

First Avoidance, Then Engagement: Political Parties' Issue Competition in the Electoral Cycle

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Abstract. A major contradiction in party research is between the saliency theory and the logic of issue convergence, or what is often referred to as issue avoidance vs. engagement. Extant research shows that parties both emphasize only their own issues 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. This argument is tested across multiple issues on a new dataset consisting of 19,350 press releases issued by the political parties in Denmark during several election cycles, 2004-2019.

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

Political parties are the key actors in representative democracy. They present voters with alternative issue priorities to choose between, and they enter debates on issues of concern to voters to mark the distance between their positions. Yet, parties have scarce attention and therefore face a basic dilemma between promoting their preferred issues – and thereby avoiding rival parties’ issues – and engaging rival parties’ issues to enter a debate on salient issues. This has motivated a large research agenda on so-called issue avoidance and engagement that shows that parties do selectively emphasize certain issues (Dolezal et al., 2013; Greene, 2016; Wagner and Meyer, 2014) but that they also engage with issues that the rival party emphasizes (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Kaplan et al., 2006; Meyer and Wagner, 2016; Sigelman and Buell, 2004). As this impressive line of research shows, there are good reasons to expect that parties want to both talk about the same issues and talk past each other. However, they cannot do both at the same time, and this contradiction remains to be solved.

I argue that both perspectives have merits and that the key to unlocking the puzzle is to unwind the electoral cycle. During the electoral cycle, parties talk with each other and talk past each other at different points in time. I argue that parties by default try to selectively emphasize issues on which they have issue ownership for as long as possible. However, as the election draws closer, a party will be less inclined to selectively emphasize its own issues and will increasingly engage the issues that the rival party emphasizes.

This argument aligns with existing research. The vast majority of studies demonstrating issue engagement use campaign statements (Kaplan et al., 2006; Meyer and Wagner, 2016; Sigelman and Buell, 2004). In contrast, studies of selective emphasis (or ‘avoidance’) typically examine manifestos that parties use to set their longer-term priorities (Dolezal et al., 2013; Greene, 2016; Wagner and Meyer, 2014). Hence, studies that demonstrate issue engagement mostly use a data source from right before the election, and studies that show issue avoidance (and selective

emphasis) use a data source that focuses on the longer term. Thus, the literature spurs – but do not test – the argument that I make.

Previous research has searched for factors that explain how parties trade off issue avoidance and engagement. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2015), for example, argue that neighbour parties in multiparty systems engage more, and Wagner and Meyer (2014) show that ideological proximity and party resources enhance issue engagement. Yet, they have not theorized how the underlying logic of how parties alternate between selective emphasis and engagement of the rivals' issues.

Recently, a research agenda has emerged on parties' issue competition during the electoral cycle. On the economy, Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu (2019) show that parties respond less to public opinion and more to rival party attention at elections. Moreover, Sagarzazu and Klüver (2017) find that coalition partners aim to stay united during most of the election period but differentiate their profiles at elections.¹ This is important first-hand evidence on changes in parties' issue strategies across the electoral cycle. I make three contributions to this emerging research agenda. (1) I move beyond a single-issue focus on the economy to more broadly study parties' issue avoidance and engagement across multiple issues. As Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu (2019: 442-443) discuss, the economy is a central issue in electoral politics – which makes it important to study – but the political dynamics may therefore also be exceptional. (2) I move beyond intra-coalition politics to study more broadly how parties avoid and engage the issues that their rivals to office emphasize. (3) I show that consistency in the rival party attention matters in addition to its level.

To test the argument, I use a novel, large-scale dataset consisting of 19,350 press releases issued by the political parties in Denmark during multiple election cycles, 2004-2019. Using the codebook of the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al., 2019), I classify the content of each press release into 22 issues, such as health and education, and calculate the number of press

releases on each issue by each party per quarter of the year. This allows me to analyze to what extent a party issues press releases on the same issues and at the same time as the other parties in parliament and whether this pattern changes during the election cycle.

Issue avoidance and engagement during the electoral cycle: Three mechanisms

The electoral cycle potentially influences a party's issue avoidance and engagement through three related, yet analytically separate mechanisms: (1) through political parties' weighting of future vs. immediate electoral yields; (2) through political parties' making of the political agenda and taking from it; (3) through political parties' weighting of pursuing its ideology and matching its rival. It is relevant to discuss each of them theoretically even if they are difficult to distinguish empirically.

The discussion of the election cycle argument begins in a simple two-party parliamentary system although the argument extends to multiparty systems as well. Without venturing into formal game theory, I refer to two rivals, Party A and Party B, that want to win elections in order to control a majority to decide policy. To this end, they are mainly interested in attracting the volatile, median voter who decides elections (Mair et al., 2004) without losing their core constituency (De Sio and Weber, 2014). In this context, issue avoidance occurs if Party A exclusively emphasizes issues on which it has issue ownership, while rival Party B emphasizes issues on which it has issue ownership. Hence, Party A's issue emphasis *does not* reflect Party B's issue emphasis. In contrast, issue engagement takes place if Party A emphasizes an issue that rival Party B already emphasizes. For the purpose of clarity, I assume that Party A can emphasize only one issues at a time. In reality, this is of course not the case. Yet, the point is that even if Party A may in reality be able to emphasize both its own issue and the issue that Party B emphasizes at the same time, there is an upper limit to its attention. Most likely, it wants to emphasize more issues than its time and

resources allow, and it therefore faces an inevitable dilemma between avoidance and engagement (to the extent that Party B emphasizes an issue on which Party A does not have issue ownership). Like the parties, the media and the voters also have scarce attention, and this could therefore be an alternative starting point (Hopmann et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2017). Although each of these starting points are important, I adhere to previous research (Wagner and Meyer, 2014; Damore, 2005: 75; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015) and depart from parties' limited attention span in order to understand their behavior.

Mechanism (1): Weighting future vs. immediate electoral yields

The two opposing strategies – issue avoidance and engagement – present two alternative ways for parties to attract voters, who research shows tend to vote for the party that is the most concerned with tackling issues that worry the voters (Meguid and Belanger, 2008). When a party selectively emphasizes an issue on which it has a track record of concern and competence, so-called issue ownership, the prediction from the literature is that it will attract voters by influencing their *future* issue concerns. The argument is that when the party has made them more concerned with the issue it promotes, it attracts them because it has issue ownership on the issue about which they have become concerned (Meguid and Belanger, 2008; Petrocik, 1996).

The possible impact of this strategy comes with a delay because research shows that voters do not change their issue priorities instantly when encouraged to do so by a party – it may take weeks or months rather than days, at least at the aggregate level (Jennings and John, 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Such a delay may also occur because the party needs to find its way into the media, the main channel of information between parties and voters, which may focus on another issue. To get there, the party will need first to make rival parties engaged with the issue in order to

turn up the volume to the voters and trigger a political conflict that fits a media news criterion. Alternatively, the party needs to connect the issue to a topical event through strategic communication to fit another media news criterion (Cook, 1998). The bottom line is that it takes time for a party to make voters concerned with the issue(s) on which it has issue ownership.

In contrast to this future-oriented avoidance strategy, when Party A focuses on its rival Party B's issue, A expects to gain votes by caring for issues that appear salient *right now* because B emphasizes the issue (Ansolabhere and Iyengar, 1994; Sigelman and Buell, 2004). A recent example is the immigration issue, which social democratic parties have had to address amidst intense rightwing politicization (Bale et al., 2010). Hence, A has to accept that it promotes an issue on which it does not have issue ownership and that is possibly B's preferred issue. Yet, the alternative for A is to risk to appear non-attentive to an issue before the electorate. If B is vocal on an issue, it probably reflects that voters worry about the issue or will do because of B's attention (Ansolabhere and Iyengar, 1994; Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2016). Moreover, B will not hesitate to let them know of A's lack of attention (Sulkin, 2005). A therefore needs to match B's attention to appear responsive (Meyer and Wagner, 2016: 556).

Issue engagement is therefore an attractive strategy, but this does not make it a dominant strategy. Selective emphasis and avoiding the rival's issue is attractive as well, and perhaps more attractive than issue engagement, because if the party is successful, it automatically remains in accord with the voters' issue concerns in the future (which the party has shaped) and, therefore, forces the rival party to also engage the issue. This way, it does not have to engage its rival's issues. Both issue avoidance and issue engagement are, thus, attractive strategies. Yet, for a party, the important distinction between the strategies is that the former implies a future yield, whereas the latter yields immediately (perhaps with longer-term costs). The party can either try to make voters

concerned with the issues the party is concerned about (through issue avoidance), or it can adjust its issue concern to the issues that voters are currently concerned about (through issue engagement).

This makes the electoral cycle important. Under normal circumstances, the cycle is sufficiently long to separate an initial period at a considerable distance from the next election from a later period closer to the election. Thus, a party can afford to prioritize the longer term first and then only later the short term when there is no tomorrow. Adding it all up, a key prediction from this argument is therefore that a party uses issue avoidance more at the beginning of the cycle and issue engagement more towards the end of the cycle.

Mechanism (2): Making the political agenda vs. taking from it

Parties compete to decide the future content of the political agenda, that is, all of the political parties' main issue focus, while at the same time having to respond to what is on the political agenda right now. Hence, parties are agenda takers as much as they are agenda makers (Baumgartner and Mahoney, 2008). This is a well-established starting point for studying parties' issue competition because the political agenda influences voters' agenda and the political agenda tends to reflect voters' agenda (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Jennings and John, 2009). This opportunity to influence voters' agenda by deciding what other parties attend to and use other parties' attention to decipher voters' agenda makes the political agenda attractive to parties.²

Yet, the content of the political agenda only changes rather slowly (Mortensen et al., 2011; Baumgartner et al., 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Hence, right before an election, any attempt to change the political agenda only materializes after the election, and the parties therefore become agenda takers much more than agenda makers. They have strived to set the agenda, and now they just have to make the best of it. In contrast, early in the cycle, the parties will fight to

decide on the issues on the future agenda and, in this process, ignore issues that do not fit their issue preferences. Hence, in this early phase, they will be agenda makers more than agenda takers.

An important point from the large literature on the political agenda is that this process of making the agenda and taking from the agenda does not take place in a vacuum. The world is constantly evolving during the cycle, and this makes the political agenda gradually evolve (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Mortensen et al., 2011). In this process, some of the issues that arrive on the agenda align with a party's preferences, and some counter them. Importantly for the election cycle argument, if the next election is far away, a party can count on the unpredictable, yet pleasant arrivals of, for instance, a government scandal or a new societal event to push unwanted issues off the political agenda. Yet, as the election moves closer, the window of agenda change quickly closes and a party has to face the issues about which other parties talk. Here, it is more important for a party to have a say on an unattractive issue than no say at all (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). Hence, the dynamics of the political agenda underline the key prediction of this study: A party's issue emphasis increasingly reflects other parties issue emphasis (the political agenda) closer to elections.

Mechanism (3): Weighting ideology vs. matching the rival

Parties are set in an often difficult dilemma between pursuing their ideology and representing their core constituency and, at the same time, moderating their position to attract voters beyond their core constituency (Adams, 2012). They are ideological creatures, and party supporters, members, and representatives expect the party to pursue their core issues (Petrocik, 1996). Hence, parties are inclined to focus on issues on which they have issue ownership until they feel forced to focus on the issues to which the rival party attends. Elections are such a force. In election campaigns, media

coverage intensifies and voters are more attentive to political issues (Gelman and King, 1993). At least we can expect that the parties believe so (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu, 2019: 443). When voters are particularly attentive to the parties, the parties are less inclined to offer rival parties electoral advantages (Sulkin, 2005; Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu, 2019: 442). This implies that the possible yield of selectively emphasizing an issue on which the party has issue ownership increases – but the risk also increases of looking unresponsive to the non-core constituency voters, ‘the median voter’, by ignoring an issue that is important to the rival party. Since the median voter decides late in the campaign, based on what the parties are currently promoting, whereas a party can count on a degree of loyalty from the core constituency (Mair et al., 2004; De Sio and Weber, 2014), the party can be expected to be more concerned with the median voter than the core constituency in the campaign. The expectation is therefore that closer to the election, parties attune to the rival party’s issue emphasis. The three mechanisms all point towards the same main expectation of the study:

(H1) As the distance to the next elections shortens, a party increasingly engages a rival party’s issue.

The influence of rival party B’s attention on party A’s attention is probably approximately linear through the electoral cycle although it might in reality be slightly non-linear. Hence, Party A will probably not respond entirely proportional to the distance to the next election but will, because of its desire to put its core issues on the agenda (its reaction stays below the straight line), wait until the last minute to accept that it cannot invest in tomorrow’s agenda but, instead, has to reflect its rival’s attention. Due to this delay, the catch up with the rival party might then be fast (above the straight line). Hence, the election cycle effect is approximately linear although it might be slightly flat and limited until late, when it will grow quickly.

Consistency in rival party attention

The election cycle argument has additional implications. For a party to engage its rival's issue, it needs to believe that voters notice non-engagement. Hence, rival party pressure is not only about the amount of attention but also about the consistency in the attention. If all members of Party B repeatedly talk about the issue – high consistency – rather than at high and low levels of emphasis – low consistency – then Party A is probably more certain that it has to adjust. Similarly, in a multiparty context, consistency implies that all of the rival parties talk equally much about the issue. A recent example is the June 2019 Danish election in which the liberal business party, *Venstre*, made the issue of climate change a top priority and improved its electoral result despite four years in office. Beginning several months before the campaign, even the Conservatives and the highly pro-market party, *Liberal Alliance*, heavily emphasized the issue in addition to the always environment-friendly parties on the left (the exception was the anti-immigrant Danish People's Party, who suffered a terrible election). Hence, the rival party consistency for *Venstre* was high. *Venstre*, thus, changed its logo color from blue to green and agreed to set binding carbon targets, enact green taxes, and subsidize green vehicles. Hence, it was hard to tell the difference between *Venstre* and the other parties, and *Venstre* increased its vote share. This motivates the additional hypothesis:

(H2) The increase during the electoral cycle in a party's engagement with a rival party's issue grows larger the more consistent the rival party emphasizes the issue.

Case selection

The hypotheses are tested on a novel dataset consisting of 19,350 press releases issued by the political parties in Denmark during multiple election cycles, 2004-2019. Since most European

political systems, including Denmark, have multiparty systems, it represents a natural point of departure for analysis (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015). Moreover, the Danish party system has a setup that allows testing the hypotheses. The theorizing focused on a two-party system such as the British, which makes the rival party obvious. In a multiparty context, we can expect that all other parties are rivals to varying degrees and will therefore influence a party's issue emphasis especially in elections. Yet, some parties are probably greater rivals than others, depending on the specific context. According to the argument, these 'greatest' rivals among all rivals are the most important to engage with for a party. We therefore have to adjust the analysis to the specific Danish party competition context. Yet, the idea remains that any party system presents rivals, and particular rivals among the rivals. The logic of rivals therefore travels beyond Denmark even if the party competition structure is slightly different in other Western countries.

In Denmark, all parties are rivals but particularly those in the opposite bloc. Hence, the analysis will focus on those. It may annoy a party – small or large – to lose votes to a neighbor party inside its bloc, but ultimately, the votes remain in the bloc. In terms of enjoying a parliamentary majority to access office and decide policy, it is much worse to lose votes to any of the parties from the opposing bloc because this vote loss counts against the party's bloc majority. This is the case in Denmark because the political system operates through a very stable separation of parties into a left bloc and a right bloc from which the parties rarely defect. This structures governing coalitions and the group of opposition parties (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). In the period of analysis, the rightwing parties were in office in 2001-2011 and, again, in 2015-2019, and leftwing parties held office in 2011-2015.

The Danish case does not appear to favor unambiguously either of the two strategies. The multiparty context in Denmark invites each party to carve out niches and therefore avoid issues promoted by any rival party. At the same time, previous studies have revealed considerable issue

engagement in Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015), which probably reflects some coordination in the bloc and the centripetal forces of the large parties competing for the same voters.

Moreover, Denmark is a useful case for the hypothesis test because it allows covering multiple issues and multiple parties across an extended time span. Hence, the analysis surpasses any peculiarities of a certain issue, party, or incumbency. The extended period of analysis, 2004-2019, includes several election cycles: 2004-2005 (the preceding election was in 2001), 2005-2007, 2007-2011, 2011-2015, and 2015-2019 (until the June 2019 election).

Data

For the hypothesis test, existing data sources on party attention are ill-suited to reveal how parties engage rival party issues because they are either annual, such as the government's executive speeches; published only at elections, such as party manifestos (Dolezal et al., 2013; Greene, 2016; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015); or highly institutionalized, such as questions to the ministers, which are predominantly used by opposition parties (Seeberg, 2013). To overcome this problem, one option is to access and code mass media news articles, but this source is edited according to journalistic norms and therefore biased in the direction of, for instance, more conflictual news from the parties.

Instead, this study relies on a new database of 19,350 press releases issued on a weekly basis by seven Danish parties from 2004 to 2019. The use of press releases to study party behavior is becoming more widespread (Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2016). The main advantage is that it allows for analyses at short time intervals. I use quarters of the year as the unit of analysis to arrive at an estimation with short time intervals but without introducing too many empty cells in the data at weekly or monthly levels.

Studies of party communication across channels suggest that parties have comparatively larger degrees of freedom in writing their press releases, for instance, according to their issue ownerships, than in news articles or in parliamentary activities (Tresch et al., 2018). This makes them a hard case for rival party influence. At the same time, the easy access to issue press releases makes them a likely candidate to see quick changes to the content of the parties' issue emphasis strategy. Each party issues about two press releases per issue per quarter on average (μ 1.96, σ 3.00), although this number varies over time and across the years (see Figures A2-A9 and Table A1 in the appendix).

The 2004-2019 interval is the period in which a digital archive, the Wayback Machine (web.archive.org), is available. Every news item was archived and issue coded. Like previous coding of political documents and news articles (Baumgartner et al., 2019), the coding of the press releases uses the titles and is carried out by trained research assistants. Since press releases are relatively short and crafted to clearly communicate one message, this appears to be a reasonable coding strategy in the sense that the message of the text is in the title. Essentially, each press release is coded to show whether it concerns fisheries, psychiatry, and so on, using the more than 220 issue subcategories in the codebook of the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al., 2019). Taking the large number of issue subcategories into account, the test of the reliability of the content coding of the data into each of the subtopics was at a very high Krippendorff's Alpha of 0.79 when we compared the coding of the research assistants and my own coding. Since there will be many zeros across all of the 220 subcategories over time, the subcategories are aggregated to 22 major categories according to the CAP codebook so that, for instance, the subcategories of drugs, doctors, health insurance, hospital management, and so on are compiled into the overall issue of health. For an overview, see Table A1 in the appendix. This gives 9,856 observations of press releases in total for the analysis (the number of press releases for each 22 issues x 7 parties x 16 years x 4 quarters).

Operationalization and estimation

In the test of the influence of rival party attention, I identify rival parties from the left and right blocs that alternate in power in the Danish parliament, as discussed above (following Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015). The red bloc includes the Red-Green Alliance, the Socialist People's Party, the Social Democrats, and the Social Liberals, and the right bloc includes the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the Danish People's Party. I do not include the Liberal Alliance or Alternativet, who only entered parliament in 2007 and 2013, respectively. To measure rival party attention for each party, I calculate for each party the average issue attention by the parties from the opposing bloc (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015).

In the analysis, I control for each party for the average issue attention by the other parties from the same bloc. I also control for the total number of press releases in order to have a measure of party strategy that includes the attention limitations and, therefore, ensures a focus on a party's trade-off between emphasizing its own issues and engaging the rival's issues. Based on this control logic and the fact that more engagement implies less avoidance (and vice versa), the analysis only needs one direct indicator of either issue avoidance or engagement. The analysis focuses on the influence of the rival's issue emphasis instead of a party's active, selective emphasis of issues on which it has issue ownership (and thereby avoidance of the rival's issue emphasis). Part of the reason is that data on issue ownership is usually only available at elections (Seeberg, 2017) and on a limited selection of issues. This corresponds with previous research, which rarely measures a party's selective emphasis directly (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2016; Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu, 2019; Schröder and Stecker, 2018).

To test election cycle dynamics in H1, I interact the average attention among the parties in the rival bloc with a variable that counts the number of quarters in the calendar since the last

election (like Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2016: 394; Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu, 2019: 450). This variable ranges from 1 to 16 quarters. Although the Danish Parliament does not have fixed election periods – the Prime Minister calls an election with three weeks’ notice no later than four years after the previous election – elections typically come regularly, such as in 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019. I assume that the effect of rival party attention on a party’s attention to an issue changes approximately linearly through the election cycle. Diagnostic tests, reported in the online appendix, based on Hainmueller et al. (2019) do not indicate violations of this approximation.

To test H2 on attention consistency, I multiply the ‘election cycle x rival party attention’ interaction by a variable for the consistency across rival parties in their issue attention. This is possible because each bloc in the Danish party system is a group of several parties. Often, the bloc speaks in concert, but this is far from always the case. In the multiparty setup, I measure consistency in the rival party’s attention as the inverse of the standard deviation around the mean of the issue attention of the parties from the rival bloc divided by the mean of their attention in order to consider that a high mean naturally causes a higher variability. If the standard deviation is low, then the rival parties are more consistent, and the risk is greater that the rivals expose the non-engagement of the party in the analysis. In a two-party system where individual representatives inside each party are important, the consistency measure would probably target the standard deviation in the issue emphasis of individual representatives inside the rival party. Diagnostic tests, reported in the online appendix, based on Hainmueller et al. (2019) do not indicate violations of the linearity assumption in this interaction term.

The cross-section, cross-time estimation uses fixed effects estimation with panels for each party on each issue. Because of panel heteroscedasticity, the estimation uses robust standard errors. Since the dependent variable is a count variable of the number of press releases issued each quarter that ranges from 0 to 35 (μ 1.96, σ 3.00) and includes a large number of zeros (46.1 percent of the

data), the estimation is based on a zero-inflated regression using the negative binomial distribution (Long and Freese, 2006).³ Diagnostic tests indicate this model before an OLS regression, a regression model based on the Poisson distribution, or a zero-inflated Poisson regression (although results replicate in these versions. See Table A4 in the appendix). To reflect the direction of causality, rival party attention enters the model one quarter prior to a party's attention (the dependent variable). This is an estimation strategy employed in other studies of issue overlap (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015: 754).

The fixed effects estimation counters concerns regarding the influence of stable characteristics, such as differences between niche and mainstream parties, party size, and differences across issues. Hence, the controls that are added to the model include the within-bloc party attention, the total number of press releases, and an indicator of media attention (details in Table A2 in the appendix) that enters the model with a one-quarter lag. I also control for government status of the party. To counter autocorrelation in the model, a lagged dependent variable⁴ and a year counter are included. The estimation also includes a dummy for each quarter to control for seasonal effects.

Analysis

Table 1 tests the hypotheses, and the relationships are visualized in Figures 1-3. Before we discuss the election cycle effect, it is worth noting from the positive, statistically significant coefficient in the first column of Table 1 that a party systematically emphasizes an issue more if the rival party emphasizes that issue. There is also an almost equally strong effect of within-bloc party attention (see Table A3 in the appendix). This is in line with previous research (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015) and underlines that the issue emphasis of all other parties is generally important,

which ensures a high level of issue engagement, including with those from the opposite bloc in the Danish party system.

[Table 1, Figures 1-3]

The results in Table 1 indicate that unfolding the electoral cycle can help unravel part of the contradiction between avoidance and engagement. In support of Hypothesis 1, the coefficient for the interaction between the electoral cycle and rival party attention to an issue ('Rival party attention x Election cycle' in the second column in Table 1) is positive and statistically significant. This suggests that Party A's attention to an issue increasingly aligns with rival Party B's attention to the same issue the closer the election moves. The effect is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the marginal effect of rival party attention on a party's number of press releases through the electoral cycle. In alignment with Hypothesis 1, the marginal effect line is hard to distinguish from zero right after an election, and the rival party attention effect on a party's press releases is therefore infinitesimal. Yet, the effect inclines as the electoral cycle unfolds, and at maximum distance from the last election, the number of press releases by a party on the topic on which the rival issues a press release increases by a factor of 1.12 (the incidence-rate-ratio, IRR, $e^{0.11}$), i.e., an increase in the chance that the party issues a press releases by 12 percent. This result does not change when using an unlagged version of the rival party attention variable or a three quarter moving-average. The effect applies broadly across parties and issues since the effect does not change when we exclude one issue or one party at a time (Tables A5-A6 in the appendix). Moreover, as the grey shaded histogram in Figure 1 shows, the effect applies across observations on the election cycle variable.⁵ As further evidence of the robustness of the results, they do not depend on the choice of the negative binomial zero-inflated estimation (Table A4 in the appendix). Moreover, since the estimation includes a control for media coverage, it suggest that rival party attention is important in its own right independent of, for instance, what the media covers.

Figure 2 adds more detail to the linear approximation by plotting the curvilinear marginal effect of rival party attention on a party's number of press releases across the electoral cycle. The graph is based on the estimation of the triple interaction 'Rival party attention x Election cycle x Election cycle', which is positive and statistically significant (in Table A7 in the appendix). The bended curve is asymmetrically u-shaped in the sense that it hangs low and is almost flat (declines a little) in the beginning of the electoral cycle and increases more steeply towards the end of the cycle. This suggests a hesitant linear function that only rises more than halfway through the cycle. As discussed in relation to H1, this indicates that a party indeed prefers to avoid a rival party's issue attention and, instead, selectively emphasize its own issues for as long as possible. Only at the point where the party accepts that it cannot set tomorrow's agenda it will increase its issue engagement. Moreover, the late rise indicates that the parties in Denmark usually count on a full electoral cycle of four years (16 quarters). At the same time though, the line becomes statistically significant at the tenth quarter which might suggest that the parties in Denmark are aware that the prime minister can call an early election which they have to start preparing for. With this perhaps more precise estimate, a party's number of press releases is predicted to increase a factor 1.29 (IRR, $e^{0.26}$) – a 29 percent greater chance – for each additional rival party press release right before the election. While I still acknowledge these important nuances, this asymmetrically bended curve suggests that a linear function is an imprecise, yet still appropriate approximation for the further analysis since the influence of rival party attention essentially increases through the electoral cycle.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the pressure of the rival party (or parties) is not only about size, as indicated in Figure 1, but also about consistency in the rival attention. This is evident from the positive, statistically significant coefficient in the third column of Table 1, which estimates the interaction 'Rival party attention x Election cycle x Rival party consistency' (H2). The importance of consistency is highlighted in Figure 3 which shows the marginal effect of rival party

consistency on a party's number of press releases (with rival party attention at $\mu - \sigma$). The upward sloping line suggests that consistency – like rival party attention – has little impact early in the cycle. In contrast, immediately before an election, a party's number of press releases increases, for instance, a factor 1.75 if rival consistency inclines one unit (μ is 15.1, σ is 3.3), i.e. an increase in the chance of a press release of 75 percent. Thus, size of attention and attention consistency operate in the same way as an expression of the pressure of rival party issue attention. This is a noticeable effect although it also suggests that it takes quite a high level of rival party pressure (attention + consistency) and proximity to the election to experience that a party abandons its avoidance strategy and fully embraces engagement. Yet, an overall pattern exists in which parties change strategy during the election cycle, and this is the important point.

To summarize, based on the supportive evidence for a number of observable implications, the electoral cycle appears to moderate the influence of rival Party B's issue attention on Party A's issue attention. The higher and more consistent rival Party B is in its issue emphasis and the shorter the distance to the next election, the more Party A emphasizes the issues that Party B already emphasizes.

Conclusion

This study tackles an important contradiction in the literature on political parties, namely why a vast body of literature finds that political parties both avoid and engage issues that rivals emphasize. One important key to unlocking this conundrum appears to be the electoral cycle. Parties do avoid their rival's issues – but mostly in the beginning of the electoral cycle; and they do engage their rivals' issues – but mostly at the end of the electoral cycle. The analysis indicates that avoiding the rival's issues is the default option for a party and that it takes considerable pressure, through high and

consistent attention from all rival parties and proximity to an election, for a party to abandon this strategy.

A main implication of this study is that the electoral cycle appears to influence much party politics. Hence, scholars should be careful not only to cover the full election period instead of using either manifestos or campaign material but also to acknowledge that party behavior is not constant through the cycle. Applying this logic to a long-standing debate on the reciprocal relationship between the mass media and party politics might, for instance, uncover that the media leads the tango close to elections but that parties lead in the inter-election period (Hopmann et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2017). Similarly, the findings might have important implications for representation since they suggest that parties focus more on swing voters at elections and more on its core voters between elections. This helps to overcome a central contradiction in party competition research on how parties cater to different parts of the electorate (De Sio and Weber, 2014). The important point is that unfolding the election cycle shows that parties do not have to choose but can reach often contradicting ends at different points in the cycle.

This study provides only part of the explanation as to how parties navigate avoidance and engagement, and since most existing studies focus on a single country, comparative analysis is a promising avenue of research. This would allow verifying if the argument applies in a two-party setting such as Britain as well as gaining a better understanding of how the argument adapts to variation across European multi-party systems. Since the structure of most European multi-party systems resembles Denmark by centering on competition between social democrats and conservatives, such as in Spain and the Netherlands (at least until lately), the adaptation appears smooth. Yet, the current green-conservative government coalition in Austria and the social-democratic-CDU government in Germany suggests a more open structure in which most other parties are rivals in order for a party to reach a legislative majority.

Finally, the study takes as a starting point that parties have limited attention. An important avenue of future research is to integrate the fact that the media and the voters – the receivers – also have limited attention spans. How does that affect the parties’ strategies? A well-established assumption is that the media, because of its page or airtime limitations, mainly covers political news according to their news criteria. If political parties emphasize issues based on this logic, we should expect more engagement than avoidance because the media prefers to cover conflict between parties and communication tied to a topical event. Yet, it remains an open question how this changes during the electoral cycle. One hypothesis is that total media attention might increase in elections because the media are more politically interested during elections (because the voters as consumers are more interested) and, therefore, deprioritize non-political information. This probably encourages the media to write more about party communication, and this might therefore influence how parties trade off avoidance and engagement.

Notes

¹ Although Schröder and Stecker (2018) also focus on parties’ issue strategies during the electoral cycle, their analysis are at the aggregate level and not at the issue level and, therefore, less relevant to this discussion.

² It could also be the case that the rival promotes an issue on which it has issue ownership but does not align with the voters’ issue priorities. Yet, since the assumption that a party anticipates that it cannot change the political agenda or voters’ issue priorities in the short run applies across parties, we can expect that also the rival tries to engage with voters’ priorities closer to elections.

³ Since I do not have any expectations on what generates the always zeroes in the model, I model this logit part of the zero-inflated version by its intercept.

⁴ The results do not change if I leave this out.

⁵ The interaction term has ‘common support’, as expressed by Hainmueller et al. (2019).

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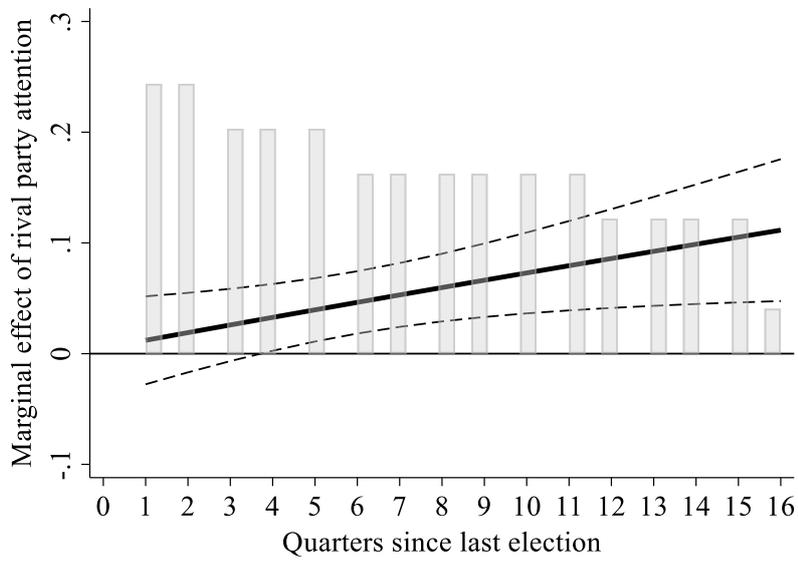
Table 1. The effect of rival party attention on a party's attention at increasing distance to the last election.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Rival party attention _{t-1}	0.02 ^{***} (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	0.67 (0.76)
Quarters since last election	-0.01 ^{**} (0.00)	-0.01 ^{***} (0.00)	-0.05 ^{**} (0.03)
H1 Rival party attention x quarter		0.003 ^{**} (0.00)	-0.23 ^{***} (0.06)
Rival party consistency _{t-1}			-0.01 (0.01)
Rival party attention x consistency			-0.04 (0.04)
Quarter x consistency			0.01 ^{***} (0.00)
H2 Rival party attention x quarter x consistency			0.01 ^{***} (0.00)
Constant	49.96 ^{***} (8.00)	46.96 ^{***} (8.11)	41.36 ^{***} (10.32)
Controls included	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9394	9394	7811

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

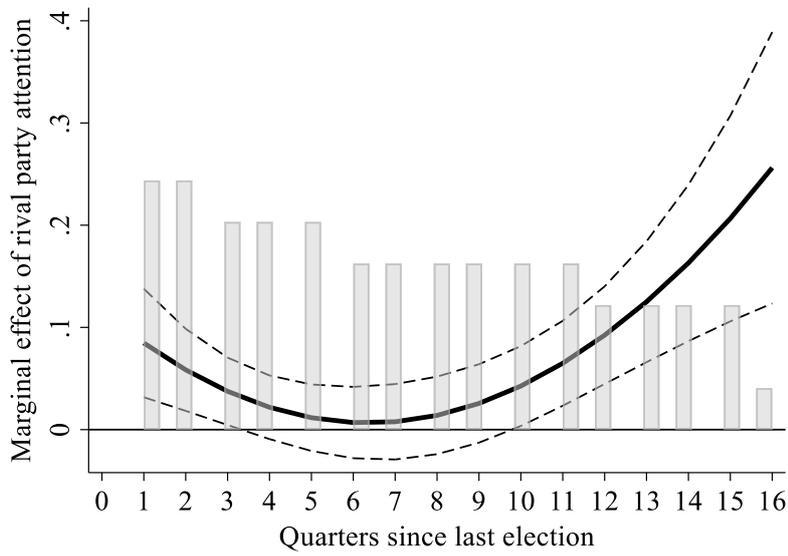
Fixed effects zero-inflated binomial regression (Table A3 in the appendix report all controls). There are fewer observations in model 3 due to 0s in denominator of the consistency variable.

Figure 1. The marginal effect of rival party attention on a party's number of press releases through the electoral cycle.



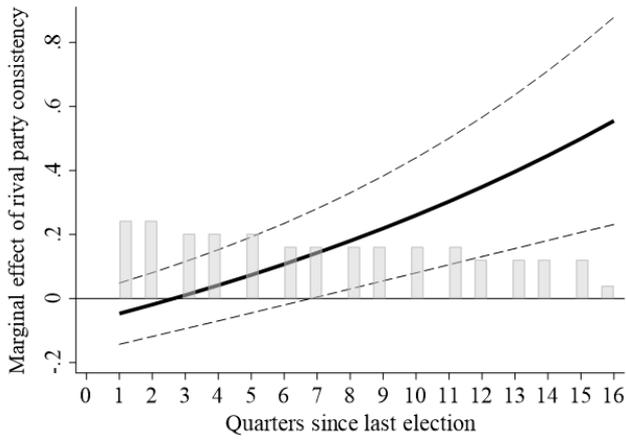
Note: Dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. The graphs are based on model 2, Table 1.

Figure 2. The marginal effect of rival party attention on a party's number of press releases through the electoral cycle (squared). The curvilinear effect of election cycle.



Note: Dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. The graph is based on Table A7 in the appendix.

Figure 3. The marginal effect of rival party consistency on a party's number of press releases through the electoral cycle.



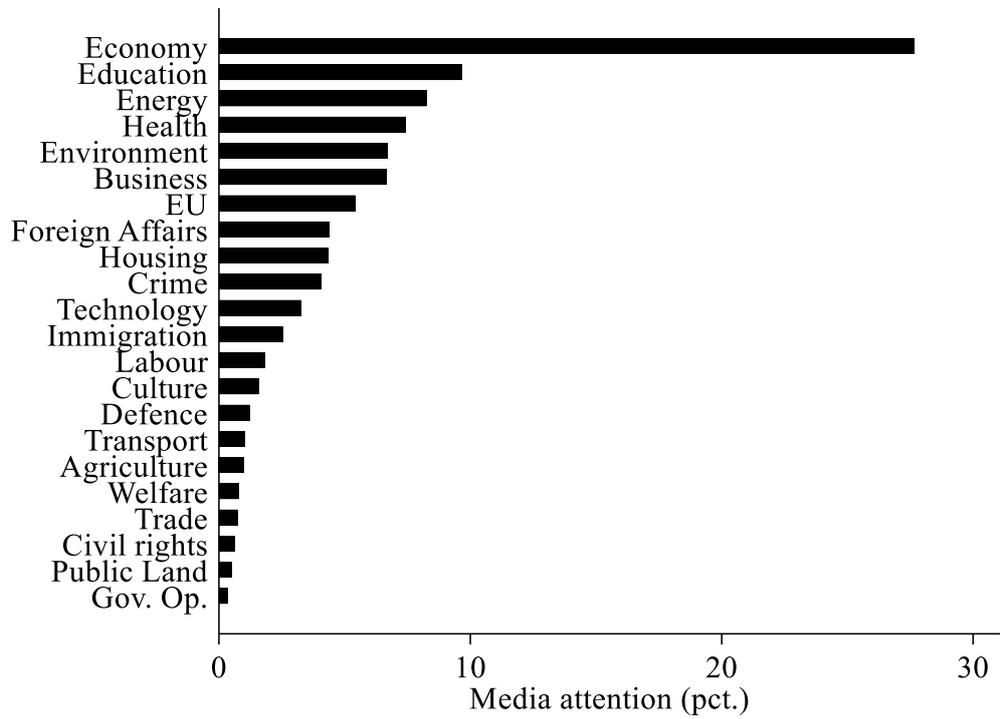
Note: Dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. The graphs are based on model 3, Table 1. Rival party attention is at $\mu - \sigma$.

Online Appendix

First Avoidance, Then Engagement: Political Parties' Issue

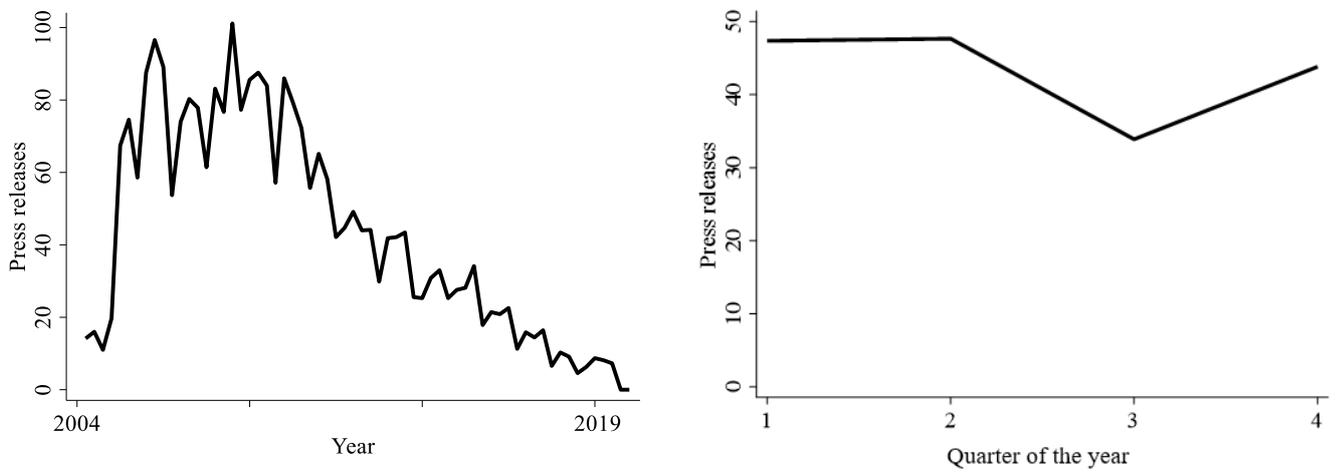
Competition in the Electoral Cycle

Figure A1. Media attention across issues, average 2004-2019.



Note: See Table A4 for more detail on the data collection.

Figure A2. The average number of press releases per year (left) and per quarter (right) across parties in Denmark, 2004-2017, on the issues of analysis.



Note: The right panel shows seasonal fluctuations in press releases by reporting the average number of press releases on all issues per party across the four quarters of the year. The left panel shows the average number of press releases on all issues per party and year for each quarter.

Table A1. Average number of press releases per quarter across the issues of analysis and for each party in Denmark, 2004-2017.

	RGA	SPP	SD	Cons.	DPP	SL	Lib.	Mean
<i>Economy</i>	3.9	2.7	2.2	3.1	0.8	3.1	5.0	3.0
<i>Civil rights</i>	2.6	1.6	1.5	0.9	1.3	1.7	1.1	1.5
<i>Health</i>	3.1	3.7	1.8	1.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.6
<i>Agriculture</i>	3.2	2.2	1.5	0.9	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.6
<i>Labour</i>	6.8	2.7	2.5	0.9	1.2	1.3	2.6	2.6
<i>Education</i>	4.8	3.9	2.5	2.0	2.6	3.2	4.2	3.3
<i>Environment</i>	4.3	4.3	2.5	1.9	1.3	1.8	1.6	2.5
<i>Energy</i>	2.4	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.4	1.1	1.1	1.1
<i>Immigration</i>	3.7	2.3	1.1	1.3	5.4	4.2	2.7	2.9
<i>Transport</i>	2.2	2.8	1.5	1.8	2.4	1.3	2.4	2.1
<i>Crime</i>	4.3	3.3	1.6	2.9	4.6	2.6	1.9	3.0
<i>Welfare</i>	5.8	3.2	2.8	1.4	2.2	2.2	2.8	2.9
<i>Housing</i>	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.5	1.1	0.9
<i>Business</i>	2.4	1.4	1.7	2.0	1.3	1.0	1.6	1.6
<i>Defense</i>	3.4	1.3	0.7	1.0	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.5
<i>Technology</i>	1.7	1.2	1.7	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.4	1.2
<i>Trade</i>	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.3
<i>Foreign Affairs</i>	7.6	2.5	1.3	1.8	3.4	2.0	2.4	3.0
<i>Gov. Operations</i>	5.7	2.7	2.0	1.2	1.8	1.9	2.2	2.5
<i>Public Land</i>	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.4
<i>Culture</i>	0.5	0.6	0.9	1.4	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.9
<i>EU</i>	2.6	1.0	1.5	0.7	2.1	1.7	1.8	1.6
Mean	3.3	2.1	1.5	1.4	1.8	1.7	1.9	2.0

Note: Red–Green Alliance (RGA), the Socialist People’s Party (SPP), the Social Democrats (SD), the Conservatives (Cons.), the Danish People’s Party (DPP), the Social Liberals (SL), and the Liberals (Lib.).

Table A2. Overview of key word search on media attention in Denmark, 2004-2017.

Issue area	Key words (Danish)	English translation
Economy	”Økonomiske udvikling”, ”økonomisk udvikling”, ”økonomiske situation”, ”økonomisk situation”, ”dansk økonomi”, ”danske økonomi”, inflation*, rente*, ”økonomisk vækst”, opsving, skat*.	Economy, economic, inflation, recession, recovery, boom, tax, interest rate.
Civil rights	stemmeret, diskrimination, ytringsfrihed, abort, aktindsigt, offentlighedslov, ekspropriation, folkekirke.	Voting rights, discrimination, freedom of speech, abortion, access to public records, expropriation, Danish church.
Health	Sundheds*, sygehus*, læge*, kræft*, sygdom*, medicin*, hospital*.	Health care, hospital, doctor, cancer, disease, medicin, physician, illness, surgeon, medic, surgery.
Agriculture	Landbrug*, landmænd*, bønder*, svineproduktion*, fødevareminister*.	Farmer(s), peasant, pork production, Ministry of food production.
Labour	*Arbejdsløs*, beskæftigelse*, jobtræning*, jobcent*, arbejdsmarked*.	Unemploy*, employ*, job training, labour.
Education	SU*, studerende, universitet*, folkeskole*, friskole*, privatskole*, eksamen, HF*, gymnasi*, erhvervsuddannelse*, lærling*.	State education grant, students, university, elementary school, primary school, secondary school, private school, exam, sixth-form college, vocational training.
Environment	Miljø*, *forurening*, drikkevand*, affald*, genbrug*, ”Global opvarmning”, klimaforandring*, olie*, gas*, kul, ”vedvarende energi”, bæredygtig*, ”alternativ energi”.	Environment*, pollution, drinking water, garbage, reuse, recycling, Global warming, climate changes, oil, fossil fuel, gas, coal, renewable energy, sustainable*, alternative energy.
Immigration	Immigra*, flygtning*, integr*, indvand*.	Immigra*, refugee*, integra*.
Energy	Energisektor, vindmølle*, solcelle*, ”grøn energi”, biobrændsel, DONG Ørsted, elektricitet, elforbrug, olie, naturgas, kul, ”alternativ energi”, ”vedvarende energi”, energiminister*.	Energy sector, wind turbine, solar power, ‘green energy’, bio fuel, DONG, Ørsted (national energy company), electricity, oil, natural gas, coal, alternative and renewable energy.
Transport	Spirituskørsel, uagtsomt, færdselsuheld, biluheld, trafik*.	Drunk driving, traffic, car accident, car crash.

Crime	Indbrud*, *tyveri*, hæleri*, bedrageri*, mandatsvig*, underslæb*, ”organiseret kriminalitet”, hvidvask*, bagmand*, bagmænd*, Vold*, overfald*, gerningsmand*.	Burglary, theft, fencing, , fraud, criminal, organized crime, money laundering, Violence, violent, assault, offender, assailant.
Welfare	Understøttelse, ”offentlig forsørgelse”, kontanthjælp, førtidspension, sygedagpenge, invalidepension, ”Kirkens Korshær”, ”Frelsens Hær”, ”Blå Kors”, Fattigdom, socialminister.	Social security (various types), disabled assistance, names of key volunteer associations.
Housing	Byzone, byfornyelse, ejerlejlighed, hus*, ejerbolig, ejendomsmarked, herberg, hjemløs, ejendomspriser, boligmarked, landsby, affolkning, landdistrikter, boligminister*, ”almen byggeri”.	Housing, urban and rural development, homeless issues, housing market for homeowners, “housing secretary”, low-income housing.
Business	Konkurs*, betalingsstandsning*, erhvervspolitik*, virksomhed*, finanssektor*, forsikringsbranche*, handel*, forbrug*.	Bankrupt, business, firm, company, finance industry, insurance company, trade, commerce, consumption.
Defence	Sikkerhedspolitik, militær*, soldat, kaserne, hæren, forsvarspolitik, ”det danske forsvar”, forsvarsreserven, forsvarsminister*, NATO, forsvarsalliance.	“Defence policy”, “defence secretary”, “security policy”, army, soldier, NATO, military*, war.
Technology	forskning*, TDC, bredbåndsinternet*, fibernet*, DR, TV2, fjernsyn*, radio, forskningspolitik*, videnskab*, forskningsminister*.	Research, Danish telephone company, broad band internet, fiber-based internet, DR, TV2, television, radio, research policy, science, Minister of Research.
Trade	Eksport*, samhandel, frihandel*, handelsaftale*, handelsbarriere, handelsbalance, betalingsbalance, valutakurs, konkurrenceevne.	Free trade agreements, export*, competitiveness, balance of payment, tariff, exchange rates.
Foreign Affairs	ulandshjælp, menneskerettigheder, FN, IMF, OECD, Verdensbanken, Israel, USA, Tyrkiet, Mellemøsten, Afrika, Kina, Rusland, Brasilien, Latinamerika, Sydamerika, Asien.	Foreign aid, human rights, FN, IMF, OECD, World Bank, Israel, USA, Turkey, Middle East, Africa, China, Russia, Brazil, Latinamerika, South America, Asia.

Gov. Operations	udligningsaftale, moderniseringsstyrelse, embedsmænd, udlicitering, ombudsmand, skattevæsen, skattemyndighed, ministeransvar.	Local-national budget agreement, modernization unit (in government), civil servant, outsourcing, ombudsman, tax department, minister responsibility.
Public land	ejendomsstyrelse, nationalmuseet, nationalpark, statsskov, statseje, Grønland, Færøerne.	Property unit (in government), national history museum, national park, state-owned forest, Greenland, Faroe Islands.
Culture	Kulturminister, teater, kunstmuseum, tipsmidler, kunstfond.	Ministry of Arts, theatre, art museum, art funds.
EU	EU, Europaparlament, Europakommission, Ministerråd.	EU, EU-parliament, EU-Kommission, EU Council of Ministers.

Note: I used the search engine, 'Infomedia', to search for articles in four national newspapers, Information, Politiken, Berlingske, and JP – the former two are left-leaning and the latter two are right-leaning. I count every article that contains at least one of the key words in the top of the article, and I only search through articles of at least 125 words that are published Monday to Friday.

Table A3. The effect of rival party attention on a party's attention at increasing distance to the last election.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Rival party attention _{t-1}	0.02*** (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	0.67 (0.76)
Quarters since last election	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.05** (0.03)
Rival party attention x Quarter		0.003** (0.00)	-0.23*** (0.06)
Rival party consistency _{t-1}			-0.01 (0.01)
Rival party attention x consistency			-0.04 (0.04)
Quarter x consistency			0.01*** (0.00)
Rival party attention x Quarter x consistency			0.01*** (0.00)
Within-bloc party attention _{t-1}	0.01** (0.01)	0.01** (0.01)	0.01** (0.01)
Media _{t-1}	0.05*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)
In government (=1)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)
Total press releases	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Year (counter)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.01)
Y _{t-1}	0.08*** (0.00)	0.08*** (0.00)	0.07*** (0.00)
Ref. point (1 st quarter)			
2 nd quarter	-0.11*** (0.03)	-0.12*** (0.03)	-0.24** (0.09)
3 rd quarter	-0.15*** (0.03)	-0.16*** (0.03)	-0.23*** (0.05)

4 th quarter	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
<hr/>			
Ref. point (RGA)			
Socialist People's Party	-0.30*** (0.04)	-0.30*** (0.04)	-0.17*** (0.04)
Social democrats	-0.12*** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)
Social Liberals	-0.18*** (0.05)	-0.18*** (0.05)	-0.09 (0.06)
Liberals	0.05 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.16*** (0.06)
Conservatives	-0.20*** (0.04)	-0.20*** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.04)
Danish People's Party	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.06)
<hr/>			
Ref. point (economy)			
Civil rights	0.74 (0.46)	0.69 (0.46)	0.80* (0.48)
Health	0.79** (0.35)	0.75** (0.35)	0.81** (0.36)
Agriculture	0.65 (0.46)	0.59 (0.46)	0.68 (0.47)
Labour	1.06** (0.45)	1.01** (0.45)	1.02** (0.46)
Education	0.89*** (0.32)	0.85*** (0.32)	0.89*** (0.33)
Environment	0.78** (0.37)	0.73** (0.37)	0.77** (0.38)
Energy	0.11 (0.34)	0.07 (0.34)	0.13 (0.35)
Immigration	1.12** (0.44)	1.06** (0.44)	1.14** (0.45)

Transport	0.95** (0.46)	0.90** (0.46)	0.98** (0.47)
Crime	1.04** (0.41)	0.99** (0.41)	1.06** (0.42)
Welfare	1.25*** (0.46)	1.19** (0.46)	1.25*** (0.48)
Housing	0.23 (0.40)	0.18 (0.40)	0.23 (0.41)
Business	0.53 (0.36)	0.49 (0.36)	0.57 (0.37)
Defense	0.71 (0.45)	0.66 (0.45)	0.71 (0.47)
Technology	0.46 (0.42)	0.41 (0.42)	0.49 (0.43)
Trade	-0.57 (0.47)	-0.63 (0.47)	-0.32 (0.49)
Foreign Affairs	0.99** (0.41)	0.94** (0.41)	0.96** (0.42)
Gov. Operations	1.13** (0.47)	1.07** (0.47)	1.10** (0.49)
Public Land	-0.47 (0.47)	-0.53 (0.47)	-0.43 (0.49)
Culture	0.23 (0.45)	0.18 (0.45)	0.35 (0.46)
EU	0.58 (0.39)	0.54 (0.39)	0.62 (0.41)
Constant	49.96*** (8.00)	46.96*** (8.11)	41.36*** (10.32)
Observations	9394	9394	7811

Note. This is the full Table 1 with the control variables reported. Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A4. The effect of rival party attention on a party's attention at increasing distance to the last election. Using different types of estimations.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(E) Quarters since last election	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
(R) Rival party attention _{t-1}	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
E x R	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)
Constant	45.76*** (8.13)	55.07*** (8.45)	51.79*** (8.19)
Estimation	ZINB	ZIP	POISSO N
Observations	9394	9394	9394

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Estimations uses fixed effects like in Table 1. “ZINB” is the zero-inflated negative binomial regression that is used in the analysis; “ZIP” is the zero-inflated Poisson regression; “POISSON” is the Poisson regression

Table A5. The effect of rival party attention on a party's attention at increasing distance to the last election with one issue excluded at a time.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(12)
(E) Quarters since last election	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
(R) Rival party attention _{t-1}	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
E x R	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)
Constant	49.57*** (8.34)	44.16*** (8.35)	45.20*** (8.38)	44.35*** (8.32)	46.45*** (8.35)	48.14*** (8.34)	43.14*** (8.26)	46.46*** (8.26)	40.96*** (8.35)	45.58*** (8.36)	48.50*** (8.42)
Observations	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The top row indicates the CAP code of the issue that has been excluded from the estimation.

Table A5 (continued).

	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(23)	(24)
(E) Quarters since last election	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
(R) Rival party attention _{t-1}	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
E x R	0.001** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)
Constant	50.51*** (8.37)	49.37*** (8.27)	45.24*** (8.34)	47.49*** (8.29)	43.45*** (8.29)	44.89*** (8.20)	44.64*** (8.37)	46.17*** (8.40)	44.20*** (8.21)	43.20*** (8.25)	44.16*** (8.33)
Observations	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967	8967

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The top row indicates the CAP code of the issue that has been excluded from the estimation. "24" is the EU, which is usually coded as 1912.

Table A6. The effect of rival party attention on a party's attention at increasing distance to the last election with one party excluded at a time.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(E) Quarters since last election	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
(R) Rival party attention _{t-1}	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
E x R	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001 ^a (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001 ^b (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)
Constant	92.80*** (9.54)	11.59 (8.57)	51.45*** (8.52)	59.29*** (8.80)	48.69*** (8.84)	40.66*** (8.54)	23.18*** (8.96)
Party excluded	RGA	SPP	Social Dems.	Soc. Liberals	Liberals	Cons.	DPP.
Observations	8052	8052	8052	8052	8052	8052	8052

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. "RGA" Red-Green Alliance; "SPP" Socialist People's Party; "DPP" Danish People's Party. ^a $P < 0.05$ if Liberals are excluded too. ^b $P < 0.12$.

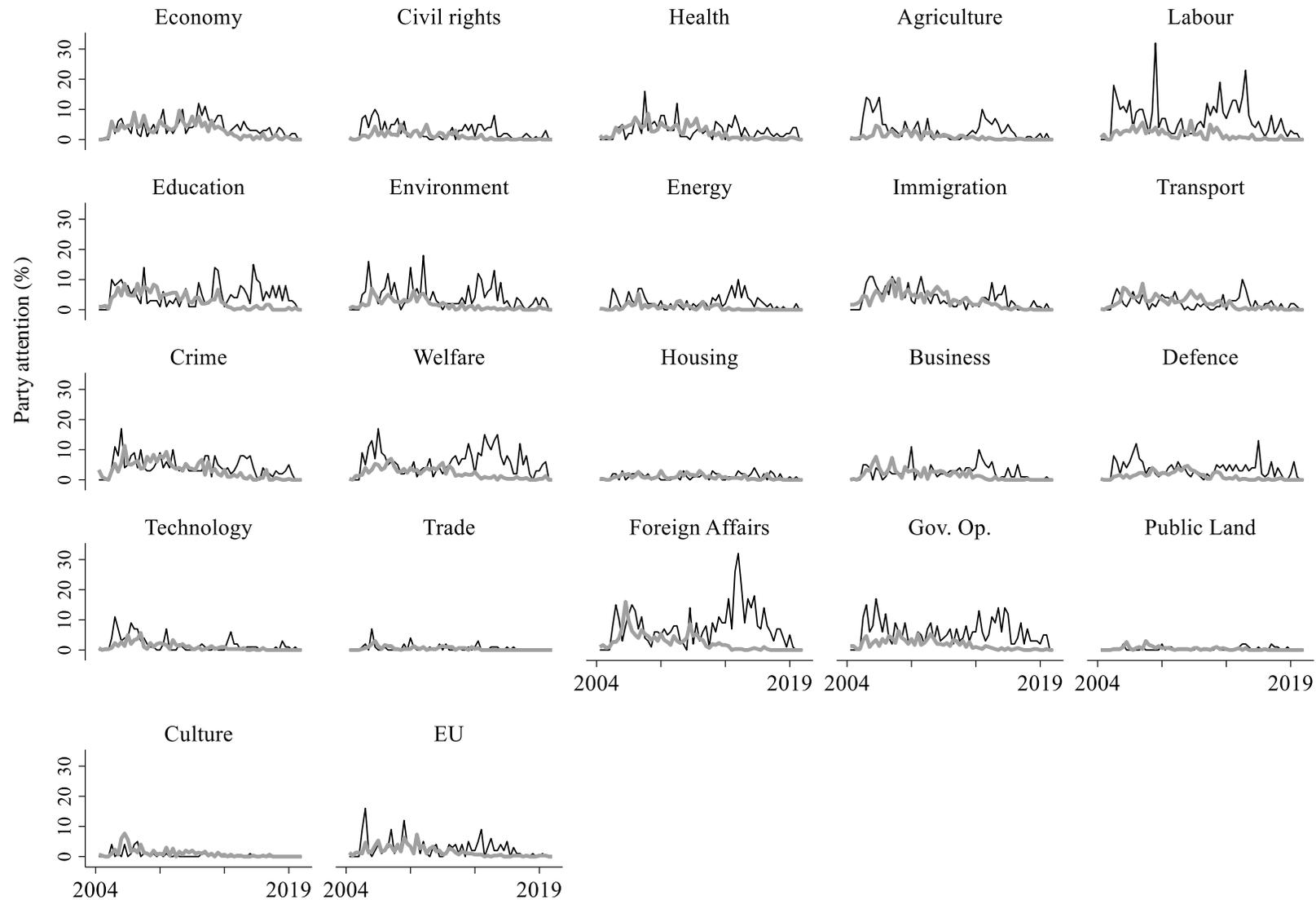
Table A7. The effect of rival party attention on a party's attention at increasing distance to the last election (the curvilinear effect).

	(1)
(R) Rival party attention _{t-1}	0.05*** (0.02)
(E) Quarters since last election	0.06*** (0.02)
R x E	-0.02*** (0.00)
E x E	-0.001*** (0.00)
R x E x E	0.001*** (0.00)
Within-bloc party attention _{t-1}	0.01*** (0.01)
Media _{t-1}	0.05*** (0.02)
In government (=1)	-0.03 (0.03)
Total press releases	0.01*** (0.00)
Year (counter)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Y _{t-1}	0.08*** (0.00)
<hr/>	
Ref. point (1 st quarter)	
2 nd quarter	-0.10*** (0.03)
3 rd quarter	-0.15*** (0.03)
4 th quarter	0.03 (0.03)
<hr/>	
Ref. point (RGA)	
Socialist People's Party	-0.30*** (0.04)
Social democrats	-0.12*** (0.04)
Social Liberals	-0.19*** (0.05)
Liberals	0.05 (0.04)
Conservatives	-0.21*** (0.04)
Danish People's Party	-0.16***

	(0.04)
<u>Ref. point (economy)</u>	
Civil rights	-0.57*** (0.07)
Health	-0.19*** (0.07)
Agriculture	-0.65*** (0.07)
Labour	-0.20*** (0.07)
Education	0.01 (0.07)
Environment	-0.24*** (0.07)
Energy	-0.82*** (0.08)
Immigration	-0.13* (0.07)
Transport	-0.34*** (0.07)
Crime	-0.11 (0.07)
Welfare	-0.07 (0.06)
Housing	-0.90*** (0.08)
Business	-0.48*** (0.07)
Defense	-0.57*** (0.07)
Technology	-0.72*** (0.08)
Trade	-1.87*** (0.11)
Foreign Affairs	-0.16** (0.07)
Gov. Operations	-0.21*** (0.07)
Public Land	-1.78*** (0.11)
Culture	-1.02*** (0.09)
EU	-0.51*** (0.08)
Constant	44.22*** (8.16)
<u>Observations</u>	<u>9394</u>

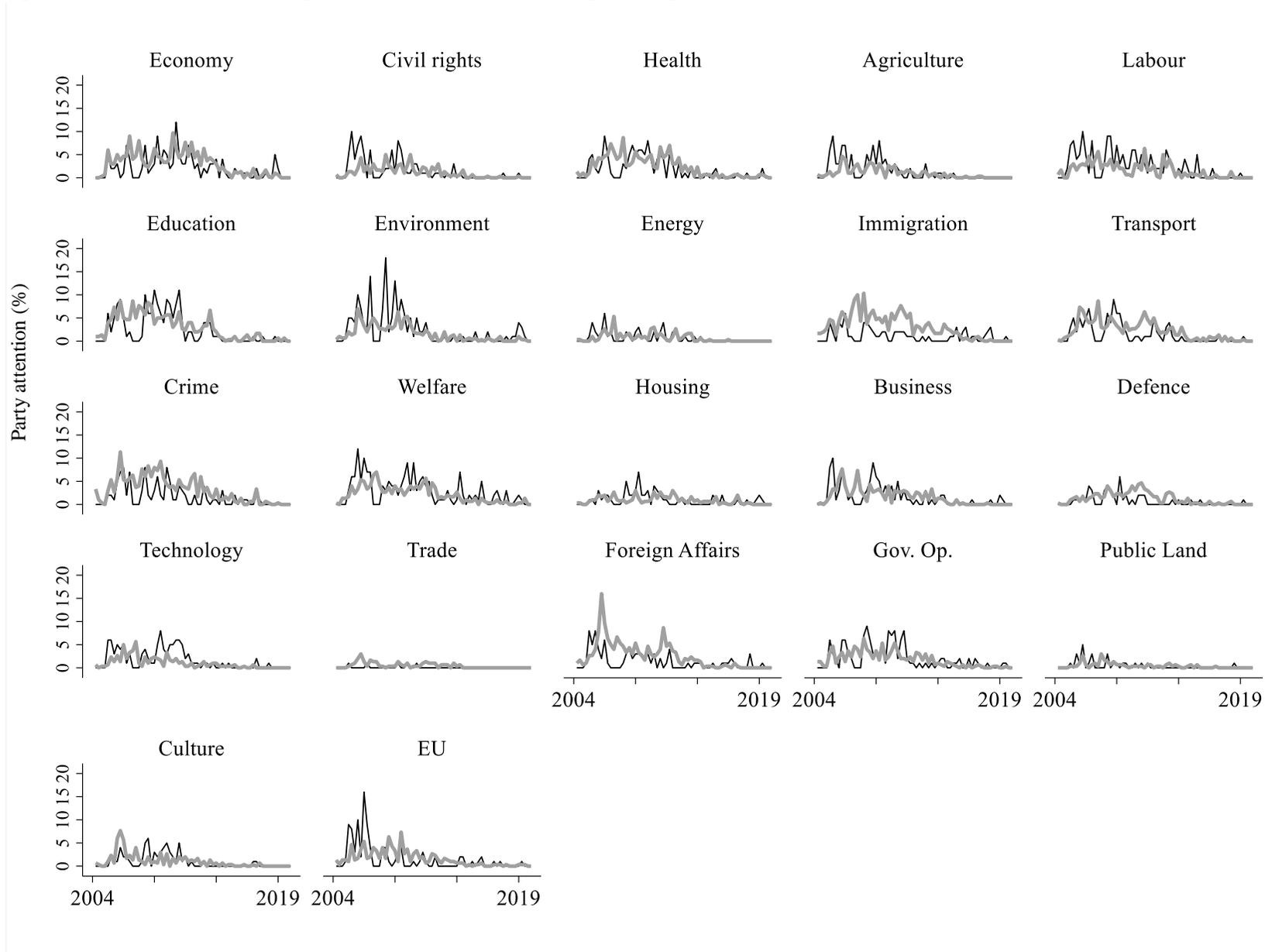
Note. Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure A3. Red–Green Alliance’s press releases and their rival parties’ press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.



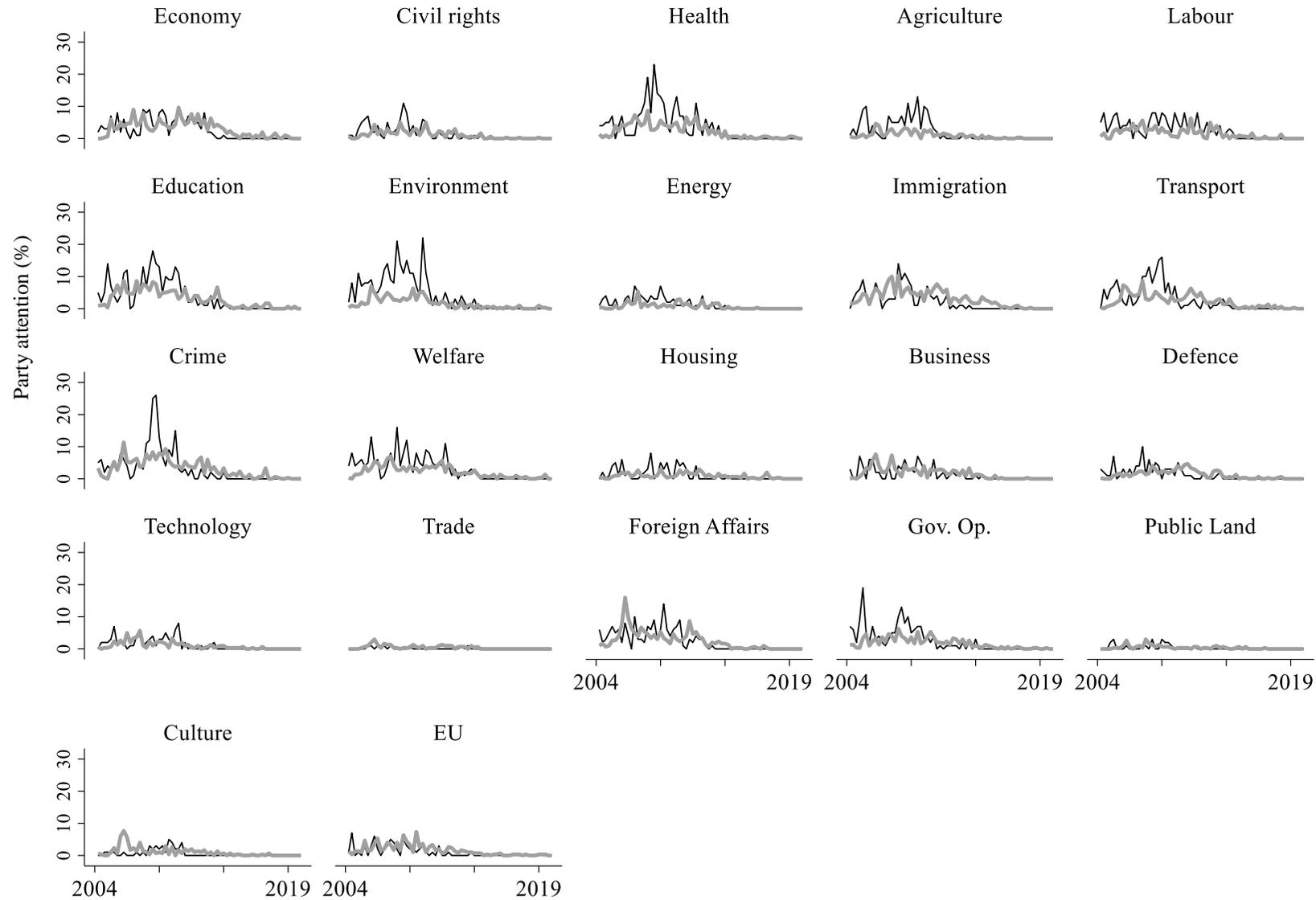
Note: Red–Green Alliance’s press releases (black line) and their rival’s press releases (grey line).

Figure A4. Social Democrats' press releases and their rival parties' press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.



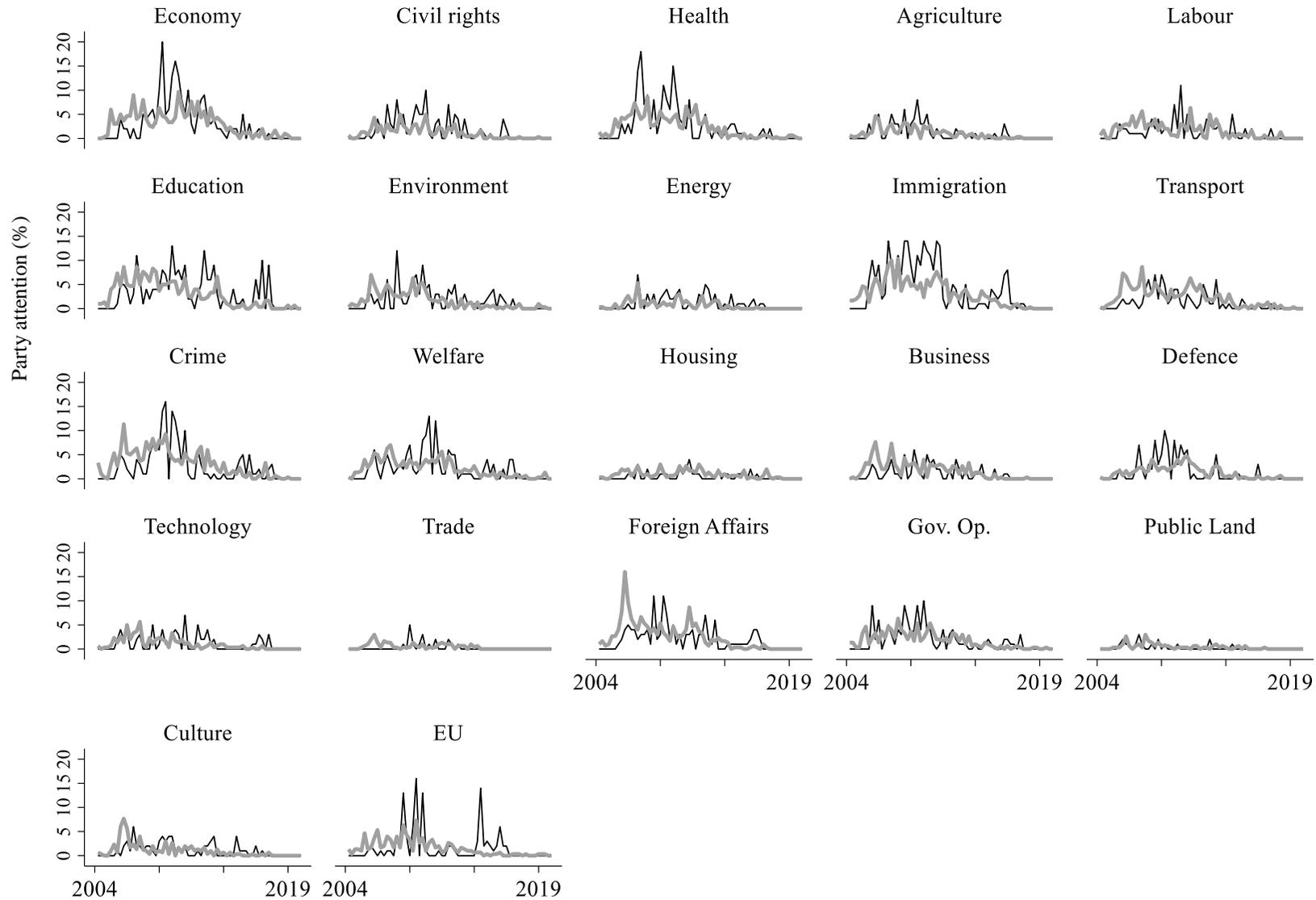
Note: Social Democrats' press releases (black line) and their rival's press releases (grey line).

Figure A5. Socialist Peoples Party's press releases and their rival parties' press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.



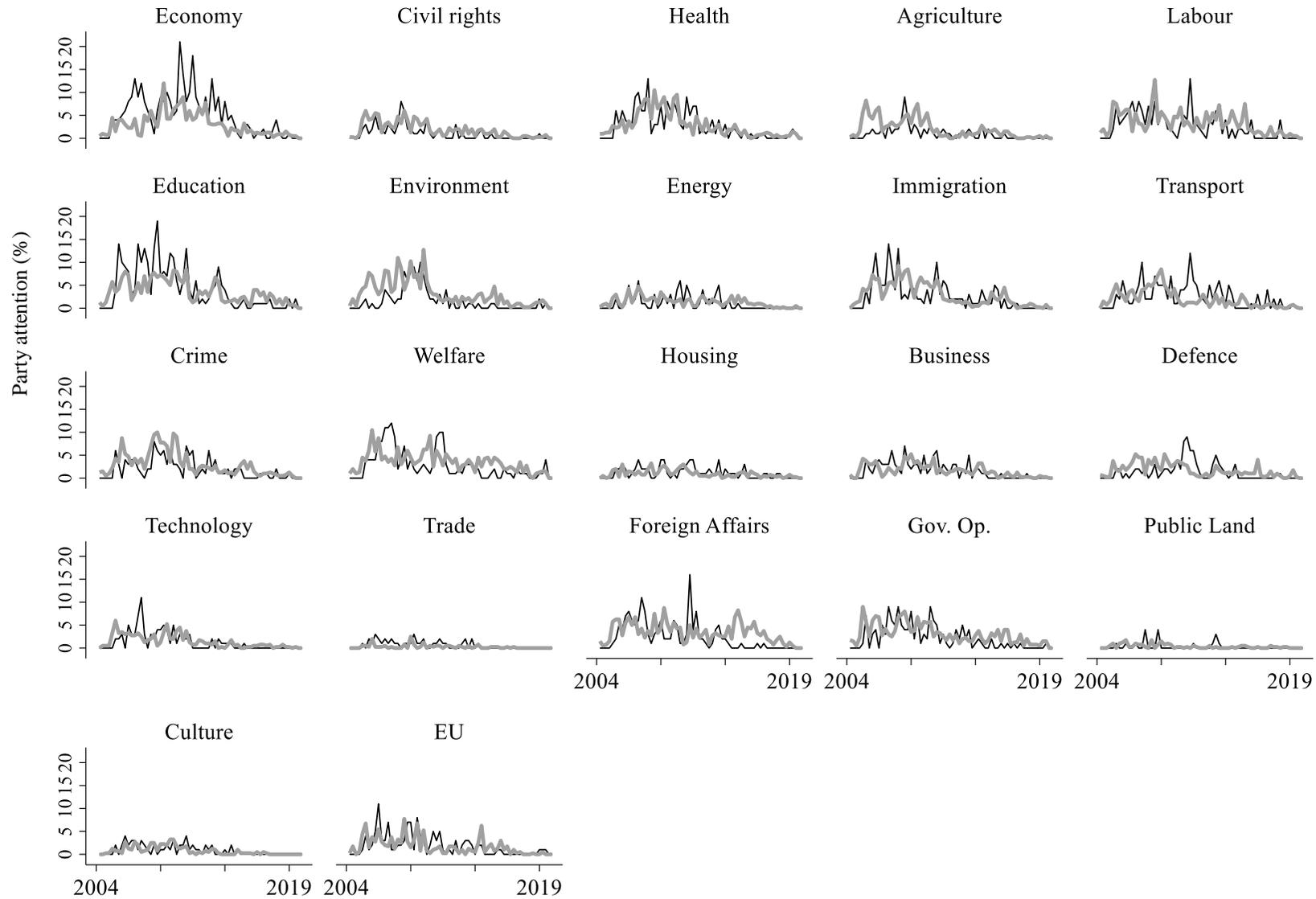
Note: Socialist Peoples Party's press releases (black line) and their rival's press releases (grey line).

Figure A6. Social Liberal's press releases and their rival parties' press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.



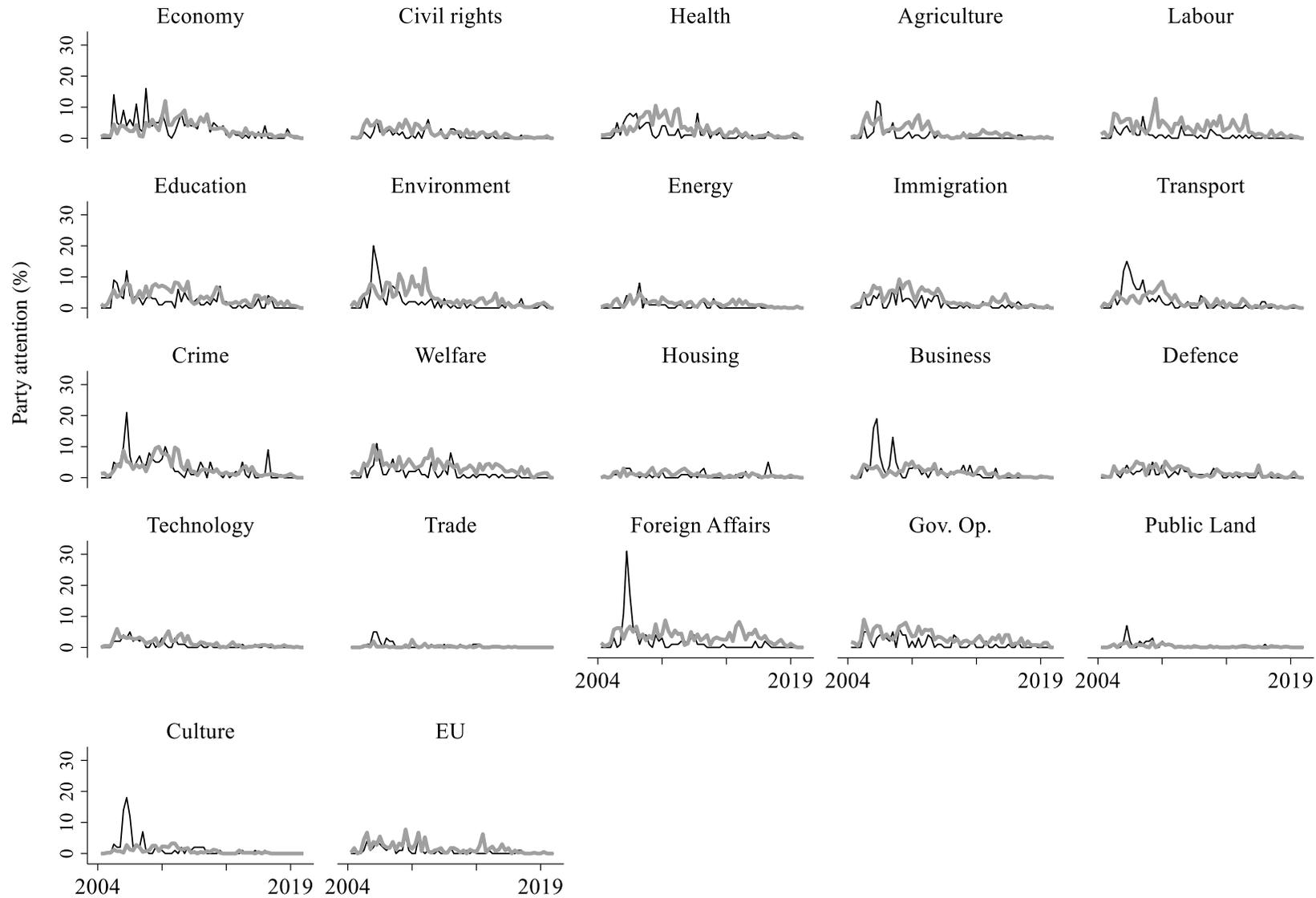
Note: Social Liberal's press releases (black line) and their rival's press releases (grey line).

Figure A7. Liberal's press releases and their rival parties' press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.



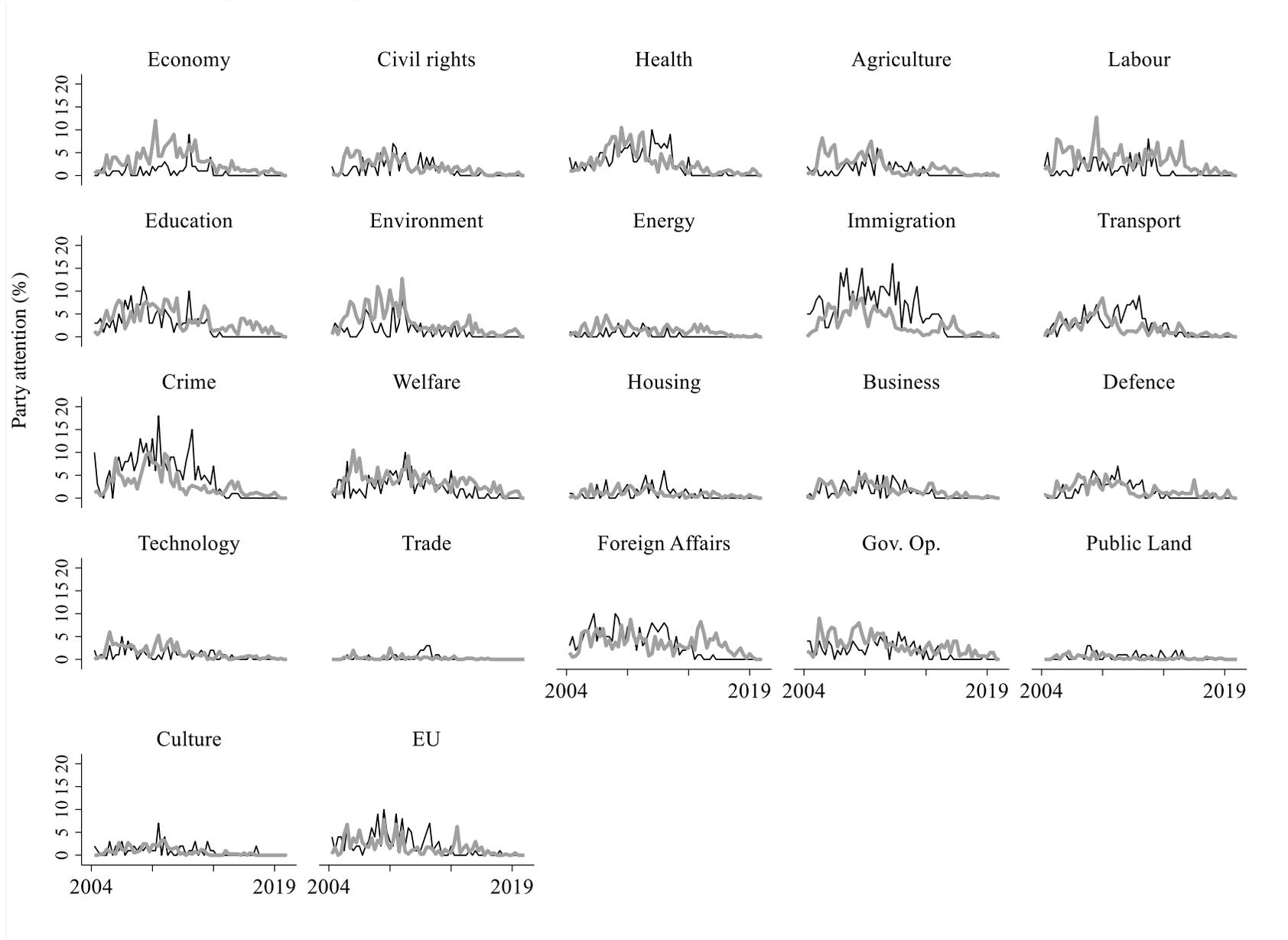
Note: Liberal's press releases (black line) and their rival's press releases (grey line).

Figure A8. Conservative's press releases and their rival parties' press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.



Note: Conservative's press releases (black line) and their rival's press releases (grey line).

Figure A9. Danish People’s Party’s press releases and their rival parties’ press releases in Denmark, 2004–2017, across 22 issue areas.

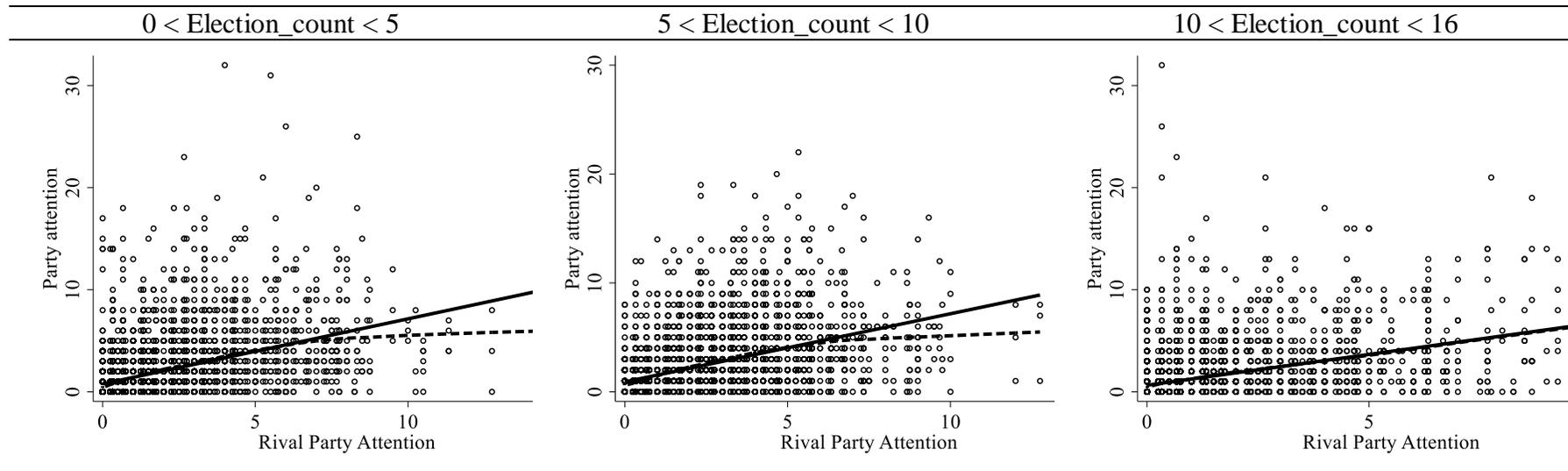


Note: Danish People’s Party’s press releases (black line) and their rival’s press releases (grey line).

Test of the linearity in the multiplicative interaction model

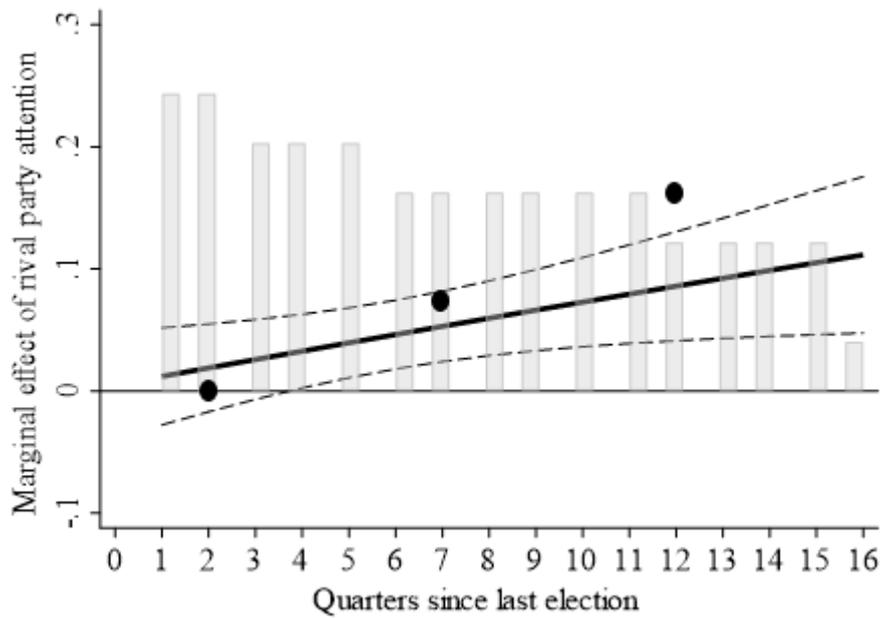
In the following, I use the recommendations of Hainmueller et al. (2019) to test the linearity assumption in the multiplicative interaction model reported in model 2 in Table 1 and in Figure 1 in the main manuscript. I report a linear interaction diagnostic plot (Hainmueller et al., 2019: 169) in Figure A10, and a plot of the conditional marginal effects from a binning estimator (Hainmueller et al., 2019: 173) in Figure A11. None of the plots indicate violations of the linearity assumption. Figure A10 reports three scatter plots of the relationship between the independent variable ('Rival party attention') and the dependent variable ('Party attention') in three similarly sized intervals ('terciles') of the conditional variable ('the election cycle'). As expected, there is a positive relationship in each of the three plots. Figure A11 reports the marginal effects of Rival party attention on a party's attention through the electoral cycle (the solid black line), which is also reported in Figure 1 in the main manuscript. This is based on the assumption that the effect of the rival party attention on a party's attention changes linearly through the electoral cycle. At the same time, Figure A11 plots the conditional marginal effects at the median of the terciles of the conditional variable, "quarters since last election", from a linear regression based on the data from each of these terciles (see Hainmueller et al. 2019, 170-173). The expectation is that the black dots indicate a linear relationship between the election cycle and the marginal effects of the rival party attention on a party's attention, and that these dots are close to the black line. This appears to be the case in Figure A11, and the dots may even indicate that I underestimate the true effect of the election cycle – this is also the message from the more flexible quadratic estimation in Figure 2 in the manuscript. In Figures A12-A13, I test the linearity assumption of the three way interaction hypothesized in H2 in the manuscript. Also here I do not see clear indications of violations of the linearity assumption. I draw scatter plots of the relationship between X (rival party attention) and Y (a party's number of press releases) in three intervals of the consistency variable (instead of the election cycle variable that is also a conditional variable in the interaction).

Figure A10. Linear interaction diagnostic plots. The relationship between rival party attention (X) and a party's number of press releases (Y) in three samples of the quarters since the last election (Z).



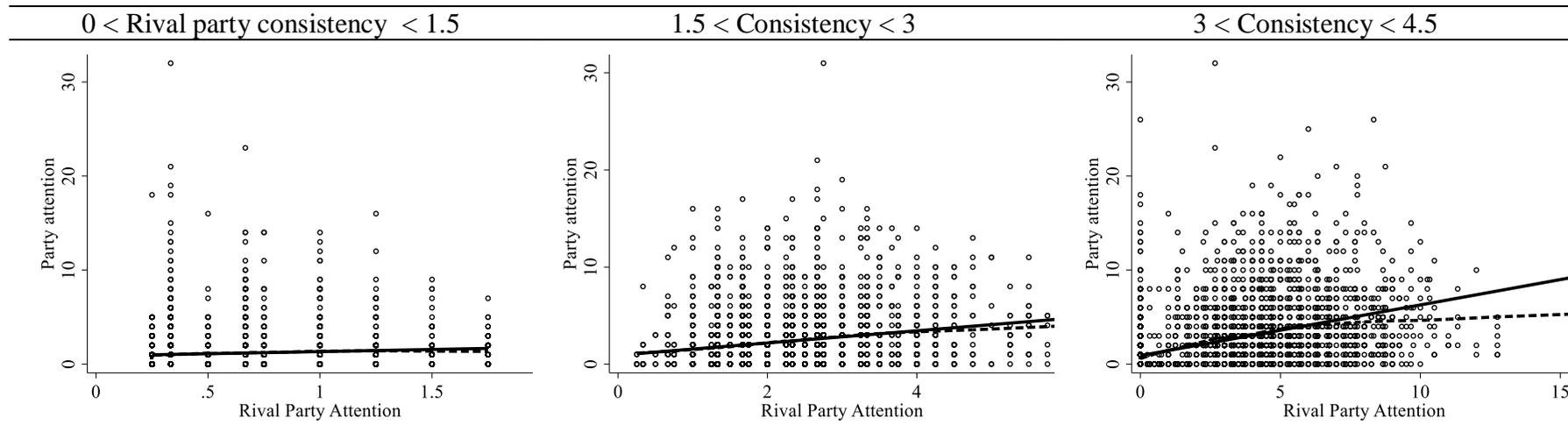
Note: The three scatter plots shows the relationship between the independent variable ('Rival party attention') and the dependent variable ('Party attention') in three similarly sized intervals ('terciles') of the conditional variable ('the election cycle') based on the recommendations of Hainmueller et al. (2019). The solid black line is a linear fit and the dotted black line is a lowess fit.

Figure A11. The marginal effect of rival party attention on a party’s number of press releases through the electoral cycle, and three conditional marginal effects at the median of the terciles of the election cycle.



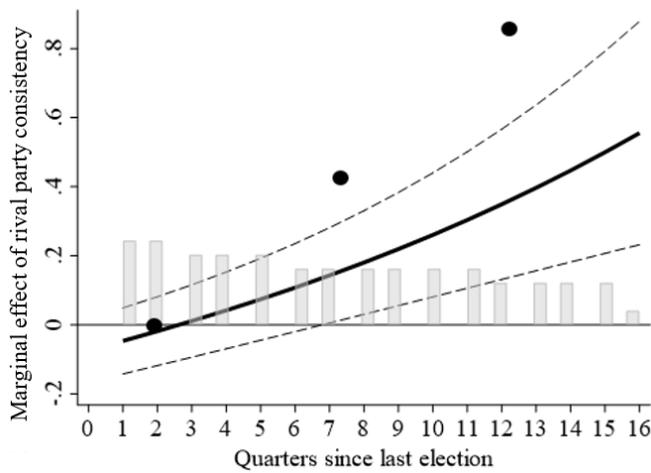
Note: The black, solid line (with 95% confidence intervals in the dashed lines) is the linear regression reported in Figure 1 in the main manuscript. The three black dots are the conditional marginal effects at the median of the terciles of the conditional variable, “quarters since last election”, from a linear regression based on the data from each of these terciles (see Hainmueller et al. 2019, 170-173). The graphs are based on model 2, Table 1.

Figure A12. Linear interaction diagnostic plots. The relationship between rival party attention (X) and a party's number of press releases (Y) in three samples of the rival party consistency (Z).



Note: The three scatter plots shows the relationship between the independent variable ('Rival party attention') and the dependent variable ('Party attention') in three similarly sized intervals ('terciles') of the conditional variable ('rival party consistency') based on the recommendations of Hainmueller et al. (2019). The solid black line is a linear fit and the dotted black line is a lowess fit.

Figure A13. The marginal effect of rival party consistency on a party’s number of press releases through the electoral cycle, and three conditional marginal effects at the median of the terciles of the election cycle.



Note: The black, solid line (with 95% confidence intervals in the dashed lines) is the linear regression reported in Figure 3 in the main manuscript. The three black dots are the conditional marginal effects at the median of the terciles of the conditional variable, “quarters since last election”, from a linear regression based on the data from each of these terciles (see Hainmueller et al. 2019, 170-173). The graphs are based on model 3, Table 1. As in Figure 3, rival party attention is at its mean minus one standard deviation.