**Avoidance and Engagement in the Electoral Cycle: Selective Emphasis, then Issue Convergence between Political Parties**

**Abstract**. A major contradiction in party research is between the saliency theory and the logic of issue convergence. Extant research shows that parties both avoid and engage each other’s issues. This study addresses this contradiction and argues that both perspectives have merits. The key to unlocking the puzzle is to unwind the electoral cycle. As far as possible into the electoral cycle, parties apply a long-term strategy and talk past each other. Yet, as the election draws closer, parties realize that they cannot change the agenda and therefore switch to a short-term strategy to engage rival parties’ issues. They switch if the rival is loud and consistent in its emphasis. Moreover, the switch is more pronounced for smaller parties. This argument is tested on a new dataset consisting of 19,350 press releases issued by political parties in Denmark during several election cycles, 2004-2019. The implications for representative democracy are important.

**Keywords**: Issue avoidance and engagement, political parties, issue competition, selective emphasis, electoral cycle.