**Avoidance and Engagement in the Electoral Cycle:**

**Selective Emphasis, then Issue Convergence between Political Parties**

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**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.

**Word** **count**: 9910.

*May 2020*

Political parties are the key actors in representative democracy. In elections, 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 entering a debate on salient issues. This has motivated a large and stimulating research agenda, which shows that parties do selectively emphasize certain issues (Dolezal et al. 2013; Green and Hobolt 2007; Greene 2016; van Heck 2018; Wagner and Meyer 2014), but that they also engage with issues that the rival party emphasizes (Banda 2015; Damore 2005; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006; Meyer and Wagner 2016; Sides 2006; 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. Yet they cannot do both at the same time, and this contradiction remains to be solved.

I address this contradiction and 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 increasingly engage with the issues to which the rival party attends. This election cycle effect on issue engagement intensifies as the pressure from the rival party increases.

This argument aligns with existing research in the sense that the vast majority of studies demonstrating issue engagement uses campaign statements (Banda 2015; Damore 2005; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006; Meyer and Wagner 2016; Sides 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004), whereas studies of selective emphasis typically examines manifestos, which parties use to set out their priorities for several years (Dolezal et al. 2013; Greene 2016; van Heck 2018; 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 is focused on the longer term. A simple review of the literature could therefore induce the argument that I make here. However, this study adds an important first direct analysis of shifting party issue attention across the electoral cycle.

Previous research has already searched for the factors that can explain how parties navigate the dilemma between issue avoidance and issue engagement. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2015), for example, argue that engagement is greatest among neighbour parties on the same side of the political spectrum in multiparty systems, and Wagner and Meyer (2014) show that ideological proximity, the level of activist intra-party influence, and party resources affect the level of issue engagement. Yet these accounts are static, and this study is therefore a novel first attempt at understanding the temporal dynamics of this dilemma.

At the same time, it is not a new invention to unwind the electoral cycle to understand party behaviour. Previous research shows that across the electoral cycle, parties change their economic responsiveness (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2019) and their roll call voting behaviour (Schröder and Stecker 2018), and that coalition partners weight the imperatives of staying united and presenting differentiated profiles to voters differently during the electoral cycle (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). This important work is not directly concerned with the contradiction between issue avoidance and engagement and therefore only serves to inspire the argument that I make.

As the selective use of either campaign data or manifesto data in previous research indicates, testing this argument is demanding in terms of data. The analysis requires detailed data across multiple issues and parties during the entire electoral cycle. Hence, data sources used in previous research, such as election manifestos or campaign statements, do not suffice (e.g., Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015). To test the argument, I have therefore collected and issue classified a novel and large dataset consisting of 19,350 press releases issued by the political parties in Denmark during multiple election cycles, 2004-2019. This allows a rigorous analytical strategy at a highly disaggregated level that uses quarters as the unit of analysis across multiple issues and multiple parties over an extended period.

The implications for representative democracy are important. According to the results, political parties manage to walk a thin line and voters get the best from two worlds. Through large parts of the election cycle, political parties represent the voters by selectively emphasizing the core concerns of their constituencies and avoiding their rivals’ issues. This ensures a broad array of issues at display in front of the voters to discuss and to use to assess the parties. Yet, political parties also provide voters with an important dialogue and debate on issues that are generally salient in the electorate when it is needed the most right before elections. Hence, political parties offer the voters profound opportunities to make informed decisions. This also means that most of the time political parties’ issue focus is not erratic, which would leave voters confused and not leave enough time to deal with each issue. Instead, political parties insist on what they believe are important issues and this provides a rather stable and predictable issue focus for most of the time, but also an agile focus when elections call for debates on topical issues. In that sense, representative democracy is in good shape.

**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 mechanism: (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 the risk of not 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 starts in a simple two-party parliamentarian system with a Party A and a Party B although the argument extends to multiparty systems as well (as discussed below). A starting point to discuss why the election cycle matters is to distinguish the logic of issue engagement clearly from the logic of issue avoidance (or selective emphasis). 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 B’s issue emphasis *does not* reflect Party A’s issue emphasis. In contrast, issue engagement takes place if rival Party B emphasizes an issue, which Party A already emphasizes.

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

These two opposing strategies – issue avoidance and engagement – present two alternative ways for parties to attract voters that tend to vote for the party that appears most concerned with tackling issues that the voters are worried about (van der Brug 2004; 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 theoretical prediction is that it will attract voters by influencing their *future* issue concerns. This makes them likely to vote for the party because it has issue ownership on the issue about which they are concerned (Belanger and Meguid 2008, Budge and Farlie 1983, Petrocik 1996). This is why social democratic parties are often vocal on social policy and unemployment (Wright 2012).

In contrast, when Party A focuses on its rival Party B’s issue, A expects to gain votes by showing concern for issues that appear to be salient *right now* because B is emphasizing the issue (Ansolabhere and Iyengar 1994; Sigelman and Buell 2004). A recent example is the issue of immigration, which social democratic parties increasingly have had to address amidst loud rightwing politicization (Bale et al. 2010). Hence, A will have to accept that it helps B in promoting B’s preferred issues to the agenda instead of elevating its own issues. Yet, A does not want to look unresponsive or non-attentive to an issue before the electorate. The rival Party B probably tries to build such pressure because A quickly looks non-attentive to an issue before the electorate if it ignores or neglects an issue to which the rival attends. Even if voters will probably be able to tell on their own, B will most likely not hesitate to let them know of A’s lack of issue attention (Sulkin 2005). Moreover, if B is very vocal on an issue, it probably reflects that voters are concerned with the issue or will be due to B’s attention (Ansolabhere and Iyengar 1994; Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016). A therefore needs to match B’s attention to not look unresponsive (Meyer and Wagner 2016, 556). To take an example from the 2019 British election, Labour did not hesitate to raise the issue of crumbling NHS performance since the end of the Blair era in the hope of pushing this on the agenda. Eventually, the Conservatives responded and made this a key campaign battleground alongside the Brexit debacle, which paved the way for its electoral win (Guardian 2019).

Hence, issue engagement is an attractive strategy, but this does not mean that it is the 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 in its selective emphasis, it automatically remains in touch with the voters’ issue concerns in the future (which the party has shaped), and therefore forces rival parties to also engage with its issues. This way, it does not have to engage its rival’s issues at all.

Both issue avoidance and issue engagement are therefore attractive strategies to a party. Yet, for a party, the important distinction between the strategies is that the former implies a future yield whereas the latter generates an immediate yield (and perhaps a longer-term cost). This makes the electoral cycle important. Under normal circumstances, the cycle is sufficiently long to separate an initial period that is at considerable distance from the next election from a later period closer to the election. Thus, a party can afford to be more concerned with the longer term in the initial period than in the later period where it will be mostly concerned with the short term because there is no tomorrow. Adding it all up, a key prediction from this argument is that issue avoidance and selective emphasis will be used more at the beginning of the cycle, and issue engagement will be used 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, i.e. the political parties’ main issue focus, while at the same time having to respond to what is on the political agenda right now. This is a well-established starting point for studying party competition from a political agenda perspective (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). Hence, parties are agenda-takers as much as they are agenda-makers (Baumgartner and Mahoney 2008). Yet, right before an election, any attempt to change the political agenda only materializes after the election and the political parties therefore become agenda-takers much more than agenda-makers. They have strived to decide the content of the agenda and now they just have to make the best of it. In contrast, early in the cycle, the political parties will fight to decide 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 happen in a vacuum. The world is constantly evolving during the cycle, and the issues that the parties focus on therefore also shift frequently and sometimes abruptly (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). In this process, some of the issues that pop up on the agenda aligns nicely with a party’s issue preferences and some runs painfully against them. For example, a sudden act of terror brings security to the political agenda, which is a top priority of right-wing parties. Through a more slow-moving process, inequality may reach a point of urgency and therefor reach the agenda due to gradual changes to the housing market or labor market, and this speaks to left-wing parties (Petrocik 1996).

Importantly for the election cycle argument, if the next election is far away, a party can count on the unpredictable, yet pleasant arrivals of a government scandal or a new societal event to push unwanted issues off the political agenda such as inequality for right-wing parties. Hence, the right-wing parties can ignore this unwanted issue and try to replace it with its own issues based on the expectation that voters are mostly concerned with the issues that are on the agenda when they enter the ballot box. Yet, as the election moves closer, the window of new issue arrivals on the agenda that crowd out other issues 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 not say anything at all (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Jerit 2008). Again, this is to avoid being left behind when the rival party addresses salient issues. Hence, the dynamics of the political agenda only underline the key prediction of this study: namely, that a party’s issue emphasis can be expected to reflect a rival party’s issue emphasis more (less) as the election moves closer (is further away).

*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 votes beyond their core constituency (Adams 2012; Strom 1990). Research emphasizes that parties are ideological creatures (Budge 1994), and party supporters, party members, and party representatives expect the party in parliament to pursue their core issues (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996). Hence, parties are inclined to avoid an unfriendly agenda by default and focus instead on issue on which they have issue ownership. These are the issues that the party cares about at all levels and the issues on which the party was build. Hence, although parties can anticipate an immediate pay-off from engaging rival party issues that already are salient or easily could become salient, they will put their own issue preferences first and continue this focus until they feel forced to focus on the issues to which the rival party attends. To the extent that parties are risk averse and want to avoid blame for being out of touch with public concerns, elections exert such force on the parties.

In election campaigns, media coverage of politics intensifies and voters are more attentive to political issues (Gelman and King 1993). At least we can expect that the parties believe so (Popkin 1991, Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2019, 443). When voter attention is particularly focused on the parties, this makes the parties even more attuned to not giving rival parties any electoral advantage (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 of looking unresponsive to voters by ignoring an issue that is important to the rival party and therefore being blamed by the voters also increases. To the extent that ‘losses loom larger than gains’ (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 279) and parties are risk averse and want to avoid blame (Marsh and Tilley 2009; Vis and van Kersbergen 2007; Weaver 1986), the expectation is therefore that closer to the election, parties put the risk of loss above the possible gains and become more attuned 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 expectation builds on the assumption that Party A potentially has a lot to gain from its selective emphasis and therefore will only eventually engage with rival Party B’s issue if B is vocal on the issue as a sign that this seem to resonate with the concerns of voters. Otherwise, there is not sufficient pressure on A to match B, and A will fall back on its default of selectively emphasizing its preferred issues. Moreover, the pattern in the extent to which A’s issue emphasis reflects B’s emphasis may be more non-linear than linear. Hence, Party A will not respond proportionally to the distance to the next election but will, due to its desire to determine the agenda and pursue its core issues, wait until the last minute to accept that it cannot invest in tomorrow’s agenda but instead has to reflect its rival’s attention. Hence, the election cycle effect will be flat and limited until late, when it will grow quickly.

**Consistency in rival party pressure in addition to the size of pressure**

The election cycle argument has additional implications. First, for a party to engage its rival’s issue, it needs to believe that it will otherwise be exposed to the voters as the only party left behind with deaf ears and closed eyes. Hence, rival party pressure is not only about the amount of attention but also about consistency in the attention. If all members of Party B repeatedly talk about the issue, 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 about equally much about the issue. A recent example is the June 2019 Danish election in which the immigrant-hostile Danish People’s Party ignored the issue of climate change and endured a terrible election. During the spring, the activist movement led by Greta Thünberg received a lot of media coverage, and climate change for the first time hit voters’ top three concerns. The political parties’ focus on climate change became not only very loud but also very consistent. In addition to the always very environment-friendly left parties, even the highly market-oriented liberal rightwing parties enthusiastically took up the issue. The Liberals, for instance, changed the colour of their logo from blue to green and the Liberal Alliance called for industry-solutions to climate change and technological innovation. The election campaign became a competition to be the most climate-ambitious party. Meanwhile, the Danish People’s Party shied away from the debate and referred to it as hysteria promoted by extremists. After a dramatic electoral defeat, senior members of the party were quick to point to their party’s deaf ears on climate as a main contributing factor (Altinget, 2019). Hence, this example provides an exception that proves the rule:

(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’s issue emphasis is.

**Small and large parties shift unequally across the electoral cycle**

A final observable implication of the election cycle argument is that during the electoral cycle, small parties will switch strategy more than large, mainstream parties will. This argument applies particularly to multiparty systems because they typically harbor parties of unequal sizes as opposed to two-party systems dominated by two relatively similarly sized parties. The argument extends on a large literature on the differences between small and large parties. The main distinction is that large parties typically are more catchall parties that alternate in office and therefore want – and are expected by voters – to have an opinion on all kinds of issues (Adams et al. 2006; Meyer and Wagner 2013; Wagner 2012). Hence, large parties generally are more concerned with the issues that rival parties emphasize and the electoral cycle therefore matters less. Another argument for this observation is that larger parties generally have more manpower and a more professional organization to enact parliamentary activities and make public statements. Hence, they enjoy better chances of influencing the political agenda in the ‘agenda-making phase’ and therefore needs to switch strategy less towards the end of the electoral cycle and respond to rival parties in the final ‘agenda-taking phase’. In contrast, small parties rarely hold office and typically focus on a small number of core issues, such as green parties on the environment and far-right parties on immigration. Moreover, smaller parties lack the agenda-making advantages of larger parties and therefore need to catch up with the issues that they neglected until the election. Hence, small parties will enact particularly large strategy switches during the electoral cycle. This argument probably also applies dynamically in the sense that if a party experiences a decline in the polls, it will narrow its emphasize to its core issues in order to mobilize its voter base – and in this way act like a small party although it may still have the seats to behave like a large party.

(H3) The increase during the electoral cycle in a party’s engagement with a rival party’s issue is greater for small parties than large parties.

For the electoral cycle argument, a key implication of this hypothesis is that political parties do not jump chaotically and erratically from one issue to another all of the time. Small parties will stubbornly hold on to their core issues as long into the cycle as possible. Meanwhile, mainstream parties may be more concerned with rival parties’ issues than smaller parties are but will also more often than smaller parties be able to elevate their issues to the political agenda and in this way be able to maintain their issue focus throughout the electoral cycle.

**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. I use Denmark for several reasons, including the availability of this large body of press releases. 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. Yet, the multiparty system in Denmark qualifies as a case of analysis because its rival parties are clearly delineable overall. The Danish political system operates through a very stable separation of parties into a left bloc and a right bloc from which the parties rarely defect (Christiansen and Damgaard 2008; Green-Pedersen and Thomsen 2005). This structures the governing coalition and the group of opposition parties (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). Hence, in the Danish case, a party may be annoyed by losing votes to a neighbor party in the bloc, but ultimately the votes stay inside 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. Whereas this relative importance of parties close by and far away in the party system may differ across countries, the setup in Denmark makes it resemble a two-party system where the enemy of a left-wing party is all the right-wing parties and vice versa (Green‐Pedersen and Mortensen 2015). At the same time, each bloc is a group of several parties that allows testing H2 on the consistency in rival party issue emphasis. Often, the bloc speaks in concert but this is far from always the case.

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 selectively emphasize particular issues. This makes it harder to see issue engagement. At the same time, previous studies have revealed considerable issue overlap in Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015), which probably reflects some coordination in the bloc and the centripetal forces of the two blocs 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, 2015-2019 (until the June 2019 election). The Danish parliament harbours classic mainstream parties such as a large social democratic party and an equally large centre-right liberal party, along with the more recent emergence of an immigration-hostile radical right party, the Danish People’s Party (founded in 1995), and a far-left socialist-environmental party, the Red-Green Alliance (founded in 1990). In terms of the issue diversity of the political agenda, the Danish political agenda has since the early 1990s increased its scope and capacity to include an increasing number of issues, which means that party competition is not centered just on the economy for instance (Green-Pedersen 2007).

**Data**

For the test of the hypotheses, existing data sources on party attention are ill-suited to reveal how parties attend to fluctuations in indicators because they are either annual, such as the government’s executive speeches (Mortensen et al. 2011); published only at elections, such as party manifestos (Volkens et al. 2018; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015); or highly institutionalized, such as questions to the minister, which are predominantly used by opposition parties (Vliegenthart, Walgrave, and Meppelink 2011). To overcome this problem, one option is to access and code mass media news articles (Kriesi et al. 2008), 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; Hänggli and Kriesi 2010). The main advantage is that it allows for analyses at short time intervals and therefore offers a way to get close to frequently changing party attention than the usual unit of observation of one year or one election term. I use quarters as the unit of analysis (like other research on political behaviour; Bevan, Jennings, and Pickup 2018; Seeberg 2018) to arrive at an estimation with short time intervals but without introducing too many empty cells in the data at daily, weekly or monthly levels.

Studies of party communication across channels suggest that parties have comparatively larger degrees of freedom in writing their press releases, e.g., according to their issue ownerships, than in news articles or in parliamentary activities (Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 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 year.

The 2004-2019 interval is the period in which a digital archive is available. The press releases were accessed through the Wayback Machine (web.archive.org) by entering the online newsroom of each party as it appeared back in time. Every news item was archived and issue coded, although it is unknown whether each item was for example sent to Reuters as a press release. Some of the items are probably more like a news item, but they work the same way as a press release, namely to draw attention to a particular topic. To verify this characterization of press releases, I interviewed press officers from the Social Democrats and the Danish People’s Party in the Danish Parliament (telephone interviews on June 26, 2019). According to these officers, the news content is written by the party press office in collaboration with party professionals as well as local and national politicians and intends to communicate initiatives from the party. The aim of the newsroom is to provide a go-to-place for journalists and citizens if they want more information about, e.g., a new policy proposal or to read a party leader’s speech.

The content of each press release is categorized based on a human-supervised machine algorithm – an automated, naïve bayesian text classifier – which has previously proven useful for other measures of party attention (Loftis and Mortensen 2020). Like previous coding of political documents and news articles (Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman 2019), the coding uses only the title, which is typically a short, full sentence summarizing the key message of the text. Essentially, each press release is coded to show whether it is about fisheries, psychiatry, domestic violence, etc., based on the 220 sub-topics in the Comparative Agendas Project codebook (CAP; Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman 2019). Such detailed coding into a large number of subcategories is highly demanding. I follow what has become a standard coding procedure (Loftis and Mortensen 2020) and train an algorithm based on coded parliamentary data on political communication similar to the content of press releases from 2005-2015 from the Danish CAP project (Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman 2019). The trained machine algorithm then makes a first categorization of the press releases and trained student coders then verify a random sample of about 25% of this machine-coded data. This verified data is used to improve the algorithm that is then used to code the remaining non-coded data again. A new sample is then verified and added to the coded and verified training data and the loop continues until all press releases are coded. Taking the large number of issue categories into account, the test of the reliability of the content coding was at a very high Krippendorff’s Alpha of 0.79 when comparing a random sample of the coding by the student coders in collaboration with the machine and my manual 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 etc. are compiled into the overall issue of health. The 22 issues are the economy, civil rights, health, agriculture, labour, education, environment, energy, immigration, transport, crime, welfare, housing, business, defence, technology, trade, foreign affairs, government operations, public land, culture, and the EU. This gives 9856 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 the average issue attention by the parties from the opposing bloc (again following Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015). In the analysis, I control for the average issue attention by the other parties from the same bloc. Moreover, I control for the total number of press releases in order to have a measure of party strategy that includes an attention limitation 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 presumption, the analysis only needs a direct indicator of either issue avoidance or issue engagement. The analysis focuses on the influence of the rival’s issue emphasis instead of a party’s selective emphasis of issues on which it has issue ownership. The reason is that the latter would rely on a crude time-invariant dummy variable that would not do justice to the more diverse concept of issue ownership, which applies better to some issues than others and do not always apply very well over time (Seeberg 2017).

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 since the last election (like Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016, 394; Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2019, 450; Schröder and Stecker 2018, 712). This variable ranges from 1 to 16 because the Danish parliament do not have fixed election periods – the Prime Minister has to call an election no later than four years after the previous election. This happened after almost four years in 2005, 2011, 2015, and 2019 and after almost three years in 2007. To test H2 on consistency, I multiply the election cycle variable by the rival party attention variable and a variable for consistency in this rival party attention. I measure consistency in the rival party’s attention as the standard deviation around the mean of the issue attention by each of the parties from the rival bloc. If the standard deviation is low, then the rival parties are more consistent and the risk is greater that the party in the analysis is left behind. To test H3 on small and large parties, I used the quarterly average of monthly polls of vote intention for each party (Risbjerg 2019). Hence, the analysis not only shows the difference between small parties and large parties, but also how a party’s issue emphasis changes if the party’s approval changes. I use polls instead of the much more stable vote share in line with the theoretical argument that parties adjust their issue strategy to its projected size.

The cross-section, cross-time estimation uses fixed effects estimation with panels for each party on each issue. Due to 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).[[1]](#footnote-1) This statistical approach is commonly used in similar settings (Seeberg 2013; Vliegenthart, Walgrave, and Meppelink 2011). Diagnostic tests indicate this model before an OLS regression, a regression model based on the Poisson distribution or a zero-inflated Poisson regression (results replicate in these versions, though see Table A2 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; Banda 2015). Based on my interviews with the party officers, I take it that press releases are rather quick and easy to publish and will be some of the first signs that a party is concerned with rival party attention. Hence, the parties are expected to respond rather quickly to rival party attention, and the rival party attention variable therefore only enters the model with a lag of one quarter.

The fixed effects estimation counters concerns regarding the influence of stable characteristics, such as differences between niche and mainstream parties, party size, differences between government and opposition party, and differences across issues. Hence, the controls that are added to the model include in addition to the indicator of within-bloc party attention, the total number of press releases. To counter autocorrelation in the model, a lagged dependent variable and a year counter are included (Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016; like Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2019). The estimation also includes a dummy for each quarter to take seasonal effects into account.

**Analysis**

To get a first-hand impression of the data for analysis, Figure 1 reports the average number of press releases for the left-wing and right-wing parties across issues. The striking pattern is that right-wing parties rather consistently put more priority on the issues on which they have issue ownership than do left-wing parties and vice versa. Right-wing parties have issue ownership on crime, immigration and the economy (Seeberg 2017) and these feature as second, third and fourth on the right-wing party list but seventh, eighth, and ninth on the left-wing party list. Business is tenth for the right-wing parties and only fifteenth for the left-wing parties. Likewise, the left-wing parties rank education, welfare, labour, and the environment, which they own (Seeberg 2017), second, third, fourth and fifth, and the right-wing parties rank these issues fifth, eighth, eleventh and twelfth. Hence, overall, left and right prioritize different issues. This is a prerequisite for studying issue avoidance vs. issue engagement.

Based on these differences, Table 1 tests the hypotheses, and the relationships are visualized in Figures 2-5. Before discussing 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 equally strong effect of coalition party attention (see Table A1 in the appendix). This is in line with previous research (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015).

[Table 1, Figures 2-5]

The results in Table 1 indicate that unfolding the electoral cycle can 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 (‘R x E’ 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 2, which shows the pressure from loud issue emphasis by rival Party B (µ+2σ) on A’s issue emphasis in the right graph and an a more modest issue emphasis by B (µ) to the left. Looking across the two graphs at increasing distance from the last election, it is worth underlining that the line is only upward sloping at rather high levels of rival party attention. It has to pass one standard deviation above its mean (µ 1.96, σ 3.00) for the slope to incline and it has to reach almost two standard deviations above its mean for the effect to be substantial. This reaffirms the discussion above that some pressure from rival Party B is needed to force Party A away from its preferred selective emphasis strategy. With only limited issue emphasis by B, A is not concerned about B’s attention and will be looking more and more for the yield of selective emphasis as the next election comes closer. Yet if pressure from B is high as in the right graph, A responds to the rival even when the stakes are low. To the left in the graph at a long distance from the next election, the predicted number of press releases surpasses the number of press releases at any time in the left graph at moderate rival party issue attention. This also underlines that a party does not completely avoid engaging the rival’s issue at distance – the level of engagement is just much lower.

The inclining graph to the right indicates the expected increasing influence of rival party attention across the electoral cycle. Although the party does not move from complete issue emphasis to full issue engagement, the effect is still very evident. In close proximity to the next election (the right side of the graph), A is expected to issue 2.55 press releases, in contrast to only 2.36 at a great distance (to the left). Although this does not imply a full scale switch to zero selective emphasis and complete issue engagement, it is a tangible increase of 6.7% of a standard deviation in the number of press releases (µ 1.96, σ 3.00). This election cycle effect applies broadly across parties and issues since the effect does not change when excluding one issue or one party at a time (Tables A3-A4 in the appendix). As further evidence of the robustness of the results, they do not depend on the choice of the negative binomial zero inflated estimation (Table A2 in the appendix).

Figure 3 adds more detail to the linear approximation. In line with the theoretical discussion, it plots the curvilinear effect of the electoral cycle on the impact of rival issue emphasis on a party’s issue emphasis. 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 A5 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 steeply towards the end of the cycle. Hence, we see a delayed or hesitant linear function that only rises more than halfway through the cycle. As anticipated in the discussion of H1, this reveals 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 will it switch to the issue engagement strategy. With this perhaps more precise estimate, the suggested difference (at rival party attention two standard deviations above its mean) for a party between being far from the election and close to the election is 2.33 press releases vs. 3.03 press releases. This is a substantial increase of 23.3% of a standard deviation in the number of press releases. While still acknowledging these important nuances, the 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 2, but also about consistency in the issue attention. This is evident from the positive, statistically significant coefficient in the third column of Table 1, which includes the interaction ‘rival party attention x election cycle x rival party issue attention consistency’. The importance of consistency is highlighted in Figure 4, which shows the predicted number of press releases across the electoral cycle at an average level of rival party attention but with high consistency to the right (rival party attention standard deviation at µ-σ) and low consistency to the left (µ+σ). As the lines with opposite slopes reveal, the contrast between high and low consistency is stark. When rival parties uniformly attend to an issue, the party’s risk of being left behind is much greater and it therefore responds as the election moves closer (independent of the amount of issue attention). With low consistency, in contrast, the pressure from rival party attention on the party is weaker and the party therefore increasingly ignores the rival as the election moves closer. Hence, size and consistency operate in the same way as an expression of the pressure of rival party issue attention. The cocktail effects of size and consistency are considerable. Close to the election, a party issues 2.86 press releases if size and consistency are high (µ+σ and µ-σ, respectively) vs. 1.61 press releases at a low level (µ and µ+σ, respectively). This amounts to a whopping increase of 41.7% of a standard deviation in the number of press releases.

Finally, the negative and statistically significant coefficient for the triple interaction ‘rival party attention x election cycle x party support’ in Model 4, Table 1 indicates, in support of H3 that small parties’ engagement increases more during the election cycle than does large parties’ engagement. This is visualized in Figure 5, which shows small parties’ engagement to the left (µ-σ on the continuous party support variable) and large parties’ engagement to the right (µ+σ). The contrast is hard to miss. The engagement of large, mainstream parties is consistently higher than small parties’ engagement at any time during the electoral cycle but the line is almost flat and their engagement therefore hardly changes. For small parties, the line is much steeper than the average effect for all parties in Figure 2 and suggests that their engagement increases a noticeable 20% of a standard deviation during the electoral cycle.

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 more vocal and the 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. This change in the engagement intensifies the smaller the party.

**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 issues that rivals emphasize and engage issues that rivals emphasize. The key to unlocking this conundrum is to unwind the electoral cycle. Political parties do both talk past each other and talk about the same issues – but at different points in time during the electoral cycle. Parties do selectively emphasize issues on which they have ownership – 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 selective emphasis is the default option for a party and it takes considerable pressure, through loud and consistent attention from all rival parties and the shadow of an approaching election, for a party to abandon this strategy. Once it does, even though the party has drafted a manifesto on its key priorities in running for office, it ranks engagement with the rival party’s issues above its basic interest in selective emphasis when it really matters. This switch during the electoral cycle is more pronounced the smaller the party.

This is the first study of the temporal dynamics and timing of issue avoidance and engagement, and therefore an important addition to existing research on issue competition among political parties. The study does not suggest that one strategy is more prevalent or important than the other. Instead, it underlines that selective emphasis as well as issue engagement remain important strategies in the arsenal of political parties. This also means that issue engagement is present at the start of the electoral cycle and that political parties do not entirely abandon selective emphasis at the end of the cycle, although the weighting surely changes.

This is comforting news for representative democracy in the sense that during the electoral cycle, parties present voters with different types of important information that allow voters to distinguish the parties in terms of their unequal issue priorities early in the cycle as well as through their disagreements on shared issues later in the cycle. Moreover, the results suggest more optimistic conclusions about representative democracy than recent research on Austrian data that finds an absence of issue engagement between positionally distant parties right before elections, just when it is needed most (Meyer and Wagner 2016, 556). I find, in contrast, that political parties in the Danish multiparty system do engage with the issue focus of rival parties at the other end of the political spectrum and that this engagement actually increases near elections.

Since the multiparty system in Denmark represents a rather typical case for many Western parliamentarian, multi-party systems, there is potential to generalize the findings beyond Denmark. Yet studies of other countries will bring more variation not only on institutions but also on the length of the election cycle, the number of parties and the diversity in issue emphasis, and therefore probably also more evidence to advance the dynamic understanding of the important contradiction between issue avoidance and engagement.

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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) | (4) |
|  | (R) Rival party attentiont-1 | 0.02\*\*\* (0.01) | 0.00 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.02) | -0.04\*\* (0.02) |
|  | (E) Quarters since last election | -0.01\*\* (0.00) | -0.01\*\*\* (0.00) | 0.04\*\*\* (0.01) | -0.03\*\*\* (0.01) |
| H1 | R x E |  | 0.001\*\*\* (0.00) | -0.00 (0.00) | 0.01\*\*\* (0.00) |
|  | (C) Rival party consistencyt-1 |  |  | 0.08\* (0.05) |  |
|  | R x C |  |  | -0.00 (0.01) |  |
|  | E x C |  |  | -0.02\*\*\* (0.00) |  |
| H2 | R x E x C |  |  | 0.001\* (0.00) |  |
|  | (S) Party support |  |  |  | 0.01\*\*\* (0.00) |
|  | R x S |  |  |  | 0.001\*\*\* (0.00) |
|  | E x S |  |  |  | 0.001\*\* (0.00) |
| H3 | R x E x S |  |  |  | -0.001\*\*\* (0.00) |
|  | Constant |  |  |  | 50.97\*\*\* (8.17) |
|  | Observations |  |  |  | 9394 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The model includes control for coalition party attention, incumbency, total press releases, time (year-counter), season (quarter-dummies), and a lagged DV. Fixed effects zero-inflated binomial regression (see full table in Table A1 in the appendix).

Figure 1. Average attention to issues in press releases from left and right parties in Denmark, 2004-2019.



Note: The figure displays the average number of press releases across parties on the right and the left, respectively, and across time.

Figure 2. Predicted number of press releases at two levels of rival party attention through the electoral cycle.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| Rival party attention (µ) | Rival party attention (µ+2σ) |

Note: The dashed lines mark the 95% confidence interval. The graphs are based on model 2 in Table 1.

Figure 3. Predicted number of press releases at high rival party attention through the electoral cycle. The curvilinear effect of election cycle.



Note: The graph is based on Table A5 in the appendix. Rival party attention is at six press releases (µ+2σ).

Figure 4. Predicted number of press releases at an average level of rival party attention and two levels of rival party consistency through the electoral cycle.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| Low consistency: rival party attention standard deviation at µ+σ | High consistency: rival party attention standard deviation at µ-σ |

Note: The dashed lines mark the 95% confidence interval. The graphs are based on model 3 in Table 1. Rival party attention is at its mean (µ 1.93).

Figure 5. Predicted number of press releases through the electoral cycle at the same level of rival party attention for small and large parties.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| Small party (µ-σ) | Large party (µ+σ) |

Note: The dashed lines mark the 95% confidence interval. The graphs are based on model 4 in Table 1. Rival party attention is at six press releases (µ+2σ).

**Appendix**

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

Table A1. The effect of rival party attention on a party’s attention at increasing distance to the last election.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| (R) Rival party attentiont-1 | 0.02\*\*\* (0.01) | 0.00 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.02) | -0.04\*\* (0.02) |
| (E) Quarters since last election | -0.01\*\* (0.00) | -0.01\*\*\* (0.00) | 0.04\*\*\* (0.01) | -0.03\*\*\* (0.01) |
| R x E |  | 0.001\*\*\* (0.00) | -0.00 (0.00) | 0.01\*\*\* (0.00) |
| (C) Rival party consistencyt-1 |  |  | 0.08\* (0.05) |  |
| R x C |  |  | -0.00 (0.01) |  |
| E x C |  |  | -0.02\*\*\* (0.00) |  |
| R x E x C |  |  | 0.001\* (0.00) |  |
| (S) Party support |  |  |  | 0.01\*\*\* (0.00) |
| R x S |  |  |  | 0.001\*\*\* (0.00) |
| E x S |  |  |  | 0.001\*\* (0.00) |
| R x E x S |  |  |  | -0.001\*\*\* (0.00) |
| Coalition party attention | 0.01\*\*\* (0.01) | 0.01\*\*\* (0.01) | 0.01\*\*\* (0.01) | 0.02\*\*\* (0.01) |
| In government (=1) | -0.04 (0.03) | -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) | 0.01\*\*\* (0.00) |
| Year (counter) | -0.02\*\*\* (0.00) | -0.02\*\*\* (0.00) | -0.02\*\*\* (0.00) | -0.03\*\*\* (0.00) |
| Y t-1 | 0.08\*\*\* (0.00) | 0.08\*\*\* (0.00) | 0.08\*\*\* (0.00) | 0.08\*\*\* (0.00) |
| Ref. point (1st quarter) |  |  |  |  |
| 2nd quarter | -0.11\*\*\* (0.03) | -0.12\*\*\* (0.03) | -0.21\*\* (0.09) | -0.11\*\*\* (0.03) |
| 3rd quarter | -0.16\*\*\* (0.03) | -0.16\*\*\* (0.03) | -0.21\*\*\* (0.05) | -0.17\*\*\* (0.03) |
| 4th quarter | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.00 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.03) |
| Ref. point (RGA) |  |  |  |  |
| Socialist People’s Party | -0.30\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.30\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.29\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.42\*\*\* (0.05) |
| Social democrats | -0.13\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.13\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.12\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.08) |
| Social Liberals | -0.19\*\*\* (0.05) | -0.19\*\*\* (0.05) | -0.13\*\* (0.06) | -0.25\*\*\* (0.05) |
| Liberals | 0.05 (0.04) | 0.05 (0.04) | 0.11\* (0.06) | -0.16\*\*\* (0.05) |
| Conservatives | -0.20\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.21\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.20\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.23\*\*\* (0.04) |
| Danish People’s Party | -0.15\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.15\*\*\* (0.04) | -0.09 (0.06) | -0.61\*\*\* (0.08) |
| Ref. point (economy) |  |  |  |  |
| Civil rights | -0.58\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Health | -0.20\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.20\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.20\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.19\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Agriculture | -0.66\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.65\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.65\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.65\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Labour | -0.21\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.20\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.20\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.20\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Education | -0.01 (0.07) | -0.00 (0.07) | -0.00 (0.07) | -0.00 (0.07) |
| Environment | -0.26\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.25\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.25\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.25\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Energy | -0.83\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.83\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.83\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.83\*\*\* (0.08) |
| Immigration | -0.13\* (0.07) | -0.13\* (0.07) | -0.12\* (0.07) | -0.12\* (0.07) |
| Transport | -0.35\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.34\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.34\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.34\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Crime | -0.13\* (0.07) | -0.12\* (0.07) | -0.11\* (0.07) | -0.11\* (0.07) |
| Welfare | -0.07 (0.07) | -0.07 (0.07) | -0.07 (0.06) | -0.07 (0.07) |
| Housing | -0.90\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.90\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.90\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.90\*\*\* (0.08) |
| Business | -0.49\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.49\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.49\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.49\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Defense | -0.58\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.57\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Technology | -0.73\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.73\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.73\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.73\*\*\* (0.08) |
| Trade | -1.88\*\*\* (0.11) | -1.87\*\*\* (0.11) | -1.88\*\*\* (0.11) | -1.87\*\*\* (0.11) |
| Foreign Affairs | -0.17\*\* (0.07) | -0.16\*\* (0.07) | -0.15\*\* (0.07) | -0.16\*\* (0.07) |
| Gov. Operations | -0.22\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.21\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.21\*\*\* (0.07) | -0.21\*\*\* (0.07) |
| Public Land | -1.79\*\*\* (0.11) | -1.78\*\*\* (0.11) | -1.79\*\*\* (0.11) | -1.79\*\*\* (0.11) |
| Culture | -1.04\*\*\* (0.09) | -1.03\*\*\* (0.09) | -1.03\*\*\* (0.09) | -1.03\*\*\* (0.09) |
| EU | -0.52\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.51\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.51\*\*\* (0.08) | -0.51\*\*\* (0.08) |
| Constant | 48.92\*\*\* (8.03) | 45.76\*\*\* (8.13) | 45.61\*\*\* (9.65) | 50.97\*\*\* (8.17) |
| Observations | 9394 | 9394 | 9394 | 9394 |

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 A2. 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 attentiont-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 | POISSON |
| 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 A3. 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 attentiont-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 A3 (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 attentiont-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 A4. 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 attentiont-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) | 0.001a (0.00) | 0.001\*\* (0.00) | 0.001b (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, \*\*\*. “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 A5. 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 attentiont-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) |
| Coalition party attention | 0.01\*\*\* (0.01) |
| 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) |
| Ref. point (1st quarter) |  |
| 2nd quarter | -0.10\*\*\* (0.03) |
| 3rd quarter | -0.15\*\*\* (0.03) |
| 4th quarter | 0.03 (0.03) |
| 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) |
| Ref. point (economy) |  |
| 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) |
| Observations | 9394 |

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

1. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)