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Using Cognitive Mapping to Longitudinally Examine Political Brand Associations

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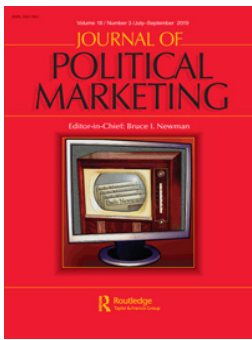
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Using Cognitive Mapping to Longitudinally Examine Political Brand Associations

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This paper uses cognitive mapping techniques to understand how brand associations, an important aspect of political brand equity are formed, differ, and change, from the perspective of citizens, across the four largest Irish political parties between 2013 and 2016. The paper focuses in particular upon the strength, favourability and uniqueness of these brand associations. The results constitute a first attempt to longitudinally explore changing political brand associations through cognitive mapping techniques, using data generated with the participation of hundreds of citizens. Our findings suggest that this approach can contribute to our understanding of how and why political brand associations change over time.

KEYWORDS *cognitive mapping; political; brand; associations*

INTRODUCTION

Political marketing has become a fundamental part of life for parties, leaders, and governments in their pursuit of their objectives (Lees-Marshment 2014). Political branding enables researchers and policy makers to conceptualize parties, persons, or other political entities as cognitive structures (Harris and Lock 2001; Jakeli and Tchumburidze 2012; Lees-Marshment 2009; Smith 2001). As political branding has garnered increased attention

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in recent years, there is a “growing consensus that parties and politicians can usefully be conceptualised as brands” (Needham and Smith 2015, 1) and is actively being used as an element of campaign strategy (Downer 2016). Accepting that political brands are important, then understanding how value is attributed to a political brand is crucial. Political brand equity provides a theoretical means to address this.

Research on political marketing and, more specifically, political branding has proliferated in recent years at the international level. This is evidenced by new texts theorizing the application of political marketing in East and Southeast Asia (Schafferer 2017) and Ghana (Mensah 2017), as well as the investigation of political branding in Australia (Downer 2016; Grimmer and Grube 2017), India (Kumar et al. 2017), and North America (Milewicz and Milewicz 2014). From a European perspective, research on political branding has addressed issues as diverse as the brand identity of a mainstream party in the United Kingdom (UK) (Pich and Dean 2015), the role played by political brands in citizen engagement in France (Baygert 2013) and even the re-branding of political institutions in Scotland (Unger 2013). However, there remains a dearth of research on political branding in Ireland.

Thus, this paper seeks to understand the changing brand associations of the four largest Irish political parties. Specifically, it seeks to identify the changing strength, favorability and uniqueness of the parties’ brand associations from 2013 to 2016, what Keller (1993) regards as the building blocks of brand equity. Due to the absence of a conventional class cleavage party system in Ireland (Weeks 2010) and a politics not founded on conflicts between church and state, urban and rural, or center and periphery (Lipset and Rokkan 1990) – it is unsurprising that such research has been neglected. However, this deficiency of research on the branding and brand equity of Irish political parties constitutes an imperative to investigate how the country’s most significant political brands, after almost of century of independence, were perceived prior to what is now recognized as an unprecedented election in 2016 (Gallagher 2016).

The paper initially discusses the literature on political branding and political brand equity, focusing on the analysis of brand associations as key to the understanding of the latter. We then set out our theoretical framework, the political context and party selection. The paper then moves on to discuss methodology, before examining the aggregate brand concept maps from 2013 and 2016 and assessing the centrality of the brand associations. The findings are then examined and discussed. The conclusion highlights the significance and limitations of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW: BRANDING, POLITICAL BRANDING AND POLITICAL BRAND EQUITY

Extant literature on political branding often emphasizes the mental, or psychological nature of brands (Harris and Lock 2001; Lees-Marshment 2009, 2011; Smith 2001). Here we approach political branding from a consumer-oriented perspective which, at an ontological level, posits political brands as cognitive structures. As such, “the political brand is defined as an associative network of interconnected political information, held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of a voter” (French and Smith 2010, 462). Kim (1990, 65) argues that a brand has no tangible properties, it “is a mental translation, an abstraction of that object or service. It exists solely as a ‘mental construct,’ a ‘typification,’ an ‘idea’ in the minds of those who behold it”. This definition holds relevance when examining the concept of political brands.

According to Keller (1993) in a general sense, brand equity is defined in terms of marketing effects uniquely attributable to a brand. From our perspective, political brand equity is the effect that can be attributed to a political party, those political connotations that are associated with a party's name, symbols and personnel. Previous research on political brand equity (Ahmed et al. 2017; French and Smith 2010; Phipps et al. 2010; Smith and Spotswood 2013) explores the concept through the investigation of one or more of its constituent theoretical constructs; brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand quality or brand associations. Due to the key role of brand associations for understanding brand equity, much research has been focused on empirically investigating brand associations situated in different contexts and employing different methods (French and Smith 2010, 2013; Grimmer and Grube 2017; Omojola 2008; Speed et al. 2015; Schnittka et al. 2012; Winther Nielsen 2016).

Where this paper differs from the extant literature on brand associations (French and Smith 2010; Phipps et al. 2010; Schnittka et al. 2012; Smith and Spotswood 2013; Winther Nielsen 2016) is not only with respect to the unique context of the investigation, but also that it is a diachronic study of brand associations for a range of political parties. Interestingly, French and Smith (2013) suggested that brand concept maps could be used to examine changes in brand equity over time to explore the effectiveness of marketing strategies in strengthening brand associations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is concerned with examining brand associations, foundational concepts which enable more complex cognitive structures such as loyalty

and perceived brand quality (French and Smith 2010). We seek to explore how political brand associations, their strength, favorability, and uniqueness developed for the four largest Irish political parties over several years. With its focus on voters' party associations, this research falls within the voter-centric political brand perspective (French and Smith 2010; Speed et al. 2015; Winther Nielsen 2016).

We can theoretically conceptualize political brand equity through networks of strong, favorable, and unique associations located in memory (French and Smith 2010). In this respect, a cognitive map is a socially constructed model of a given object (Laszlo 1993). By distilling multiple cognitive maps into a single aggregate map, one can provide an abstract representation of the average view of a sampled population at a point in time (French and Smith 2010; John et al. 2006; Schnittka et al. 2012). Such aggregate maps include the core brand associations that define the brand's image and which associations are linked directly and indirectly to the brand (John et al. 2006).

CONTEXT AND THE PARTIES SELECTED FOR EXAMINATION

The Irish electoral system uses proportional representation by single transferable vote (PR-STV). PR-STV provides voters with the ability to rank candidates in order of preference, which also tends to result in coalition governments (Sinnott 2005).

Ireland, as a British colony, missed the industrial revolution preventing the formation of a proletarian base, while British suppression of the Catholic Church reinforced that faith as an aspect of national identity. This explains why continental political divides are absent in Ireland (Mair and Weeks 2005). However, the Irish political landscape is not fragmented. The top four parties, which we examine here, accounted for 88 percent of first preference votes in the 2011 general election, and 70 percent in the 2016 general election (Gallagher 2016). Two of these parties are center right – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael; and two from the left – the Labour Party and Sinn Féin.

Fianna Fáil, established in 1926, has held power, either in overall majority governments, coalitions, or minority administrations, for 61 years. The party materialized from a split in Sinn Féin over the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty; a populist party, it positions itself to the right of center (Titley 2011). **Fine Gael**, formed in 1933, is a center-right, socially conservative party (Marsh et al. 2008). It is aligned with Christian Democratic parties on the continent. It has governed on several occasions as the larger partner in coalitions.

The Labour Party, established in 1912, organizes as a center-left, social-democratic party (Lutz 2003). Labour has been in power on several occasions as the minor partner in coalitions. **Sinn Féin**, established in 1905, has witnessed numerous splits, giving rise to parties such as Fianna

TABLE 1 2007; 2011 and 2016 General Election Outcomes for the Four Largest Parties

	2007			2011			2016		
	% First Preference			% First Preference			% First Preference		
	Votes	Seats	% Seats	Votes	Seats	% Seats	Votes	Seats	% Seats
Fianna Fáil	41.6	78	47.0	17.4	20	12.0	24.3	44	27.8
Fine Gael	27.3	51	30.7	36.1	76	45.8	25.5	50	31.6
Labour Party	10.1	20	12.0	19.5	37	22.3	6.6	7	4.3
Sinn Féin	6.9	4	2.4	9.9	14	8.4	13.8	23	14.5
Totals	85.9	153	92.1	82.9	147	88.5	70.2	124	78.2
Turnout	67.03			69.9			65.1		

Source: McCarthy (2011); Gallagher (2016).

Fáil. It contests elections in Ireland and the UK. It is a nationalistic party, moderately Eurosceptic (Maillot 2009) and advocates democratic socialism.

In Table 1, we see significant shifts in voter preferences between the 2007 and 2016 general elections – a time of economic upheaval (2008–2012). Employing the Pedersen index, Mair (2011) discovered that the 2011 election was one of the most volatile in Western Europe since 1945.

METHODOLOGY: CREATING BRAND CONCEPT MAPS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

Our methodological framework is a hybrid of the qualitative and quantitative approaches necessary to address the question of how political brand associations have developed for the four largest Irish political parties, from two separate samples, between 2013 and 2016. The first stage makes use of an open-ended questionnaire to generate a list of common associations from which certain key associations are extracted. During the second stage these associations are used as a prompt to create political brand concept maps which are subsequently aggregated to form an abstraction of an average view of each of the four political brands under investigation.

Qualitative and quantitative research

Qualitative methods are initially used to generate data which is then subjected to quantitative analysis through the aggregation and analysis of brand concept maps. What follows is a brief overview of the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative research and the complementary relationship they share when used together.

CONCERNING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For Kumar (2011, 104) qualitative research aims to “understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people”. While feelings, perceptions, values, and beliefs can be measured in a quantitative fashion through a process of deductive inquiry, when a researcher does not possess *a priori* knowledge of these concepts and wishes to uncover or describe them through processes of inductive or abductive research one must look to qualitative methods. This shortcoming with quantitative research is why, as Kumar (2011) states, the pursuit of inductive logic, and the emergent, non-linear and non-sequential nature of qualitative research designs are important for investigating certain types of questions. Issues such as the inability to verbalize responses, or an unwillingness to answer direct questions can be overcome by qualitative research where a quantitative approach often fails (Tull and Hawkins 1984).

CONCERNING QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research has shortcomings too, due to its nature it is often impossible to build replicable research models. According to Flick (1998, 178), “the interpretation of data is at the core of qualitative research” which contrasts with quantitative research which focuses more upon the analysis of data which can be measured and quantified. Thus, quantitative research seeks to systematically investigate empirically observable phenomena via statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques (Given 2008). It is seen to bring “rigour and disciplined enquiry to the overall research activities” (Chisnall 2005, 217). In quantitative research, sufficient details about a study’s design is provided for it to be replicated for verification and reassurance. For Zikmund and Babin (2007, 130) quantitative data can be defined as “research that addressed research objectives through empirical assessments that involve numerical measurement and analysis”.

In most instances, depending on the scope and topic investigated, a single approach will suffice. Less frequently, as with this study, when one seeks to both inductively uncover concepts and systematically measure them, one must make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

PART 1 OF STUDY: ELICITATION

In line with French and Smith’s (2010) seminal study, an unprompted elicitation stage was employed to uncover common associations among a discrete group of participants which would subsequently be used to prompt and aid a second discrete group during the subsequent mapping stage. To elicit common associations for the political brands under investigation an

open-ended questionnaire was employed. An open-ended questionnaire allows participants to reflect upon and write answers which they may not be able to verbalize, it provides a level of anonymity which helps when expressing potentially sensitive views and it provides an open-ended means of engagement.

A sample of undergraduate students at two Dublin universities ($n=232$ in 2013 and 2016; total $n=464$) were asked, through a single open-ended question (see Appendices A and B), to write any associations that came to mind when they thought of the political party for which they had the greatest affinity from the list provided. This generated a large body of information from which the most frequently reoccurring associations could be isolated. While not representative of the electorate at large, students were selected because of “their relative homogeneity as a group” (French and Smith 2010, 465) and as Calder et al. (1981) point out, they are useful for piloting research.

PART 2 OF STUDY: MAPPING

The second stage involved constructing individual brand concepts maps, to uncover the relationships between associations and chart the general structure of the political brands in the minds of participants. While brand maps are not the only means of visualizing associations, they offer an advantage, as unlike techniques such as network analysis (Joiner 1998), one “can analyze brand association networks at both individual and aggregate levels, because brand maps emerge for each respondent” (Schnittka et al. 2012, 267). Brand maps were also chosen for their simplicity of construction (French and Smith 2010) for large groups of participants, where other more in-depth methods would be inappropriate or impractical.

The data collection device is a blank sheet of paper, upon which each participant constructs their own brand concept map (Appendix C). Participants may make use of the associations gathered from the elicitation stage should they wish. The construction of a brand concept map is a creative experience and should reflect each participant’s unique interpretation. The samples used in the mapping stage ($n=76$ in 2013; $n=107$ in 2016) were discrete groups of undergraduates.

Once the maps are constructed, quantitative analysis begins. Regarding aggregation, a different approach was adopted to that employed by French and Smith (2010). The following method simplifies and provides additional data by reducing the thresholds for inclusion on the aggregate map. In short, we propose a modification of the five-step approach employed by other researchers (French and Smith 2010; John et al. 2006) where the fifth step, exploring the strength of links, is abandoned, and steps one to four are reduced to two threshold rules for inclusion on the

aggregate map. We acknowledge there is a cost incurred with the reduced richness of data due to this simplification. Yet, this was necessary to process the large amounts of data into aggregate maps which are still useful and insightful.

The threshold rules utilized are:

1. Node inclusion: A given association must be present on at least 15 percent of maps to be included on the aggregate map.
2. Vertex inclusion: A given link between associations, indicated by lines on individual maps, must be present on at least 10 percent of maps to be included on the aggregate map.

While core brand association must be present on at least 50 percent of maps (John et al. 2006), it was felt that a large amount of data was lost by only examining associations with such restrictive parameters, hindering longitudinal analysis of emerging or declining associations. The obvious problem of using reduced thresholds is countered by the inclusion of data on the frequency of each node of the aggregate map; enabling greater scope for interpretation whilst avoiding the conflation of low and high frequency nodes during the process.

These consensus maps provide an average representation of the cognitive structures of each political brand residing in the minds of the sample population (John et al. 2006). After aggregation, by assessing the centrality of associations one can determine those which are most fundamental to the brand. French and Smith (2010, 469) used three measures to achieve this which are also employed here:

1. Degree centrality – how many associations are directly linked to each association;
2. Betweenness centrality – what proportion of geodesic paths in the map link through a certain association; and
3. Closeness centrality – how close an association is to other associations in the map.

LIMITATIONS

One cannot draw conclusions about the population at large, as the data generated is only representative of the samples in question at the specific times. Furthermore, the brand concept maps are not conducive to uncovering deep rooted associations which may require probing (John et al. 2006). Associations tend to be verbal, which prevents researchers gathering richer data which may be possible with techniques such as focus groups, where body language and emotions can be observed in conjunction with verbal responses. Finally, brand concept maps present the issue of aggregation bias. By aggregating different maps to create an average picture, it is

possible that the validity of the data amassed in individual maps is adversely affected. There is further room for improvement by charting the strength of links between associations and by recording their frequency, as the terminal point for inclusion of 10 percent offers limited descriptive utility.

ANALYSIS: THE BRAND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FOUR PARTIES

Whilst the aggregation method employed by John et al. (2006) and French and Smith (2010) allows researchers to create simple maps which display how associations are linked to a brand, it excludes certain positive associations not directly linked to the brand, or its core associations. Understanding that these unlinked associations exist, but do not appear on the brand map, may present opportunities for brand managers to forge strong links between them and the brand. Due to the way unlinked associations may affect the equity of a brand, we feel the absence of such information necessitates a different approach to map aggregation as outlined by John et al. (2006).

Initial data analysis involved digitizing the hand drawn cognitive maps using the concept mapping and analysis software Visual Understanding Environment (VUE). The second stage was to aggregate the information, producing a single map that can be used to give an overall impression of the shape of the collected maps. This highlights the common associations, links and patterns within the data. We indicate on the aggregated map the percentage of times the association appears on individual maps. Associations on at least 15 percent of maps will appear on the aggregation map, as this generates maps that are neither too dense with extraneous information, nor too condensed. Whilst common links on at least 10 percent of maps will appear on the aggregation map.

Next, we analyzed the valences of the attributes to determine the degree to which respondents viewed a given attribute in a positive, negative or neutral light. This involved assessing each attribute on the aggregation map, and tallying the number of times respondents ascribed a plus or minus sign to that attribute on their individual maps. Plus signs were ascribed a value of one, no indication a zero and minus signs were ascribed a value of minus one. The average of these figures was derived to determine a valence for each attribute on the maps.

By analyzing the individual maps, we constructed aggregate maps for each party, in each period, that shed light on the most common associations. Each node on the map represents an association; the positive, negative or absence of a symbol indicates how the association was seen on average by respondents on their individual association maps. The

percentage figure indicates the percentage of respondents who included the association on their individual maps. “The maps reflect the views held by the sample at a given point in time” (French and Smith 2010, 468); in our case April 2013 and February 2016, the latter a few days prior to the 2016 general election.

The Centre Right Parties

FIANNA FÁIL

In 2013, Fianna Fáil had the largest number of individual brand concept maps, 31 respondents. Figure 1 shows how, on aggregate, respondents viewed the party then.

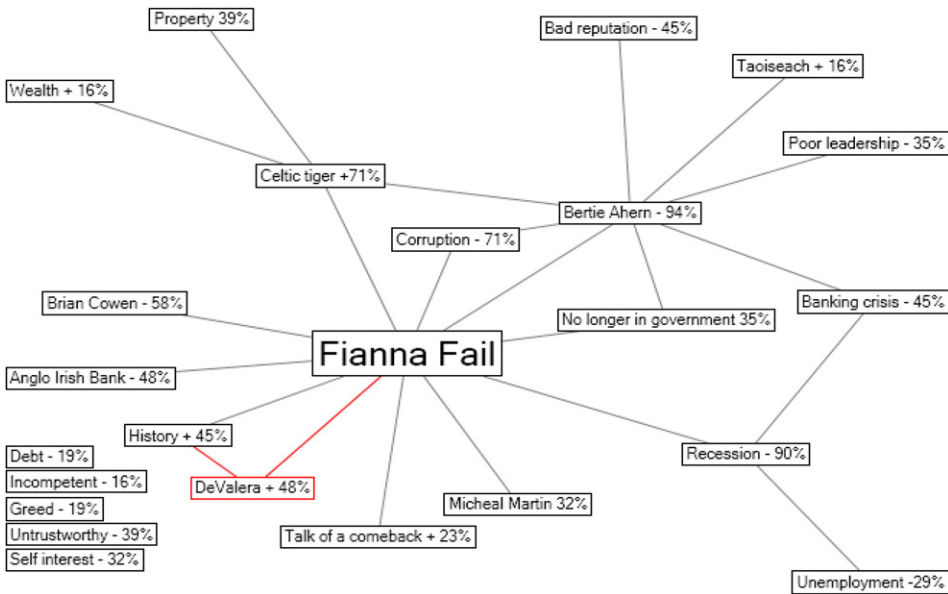


FIGURE 1 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF FIANNA FÁIL - 2013.

The overwhelming presence of negative associations and the dominant position of former leader Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach¹ in the years preceding the economic crisis, paint a challenging picture for any brand manager. Despite Ahern stepping down in 2008, he was more frequently mentioned than current leader, Micheál Martin. Other past leaders, Cowen and de Valera, were also mentioned more frequently than the incumbent.

In 2016, Fianna Fáil had 26 individual brand concept maps constructed. When aggregated in Figure 2 they show changes in how respondents view the party.

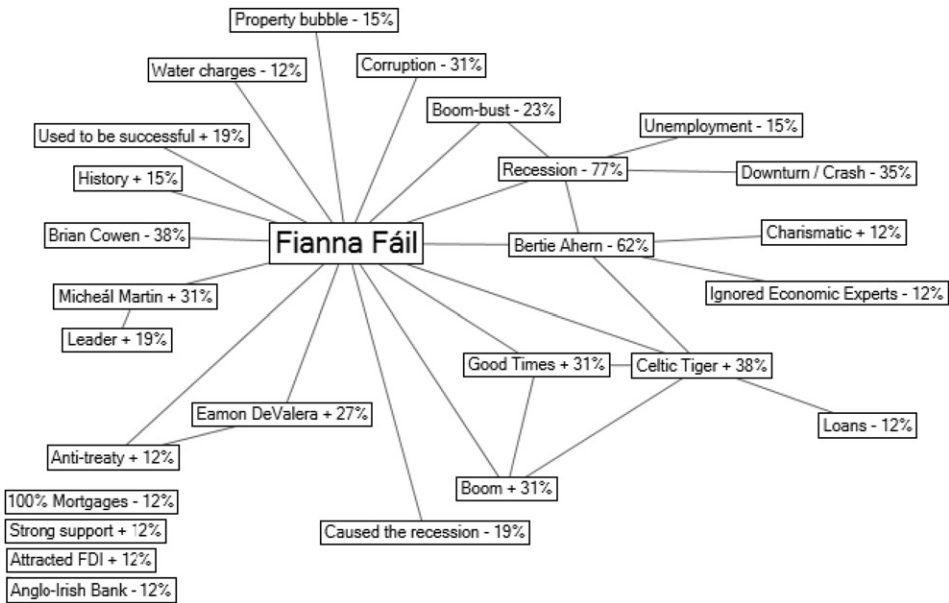


FIGURE 2 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF FIANNA FÁIL - 2016.

While many associations in Figure 2, as in Figure 1, are negative, the level of negativity has diminished. Ahern still holds a dominant and negative position, but less so than before. Micheál Martin is more recognized as party leader. Regarding Ahern, there is a degree of continuity with the two clusters of associations he is linked to. The first, relatively positive, is that of Celtic Tiger, whilst the negative cluster is associated with the recent recession. This separation between the Celtic Tiger and recession clusters indicates that while the participants linked the Fianna Fáil brand to the positive association of Celtic Tiger and the negative association of the subsequent recession, the two associations are viewed as separate – which is troubling. The 2016 aggregate map suggests Fianna Fáil's brand has revived somewhat – as is evidenced by the party's success in the 26 February general election – increasing its presence in Dáil Éireann (lower house of parliament) from 21 to 44 seats.

The absence of ideological associations seems to support the claim that traditional lines of political cleavage play a smaller role in Irish politics than in other European countries (Mair and Weeks 2005). While corruption is still an issue for the brand, this negative association has weakened in the most recent map. The floating associations – those not producing enough common links to tie them to either the brand, or other associations, yet were frequent enough to warrant observation – differ between the two maps, but are less negative in 2016. Anglo Irish Bank was a moderately

strong and central association in 2013, but in 2016 it was a weak floating association, suggesting that whilst there is still some association between the Fianna Fáil brand and the bank, there is no longer a direct association with the controversy surrounding that institution for the most recent participants.

FINE GAEL

In 2013, Fine Gael was the party with the second largest number of respondents – 23 – producing the aggregate map in Figure 3.

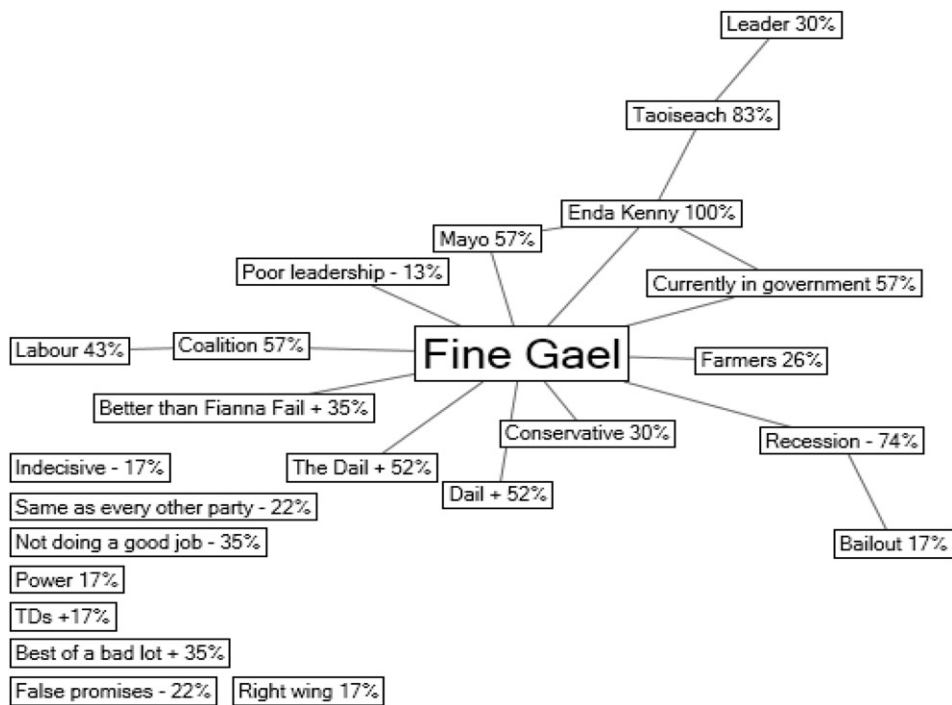


FIGURE 3 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF FINE GAEL - 2013.

Unlike Fianna Fáil in 2013, which possessed many interlinked negative associations, Fine Gael had trouble eliciting large numbers of associations with common links. That associations rarely moved beyond the first order, or forked into sub associations, should concern anybody managing the brand – it indicates a weak set of common cognitive structures around the brand. Enda Kenny², then party leader and Taoiseach, appeared as a key association, mentioned by all participants, with links to several other associations. Despite this, Kenny’s place of origin, occupation and the observation that he is a member of government, hardly amount to

compelling brand differentiation. However, it should be recognized that when the map in Figure 3 was created Fine Gael had recently returned to power (in coalition with Labour), after a 14 year interlude.

In 2016, Fine Gael, coming to the end of five years in government, during which it oversaw economic recovery, had 52 individual brand concept maps constructed. When aggregated in Figure 4, they show changes in how respondents viewed the party from three years before.

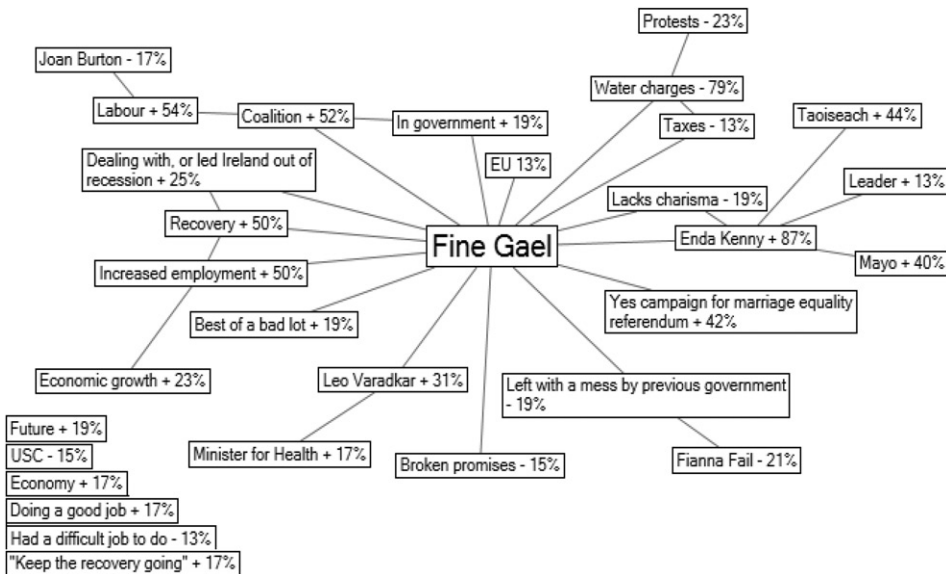


FIGURE 4 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF FINE GAEL - 2016.

There are more associations with the Fine Gael brand in Figure 4, and some are negative. Enda Kenny still holds a prominent position, and whereas previous participants were neutral on him, now they are positive. The emergence of two clusters in the 2016 map is interesting; these centered around water charges (negative) and economic recovery (positive). Further, it appears that the negative association of recession, seen in 2013, has been supplanted by recovery. That a much younger politician – Leo Varadkar³ – is linked to the brand suggests a newly perceived depth in leadership. Despite this, Fine Gael managed to keep only 50⁴ of its 66 TDs⁵ in the 2016 general election – far short of the 79 needed for a majority. Being in government for five years took a toll on some of the party's brand associations.

As with Fianna Fáil, traditional issues of cleavage hold little sway in the minds of the participants when creating concept maps for the Fine Gael brand. Conservative is directly linked to Fine Gael in the 2013 aggregate map, being mentioned by 30 percent of participants, but it does not

reappear in 2016. Whereas, in Figure 3 the associations with the Fine Gael brand lacked potency, they are stronger in Figure 4, as it emerges from five years in coalition government.

The Left Wing Parties

SINN FéIN

Sinn Féin attracted 14 of 76 participants in 2013 to construct concept maps. When aggregated, these produced a map rich with associations (Figure 5).

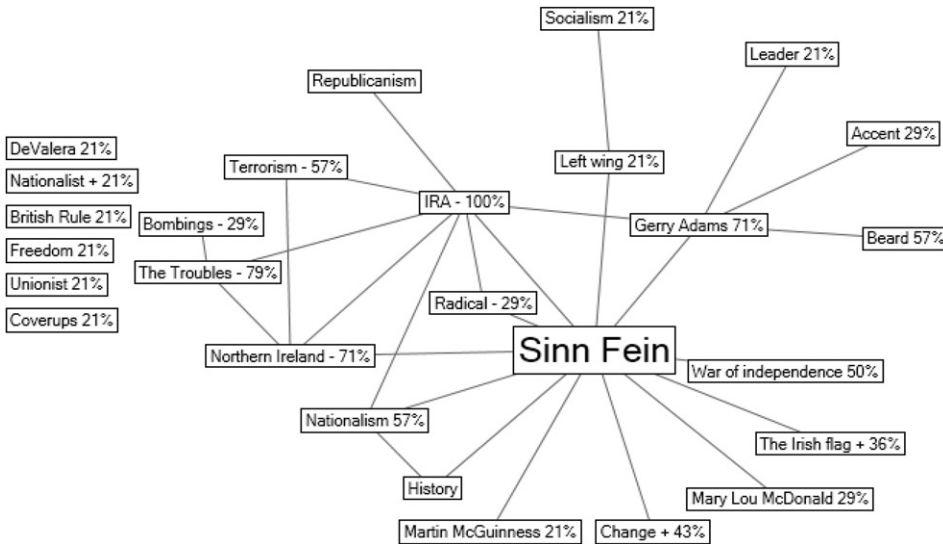


FIGURE 5 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF SINN FéIN – 2013.

The dominant positions of the associations Irish Republican Army (IRA), and Northern Ireland, are clear in the 2013 map. As with the preceding parties in 2013, prominent party members feature; although, unlike Fianna Fáil, all the named members of Sinn Féin were in office at the time.

In 2016, Sinn Féin had 20 individual concept maps constructed. When aggregated in Figure 6, these show changes in how respondents viewed the party.

Two large clusters exist in the 2016 map. There is a highly interconnected group of associations on the left, linking violence associated with the IRA to positive associations about Irish republicanism and unification. On the right of the map, there is a largely positive and clearly delineated cluster of left wing associations. The party’s positive left-wing associations seem to assert themselves more strongly in the 2016 aggregate map, as a pillar of the changing brand. The working class manifested itself on

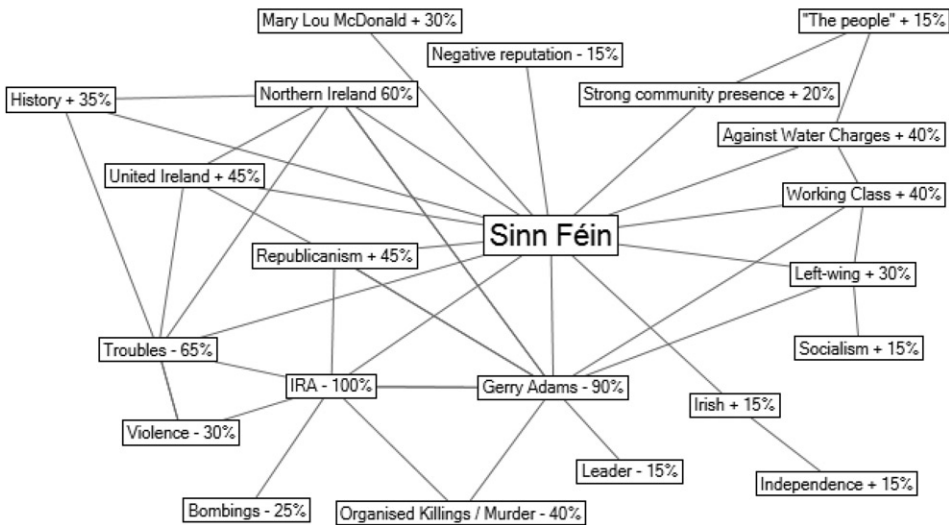


FIGURE 6 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF SINN FÉIN – 2016.

individual maps of roughly two fifths of respondents, and opposition to the regressive water charges is now linked to the brand. While many negative associations with Northern Ireland persist, where they are repeated in the 2016 map, the level of negativity has diminished. Furthermore, unlike the aggregate brand maps for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, there are no associations to the recession, or banking crisis. This might be attributed to Sinn Féin being perpetually in opposition. The general election, a week after we collected the brand concept maps, saw Sinn Féin increase its presence in the Dáil from 14 to 23 seats, becoming the third largest party.

THE LABOUR PARTY

As Labour attracted only 7 participants in 2013, aggregating so few maps is questionable. The parameters had to be modified for aggregation, as the initial settings, with such a low quantity of data, produced a large map with an equally large amount of questionable output. Therefore, more concrete associations, which show on at least 3 of the 7 Labour maps, appear on the aggregation map in [Figure 7](#). The small number of relatively prominent associations point to a framework for potentially understanding the Labour brand from the perspective of respondents.

Bearing in mind the limitations of this aggregation map, it contains the first significant appearance of ideology as a core feature of an Irish political brand in our 2013 research. Labour was associated with the left. Eamon Gilmore, then leader, also appears to play a significant role in the brand.

In 2016, Labour was at the end of five years in government, as the junior partner to Fine Gael. In that role it had to make many policy com-

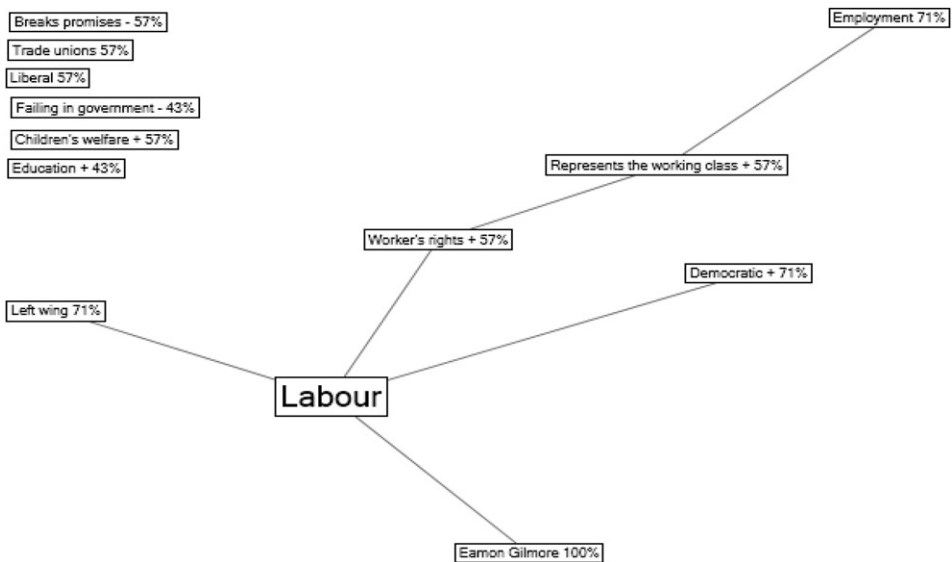


FIGURE 7 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF LABOUR – 2013.

promises, justified by alluding to the necessity for economic recovery and stability. In this case, 9 individual brand concept maps were constructed. Figure 8 shows a more significant aggregate brand concept map than Figure 7.

The 2016 aggregate map is more substantial; indicating respondents were familiar with the party after its time in government. We observe three main clusters of associations; one is centered around Joan Burton, another around student fees – unsurprising given the cohort in question, and the final cluster is focused on links between employment and the working class. The then party leader Joan Burton, features strongly but negatively, and attitudes toward university fees are mixed. Unlike Fianna Fáil, where previous leaders occupy prominent positions in both 2013 and 2016, Eamon Gilmore, Labour leader from 2007 to 2014 is absent; despite being mentioned by every respondent in 2013. While there are many new associations, some, such as water charges, are negative. The party's 2013 associations with traditional social democratic tropes – “left wing”, “workers' rights”, and “represents the working class” weakened in 2016.

In Figure 8 there is a sense that the party has moved away from its traditional values. The respondents' aggregate map suggests the party has been pulled to the right by its larger coalition partner – Fine Gael. Enda

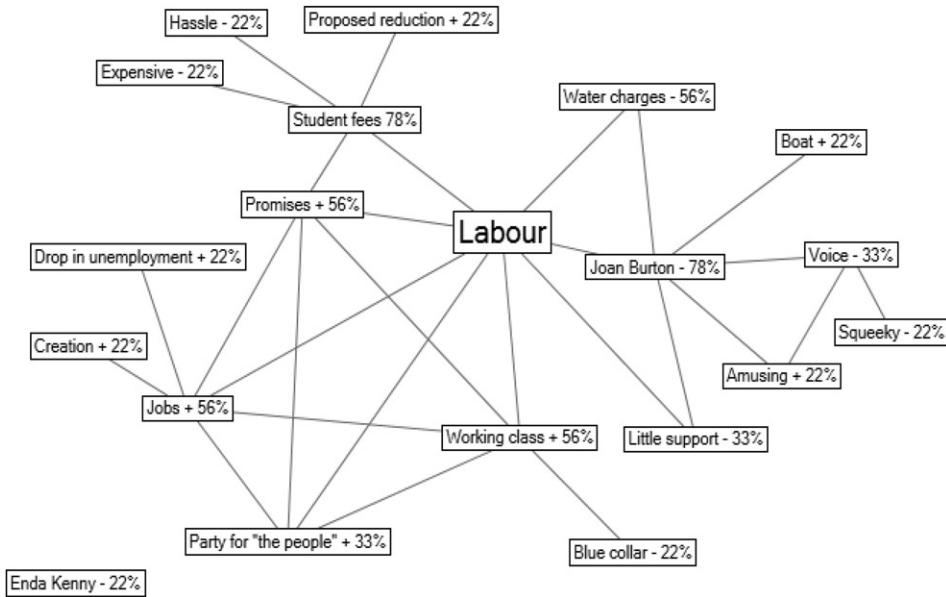


FIGURE 8 AGGREGATED BRAND CONSENSUS MAP OF LABOUR – 2016.

Kenny, then leader of Fine Gael, makes an appearance (albeit negatively) on the Labour map! The week after we collected this data, Labour lost 26 of its 33 seats in Dáil Éireann.

ASSESSING BRAND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FOUR PARTIES

Now we determine the strength, favorability and uniqueness of the associations generated by the aggregation maps. To determine strength, the number of associations and their positions as first, second or third-degree associations is important, as is the centrality of the associations in determining their importance to the network. Drawing from Krishnan (1996), favorability can be determined by assessing the net valence of associations. Uniqueness can be determined by identifying the proportion of unique associations that occur for each brand.

The Centre Right Parties

FIANNA FÁIL

While the number of associations present in a concept map indicates a measure of equity for a brand; this makes no claim on the quality of that equity, which might be good or bad (French and Smith 2010). The Fianna

Fáil aggregation map from 2013 (Figure 1) produced 23 associations, 18 of which were linked to the brand, or other associations, and the remaining five were floating associations. The aggregation map from 2016 (Figure 2) produced 26 association, 22 of which were linked to the brand, or other associations. To ascertain the degree to which certain associations hold positions of importance for the brand, it is necessary to examine their centrality figures in Tables 2 and 3. For brevity, and as their centrality values amount to 0, we have excluded floating associations.

TABLE 2 Centrality Values for the Fianna Fáil Aggregation Map 2013

<i>Associations</i> ⁶	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Fianna Fáil	11	103.500	0.040
Anglo Irish Bank	1	0.000	0.024
Bad reputation	1	0.000	0.022
Banking crisis	2	4.000	0.024
Bertie Ahern	8	60.000	0.034
Brian Cowen	1	0.000	0.024
Celtic tiger	4	33.000	0.030
Corruption	2	0.000	0.027
DeValera	2	0.000	0.024
History	2	0.000	0.024
Micheal Martin	1	0.000	0.024
No longer in government	2	0.000	0.027
Poor leadership	1	0.000	0.022
Property	1	0.000	0.020
Recession	3	20.500	0.026
Talk of a comeback	1	0.000	0.024
Taoiseach	1	0.000	0.022
Unemployment	1	0.000	0.018
Wealth	1	0.000	0.020

Degree centrality indicates the number of interconnections between a given association and the surrounding nodes; this can be observed by counting the links from the connection. We observe that, ignoring the central node – Fianna Fáil, Bertie Ahern is the most interconnected node in Figure 1, connecting with eight other nodes; and connecting with five nodes in Figure 2. Recession in Figure 2 also connects with five nodes. Betweenness centrality, according to Freeman (1978), indicates the number of the shortest paths between two nodes that must pass through the node in question. Nodes with a high level of betweenness centrality are, in the case of brand maps, associations occupying important mental bottlenecks, generating and linking to numerous other associations. Closeness centrality is a representation of how close any given association is to all others connected on the map.

The 2013 Fianna Fáil aggregation map (Figure 1) was dependent on four nodes for its structure – two negative – Ahern and Recession. Both

associations were present in the 2016 map, however they were not as strong as in the preceding map, given they were mentioned by fewer subjects. The net valence, arrived at by subtracting the sum of positive associations from the sum of negative associations and dividing by the total number of associations, produces a favorability score (French and Smith 2010) for the Fianna Fáil brand of $(-8/23) -0.35$ in 2013 and $(-1/26) -0.038$ in 2016. 1.0 indicates complete favorability. This shows that the Fianna Fáil brand was overwhelmingly negative in 2013. However, by 2016 the level of negative associations had diminished – pointing to improving brand equity.

TABLE 3 Centrality Values for the Fianna Fáil Aggregation Map 2016

<i>Associations</i> ⁷	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Fianna Fáil	16	191.500	0.036
Micheál Martin	2	21.000	0.021
Leader	1	0.000	0.015
Anti-treaty	2	0.000	0.021
Eamon DeValera	2	0.000	0.021
Brian Cowen	1	0.000	0.020
History	1	0.000	0.020
Used to be successful	1	0.000	0.020
Property bubble	1	0.000	0.020
Corruption	1	0.000	0.020
Water charges	1	0.000	0.020
Caused the recession	1	0.000	0.020
Recession	5	42.500	0.024
Unemployment	1	0.000	0.016
Boom-bust	2	0.000	0.022
Bertie Ahern	5	44.000	0.025
Charismatic	1	0.000	0.016
Boom	3	0.000	0.022
Celtic Tiger	5	24.000	0.024
Loans	1	0.000	0.016
Downturn/Crash	1	0.000	0.016
Ignored economists / experts	3	0.000	0.022
Good times	4	6.000	0.250

Finally, regarding uniqueness, the 2013 Fianna Fáil aggregate map produced four associations common to other political parties – Taoiseach, poor leadership, history and De Valera – meaning that 83 percent of the map comprised unique associations. The 2016 map contained four associations in common with the other parties, leaving 85 percent unique associations.

FINE GAEL

The original aggregation map for Fine Gael (Figure 3) produced 23 associations. However, the lack of common links between associations

TABLE 4 Centrality Values for the Fine Gael Aggregation Map - 2013.

<i>Associations⁸</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Fine Gael	11	93.500	0.050
Bailout	1	0.000	0.022
Better than Fianna Fáil	1	0.000	0.029
Coalition	2	14.000	0.031
Conservative	1	0.000	0.029
Currently in government	2	0.000	0.032
Dail	1	0.000	0.029
Enda Kenny	4	26.500	0.036
Farmers	1	0.000	0.029
Labour	1	0.000	0.022
Leader	1	0.000	0.019
Mayo	2	0.000	0.032
Poor leadership	1	0.000	0.029
Recession	2	14.000	0.031
Taoiseach	2	14.000	0.025
The Dail	1	0.000	0.029

prevented the formation of a map akin in structure to Fianna Fáil's. Eight floating associations indicated that the overall structure of the Fine Gael brand was weaker than Fianna Fáil. The subsequent Fine Gael map (Figure 4) had 30 associations, 24 of which linked to the brand, or other associations.

Centrality values for the 2013 Fine Gael aggregate map (Figure 3) can be seen in Table 4. In contrast to the Fianna Fáil table, none of the nodes, bar Fine Gael itself, have a high degree of connectivity. Neither do they generate more associations. The nodes are distributed roughly equally, as indicated by their closeness centrality. Removing any node would not have an overwhelming impact on the structure of the map and thus the overall brand position and value attributed to it by the sample of political consumers. In Table 5, we see that the betweenness centrality values for several nodes in the subsequent Fine Gael aggregation map (Figure 4) are higher – with Enda Kenny more than doubling in value.

Calculating favorability and uniqueness from the 2013 map, Fine Gael has a better, albeit negative, favorability score of -0.04 and the same percentage of unique associations as Fianna Fáil, 83 percent. However, from the 2016 map we ascertained a favorability score of 0.31 (far ahead of Fianna Fáil) and again 83 percent unique associations. Betweenness centrality shows there is continuity in the roles Kenny and the Coalition play as bottlenecks for other associations, with water charges and increased employment as areas of interest.

TABLE 5 Centrality Values for the Fine Gael Aggregation Map 2016

<i>Associations</i> ⁹	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Fine Gael	15	250.000	0.029
Bailout	1	0.000	0.022
Enda Kenny	5	66.000	0.020
Taxes	2	0.000	0.018
Water charges	3	23.000	0.019
Leo Varadkar	2	23.000	0.018
Lacks charisma	2	0.000	0.019
Dealing with, or led Ireland out of recession	2	0.000	0.018
Increased employment	3	23.000	0.019
Recovery	3	1.000	0.019
Yes campaign for marriage equality referendum	1	0.000	0.018
EU	1	0.000	0.018
Broken promises	1	0.000	0.018
Best of a bad lot	1	0.000	0.018
Coalition	3	44.000	0.019
In government	2	0.000	0.019
Left with a mess by previ- ous government	2	23.000	0.018
Protests	1	0.000	0.013
Minister for Health	1	0.000	0.013
Mayo	1	0.000	0.014
Leader	1	0.000	0.014
Taoiseach	1	0.000	0.014
Economic growth	1	0.000	0.013
Labour	2	23.000	0.014
Joan Burton	1	0.000	0.010
Fianna Fáil	1	0.000	0.013

The Left Wing Parties

SINN FÉIN

The Sinn Féin aggregation map from 2013 (Figure 5) produced 26 associations, 20 of which were linked to other associations and six floating. This indicates that Sinn Féin was a stronger political brand among participants than Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. Three years later (Figure 6) there were 21 associations, each linked to the brand and other associations. While the brand was centered on a small number of associations in Figure 5; one of which, the IRA, was negative; three year later, in Figure 6, the number of nodes and associations had increased. The centrality values for the Sinn Féin aggregate maps can be found in Tables 6 and 7.

TABLE 6 Centrality Values for the Sinn Féin Aggregation Map – 2013

<i>Associations</i> ¹⁰	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Sinn Fein	12	127.500	0.034
Accent	1	0.000	0.018
Beard	1	0.000	0.018
Bombings	1	0.000	0.015
Change	1	0.000	0.021
Gerry Adams	5	54.000	0.027
History	2	0.000	0.021
IRA	8	59.500	0.030
Leader	1	0.000	0.018
Left wing	2	19.000	0.022
Martin McGuinness	1	0.000	0.021
Mary Lou McDonald	1	0.000	0.021
Nationalism	3	2.000	0.024
Northern Ireland	4	14.000	0.025
Radical	2	0.000	0.023
Republicanism	1	0.000	0.019
Socialism	1	0.000	0.015
Terrorism	2	0.000	0.020
The Irish flag	1	0.000	0.021
The Troubles	3	19.000	0.020
War of independence	1	0.000	0.021

The 2013 Sinn Féin aggregate map produced a favorability score of -0.11 and uniqueness for approximately 85 percent of associations. The 2016 map had a favorability score of 0.19 , a big improvement, and 81 percent unique associations. The favorability findings from both maps put Sinn Féin in a better position than Fianna Fáil, but behind Fine Gael. Given the consistent centrality of the IRA association; it would be pertinent for those managing the brand to disassemble that link.

THE LABOUR PARTY

Finally, in the context of the limitations of the 2013 Labour aggregation map, we must bypass gauging strength through associations, as the limited number of maps prevents useful data. Even the centrality values from the analysis of the Labour map present little information worthy of analysis (seen [Table 8](#)). The link between the Labour brand, worker's rights and working-class representation indicates these associations are central to the brand.

However, the 2016 Labour map ([Figure 8](#)) is more complex, producing 19 associations, with one floating. This contains many common links, resulting in a richer map. The centrality values in [Table 9](#) show that some of the nodes contain a high degree of connectivity – Burton, promises, jobs and student fees. These nodes are distributed evenly, as can be seen from their closeness centrality. A couple of nodes could be removed and

TABLE 7 Centrality Values for the Sinn Féin Aggregation Map – 2016.

<i>Associations</i> ¹¹	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Sinn Féin	14	134.133	0.036
IRA	7	37.233	0.026
Northern Ireland	5	3.083	0.024
Troubles	6	11.083	0.025
Republicanism	4	1.667	0.024
United Ireland	4	0.667	0.023
History	3	0.000	0.022
Gerry Adams	8	37.767	0.028
Left-wing	4	20.000	0.024
Working class	4	3.867	0.024
Against water charges	3	10.767	0.022
Strong community presence	2	8.233	0.022
Mary Lou McDonald	1	0.000	0.021
Irish	2	20.000	0.022
Negative reputation	1	0.000	0.021
Organised Killings / Murder	2	0.000	0.019
Bombings	1	0.000	0.017
Violence	2	0.000	0.019
Leader	1	0.000	0.018
Socialism	1	0.000	0.016
"The people"	2	0.500	0.016
Independence	1	0.000	0.015

TABLE 8 Centrality Values for the Labour Aggregation Map – 2013

<i>Associations</i> ¹²	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness Centrality</i>	<i>Closeness Centrality</i>
Labour	4	12.000	0.111
Democratic	1	0.000	0.071
Eamon Gilmore	1	0.000	0.071
Employment	1	0.000	0.056
Left wing	1	0.000	0.071
Represents the working class	2	5.000	0.077
Worker's rights	2	8.000	0.100

the structure of the 2016 aggregation map would still be stronger than in 2013.

An aspect of the 2013 Labour map is that it was the only party to possess net positive associations. Five positive associations reveal themselves on the aggregate map, while two negatives surface as floating associations. The favorability score was (3/12) +0.25. The uniqueness of associations on the aggregate map, at 92 percent, was higher than the other parties – left wing being an association shared with Sinn Féin. However, in the 2016 map we see a favorability score of 0 and 74 percent unique associations. Labour had a stronger brand presence with respondents than three years before – but it had also lost some of its appeal.

TABLE 9 Centrality Values for the Labour Aggregation Map - 2016

Associations	Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality
Labour	8	89.500	0.034
Working class	5	17.000	0.026
Water charges	2	0.000	0.024
Joan Burton	6	59.500	0.028
Student fees	5	48.000	0.026
Promises	5	12.000	0.028
Party for "the people"	4	0.000	0.025
Jobs	6	33.000	0.026
Little support	2	0.000	0.024
Blue collar	1	0.000	0.018
Boat	1	0.000	0.019
Voice	3	17.000	0.020
Squeeky	1	0.000	0.015
Amusing	2	0.000	0.020
Expensive	1	0.000	0.018
Hassle	1	0.000	0.018
Proposed reduction	1	0.000	0.018
Drop in unemployment	1	0.000	0.018
Creation	1	0.000	0.018

FINDINGS

In this voter-centric political brand perspective approach we try to capture the participants' complex associative network (Winther Nielsen 2016) concerning the political party of their choice. Overall, this broad cognitive psychology approach has been used by a variety of scholars employing a range of techniques (see Erdem 1998; French and Smith 2010; 2013; Keller 1993; Pappu et al. 2006; Winther Nielsen 2016). However, our study is different in terms of its scale and scope, diachronically examining the political brand associations for a range of parties. Our method of aggregation of the individual political brand concept maps is also different in that it reduces the thresholds for inclusion on the aggregate maps and so provides additional data and insights. The findings offer greater scope for interpretation of changes to key associations

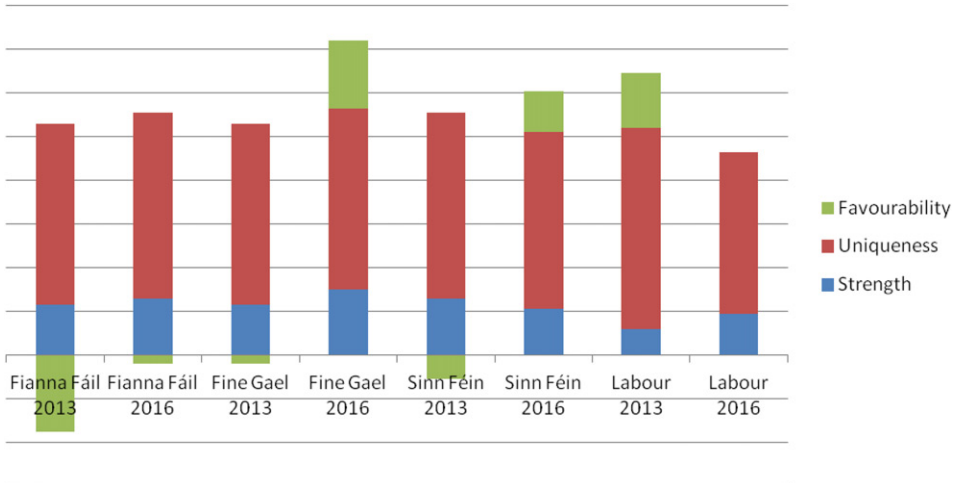
From the 76 students in the brand mapping stage in April 2013, the overwhelming picture of political brand associations was negative. It was also noteworthy that the governing Fine Gael and Labour parties lacked strong and meaningful associations.

From the 107 students sampled in February 2016 the negativity toward the political brands had largely vanished, with Fianna Fáil the exception (see Table 10). All of the parties, apart from Labour, saw their favorability improve (see Figure 9). Fianna Fáil became the most unique brand – another indication of its revival. Fine Gael emerged as the brand with the most associations.

TABLE 10 Key Brand Association Values for the Four Parties

	Strength* (2013)	Strength (2016)	Uniqueness (%) (2013)	Uniqueness (%) (2016)	Favourability** (2013)	Favourability (2016)
Fianna Fáil	18L + 5F	22L + 4F	83	85	-0.35	-0.038
Fine Gael	15L + 8F	24L + 6F	83	83	-0.04	+0.31
Sinn Féin	20L + 6F	21L + 0F	85	81	-0.11	+0.19
Labour	6L + 6F	18L + 1F	92	74	+0.25	0

*(L = Linked brand associations; F = Free or floating brand associations); ** (Range 1 to -1).

**FIGURE 9** VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF BRAND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FOUR PARTIES.

We saw similarities in our aggregated maps to what others have found (Parker 2012; Smith and Spotswood 2013; Speed et al. 2015), namely the significance of the leader to the party's brand; with some unique, though not always positive, associations. Enda Kenny, Gerry Adams and the Labour leader Joan Burton (who replaced Eamon Gilmore in 2014 and was herself replaced in May 2016) are closely associated with their parties' brands, the link being weaker in the case of Micheál Martin and Fianna Fáil. Former party leaders, Ahern and Cowen, are still closely connected with the Fianna Fáil brand. Ahern's connection with Fianna Fáil links that party to the negatives associated with the former Taoiseach (Parker 2012).

From Table 10 we see that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael had the same number of brand associations in 2013, with the latter possessing more floating associations, and the majority of Fianna Fáil's associations being negative. In 2016, Fine Gael has more brand associations and they were mostly positive, while Fianna Fáil, although its brand associations had improved, was still negative overall. Clearly, common associations indicate

TABLE 11 The Parties' Changing Seats in Dáil Éireann, 2013–2016

	Fine Gael	Fianna Fáil	Sinn Féin	Labour
April 2013	74	18	14	33
January 2016	66	21	14	33
March 2016	50	44	23	7

Source: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/>.

that a brand can be remembered and, if positive, beneficially impact the brand's equity (Severi and Ling 2013). Sinn Féin, which possessed the most associations in 2013, had only 21 in 2016. Each party had many unique associations – contradicting the notion of growing party homogeneity (Allern and Bale 2012). However, that these brand associations are not all positive, or strong, is a problem; as Keller (1993) pointed out that powerful brands require associations that are favorable and strong in addition to being unique.

Changing attitudes towards the political brands, captured in the findings from our non-representative samples, could be seen in the makeup of the parliament following the 26 February 2016 general election (summary in Table 11). The declining hostility toward Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin seems to have paid dividends in seats, while Labour, in particular, paid the price for being in government during the recovery period, making decisions which contradicted their previous election platform. That said, Labour's coalition partner, Fine Gael, despite the strength, favorability and uniqueness of its brand associations improving amongst our samples, also lost seats, although nothing like the disaster which befell Labour.

All parties, apart from Fianna Fáil, tend to maintain their historical brand associations. Fine Gael is linked with conservatism in 2013 which gave way to more contemporary issues in 2016, Sinn Féin with left wing issues, nationalism and Northern Ireland, and Labour with left wing politics and workers' rights. Only Fianna Fáil, through its mismanagement of the economy in the late Celtic Tiger period 2002–2007, severed its links with its historical brand associations.

DISCUSSION

The methodological approach used here, combining quantitative and qualitative elements, establishes the potential to discover a range of political brand associations, identifying their strength, favorability and uniqueness crucial in the examination of political brand equity. The process of data gathering – in the elicitation and brand mapping phases – is straightforward for both researchers and participants (French and Smith 2010; John et al. 2006) while aggregation and analysis is made possible through

mapping software which helps to highlighting those weaker and unlinked associations which would be overlooked in other brand concept mapping techniques, facilitating examination of change. The findings, as set out above for four Irish political parties, highlight the valuable contribution of this cognitive mapping methodology in aiding our understanding of Irish society's perception of these parties' brand associations.

In assessing the largest Irish parties in 2013 and 2016 (Murphy 2016) – through looking at the strength, favorability and uniqueness of their brand associations (Keller 1993) – we see that although there is no quantifiable figure with which to rank the parties; a certain hierarchy is observable. Of course, this hierarchy is very different from what existed in Ireland for decades prior to the transformational general election of 2011 (Little, 2011) that was so influenced by the economic crisis that began in 2008 (Chari and Bernhagen 2011).

Understanding that brand equity is “the differential effect of brand associations on consumer response to the brand” (French and Smith 2010 p. 462), we see that Fianna Fáil, the party with the worst associations in 2013 was on the road to recovery by 2016 – its brand associations with respect to uniqueness and favorability had improved. This is also clear from opinion polls carried out prior to the 2016 general election (Ryan 2016).

In 2013, while the results appeared to show that Labour had the best associations of all the parties, there were too few individual brand concept maps upon which to build a rich picture of the brand. Although the 2016 Labour aggregate brand consensus map was richer, the brand's uniqueness and favorability scores had declined. Opinion polls in early 2016 reflected the party's declining popularity after years in government (Bardon 2016).

Fine Gael's brand was slightly stronger and had a higher favorability than Fianna Fáil's in both periods. While participating students had trouble forming common links between the party's brand associations in 2013, the party's 2016 aggregate brand consensus map was richer – indicating that certain policies and personalities were garnering more attention. By 2016 Fine Gael seemed to be creating cognitive maps possessing many interlinking nodes in the minds of participants.

Despite strong negative associations, the Sinn Féin aggregate map possessed the largest number of associations in 2013. By 2016 the brand had a high percentage of favorably viewed unique associations, with an emergent cluster focused on left-wing issues separated from the negative cluster around the IRA. This was reflected in the party's improved performance in opinion polls prior to the 2016 general election (Bardon 2016; Gallagher 2016).

Our findings, while the samples were not representative of the general population, were somewhat reflected in the 2016 general election (see Table 11 above). That election resulted in one of the most fragmented

Dáils ever, and the longest process of putting together a minority coalition government that was also dependent upon a confidence and supply arrangement (Little, 2017). While our participants felt that three of the parties' brand equities improved over the period 2013-2016, only two, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, saw their representation in parliament increase. This points to the resilience of both of these deep-rooted parties and that five years in opposition was sufficient time to detoxify the Fianna Fáil brand (Barrett, 2016).

Fine Gael, despite improved brand associations, lost seats. It was the major partner in the coalition government with Labour (2011–2016), and was responsible for many of the unpopular decisions made during Ireland's economic recovery (Costello et al. 2016). Both parties, over the life of their government, experienced many controversies surrounding broken promises, reforms that did little to change how Irish politics functions and policy failures (Little 2017; Farrell 2017). Yet, Fine Gael did not suffer anything like the deterioration in brand associations, or loss of seats, experienced by Labour. Labour tried to distinguish itself from Fine Gael on matters of taxation, abortion and the role of religion in education (Little, 2017). However, it is the case that smaller parties in coalition governments often perform poorly in subsequent general elections, their distinct identity having been submerged within the coalition (Paun and Munro 2013; Murphy 2016). It may also be that Fine Gael's improved associations protected it to some extent, but did not safeguard all of its seats, from the resurgent Fianna Fáil and the steadily rising Sinn Féin. The issue of improving brand associations, but declining representation in parliament, is something that future longitudinal studies, employing more representative samples, may explore.

CONCLUSION

Engaging with over 600 participants, this paper sought to chart the changing brand associations of four Irish political parties at a time of unprecedented political change. The results of individual and aggregated brand concept maps largely conformed to academic discourse, that the Irish political system cannot strictly be assessed along traditional cleavage lines. We may posit though that there are indications of change, in 2013 the only party for which left-right ideology played a dominant role was Labour whilst in 2016 strong left-wing associations can also be observed for Sinn Féin.

Research on political brand associations, identifying negative or weak associations, enables parties to take remedial action to target those qualities the public dislikes while reinforcing positive, strong, or unique associations

that the public appreciates. We see how failure to overcome key negative associations such as “Ahern” and the “IRA” continues to impact the Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin brands. Identification of unexpected brand associations may present parties with an aspect of their brand previously unconsidered, whilst the de-linking of associations from other nodes to occupy floating positions, as seen with Fianna Fáil’s associations to the banking crisis, can provide a positive indication of a collective forgetting of negative associations. This study also affirms previously observed tendencies in the literature, for leaders, both past and present, to be key brand associations for each of the parties investigated (French and Smith 2010). Thus, the results of this study demonstrate the valuable contribution that cognitive mapping techniques can provide in understanding the publics’ perception of political parties’ brand associations.

NOTES

1. Prime minister
2. Kenny remained leader of Fine Gael and Taoiseach until June 2017.
3. Leo Varadkar became leader of Fine Gael and Taoiseach in June 2017, becoming, at 38, the country’s youngest ever leader, taking over from Enda Kenny then aged 66.
4. Despite failing to retain all of its outgoing TDs, this was only the second time that Fine Gael won more seats in Dáil Éireann than any other party. The first occasion was the 2011 general election then Fine Gael took 76 seats.
5. Teachta Dála – member of the lower house of parliament
6. Does not include floating associations from map
7. Does not include floating associations from map.
8. Does not include floating associations from map
9. Does not include floating associations
10. Does not include floating associations
11. Does not include floating associations
12. Does not include floating associations

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APPENDIX A. ELICITATION SHEET

Elicitation

1. From the list below, please select the party for which you have the greatest affinity:
 - a. Fine Gael
 - b. Labour
 - c. Fianna Fáil
 - d. Sinn Féin
 - or
 - e. Uncommitted
2. Please write below any associations that come to mind when thinking of the party chosen above:

APPENDIX B. SAMPLE OF COMPLETED ELICITATION SHEET

Male Female

Elicitation

1) From the list below, please select the party for which you have the greatest affinity:

a. Fine Gael
 b. Labour
 c. Fianna Fáil
 d. Sinn Féin
 or
 e. Uncommitted

2) Please write below any associations that come to mind when thinking of the party chosen above:

11 - Bertie
 - Brian Cowen
 - Long history in politics
 - Recently increased opinion (surprisingly)
 - storied past
 - Lack of trust
 - Relationship with Anglo/Irish
 - Nationwide / Developers
 - Good Friday Agreement
 - DeValera.

10) - 2007 / 2008 Economic downturn.

Male Female

Elicitation

1) From the list below, please select the party for which you have the greatest affinity:

a. Fine Gael
 b. Labour
 c. Fianna Fáil
 d. Sinn Féin
 or
 e. Uncommitted

2) Please write below any associations that come to mind when thinking of the party chosen above:

11 - Bertie
 - Brian Cowen
 - Long history in politics
 - Recently increased opinion (surprisingly)
 - storied past
 - Lack of trust
 - Relationship with Anglo/Irish
 - Nationwide / Developers
 - Good Friday Agreement
 - DeValera.

10 | - 2007 / 2008 Economic downturn.

APPENDIX C. INDIVIDUAL BRAND CONCEPT MAP

