspects of rail policy (Ludvigsen et al, 2013); the electoral salience..."

Added References:

Casson, M. (2009) *The World's First Railway System: Enterprise, Competition, and Regulation on the Railway Network in Victorian Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Crompton, G. (1992) "Good business for the nation?" *The railway nationalization issue, 1921-47*, *Journal of Transport History* 3rd series, 20, 2, 17-31.

Gourvish, T. (1987) *British Railways 1948-1973: A Business History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Gourvish, T. (2008) *Britain's Railway, 1997-2005: Labour's Strategic Experiment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Loft, C. (2013) *Government, the Railways and Modernization of Britain: Beeching's Last Trains*, London: Routledge.

McLean, I. and Foster, C. (1992) 'The political economy of regulation: interests, ideology, voters and the UK Regulation of Railways Act 1844', *Public Administration* 70, 313-31.

(2) How were the frames used in the coding selected? Are they derived from theory or the historiography, or did they emerge from a provisional assessment of the manifestos? If the former, there is a risk that substantive categories might have been missed; in the latter, a risk of circularity ('we found what we set ourselves up to find'). In any case, greater methodological clarity is needed here.

Author Response

This is really helpful - it links to an interesting area of the qualitative methods literature. There's certainly no circularity - exactly the opposite - as it's the data that determine the frames. I've added the following new section to give greater explanation of the coding used and how it is rigorous and defensible. I've also added supporting citations.

Added text:

Individual quasi-sentences were subsequently coded using an inductive coding frame (Boyatzis 1998) that captured key themes related to rail transport policy (See Figure 5.). As Thomas (2006, p. 238) notes 'inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher'. It is an approach well established in the qualitative research methods literature (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Dey, 1993). Its strengths include that it avoids the charge of circularity (i.e. the research finds what it set out to find) sometimes levelled at deductive coding based on grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) whereby, preconceived categories are applied to the data. This is because it is operationalised by first reading the manifesto texts and noting down key emerging themes or frames (e.g. nationalisation, infrastructure development etc.). In this way coding is driven by the data. A full and detailed analysis of the manifesto texts follows in which individual quasi-sentences are allocated to each frame. Importantly, this is a reflexive process that prevents key frames from being missed for additional frames can be added during the coding process. This is particularly valuable in analysing longitudinal data as in the present study, when particular issues come to prominence at certain periods (e.g. Beeching era cuts) and others diminish or disappear. In the current analysis the result was a coding schema that incorporates a range of frames including: nationalisation versus privatisation; governance and regulation; economic effects; social aspects; environment/ sustainability; modernisation; efficiency/ service standards; and subsidy/ profitability.

Added citations:

Boyatzis, R. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information*. London, Sage.

Bryman, A., & Burgess, R. G. (Eds.). (1994). *Analyzing qualitative data*. London: Routledge.

Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user-friendly guide for social scientists*. London: Routledge

Thomas, D. (2006) *A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data*, *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237- 56.

(3) At pp.9-10 I am unclear about the sample to which the percentages refer: all (UK) manifestos from 1945? And despite the relentlessly upward trend of the dotted line drawn in Fig. 1, there seems to have been a significant downturn in manifesto references ca 1964-74; which is perhaps not surprising given that British Rail continued to be something of a political headache for both Labour and Conservatives given the financial failings of the Beeching era.

Author Response

Yes, it is all (UK) manifestos from 1945. I have added a couple of words to underline this in the text/ improve clarity. '... Just 4 per cent of all-party post-war references to rail policy in UK manifestos were made in these ballots'.

The dotted line in Figures 1 and 2. Is the trend line generated by the statistical package. Apologies this should have been noted in a legend under each Figure - I've now added this in the revised paper.

The note re. the drop in salience 1964-74 is very helpful - and I've added it to the text. Thank-you.

Added text:

Notwithstanding a significant downturn in manifesto references circa 1964-74 (which is perhaps not surprising given that British Rail continued to be something of a political headache for both Labour and Conservatives given the financial failings of the Beeching era)...

(4) P.10. The socially regressive character of much rail travel was a policy issue in the 1960s and 1970s (see R.W.S. Pryke and J.S. Dodgson, *The Rail Problem* (Martin Robertson, 1975)), and is not entirely irrelevant now - see, e.g, the debate over HS2. Was this ever a concern in the manifestos (i.e. as a theme which threatened rail's status as a valence issue)? I suspect that it might be more apparent if the study were extended to local/municipal elections, where buses might be represented

as better value-for-money and more socially inclusive than support for rail.

Author Response

I've gone back to the data and carefully checked. The issue of rail being socially regressive doesn't emerge in the manifesto texts. There are a handful of generalised references to improvements needing to be for the benefit of all - but nothing that could be seen as a definite frame or trope around social regressiveness. As the reviewer says, it would be interesting to look at municipal election where this will probably be evident.

(5) Pp.14-15. Yes, regulation and governance have been near-constant issues throughout the post-war period, but these have played out very differently with regard to passengers and freight. In particular, it's not appropriate to elide discussion of passenger franchises in the privatized era with the regulation (or otherwise) of the freight companies.

Author Response

This is helpful. I have taken care to go back to the data and disaggregate the data and address this point by adding the following text dealing with freight governance and regulation discretely:

Added text.

A caveat is necessary here in relation to analysing attention to regulation and governance. These have been near-constant issues in the manifestos throughout the post-war period, but these have played out very differently with regard to passengers and freight. Rather than solely relying on aggregate data combining freight and passengers the data were re-coded in order to offer a discrete view of the discourse on freight regulation and governance alone. This is helpful in avoiding eliding discussion of passenger franchises in the privatized era with the regulation (or otherwise) of the freight companies - issues that have played out in markedly different ways. Thus, concerns with freight regulation / governance emerge in 1964 in an attack on 'the Government's policy of breaking up road and rail freight co-ordination' (Labour Party, 1964, p.7). Overall freight constitutes just over a fifth (22.2 per cent) of all references to regulation and governance issues. The discourse of the 1970s is concerned with freight governance and regulation as part of a wider integrated transport system (e.g. 'first rate integrated public service for freight', Labour Party, 1970, p.16). The majority (61.2 per cent) of references to freight governance are in the 1990s and later and are concerned with effective regulation in the wake of privatisation and efforts to remove freight from the roads (in part driven by an environmental agenda). For example 'treble the freight carried on Britain's railways by the year 2010. We will strengthen the powers of

the rail regulators. We will require Railtrack to meet targets for greater investment and increased... freight traffic' (Labour 1997, p. 29).

(6) P.18. An obvious point, perhaps, but one that it might be worth spelling out: Conservative rhetoric on subsidies has been about costs, Labour's on benefits.

Author Response

Yes, this really helpful thanks - I've reinforced the point with an addition to the text.

Additional text:

In contrast the Conservative Party accounts for most policy framing in relation to grants and subsidies extended to the railways (52.4 per cent; followed by Labour 39.5 per cent). When references under this frame are coded for direction party differences are clear. The Conservatives' rhetoric on subsidies has been about costs, Labour's on benefits. Thus the Conservatives are responsible for 87.2 per cent of quasi-sentences questioning or opposed to state subsidies. Examples include: 'millions...

(7) P.22. Is the 'disconnect' between political rhetoric and reality limited to the first two election cycles? And if so, in what did it consist? - little mention in the manifestos of the environment, while substantive action was taken in power? If the point is that more recent devolved governments have been more enthusiastic about the environment - either at the level of rhetoric or policy - than earlier ones, there is, of course, no 'disconnect' in the sense of inconsistency, merely change.

Author Response

Apologies - I should have phrased more clearly (it's not restricted to the first two cycles - but is more apparent) as you rightly say its change rather than a disconnect - I've corrected/ amended the text as follows:

Successive Scottish and Welsh governments have espoused the need for environmentally-friendly, sustainable policies (Haughton et al, 2008). In this regard the data provide evidence of significant change over election cycles. In the first two post-1998/9 election cycles limited attention was given to the environmental aspects of rail policy. Subsequently, over the last three cycles in Scotland and previous two in Wales, there is evidence of heightened emphasis on the environmental benefits of rail transport. This

is revealed by the index

(8) In terms of future work, it would be good, as I hinted earlier, to see this kind of study extended to the level of municipal/local electioneering: transport has been a lively issue in recent years in London, Manchester and some other big English municipal regions, of course.

Author Response

I totally agree - thank-you - I've added this to the future research agenda section at the end of the paper.

Highlights

- Explores the role of electoral politics in shaping rail policy in (quasi-)federal systems
- Original mixed methods analysis of issue-salience and policy framing in manifestos
- Findings detail post-war party politicization of rail - part of the wider rise of valence politics
- Analysis reveals the territorialisation of rail transport policy following devolution
- Policy framing is contingent on regional factors, inc. nation-building by nationalist parties

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Title: Mixed-Methods Analysis of Political Parties' Manifesto Discourse on Rail Transport Policy: Westminster, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Elections 1945-2011

Submitted to: *Transport Policy*

Key Words: Rail Transport Policy, Party Politicization, Issue-Salience, Manifesto, Elections, UK

No. Words: 8,700

No. Figures: 5

**Mixed-Methods Analysis of Political Parties' Manifesto Discourse on Rail
Transport Policy: Westminster, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Elections
1945-2011**

Abstract

This study addresses a key lacuna by exploring the role of electoral politics in shaping public policy on rail transport in (quasi-)federal systems of governance. Attention centres on issue-salience and policy framing in party manifestos in state-wide and regional elections. The findings reveal a significant rise in issue-salience in parties' Westminster election programmes; with Right – and Left-of-centre parties increasingly advocating mixed economy approaches to rail transport as part of the wider rise of 'valence politics'. The analysis also reveals how devolution may lead to the territorialisation of rail transport policy. In contrast to parties' Westminster programmes, regional manifesto discourse evidences a general rejection of neo-liberalism and stronger support for state control and/or not-for-profit rail operators. Overall, the findings underline the formative nexus between political representation and public policy - and show how, in the wake of state decentralisation, policy framing is contingent on 'regional' socio-economic factors and party politics, including state-building by civic nationalist parties.

Key Words Rail Transport Policy, Party Politicization, Issue-Salience, Manifesto, Elections, UK

Introduction

The present study makes an original contribution and addresses a knowledge-gap by analysing political parties' manifesto discourse and the framing of policy on rail transport in UK Westminster and regional elections 1945-2011.¹ Existing work underlines the political provenance of rail transport policy (Cf. Perl, 2002; Casson, 2009; Gourvish, 1987, 2008; Jackson, 2013; Loft, 2013). As Wragg (2004) cogently notes, 'politics became involved with the railways right from the start'. Yet extant studies have given insufficient attention to the formative phase of rail policy-making. Specifically, electoral politics, mandate-seeking and understanding the way that parties envision rail transport as they seek voters' backing at the ballot box. It is a lacuna that matters in a number of regards. Not least because: 1. manifestos provide substantive details of future government (and opposition) parties' policies; 2. They show how parties compare in the priority they attach to rail transport; 3. Electoral discourse reveals areas of inter-party conflict and consensus; and 4. Such a focus provides insight into how policy is shaped by party ideology and contingent on local socio-economic and political factors. In these regards it reveals the political use of language and discourse-based processes that underpin the development of public policy on rail transport; thereby providing a 'discursive benchmark' to complement *ex post* analyses of policy delivery (Mees, 2005; Williams *et al*, 2005).

The present approach is thus concerned with the process of political agenda-setting on rail transport in liberal democracies (Cobb and Ross, 1997). It contributes to understanding of the connection between political representation and rail transport

policy. It is a relationship explained by both mandate and accountability theory (Budge and Hofferbert, 1990; Royed, 1994; Fearon, 2003). The former asserts that when in government parties should implement the policies that they promised when running for office. In contrast, accountability theory asserts that elections are effectively ‘opinion polls’ on the performance of the party or parties forming the previous administration – and whether they delivered the policy programme that they were elected on (Przeworski *et al*, 1999; Ferejohn, 2003).

Two non-discrete factors heighten the importance of the foregoing theoretical underpinnings: devolution and, the rise of coalition government. In the former case, study of rail transport policy needs to be cognizant of the discursive underpinnings of distinctive territorial approaches. This stems from the pluralising of electoral systems that accompanies state decentralisation (or ‘devolution’) such that single state-wide ballots are supplemented by regional elections. Far from solely being a UK phenomenon, this has international significance for as Rodriguez-Pose and Gill (2003, p. 334) observe, a ‘devolutionary trend has swept the world [... involving widespread] transference of power, authority, and resources to subnational levels of government’ (Cf. Treisman 2007). In regard to the second factor, whereas the current Westminster coalition government is something of a rarity at a UK level, multi-party executives have become a routine aspect of devolved government. Electoral discourse thus plays a key role in constructing coalition agendas for governing as the respective partners seek to merge party-specific election pledges into a single executive policy programme.

The international rise of meso-government – or ‘quasi-federalism’ (Gamble 2006), has important implications for the way that rail transport policy develops. Not least because many unitary states are collectivities of different nations and devolution

means that policy is no longer exclusively grounded in unitary elections that reflect the power and priorities of dominant state-wide parties at the federal level. Instead, it is also mandated in meso-ballots where regionalist parties have greater influence and contrasting policy priorities – and where rail transport is integral to developing regional infrastructures as part of nation-building. Compared to centralised systems it also offers the potential for closer alignment between ‘local’ political traditions and attitudes and government policies. In the present case, constitutional reform in the UK has seen the (re-)creation (circa 1998-9) of national legislatures for Scotland and Wales - and an Assembly for Northern Ireland. Prior to this rail transport policy was solely mandated in UK general elections.² Subsequently, a multi-level system operates; policy proposals are also advanced Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish ballots. This is a governance shift designed to boost democratic accountability and engage voters with policy that reflects local socio-economic circumstances - as determined by regional-party politics.

In summary, the following discussion explores the post-war development of rail transport policy with reference to three principal aims: 1. To explore changes in the issue-salience of rail transport in post-war state-wide elections; 2. To examine policy framing in manifesto discourse; and 3. To analyse the impact of state decentralisation. Accordingly, the remainder of the paper is structured thus: a discussion of the literature on the rail transport policy and electoral competition is followed by an outline of the research methodology. The findings are then presented. The main findings and their implications are discussed in the conclusion.

Electoral Politics: The Formative Phase of Rail Transport Policy-Making

The term 'rail transport policy' refers to purposive interventions linked to the state and the democratic process designed to shape the development and operation of the railways through a combination of instruments including law and regulation, communication and the allocation of resources (see Colebatch, 2002; Hill, 2009). It thus spans a range of factors including: infrastructure, safety, employment, marketing, and economic development.

A survey of extant work reveals a modest literature on rail transport policy and elections. This has largely focused on: state grants and subsidies as an electoral issue (Else, 1996); the electoral dimension to rail regulation (McLean and Foster, 1992); the influence of state-trades union relations on voting patterns (Howell, 1999); parties' programmes on competition and regulation (Charlton *et al*, 1997); electoral debate on nationalisation (Pagoulatos, 2005); policy actors' attitudes to aspects of rail policy (Ludvigsen *et al*, 2013); the electoral salience of rail policy and environmentalism (Carter, 1992); party pledges on rail modernisation (Liow, 2005) and the electoral politics of rail closures (Loft, 2006).

Accordingly, in order to address the dearth of work exploring the origins of rail transport policy in electoral discourse the following draws upon the theory of 'issue-salience' (RePass, 1971; Robertson, 1976); a conceptualisation whereby key importance lies not only on party issue-positions but on the prominence and attention afforded to different issues in their campaigns; ergo the more an issue is emphasised by a party (making it 'salient'), the greater the likelihood it will attract voters who share similar concerns. Traditionally, quantitative analysis has been used to explore this (Libbrecht *et*

al, 2009; Volkens, 2001). The present examination takes a more holistic approach by combining it with an exploration of policy framing. Frames here are 'a necessary property of a text—where text is broadly conceived to include discourses, patterned behaviour, and systems of meaning, policy logics, constitutional principles, and deep cultural narratives' (Creed *et al*, 2002, p. 37; see also Fairclough, 2000).

By focusing on state-wide and regional elections this study provides insight into the impact of multi-level governance on rail transport policy-making. This locus of enquiry is appropriate because, as noted, 'devolution'- or move to quasi-federalism in the UK is part of the wider international trend of state restructuring (Doornbos, 2006). Under the revised governance structures the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments have responsibility for many aspects of state rail transport policy in their territories.³ However, it should be noted that the asymmetrical nature of devolution in the UK means that there are contrasts in the powers of the regional governments and legislatures. Moreover, these powers are developing over time. The biggest changes to date include the Transport Act (Wales) 2006 (which significantly enhanced the powers devolved government has over the railways in Wales)⁴ and Transport and Works (Scotland) Act 2007 (that revised the legislative process authorising new railways in Scotland).⁵ In timescale we consider the post-war decades. This is consistent with existing studies (Gourvish, 1987) and provides insight into a period of major change in rail transport policy in the UK (Faulkner and Austin, 2012).

Methodology

By applying mixed research methods the current study heeds earlier calls for policy work to combine content and critical discourse analysis (Tonkiss 2004). Accordingly,

issue-salience is determined by content analysis of the manifestos. This is applied by logging the number of incidences of key words, ideas or meanings in party programmes (Topf 1994, Krippendorff and Bock 2008) and is complemented by frame analysis (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Schön and Rein 1994). The latter is concerned with how, as political texts, manifestos enable parties to construct (or 'frame') policy proposals on rail transport and other matters. In electoral terms, as Nelson and Oxley (1997, p. 75) observe: 'frames influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame'. In this way framing leads to political agenda-setting (Cohen 1963, Cobb and Ross 1997) and, ultimately, the substantive policies that are mandated.

Comparative analysis of framing practices in different polities and tiers of government is an established methodological practice (De Vreese *et al* 2001, Papacharissi 2008). Notwithstanding this, it is germane to reflect upon the appropriateness and robustness of such a method. A key potential criticism acknowledged here is that policy discourse does not always translate into action and outcomes. However, our aim here is not to focus on outcomes but to examine the formative stage of policy-making thereby complementing existing instrumental policy studies that, *inter alia*, attempt to measure policy impact (Caracelli and Greene 1993, Ivankova 2011). This on-going, *ex ante* processual perspective has explanatory power that complements traditional *ex post* policy analysis. Its emphasis is on policy documents as anticipatory statements of state action. These provide a discursive benchmark against which to assess outcomes – and crucially, they reveal how rail

transport policy is envisioned. They also offer insight into differences of approach, debates and ideology across territories.

The data analysis was operationalised as follows. Electronic versions of the manifestos of the leading⁶ parties in UK general and regional elections 1945-2011 were analysed using appropriate software.⁷ Thus, in the preliminary stage of the research, the manifesto texts were divided into 'quasi-sentences' (or, 'an argument which is the verbal expression of one political idea or issue,' Volkens 2001, p. 96). Dividing the text in this manner controlled for long sentences that contain multiple policy proposals.⁸

Individual quasi-sentences were subsequently coded using an inductive coding frame (Boyatzis 1998) that captured key themes related to rail transport policy (See Figure 5.). As Thomas (2006, p. 238) notes 'inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher'. It is an approach is well established in the qualitative research methods literature (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Dey, 1993). Its strengths include that it avoids the charge of circularity (i.e. the research finds what it set out to find) sometimes levelled at deductive coding based on grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) whereby, preconceived categories are applied to the data. This is because it is operationalised by first reading the manifesto texts and noting down key emerging themes or frames (e.g. nationalisation, infrastructure development etc.). In this way coding is driven by the data. A full and detailed analysis of the manifesto texts follows in which individual quasi-sentences are allocated to each frame. Importantly, this is a reflexive process that prevents key frames from being missed for additional frames can be added during the coding process. This is particularly valuable in analysing longitudinal data as in the

present study, when particular issues come to prominence at certain periods (e.g. Beeching era cuts) and others diminish or disappear. In the current analysis the result was a coding schema that incorporates a range of frames including: nationalisation versus privatisation; governance and regulation; economic effects; social aspects; environment/ sustainability; modernisation; efficiency/ service standards; and subsidy/ profitability.

Contested frames – such as privatisation versus nationalisation - were coded a second time to reflect Reingold's (2000) notion of 'direction', and whether policy discourse is pro-, anti- or neutral on a subject. In order to increase data reliability the coding was done twice, first by the authors and again by a research assistant. Divergent views emerged in <2 per cent of quasi-sentences (N=1,824)⁹ (resolved by discussion between coders). Issue-salience was then determined by logging the frequency of quasi-sentences in a database of party manifestos 1945-2011.

As existing electoral studies reveal, over recent years party programmes have tended to become more detailed and have a greater word-length. This has potential methodological implications for any claims made about changes in salience over time; not least because it might be regarded as a function of increased manifesto length rather than greater attention to rail transport policy by the respective parties. To control for this, the present analysis uses both 'absolute' and 'relative totals' methodologies. The former details the total number of quasi-sentences on rail transport; whilst the latter recalculates them as a percentage of all quasi-sentences in each manifesto¹⁰ (i.e. on all topics and issues; see Figure 2. – below). Because the impact of increased manifesto word length on saliency is complex and variable¹¹ both approaches have advantages and limitations. For example, notwithstanding the overall trend towards greater

manifesto length, there are major fluctuations in both manifesto word totals and the number of quasi-sentences (in seven of the 18 general election cycles studied here the total number of quasi-sentences in the manifestos studies actually *decreased* compared to the preceding ballot). Nevertheless, in order to increase reliability and to control for any discrepancies between the two methods, both were used in the following analysis. This dual approach affirmed that the 'absolute totals' method (i.e. exploring the changing totals of rail policy quasi-sentences) produced findings consistent with those derived from the 'relative proportion' method (thus, for example, they both reveal a significant increase in the issue-salience of rail policy over time, see Figures 1 and 2).

Rail Transport Policy in Westminster Election Manifestos 1945-2010

The present data show that in the first four post-war elections rail transport had markedly low issue-salience. During this period the emphasis was on building the new institutions of the welfare state and allied social policy interventions (Whiteside, 1996; Gourvish, 1987). Just 4 per cent of all-party post-war references to rail policy in UK manifestos were made in these ballots. Subsequently, there is a significant increase in salience. It is confirmed by the contrasting methodological techniques employed here. Specifically, it is apparent when absolute totals are examined (Figure 1) and it is shown when all-party references to rail policy are plotted as a percentage of total quasi sentences (i.e. on all topics and issues) in each election (Figure 2). Notwithstanding a significant downturn in manifesto references circa 1964-74 (which is perhaps not surprising given that British Rail continued to be something of a political headache for both Labour and Conservatives given the financial failings of the Beeching era) - when

the 1960s mean number of references per election is compared with post-2000 ballots, a threefold increase in salience is revealed. With the exception of the 1980s, the data show the decade-on-decade increase in salience; thus, 3.5 per cent of references were made in the 1950s, 9.4 per cent in the 1960s, 11.9 per cent in 1970s, 10.5 per cent in the 1980s, 24 per cent in the 1990s and 38.3 per cent since 2000. This is significant for it provides empirical evidence of the way that political attention to rail transport has both increased and intensified over the past six decades.

[Temporary Note – Figures 1 and 2 – about here]

In terms of electoral theory the increasing salience and party politicization of rail policy can be explained by its dual status as both a valence and position issue (Stokes, 1962, 1992; Enelow and Hinich, 1982). In other words, as a valence issue it is a topic which generally unites voters (given its wider economic, environmental and social benefits few would argue *against* the provision of rail transport). However, as a position issue parties differ in their views (or ‘position’) on what public policy should (and should not) aim to achieve in relation to rail transport. In turn, contrasting issue positions reflect parties’ ideological standpoints on the appropriate balance between the market and state (Barnett and Barnett, 1997). Traditionally, those on the Right have embraced neo-liberal, market-based solutions and eschewed state intervention; whilst those of the Left have advocated the harnessing of state power to promote safe and affordable rail transport for work and leisure (Strangleman, 2002).

Shifting party positions on rail policy over time are part of the trend towards welfare pluralism (Beresford and Croft, 1983) – or mixed economy approaches to public services. This is integral to the rise of *valence politics* in the UK as the main parties have converged towards the political centre-ground (Bara and Budge, 2001; Bromley and Curtice, 2002). One consequence is the increasing party politicization of rail transport. The latter term refers to how issues rise and fall on the political agenda as parties compete for votes on a given issue (Carter, 2006). It is allied to the concept of 'issue ownership' (Petrocik, 1996); or how parties prioritize certain policy issues, emphasize earlier policy successes and attempt to highlight party competence on a given topic whilst at the same time dismissing rivals' records. The underlying motive is to be seen as the 'owners' of an issue – thereby securing electoral and reputational advantage.

The post-war party politicization of rail transport policy in the UK is revealed by statistically-significant inter-party differences in issue-salience ($p < 0.001$). The present data show how parties compare in the priority that they attach to rail transport.¹² The heightened post-war electoral salience of rail policy has been driven by the Left-of-centre Labour Party which accounts for almost a half (42.2 per cent) of all references to rail transport policy in the post-war manifestos. In contrast, the Conservatives are responsible for under a third (31.4 per cent), and the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats 26.4 per cent (Figure 3.). In turn, Labour's dominance reflects a longstanding view that emerged as far back as the end of the nineteenth century that 'railways should act more as public corporations than as profit-making businesses. The main thrust of course came from the Labour movement' (Gourvish, 1987, p.13).

[Temporary Note – Figure 3. – about here]

Textual analysis reveals how competition over 'issue ownership' features in the discourse. Thus, all three parties use their manifestos to criticise and dismiss rivals' approaches. The Conservatives discourse is typified by statements such as:

We must move our goods swiftly to markets, shops and homes, and to the ports for our overseas trade. In work and at leisure we look to our railways... to give us efficient service. It is Conservative policy to see that they do. The spur of competition which we have provided will certainly help.... railways require vigorous development to make up for the time lost in the years of war and of Socialism (Conservative Party, 1955, p.14).

Labour's response has been equally forthright. For example: 'Nowhere is planning more urgently needed than in our transport system... the Government's policy of breaking up road and rail freight co-ordination... and finally of axing rail services under the Beeching Plan, have made things worse' (Labour Party, 1964, p.18); and the 'Tory attempt to solve our transport problems by increasing competition between road and rail, by the adoption of rigid commercial criteria for the railways, and by deliberate fragmentation of transport undertakings, is the most conspicuous and most costly of all their failures' (Labour Party, 1966, p.14). Such politicking is also evident in the third party's manifestos. For example, 'under eighteen years of Conservative government... Rail passengers suffered the consequences of a disastrous privatisation' (Liberal Democrats, 2001, p.36).

Analysis of parties' framing of rail transport policy reveals a longitudinal shift. Specifically, Labour and the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats' move away from exclusive emphasis on nationalisation and state control to advocacy of a mixed economy approach. In the case of Labour this can be traced to its 1990s re-branding and emergence of 'New' Labour (Driver and Martell, 2006). It has further been driven by external advice to government (Cf. Eddington, 2006; McNulty, 2011). It is typified in discourse such as: 'We will allow British Rail to proceed with a leasing scheme of 188 new Networker trains on the North Kent line - the first step in securing private investment to help modernise Britain's railways' (Labour Party, 1992, p.38); and we will 'reinvigorate the Private Finance Initiative - Britain's infrastructure is dangerously run down: parts of our rail network are seriously neglected... £180 billion of investment, split between railways, roads and local transport and delivered in partnership with the private sector' (Labour Party, 2001, p.29). Contemporaneous examples from the Liberal Democrats include: we will 'we will break up the monopoly providers of services... We will permit access by private operators to the British Rail track network' (Liberal Democrats, 1992, p.22); and we will 'invest in public transport by building new partnerships with the private sector' (Liberal Democrats, 1997, p.33). For the Conservatives, whilst a neoliberal orientation characterises the Party's post-war manifestos, over recent years there is a discernable shift away from the ethos of the Beeching era cuts. For example, 'we will introduce a moratorium on building on disused rail lines still in public ownership, so they are available to be re-opened' (Conservative Party, 2010, p.44).

The research data also show a further aspect of the party politicization of post-war rail policy: statistically significant differences in the framing practices of the three major parties ($P < 0.001$)¹³. This reflects contrasting political attitudes and issue positions as the parties compete over the manner and extent to which the state should intervene in rail transport (Figure 4). For Labour the lead frame in its post-war election programmes is 'governance/ regulation' (23.6 per cent of the Party's total of quasi-sentences on rail policy), followed by 'modernisation' (16.9 per cent) and 'privatisation/ nationalisation' (15.3 per cent). For the Conservatives the top three frames are 'governance/ regulation' (26.2 per cent), and 'privatisation/ nationalisation' (23.6 per cent), and 'integration¹⁴/ improved infrastructure' (11.2 per cent). In the case of the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats the three lead frames are 'integration/ improved infrastructure' (24.2 per cent), 'economic effects' (21.3 per cent) and 'modernisation' (13.7 per cent).

Overall, 'governance/ regulation' was the lead frame in the combined post-war manifesto discourse of the three main parties. Labour accounted for 50 per cent of references under the frame, followed by the Conservatives (34.7 per cent) and Liberals/ Liberal Democrats (15.3 per cent) ($P < 0.001$).¹⁵ Notably, over the past two decades the framing of policy in relation to effective regulation of the railways has come to the fore and been a key aspect of the party politicization of rail. One cause is public concern over rail safety (Elms, 2001). Yet the principal explanation is parties' response to the privatization of British Rail (in England, Scotland and Wales) and associated deregulation. As Gourvish (2008, p.1) states: 'few people have had kind words for the privatized rail structure constructed so hastily – yet laboriously by John Major's Conservative Government from 1992'. Notwithstanding the Conservatives' pledge that:

'a new Rail Regulator - will ensure that all companies have fair access to the track - will award the franchises and make sure that the franchisees honour the terms of the contract'; as Stittle (2004, p. 412) observes: 'failure... to insist on rail freight growth targets or to impose any claw-back of the subsidies for non-performance is a tribute to weak political and legislative control over regulatory mechanisms'. This raises questions about the Department for Transport and its grants to promote rail freight transport. However, such concerns over regulation and effective governance pre-date privatisation and span the post-war period. Early examples of this discourse include: we will ensure 'protection against any risk of monopoly charges' (Conservative Party, 1945, p.8); 'railways are clearly in effect a monopoly, and should be treated as a Public Utility on a national plan (Liberal Party, 1945, p.11); and 'nowhere is planning more urgently needed than in our transport system... the Government's policy of breaking up road and rail freight co-ordination, of denationalising road haulage and finally of axing rail services under the Beeching Plan, have made things worse' (Labour Party, 1954, p.19).

A caveat is necessary here in relation to analysing attention to regulation and governance. These have been near-constant issues in the manifestos throughout the post-war period, but these have played out very differently with regard to passengers and freight. Rather than solely relying on aggregate data combining freight and passengers the data were re-coded in order to offer a discrete view of the discourse on freight regulation and governance alone. This is helpful in avoiding eliding discussion of passenger franchises in the privatized era with the regulation (or otherwise) of the freight companies – issues that have played out in markedly different ways. Thus, concerns with freight regulation / governance emerge in 1964 in an attack on 'the Government's policy of breaking up road and rail freight co-ordination' (Labour Party,

1964, p.7). Overall freight constitutes just over a fifth (22.2 per cent) of all references to regulation and governance issues. The discourse of the 1970s is concerned with freight governance and regulation as part of a wider integrated transport system (e.g. 'first rate integrated public service for freight', Labour Party, 1970, p.16). The majority (61.2 per cent) of references to freight governance are in the 1990s and later and are concerned with effective regulation in the wake of privatisation and efforts to remove freight from the roads (in part driven by an environmental agenda). For example 'treble the freight carried on Britain's railways by the year 2010. We will strengthen the powers of the rail regulators. We will require Railtrack to meet targets for greater investment and increased... freight traffic' (Labour 1997, p. 29).

The second frame in the combined post-war manifesto discourse of the three main parties is 'nationalisation/ privatisation'. Labour accounts for 39.6 per cent, of such references followed by Conservatives (38.2 per cent) and Liberals/ Liberal Democrats (22.2 per cent) ($P < 0.05$).¹⁶ As Crompton's (1999) insightful work outlines, it is a topic that has been the centre-point of intense political debate practically from the outset of the railways. When coded for direction, the Conservatives account for the majority of quasi-sentences under this frame advocating privatisation/ private sector involvement (74.3 per cent). The data provide insight into the political motives underlying party pledges. Enduring tropes used to promote private-sector involvement include 'efficiency', 'autonomy' or freedom from state control, 'competition', the profit motive, and accountability. Examples include, 'in work and at leisure we look to our railways to give us efficient service. It is Conservative policy to see that they do. The spur of competition which we have provided will certainly help' (Conservative Party, 1955, p.21); 'we will continue our privatisation programme. We will end British Rail's

monopoly. We will sell certain rail services and franchise others' (Conservative Party, 1992, p.29); and 'our railways are already improving now they have been liberated into the private sector' (Conservative Party, 1997, p.18).

The data also reveal key policy shifts on the part of Labour. Thus, in its 1945 manifesto the party asserted: 'public ownership of inland transport. Co-ordination of transport services by rail... cannot be achieved without unification. And unification without public ownership means a steady struggle with sectional interests or the enthronement of a private monopoly, which would be a menace to the rest of industry' (Labour Party, 1945, p.8). The manifesto discourse also expresses the party's long-standing opposition to rail privatisation and its desire for 'a first-rate publicly owned service' (Labour Party, 1966, p.21). However, in the 1990s there is a discursive shift towards market involvement. Rather than wholesale rejection of the party's earlier reliance on statist solution this shift is framed as a pragmatic move: 'our task will be to improve the situation as we find it, not as we would wish it to be' (Labour Party, 1997, p. 38). For some analysts this can be viewed as complicity in the privatisation process (Engle, 2011).

The third-ranked frame in the combined post-war manifesto discourse of the three main parties is 'integration / improved infrastructure'. It illustrates the Left-Right cleavage that characterises the period to the 1992 election, with the Left parties espousing statist solutions to network improvements. Thus the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats account for almost a half of all references (47.5 per cent), followed by Labour (34 per cent). In contrast, the Conservatives' *laissez faire* position is reflected in the fact that they account for under a fifth of references (18.4 per cent) ($P < 0.001$).¹⁷ Examples of the discourse under the frame include: 'we will undertake a major renewal

of road, rail and port infrastructure' (SDP, 1987, p.25); and 'we will provide support for transport infrastructure, including a dedicated high-speed rail link from the Channel Tunnel to connect with the major routes to the North and West of Britain, and the extension of electrification throughout the country' (Liberal Democrats, 1992, p.29).

The 'environment/ sustainability' frame emerges in the 1990s. Before this environmental concerns are implicit rather than explicit in the manifesto discourse (for example, in promises to switch freight transport from the roads to the railways). The present data support existing analyses that highlighting the Left's traditional predominance in public policy interventions on the environment (Kamieniecki, 1995). Thus the parties of the Left account for the overwhelming majority of references under the 'environment/ sustainability' frame (in total 92.3 per cent; 50 per cent by the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats and 42.3 per cent by Labour) ($P < 0.001$).¹⁸ Examples include: we will make 'immediate improvements in the rail network, allowing more movement of goods and passengers by rail and less environmental damage' (Liberal Democrats, 1992, p.33); 'we will transform transport policy by ensuring, for the first time, that all railway... projects are judged on the basis of their environmental, social and economic impact... All major transport projects will be subject to Environment Impact Assessment' (Labour Party, 1992, p.41); and 'we will establish a Sustainable Transport Authority (STA) which will take over the functions of the Strategic Rail Authority' (Liberal Democrats, 2001, p.29).

Labour accounts for over two-thirds of references under the 'social aspects'¹⁹ frame (68.2 per cent; followed by the Conservatives, 18.2 per cent) ($P < 0.001$).²⁰ This reflects the party's traditional view of rail as a social policy intervention (Wilson, 1964) and fury in some quarters that, as (Loft, 2006, p.5) observes Beeching era 'closures were

not subject to detailed social cost benefit analyses'. Examples of the discourse under this frame include: 'the Socialised Industries... Britain's public transport system, as rail services are increasingly unified, will bring an ever better service to industry and passengers... Labour will not be content until each public enterprise is a model of efficiency and of social responsibility' (Labour Party, 1950, p.11); and 'we will transform transport policy by ensuring, for the first time, that all railway... projects are judged on the basis of their... social impact' (Labour Party, 1992, p.29).

As Loft (2006, p.14) notes by the 1964 election 'modernization' was an emerging trope in the political discourse: 'both parties sought to present themselves as modernizers. The use of modernization as a universal panacea for British problems reflects the wider national fascination with modernity'. Despite its popularity amongst party policy makers in general, a Left-Right party cleavage is also evident in the 'modernisation' frame. The parties of the Left account for over three-quarters of references (80.8 per cent; Labour 50.4 per cent; Liberal Democrats 30.4 per cent) ($P < 0.001$).²¹ This again reflects their propensity towards state intervention in transport (Visser, 2000). For example, 'Labour believes that public transport, road and rail, must play the dominant part in the journey to work. Every effort will be made to improve and modernise these services' (Labour Party, 1964, p.8).

In contrast the Conservative Party accounts for most policy framing in relation to grants and subsidies extended to the railways (52.4 per cent; followed by Labour 39.5 per cent).²² When references under this frame are coded for direction party differences are clear. The Conservatives' rhetoric on subsidies has been about costs, Labour's on benefits. Thus the Conservatives are responsible for 87.2 per cent of quasi-sentences questioning or opposed to state subsidies. Examples include: 'millions of pounds have

already been knocked off the railway losses' (Conservative Party, 1964, p.18); and, in the wake of the Tory government commissioned Serpell Report (Serpell, 1983), 'British Rail will cost the taxpayer 25 per cent less in subsidy this year than in 1983 and without any major route closures' (Conservative Party, 1987, p.38). In contrast, the Left-of-centre parties' programmes advocate state intervention to support rail. For example, 'regional authorities... must be empowered to provide specific subsidies to rail services in rural areas to keep remote communities alive' (Liberal Party, 1964, p.17); and 'as much freight as possible must be carried by rail; and the scheme whereby companies receive grants for installing railway facilities will be extended' (Labour Party, 1974, p.12).

Against the foregoing backdrop of contestation in the three main state-wide parties' programmes for Westminster elections attention now turns to the electoral discourse in post-1998 meso-elections.

Rail Transport Policy in Regional Election Manifestos 1998-2011

The data reveal that when the number of quasi-sentences in the 1998/9 manifestos is compared with 2011 there has been a fivefold increase in the issue-salience of rail transport policy since the outset of devolution.²³ A further indicator of how meso-elections have presented significant opportunities for rail transport policy development is evidenced by the fact that, in little more than a decade, more references were made in the regional ballots (1998-2011) than in all 18 post-war state-wide votes (N=941 compared to N=883).

[Temporary Note – Figure 4 – about here]

In the wake of constitutional reform the territorialisation of policy is underlined by statistically-significant inter-polity differences in the total number of rail policy quasi-sentences ($P < 0.001$).²⁴ Most references were made in Scotland (52 per cent), followed by Wales (32.9 per cent) and Northern Ireland (15.9 per cent) (Figure 4). Such contrasts are part of the re-scaling of the formative phase of rail transport policy making. Compared to state-wide ballots this more closely aligns policy development with 'local' party politics and is significant for the way it has afforded regionalist parties unprecedented policy influence. It is key discontinuity with the pre-existing situation as evidenced by the fact that following the UK's move to quasi-federalism each of the six regionalist parties considered here (SNP, Plaid Cymru, DUP, UUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin) has held government office.

[Temporary note – Figure 5. – about here]

The policy-framing data reveal statistically-significant differences in the way that rail policy is envisioned across the regional polities (Figure 5.) ($P < 0.05$).²⁵ In the case of the lead frame in the meso-elections, 'integration/ infrastructure development', most references were made in Northern Ireland (41.8 per cent), followed by Scotland (39.8 per cent) and Wales (20.3 per cent). This illustrates the historically and spatially contingent nature of the re-scaling of policy-making on regional lines. It is a point worth

re-emphasizing that not all of language on rail policy is down to different political visions/ priorities – rather it is also shaped by local circumstances (for example, giving HSR more relevance to Scotland than to Wales). This is illustrated here for the heightened level of attention afforded to the frame in Northern Ireland in turn reflects historical line closures and the under-developed nature of the network; in part a function of the civil conflict (Casserley, 1974; Neill and Gordon, 2001). Examples of this discourse include: ‘Sinn Féin supports All-Ireland infrastructural development strategies, particularly in... rail’ (Sinn Féin, 2003, p.26); and we will ‘develop a light rail system for the Belfast Metropolitan area’ (SDLP, 2007, p.22).

Most references under the ‘governance/ regulation’ frame were made in Wales (51.5 per cent; compared to 34.6 per cent in Scotland and 13.8 per cent in Northern Ireland). Historical-contingency is again at play for, in part, this reflects constitutional factors. Of all the devolved administrations Wales initially had the weakest powers in relation to rail policy. In consequence a core stand of the discourse is comprised of cross-party calls for devolution of greater policy competency over the railways (eventually secured in 2006). Examples of this discourse include: ‘we will therefore seek primary legislation at Westminster to enable the transfer of responsibility and funding for railways to the [National] Assembly [for Wales]’ (Plaid Cymru, 1999, p.11); and ‘Our rail network should make a major contribution to the economy, sustainability and communities of Wales, linking valleys to coast, north to south and encouraging the spread of prosperity across Wales. Labour will seek powers for the Assembly to make this vision a reality’ (Welsh Labour, 2003, p.22). Notably, the comparatively small number of references made under this frame in Northern Ireland compared to Scotland and Wales is a further illustration of the historically-contingent manner in which

electoral politics shapes rail policy for, in contrast to the other regional polities, Northern Ireland escaped the travails of rail privatisation of the 1980s and 1990s (Gourvish, 2004).

Reflecting the latter point the majority of references under the 'privatisation/nationalisation' frame were made in Scotland (71.8 per cent) with the remainder in Wales (28.2 per cent). It is a frame that underlines the significance to rail policy development of the move to (quasi-)federal governance. Specifically, it illustrates how, compared to sole reliance on state-wide ballots, regional electoral politics allow policy proposals to better reflect regional voting patterns and regional party politics/ideologies. Compared to the Westminster manifesto discourse, this is evident in the greater overall emphasis placed on state intervention and not-for-profit management of the railways at the meso-level. In turn, this reflects the Left-of-centre parties' traditional electoral dominance in Wales and Scotland (Benyon et al, 2002). However, it should be noted that Scottish Labour's closer alignment to the neoliberal New Labour project at Westminster (Cf. Hassan and Shaw, 2012) means that when quasi-sentences under this frame are coded for 'direction' the vast majority (94.6 per cent) advocating some form of private sector involvement in rail provision were made in Scotland. For example: 'we have invested through Public Private Partnerships in a way that brought results in new and refurbished infrastructure' (Scottish Labour Party, 2003, p. 17). In contrast, the Welsh discourse reflects the governing Labour Party's self-styled 'classic Labour' socialist ideology (Chaney and Drakeford 2004). For example: 'We will examine the feasibility of the Wales and Border rail franchise being run on a not-for-dividend basis' (Welsh Labour, 2011, p. 29). The way in which (quasi-)federal governance shapes rail policy is further illustrated by the distinctive policy position of the nationalist parties

who advocate a return to state ownership. For example, ‘we will continue to support the restoration of full public ownership of the rail system’ (Plaid Cymru, 2007, p.18); and ‘It’s time for Scotland to take back control of the railways... We believe that control and funding of the rail infrastructure in Scotland should be through a publicly accountable Not for Profit Trust’ (SNP, 2003, p.19).

Successive Scottish and Welsh governments have espoused the need for environmentally-friendly, sustainable policies (Haughton et al, 2008). In this regard the data provide evidence of significant change over election cycles. In the first two post-1998/9 election cycles limited attention was given to the environmental aspects of rail policy. Subsequently, over the last three cycles in Scotland and previous two in Wales, there is evidence of heightened emphasis on the environmental benefits of rail transport. This is revealed by the index $n = \sum \frac{100}{a} \times b$ (whereby the number of rail quasi-sentences under the ‘environment/ sustainability’ frame (b) is expressed as a percentage of those under the ‘economic effects’ frame (a) in each election). In Scotland this shows a steady rise in framing in relation to the environmental benefits of rail. Specifically, the number of environmental quasi-sentences equals 20 per cent of economic quasi-sentences in 1999, rising to 60 per cent in 2003, and 76.2 per cent in 2007; parity was reached in 2011. In Wales the corresponding figures are: 14.3 per cent in 1999, 12.4 per cent in 2003, and 91.7 per cent in 2007. Environmental quasi-sentences outstripped economic references by a margin of almost three-to-one in 2011. In contrast, the frame has low salience in Northern Ireland where environmental quasi-

sentences are equal to under a fifth of total economic quasi-sentences across the four 'post-devolution' election cycles.

Existing work outlines how railways can be central to the geographical integrity - and thus political viability, of nations (Orde, 1980). Allied to this rail policy can be integral to the political expression of - and future aspiration for, political independence (Wright, 1974; En-han, 1977; Backus Rankin, 2002); a process captured by the term 'nation building' (Kpessa and Lecours, 2011). The current data add to this body of evidence. Examples of the discourse include: 'the SNP believes that an integrated transport policy with air, rail, road and ferry links co-ordinated to serve the interests of the public is a policy aim which can be worked towards in our new Parliament, and then fully realised in the context of independence' (SNP, 1999, p.12); 'the current powers of the Scottish Parliament are too limited... for example [... it] has responsibility for passenger trains, but not the rails on which they run. We need Independence to take responsibility for all aspects of transport policy [on] rail... to come up with a comprehensive and integrated policy which will address Scotland's needs' (SNP, 2003, p.22); and 'we remain committed to an independent Wales as a full member of the European Union... We want to modernise our rail network and we will press for the devolution of the functions and funding of Network Rail in order to meet Welsh transport priorities' (Plaid Cymru, 2011, p.16). In contrast, in the case of the nationalist parties in Northern Ireland the aim is not independence but (re-)unification with another EU state, the Irish Republic. It is in this context that the nationalist parties frame their policy proposals for rail transport. For example: 'making the all-Ireland economy a reality. 'Sinn Féin supports All-Ireland infrastructural development strategies, particularly in rail' (Sinn Féin, 2003, p.17); 'The SDLP will take the following

steps to improve public transport across this island... hourly Enterprise services between Belfast and Dublin. The Belfast-Dublin line is on our most important economic corridor on this island' (SDLP, 2011, p.21); and we will 'increase all-Ireland integration and coordination of public services to improve delivery, particularly in the border areas, with a special focus on the development of the rail network' (Sinn Féin, 2007, p.14).

In the case of state-wide parties in Scotland and Wales the territorialisation of rail transport policy is not limited to the discourse of regionalist parties; it also driven by *intra*-party differences in manifesto pledges. In other words divergent practice between UK and 'regional' divisions of the same party (e.g. between Scottish Labour and Welsh Labour).²⁶ As Laffin *et al* observe (2007, p.88) this has emerged from rapid and far-reaching institutional change in the parties. For example:

British Labour remains formally a unitary party despite devolution. Nonetheless, the national party leadership has allowed the Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties considerable freedom, in practice, to... conduct regional-level elections and implement some distinctive policies. [The] parties have shifted significantly from being traditional, centralized parties.

Examples of this territorialisation of state-wide parties' policy programmes includes the Scottish Conservatives' (2007, p.18) pledge that 'we will examine the option of a new Maglev or conventional high-speed rail service'; a commitment unmatched by the Party in Wales. Likewise, Welsh Labour (2007, p.21) pledged 'we will seek to extend discounted off-peak rail travel for Welsh pensioners', Scottish Labour made no such promise. Instead it stated 'we will work to deliver free Wi-Fi and 3G mobile phone coverage as part of the next [round of rail franchise] contracts' (Scottish Labour Party,

2011, p.37); a commitment not included in the party's Welsh manifesto. In turn, the Scottish Liberal Democrats pledged we will 'introduce a Network Railcard for all ages, to allow discounted travel' (Scottish Liberal Democrats, 2003, p.16); whereas the Welsh Liberal Democrats offered the singular commitment that 'we will encourage local authorities to use their planning powers to develop economic centres around rail stations in rural areas' (Welsh Liberal Democrats, 2007, p.39).

Discussion

The present findings reveal a significant and sustained rise in the issue-salience of rail transport in the party manifestos in Westminster elections over the post-war period. This signals a (re-)prioritization of rail transport policy and is integral to the rise of valence politics in the UK. The analysis of policy framing in general election manifestos reveals parties' contrasting use of language as they seek voters' support at the ballot box. In turn, while framing data confirm a general Left-Right split, they also show how electoral discourse on rail transport reflects shifting party ideologies; notably, Labour's move away from its earlier emphasis on state support for rail transport to a 'mixed-economy' approach.

Against the backdrop of a global trend of state restructuring, the present analysis also reveals how (quasi-)federal systems lead to the territorialisation of rail transport policy. In contrast to pre-1998 practices in the UK (when rail transport policy was solely mandated in single state-wide elections), policy is now formed in four territorially-distinct political systems (*inter alia*, each with contrasting electoral arrangements, party politics, and prevailing ideologies). Accordingly, the data show how policy framing and

salience are shaped by territorial politics, and contingent on local socio-historical and party political factors. This marks a re-scaling of rail policy-making whereby a new spatial dynamic operates - for the traditional Left-party dominance of politics in Scotland and Wales can be seen to shape policy. Thus for example, in contrast to the discourse of Westminster manifestos, a key strand of policy framing in regional manifestos is concerned with (re-)nationalisation and not-for-profit management of the railways.

'Post-devolution' policy divergence is also driven by *intra*-party variation in framing and salience by the three main UK state-wide parties. They advance contrasting pledges in different polities. A further significant driver of territorialisation is civic nationalist parties' use of rail transport policy as part of their nation-building agenda. With increasing legislative powers, taxation and policy responsibilities being transferred from Westminster to the regional governments and legislatures (and an independence referendum in Scotland), rail transport policy divergence is likely to deepen and gather pace over future years.

It is in this context that the present analysis points to a future research agenda; one that builds on the current study and explores: 1. the effect of lobbying and public attitudes data in shaping rail transport policy pledges in party election programmes; 2. the internal party processes of agenda-setting on the rail transport policy as parties draft their manifestos, including the role of individual political actors and lobbyists; 3. to apply the present methodology to municipal/local electioneering and 4. examine the influence of rail transport policy pledges on voting behaviour.

Overall, the significance of the current study is in underlining the process of mandate-seeking and the formative, democratic roots of rail policy-making. Moreover, it shows how this is a discursive process whereby parties compete through contrasting use of language in an attempt to persuade voters, and how framing reflects distinctive party values and ideologies. It also reveals how the increasing issue-salience of rail transport policy is part of the wider rise of valence politics in UK. Lastly, it points to the need for contemporary study of rail transport policy to be cognizant of state restructuring and associated electoral processes whereby the relationship between rail transport and the state is being (re-)defined through the practices and processes of contemporary multi-level governance.

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¹ Excludes 1945-72 elections to the Northern Ireland Parliament. Also on definitional matters, notwithstanding the nation status of Scotland and Wales, this study follows existing practice by using the umbrella term 'regional' to denote sub-unitary state nations and provinces (Cf. Danson and de Souza 2012).

² With the exception of 1945-72 elections to the Northern Ireland Parliament.

³ The UK government and its agencies retain powers in relation to aspects of cross-border railways in Scotland and Wales. For a discussion see:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/157751/0042649.pdf> and

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/rail/?lang=en> [last accessed 17.04.14]

⁴ The Welsh Government has powers in order to: develop and fund infrastructure enhancement schemes; develop new rail passenger services; invest in improving the journey experience for rail users; and fund rail freight improvement schemes through Freight Facility Grant. See

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/5/contents> [last accessed 17.04.14]

⁵ For a discussion see: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/24105544/0> [last accessed 17.04.14]

⁶ Defined in terms of share of the popular vote.

⁷ Where necessary, hardcopy only versions of early manifestos were transcribed. The software used was Nvivo 9.

⁸ For example, the statement 'we will introduce tax incentives to business to transfer freight from the roads to rail and cut vehicle pollution' would be coded under the 'economic benefits' and 'environment/sustainability' frames.

⁹ 11 incidences.

¹⁰ Derived from the Comparative Manifesto Project, <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>

¹¹ Owing to a range of factors including changing policy competency in UK elections over time (i.e. shifting policy powers between EC/ EU as well as devolved governments/ legislatures); and the varying propensity of parties to use 'mini', dedicated manifestos to set out specific policies to targeted groups or on specific issues.

¹² $P= 3e-8$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 34.827$

¹³ ANOVA $P= 0.005641496$, $Df= 9$, $F\text{ Crit} = 3.020382947$

¹⁴ i.e. integration of the different transport sectors – road, waterways, air etc. into a coordinated – or 'integrated' system.

¹⁵ $P= 1.2e-7$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 31.852$

¹⁶ $P=0.01793502$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 8.042$

¹⁷ $P= 0.00012877$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 17.915$

¹⁸ $P= 0.00036231$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 15.846$

¹⁹ This frame refers to policy statements concerned with the social impact of rail policy – on individuals and communities. Examples include access for disabled people; concessionary fares for disadvantaged groups, tackling rural isolation, social exclusion etc.

²⁰ $P= 0.0023685$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 12.091$

²¹ $P= 0.00008541$, $Df= 2$, $\chi^2 = 18.736$

²² P=0.00241393, Df= 2, $\chi^2 = 12.053$

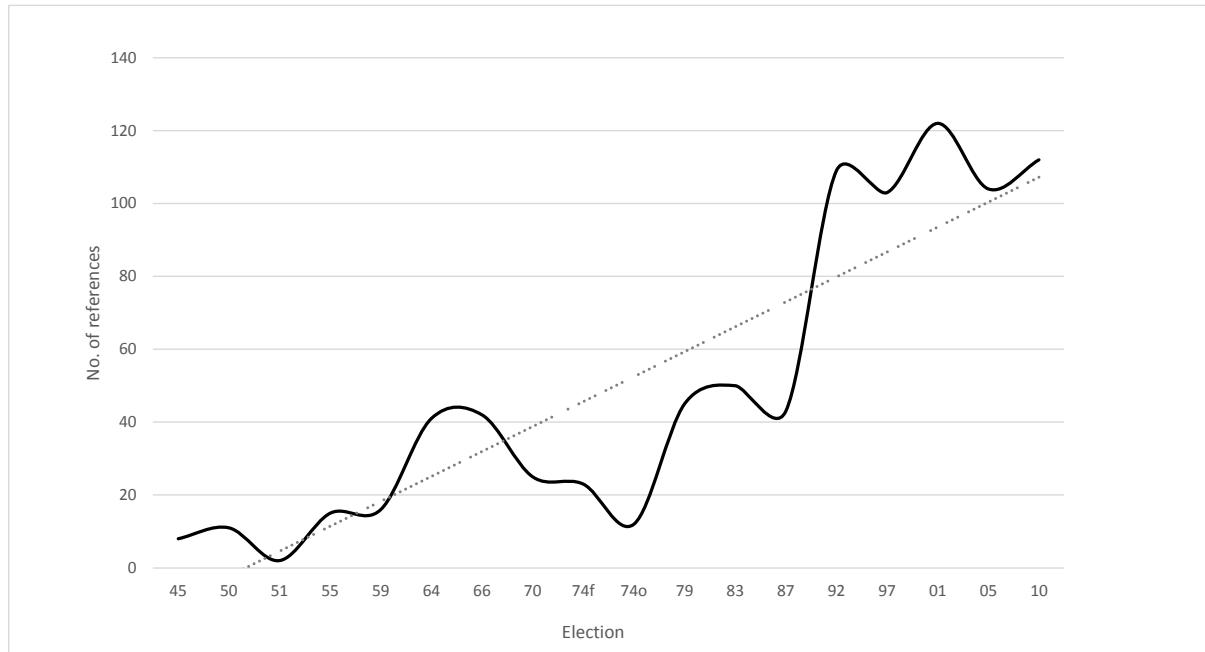
²³ All regional polity total of quasi-sentences: 1998/9 = 64; 2011 = 330.

²⁴ P=0.00086543, Df= 2, $\chi^2 = 194.221$

²⁵ ANOVA P= 0.025294437, Df= 9, F Crit = 2.392814108

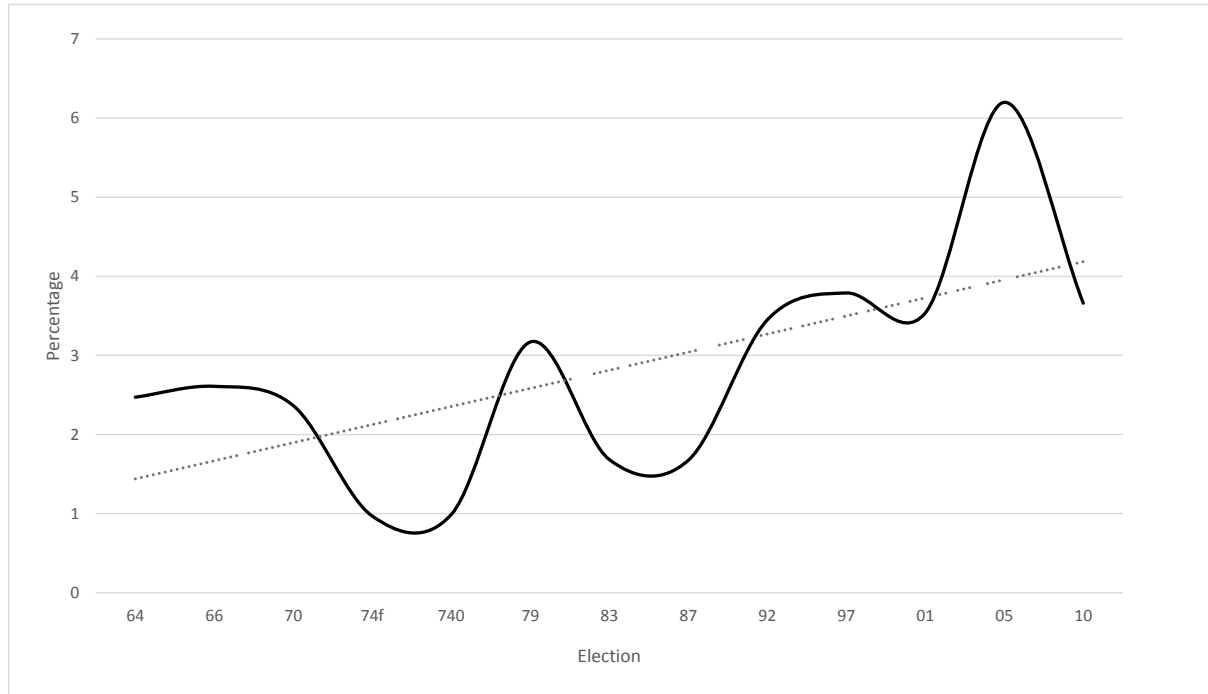
²⁶ Chi squared = 6.481, df= 2, P= 0.03914432

Figure 1. The issue salience of rail policy in the three main parties' general election manifestos 1945-2010: All-party absolute totals of quasi-sentences in each election (N= 883).



..... Trend Line

Figure 2. The issue salience of rail policy in the three main parties' general election manifestos 1964-2010: rail policy as a percentage of all quasi-sentences in each election (N= 3,060).



..... Trend Line

Figure 3. The issue salience of rail policy in the three main parties' general election manifestos 1945-2010: Total quasi-sentences in each election, by party (N=883).

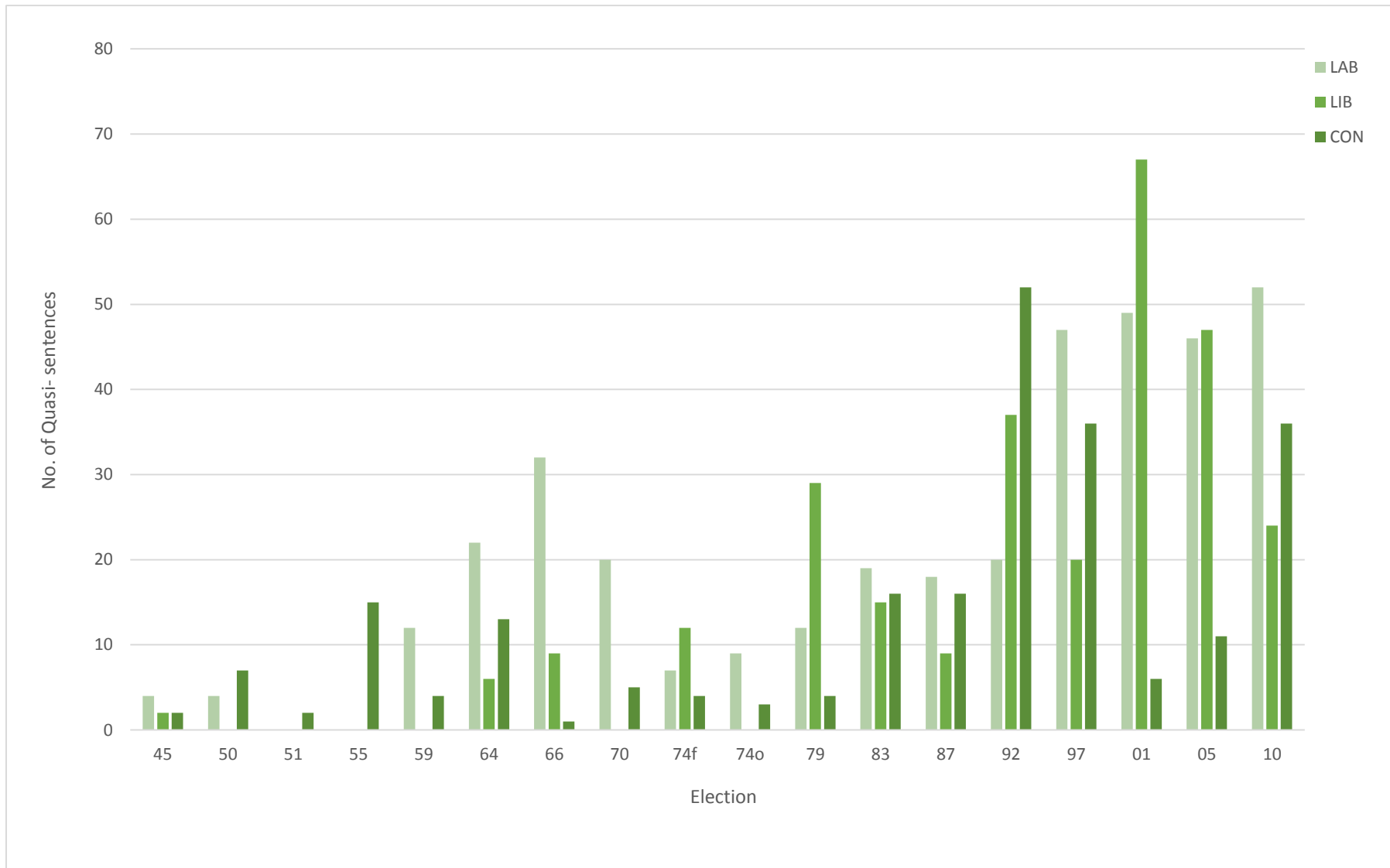


Figure 4. The issue salience of rail policy in UK meso-elections 1998-2011: Combined total of quasi-sentences in the four main parties' manifestos in each polity, over past four election cycles (N= 941).

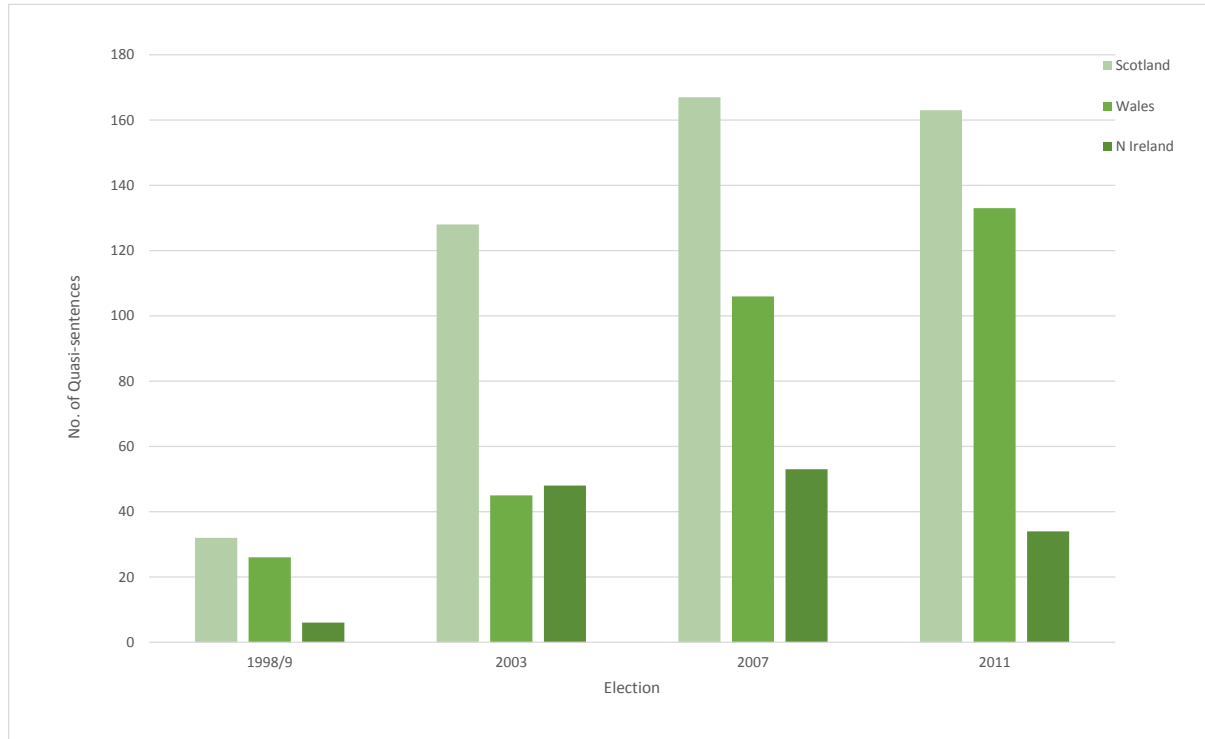


Figure 5. Policy framing profiles: Meso elections 1998-2011 (All-party post-1998/9 total of rail policy quasi-sentences disaggregated by frame. Each polity = 100%) (N= 941).

