

# **Issue Competition and Election Campaigns:**

## **Avoidance *and* Engagement**

Christoffer Green-Pedersen &

Peter B. Mortensen

Department of Political Science

Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7

8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

Phone +4589421133

Fax + 4586139839

Email [cgp@ps.au.dk](mailto:cgp@ps.au.dk)/[peter@ps.au.dk](mailto:peter@ps.au.dk)

Web: [www.agendasetting.dk](http://www.agendasetting.dk)

## **Abstract**

Political parties' election campaigns are important to the outcome of national elections. The understanding of these campaigns, however, suffers from a clash between empirical realities and the theoretically dominant issue ownership perspective. In particular, empirical studies have shown much more issue engagement across election campaigns than implied by the issue ownership based theories of issue competition. This paper offers a new model of issue competition which integrates the issue ownership perspective with ideas developed from agenda setting literature. Above all, it introduces the concept of a party system agenda, which is a structural component that highlights why a party's election campaign cannot just be explained by knowing which issues parties would prefer to emphasize from an issue ownership or ideological perspective. Empirically, we demonstrate the model's validity in a large n study of party campaigns covering every Danish parliamentary election in the last 50 years.

## **Introduction**

Studies of national election outcomes across Europe focus increasingly on the importance of the issues that dominate election campaigns (Green & Hobolt 2008; Belanger & Mequid 2008; Clarke et al. 2004; cf. also Thomassen 2005). Studies of election campaigns also point to the central role of political parties (Brandenburg 2002; Walgrave & van Aelst 2006; Strömbäck & Nord 2006). It matters whether political parties at election times talk about law and order, environmental issues, social problems, the economy, defence, or international affairs. Hence, to understand electoral outcomes we need to understand the dynamics that structure the issue emphases of political parties including the question about why political parties at election times focus on certain issues rather than others. Nevertheless, it is striking how little is actually known about the answers to this question in the literature on party competition.

One standard response is that political parties compete by selectively emphasizing preferable issues and avoid unpreferable issues (see Budge & Farlie 1983b; Carmines 1991). However, empirical studies of the issues parties actually do talk about during election campaigns find a considerable degree of “issue overlap” in the sense that parties engage in discussions about similar issues including issues they would rather ignore from a party issue ownership perspective (Sigelmann & Buell 2004; Sides 2006; Kaplan et al. 2006; Damore 2004; Green-Pedersen 2007). Hence, what is needed in light of the empirical findings is an integrated approach, theoretical as well as methodological, capable of explaining the dual importance of both issue engagement and issue avoidance in party competition.

As a response to this challenge, the paper initiates a theoretical modelling of political parties’ issue emphases at election times and demonstrates on a new large n data set covering every Danish parliamentary election in the last 50 years how the model can be evaluated empirically. According to the model a party’s issue emphasis is driven by two central

components. The first component is a *party component*, i.e. each party has a number of issues that they focus on one election after the other. This is akin to the traditional idea of parties focusing on issues they prefer or own (e.g. Petrocik 1996). The second and common component, an *agenda component*, is developed from agenda setting theory (e.g. Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Baumgartner et al. 2006; see also Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2010). On agendas, the agenda setting literature refers to the idea that at a certain point in time there is a hierarchy of issues to which the relevant actors must pay attention even as they compete about the future content of this hierarchy (see Dearing & Rogers 1996, 1-3). This structural agenda component adds the interaction of political parties to the issue ownership perspective and it thus highlights why a party's campaign emphases cannot just be explained by knowing which issues parties would prefer to talk about. Methodologically, the integration of these two components also implies that we need to take into account party-specific campaign measures as well as measures of the party system agenda when studying parties' issue emphases at election times.

Empirically, we demonstrate the importance of both components in a large n study of party campaigns covering every Danish parliamentary election in the last 50 years. We begin by replicating the findings of considerable, but far from complete issue overlap found in all other studies of parties' issue competition. Utilizing a panel time series design we then show how the two components drive the issue emphases of political parties and analyse how the parties' issue emphases during a campaign reflect the political agenda in the years preceding the election campaigns. The empirical analysis thus demonstrates how the model adds to our understanding of election campaigns. Parties compete strongly over the content of the common party system agenda, but this competition is an ongoing struggle also between elections.

## **Issue competition and election campaigns**

The idea of issue competition has a long history in political science going back to the work of Robertson (1976). He argued that party competition is focused on selective emphasis rather than direct confrontation, an argument that was further developed by Budge and Farlie (1983b). Parties compete by emphasizing issues they find advantageous rather than by assuming different positions on issues structured by a pre-determined common agenda. The same notion about the importance of issue emphasis guides the model of issue evolution developed by Carmines and Stimson (1986), which Carmines (1991) later developed into a model of party alignments and issue competition. As Carmines argues (1991, 75): "All successful politicians instinctively understand which issues benefit them and their party and which do not. The trick is to politicize the former and depoliticize the latter." Similar ideas were developed by Riker (1996) in his principles of dominance and dispersion. Thus the basic ideas of issue competition are well established.

The empirical investigation of issue competition has been closely linked to studies of election campaigns. The literature has mainly focused on providing an answer to the question about which issues benefit different parties and hence which issues different parties would be focusing on at election time. One famous answer is based on the idea of issue ownership (Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1994; Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003). Voters systematically see parties as having different problem solving competences on different issues, which generate rather time-persistent party ownership of different issues, for instance social democratic ownership of the welfare state issue or bourgeois ownership of the crime issue. The logical implication of this perspective is a strong incentive for parties to focus on the issues they own and avoid talking about others (Simon 2002).

The issue competition idea also forms the basis of the ambitious Party Manifestos Project, which contains coding of the issue emphasis of different parties in their election

manifestos in more than 50 countries since the Second World War (see Budge et al. 2001). This dataset has been used to study the effects of issues raised by competing political parties on electoral outcomes and to address broader questions about the politics of the governments that are formed on the basis of electoral outcomes (e.g. Klingemann et al. 1994; Budge & Farlie 1983a; McDonald & Budge 2005). Although Klingemann et al. (1994, 20-30), among others, recognize that the issue emphasis of political parties may reflect, for instance, media attention, the research based on the party manifesto dataset has primarily seen the issue emphasis identified in party manifestos as representing decisions by individual parties based primarily on what issues a party would prefer to focus on in accordance with for instance their issue ownership and/or their ideology (Budge 1994).

The basic ideas of issue competition are thus well established in studies of election campaigns. However, arguing that political parties compete by drawing attention to different issues is merely the beginning. Taking the idea of selective issue emphasis to its logical end implies that parties will focus on different issues with very little issue overlap between parties in a given election campaign. As Sigelmann and Buell (2004, 652) summarize the literature:

Even though adherents of the accounts we have just summarized do not take literally the possibility that issue convergence would be totally lacking in campaign discourse, it seems fair to hold them to the expectation that it should be the exception rather than the rule.

Nevertheless, empirical studies of the issue emphasis of electoral competitors systematically show considerable issue overlap. Studies of U.S. presidential campaigns (Sigelman and Buell 2004; Damore 2005) and studies of the election manifestos of party families in Western Europe (Green-Pedersen 2007) show extensive issue overlap. Thus, although parties may

prefer to focus exclusively on certain issues, for instance due to issue ownership, the reality is that parties also pay considerable and sometimes even more attention to other issues, including issues which might favour their opponents (see also Sides 2006; 2007; Kaplan et al. 2006).

The systematic finding of issue overlap challenges the existing literature on party competition and election campaigns. The idea that parties focus on issues they prefer, for instance due to issue ownership or party ideology, is only one side of the story. They also engage in other issues including those owned by their opponents. The literature thus seems to be at a dead end. Parties clearly have an incentive to focus only on issues they prefer, but empirically the consistent findings of significant issue overlap show that they also engage in issues they do not prefer. The findings of issue-overlap have caused some interest in factors that may cause issue overlap. Brasher (2003) points to the role of “recent Congressional attention” and Sides (2006; 2007) argues that parties may “ride the wave” in the sense of pursuing issues that are salient on the voters’ agenda. However, what is lacking is a theoretical account of how issue interaction among political parties in the form of public debate affects the campaign emphasis of political parties.

## **The Party System Agenda**

To provide exactly such an account, Green-Pedersen & Mortensen (2010) have developed a model of issue competition suggesting that issue competition must be understood through the dual importance of, on the one hand, the issues that individual parties want to focus on and, on the other hand, the existence of a party system agenda<sup>1</sup> to which all parties need to respond. From this perspective, agenda setting processes are *systemic* in the sense that agendas are influenced by actors, but at the same time influence the issues actors address.

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<sup>1</sup> A concept developed from agenda setting theory (McCombs 2004; Baumgartner et al. 2006).

Once issues are on the agenda, actors must attend to them. This idea is parallel to mass media studies of agenda setting that talk about the media agenda being governed by news criteria (Cook 1998). An individual newspaper or television station may generate a news story that becomes part of the media agenda. However, they also have a strong incentive to cover the stories on the media agenda even when the stories originate from their competitors. The core of agenda setting is thus the reciprocal relationship between a constraining common agenda and the individual issue emphasis of the actors trying both to respond to and control the agenda.

The mechanism driving the party system agenda is thus the perception of political parties that they have to address a certain issue because they expect the other parties to do so. This also implies some time persistence in the party system agenda. Once parties perceive an issue as being on the party system agenda, they address it and thereby reinforce its status on the agenda. Such feedback processes are highlighted by the agenda setting literature (Baumgartner & Jones 1993) and studies of agenda development consistently find time persistence in the content of political agendas (Edwards & Woods 1999; Baumgartner et al. 2008; Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2010).

The party system agenda arises due to the institutionalization in democracies of debate between political parties, for instance in parliament and through the mass media. Deliberative democracy is a strong political norm in Western democracies (Bessette 1994; Habermas 1997) and political parties are expected to enter into dialogue with each other and cannot just ignore issues on the agenda. They may of course enter a debate about an issue more or less actively, but simply ignoring an issue may be both a difficult and a risky strategy. Difficult because political parties are expected to have an opinion on all issues and therefore may be pushed by various actors, in particular political opponents, to address issues that are prominent on the party system agenda. Risky because a debated issue always has a particular

tone or frame attached to it (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, Stone 1997, Baumgartner et al. 2008), and ignoring an issue means having no influence on how it is framed (see Jerit 20078. Reframing a salient issue owned by opponents may be necessary to win elections. Holian (2004) shows how Bill Clinton needed to engage and reframe the Republican issue of crime to win the 1992 U.S. presidential election.

Realizing that issue competition is also about placing issues on the party system agenda, which opponents then cannot ignore, parties emphasize issues in their election manifestos that are driven by two components. One, which we term a *party component*, is driven by specific party characteristics such as the party's issue ownership or ideology. There are certain issues they want to stress more than others and this is the component that the literature has traditionally focused on. The other component is the *agenda component*. At any given time, a party system agenda exists and thus a number of issues that all party campaigns to some extent will be constrained by. If a party has been successful in shaping the party system agenda, the two components may work in the same direction. However, a central finding in studies of agenda setting is that no one has the capacity to control the agenda (see Kingdon 1995) and hence the expectation is that the two components show distinguishable effects on the issues political parties emphasize at election times.

Furthermore, with respect to election campaigns, the agenda component is already present from the outset of the campaign. Issue competition is an ongoing phenomenon, which is not restricted to election times (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2010). Once an election is called there is already an existing party system agenda, i.e. there are a number of issues that all parties feel compelled to address whether they own the issues or not. In other words, if one wants to understand parties' campaign emphases, understanding the development of the party system agenda in the preceding period is crucial. The party system agenda of an election is

shaped before the election is called, unless spectacular and often idiosyncratic focusing events occur right before or during an election campaign.

## Data

To examine the role of both the party component and the agenda component in party campaign issue emphasis, we draw on two extensive datasets from the Danish Policy Agendas Project (see [www.agendasetting.dk](http://www.agendasetting.dk)). The first dataset covers parliamentary activities in the Danish national parliament from 1953 to 2003. The other dataset consists of the Danish party manifestos collected as part of the international party manifesto project<sup>2</sup> and covers 20 elections between 1953 and 2005. The combination of the two datasets provides a unique opportunity to study the issues parties focus on during election campaigns while including party competition in between elections. In fact, data developed from party manifestos have rarely been combined with other data sources on political parties.

The parliamentary data were coded according to the Danish version of the Policy Agendas Project's coding scheme originally developed by Baumgartner and Jones (1993) to study agenda setting in a U.S. context. The coding system contains 19 major topics (health, transportation, energy, defence etc.) and 236 subcategories (for instance railways, air transportation, roads etc. within the major category of transportation).<sup>3</sup> Compared to the original coding scheme of the party manifestos dataset, the Policy Agendas Project's coding scheme provides a much more detailed coding scheme for other issues than macro-economy. For instance, since the party manifestos dataset coding scheme does not include specific categories for issues like immigration, health, or transportation, the manifestos have been

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<sup>2</sup> The manifestos were originally collected by the late Tove-Lise Schou and kindly given to us by Robert Klemmensen and Martin Ejnar Hansen.

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to the U.S. coding system, see Baumgartner et al. 2002 or [www.policyagendas.org](http://www.policyagendas.org).

recoded according to the Danish policy agenda setting coding system. For the study of Danish politics, the subcategories were transformed into 24 major topics like macro-economy, health, energy, environment, immigration etc., which will be used in the analysis below.<sup>4</sup> Hence, for each Danish party running for election between 1953 and 2005 the manifesto data set provides a unique measure of the party's relative emphases of the 24 major topics at the time of the election.

The parliamentary database provides a measure of the party system agenda in between elections. The measure is based on the length (measured in columns in the annual records of parliament) of debates in the Danish parliament. Debates in parliament can relate to four activities, namely bills, governmental policy accounts, interpellations and parliamentary resolutions. The first two types of activities are government driven, the two latter opposition driven and they balance each other rather closely in terms of the number of columns in the dataset stemming from government and opposition initiated activities respectively (Mortensen 2006, 69-72). The main advantage of using length of parliamentary debates as a measure of the common party system agenda is that unlike for instance questions to the ministers, length of debates is not driven by the activities of a single or a few parties. Long debates about an interpellation or a bill arise in parliament because many parties find it important to address an issue.

The party manifesto dataset provides us with a direct measure of the campaign emphasis of each individual party at each election. However, the Danish Party Manifestos Project has recently been heavily criticized, not least for the collected material (Hansen 2008). Many of the collected documents are not really party manifestos and the original coding led to a large number of non-codeable sentences. Whether they are real manifestos or not is less important for the purpose of this study as long as they measure party campaign emphasis. Coding of the

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<sup>4</sup> For an introduction to the Danish coding system, see Green-Pedersen 2005 or [www.agendasetting.dk](http://www.agendasetting.dk).

original document according to the Danish policy agendas coding scheme gave a more limited number of non-codeable sentences (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2008), which indicates that the problems with the original party manifesto coding had more to do with the application of the coding scheme than with the documents.

## Measures and methods

To show the dual importance of the party component and the agenda component in election campaigns we pursue a three-step empirical strategy. First, we examine for each election the degree of similarity in the issue emphases of the political parties participating in the election and compare this measure of interparty issue overlap in election campaigns with a measure of intraparty similarities across consecutive campaigns. This way we obtain an indicator of whether parties in a given race were actually more similar to one another than each party was to itself in consecutive races. Second, to examine simultaneously the role of the agenda component alongside the party component in parties' issue emphases we employ a panel time-series analysis, where the dependent variable measures, for each party and each election manifesto, the relative number of sentences devoted to 23 major issues.<sup>5</sup> As independent variables we use lagged measures of campaign emphases, campaign agendas and pre-election parliamentary agendas. The exact setup and estimation of the panel time-series analysis is explained below. Finally, we substantiate the statistical findings with a closer look at the major parties' attention to four of the issues dominating Danish politics over the last 20 years.

### *Measuring interparty issue overlap and intraparty continuity*

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<sup>5</sup> The issue "Greenland and The Faroe Islands" has been dropped from the analysis. The issue is debated in parliament but is more or less excluded from the Danish national election campaigns because separate elections for the Danish parliament are held in the two semi-independent territories.

Conditions obviously change between elections, but under normal circumstances it seems reasonable from the party component perspective introduced in the theoretical section to expect considerable continuity in the issues on which a party campaigns in consecutive elections. Hence, calculating both interparty issue overlap and intraparty continuity we get some leverage on the prediction of the dual importance in election campaigns of both the party component (intraparty continuity) and the agenda component (interparty issue overlap). To measure intra- and interparty issue overlap we develop a measure inspired by Sigelman and Buell's (2004) measure of issue convergence. The logic of Sigelman and Buell's measure can be illustrated by a case with two parties and three potential issues to address and where the two parties distribute their attention as follows:

[Table 1 around here]

In this case, the absolute differences between the issue emphases of the two parties would sum to 20:  $|40 - 50| + |15 - 10| + |45 - 40|$ . Since a value of 0 represents perfect issue convergence and a value of 200 represents perfect issue divergence, this hypothetical example would be a case of relatively strong issue overlap. Sigelman and Buell (2004) then standardize this measure to range between 0 and 100 and subtract from 100 to convert it into a measure of similarity rather than dissimilarity. In the simple two-party context the resulting measure of issue overlap (IO) can be expressed as:

$$IO = 100 - \left( \sum_{i=1}^n |P_A - P_B| \right) / 2 \quad 1)$$

where  $P_A$  and  $P_B$  are the percentages of their total attention that the hypothetical party A ( $P_A$ ) and B ( $P_B$ ) devote to a particular issue, and the absolute differences between them are summed over all  $n$  of the potential issues in a campaign (in the hypothetical case  $n = 3$ ).

Sigelman and Buell's (2004) measure of issue overlap is developed to fit the U.S. two-party context. In the following, we generalize it to multiparty systems found in many Western democracies including the Danish system. First, similar to Sigelman and Buell we begin by calculating each party's relative issue emphases in a given party manifesto by dividing the number of sentences devoted to an issue by the total number of sentences in the manifesto. Second, for each party we calculate a *campaign agenda* representing the average issue emphases of the campaigns of all the other parties participating in the given election. Then for each party in a given campaign we sum the numeric distance to the other parties' issue emphases, using equation 1 shown above, and calculate the average issue overlap between parties participating in the given election. That is,

$$E_{p,z,i} = \frac{S_{p,z,i}}{S_{p,z}} * 100 \quad 2)$$

$$E_{p^c,z,i} = \frac{\sum_{q \neq p} P_{q,z,i}}{m-1} \quad 3)$$

$$IO_{p,z} = 100 - (\sum_{i=1}^n |E_{p,z,i} - E_{p^c,z,i}|) / 2 \quad 4)$$

$$IO_z = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^m IO_{p,z}}{m} \quad 5)$$

where

$E_{p,z,i}$  denotes percentage of sentences to issue  $i$ , at election time  $z$ , in party  $p$ 's manifesto,

$E_{p^c,z,i}$  is the percentage of sentences to issue  $i$ , at election time  $z$ , averaged across all parties participating in the election except party  $p$  ( $p^c$  = complementary parties to party  $p$ ),

$IO_{p,z}$  represents for each party  $p$  its degree of issue overlap with the other parties  $p^c$  at election time  $z$ ,

$IO_z$  represents for each election time  $z$  a measure of issue overlap between one party  $p$  and the other parties  $p^c$  averaged across all parties participating in the given election,

$n$  is the number of issue categories ( $n=23$ ),

$m$  is the number of parties participating in the given election (range between 6 and 11).

Second, we supplement this measure of interparty issue overlap with a measure of intraparty similarity in consecutive campaigns. This way we are able to identify whether the parties' attention profiles in the Danish 2001 election, for instance, had more in common with their own attention profiles in the 1998 election than with the other parties' attention profiles in 2001. The measure of intraparty continuity is very similar to the measure of interparty issue overlap. However, instead of averaging the summed distances between one party's attention profile and the other parties' attention profile in a given campaign, we now for each election average the summed distances between a party's campaign and that party's campaign at the previous election. Thus, the measure of intraparty continuity ( $IC$ ) can be expressed as,

$$IC_{p,z} = 100 - \left( \sum_{i=1}^n |E_{p,z,i} - E_{p,z-1,i}| \right) / 2 \quad 6)$$

$$IC_z = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^m IC_{p,z}}{m} \quad 7)$$

where all symbols are as defined above.

An objection to using a coding scheme with 23 issues might be that issue overlap is driven by the many zeros in the dataset and hence by the inferior, but not the important issues. However, as shown in Table A1 in the appendix, one of the qualities of the issue overlap measure defined above is that it is unaffected by the addition of zero-attention observations.

## **Findings**

### *Issue overlap and intraparty continuity in Danish election campaigns, 1953-2005*

The first question is to what extent political parties focused on the same issues or avoided issues other parties were focusing on. As shown in Table 2 the answer is that the average issue overlap score across the 20 elections from 1953 to 2005 is above 60 on the 0 to 100 scale, where 100 represents identical attention profiles across parties. The minimum score was 44.7, the maximum score was 74.4 and most of the scores range between 55 and 65. Hence, the observed clustering of scores around 60 indicates that, on average, the attention profiles of the competing parties were three-fifths of the way toward perfect issue overlap. These relatively high scores of issue overlap clearly provide some preliminary support to the idea of a common component in parties' attention profiles.

[Table 2 around here]

This interpretation is further supported in a comparison of the issue overlap scores with the scores of intraparty similarity in consecutive campaigns reported in the second column in Table 2. What stands out about these scores is that in 14 out of 20 elections the intraparty continuity scores are lower than the interparty issue overlap scores with the former clustering around an average score of 57.3. Thus, on average, the political parties in a given election were actually more similar to one another than to themselves in consecutive races. This is inconsistent with the narrow issue ownership prediction that each side returns to more or less the same issues as in the last campaign (see also Simon 2002; Sigelman & Buell 2004).

One objection to this conclusion might be that in a multiparty context as the Danish one where political parties to a large extent have been divided into two opposing blocs centring

around the Social Democrats and the Liberals/Conservatives, respectively (see Green-Pedersen & Thomsen 2005), the average issue overlap scores reported in Table 2 could be driven mainly by overlap between parties within the two blocs. However, calculating the issue overlap scores between the Social Democrats and the Liberals/Conservatives, only, returns an average issue overlap score of 57.3, which severely weakens this alternative explanation. In other words, attention profiles overlap not only within cooperating blocs of parties, but also across competing blocs of political parties. Furthermore, when using equation 4 above to calculate for each party its degree of issue overlap with the other parties, we only find very minor differences in average scores across parties, which suggests that the aggregated results reported in Table 2 are rather robust to the most obvious subdivisions.

On the other hand, an average issue overlap score around 60 also implies considerable differences in the attention profiles of the different political parties; just as an average intraparty continuity score of 57.3 implies considerable stability in the attention profiles of the political parties across elections. Hence, Table 2 certainly also supports the notion of a party specific component in the campaign focus of the political parties. In sum, based on thousands of observations collected across 20 election campaigns and numerous parties, Table 2 bears evidence of the dual importance of both a party and an agenda component in understanding the issue emphases in political parties' election campaigns. However, to examine the relative importance of these two components we need to elaborate further on the analysis.

#### *The relative importance of the party and the agenda component*

To examine the role of the agenda component alongside the party component in election campaigns, the analysis continues with a panel time-series regression, where the dependent variable measures, for each party and each election manifesto, the relative number of sentences devoted to each of the 23 issues. Since some of the parties have been present from

1953 to 2005 and others emerged later in the period, the number of elections per party varies in this sample between a minimum of eight and a maximum of 19. This also implies that we have left out parties which have not been consistently up for election in a period covering a minimum of eight elections.

More particularly we estimate the following three models. First, as a baseline for comparisons we estimate a simple autoregressive (AR1) model where each party's campaign is modelled as a function of the party's campaign in the previous election. This way we get an estimate of intraparty continuity in election campaigns. However, since we know that a party's campaign shares common variance with the campaigns of the other parties we control in the second model for the issue emphases of the other parties in the concurrent as well as the previous election. If the autoregressive coefficient remains positive and statistically significant this corroborates the idea of a unique party component in campaign emphases. Furthermore, if the summed effect of the two agenda measures is also positive it is evidence of the co-existence of some unique intraparty continuity in consecutive election campaigns and of some common – agenda driven – interparty issue overlap. Finally, in Model 3 we add the measure of the parliamentary agenda the year before the given election. If this variable shows a distinct positive effect on the parties' campaign emphases it provides empirical support for the other basic claim of this paper: if one wants to understand parties' campaign emphases, understanding the development of the party system agenda in the period preceding the election is crucial. More formally we estimate the following three models,

$$\text{Model 1: } E_{p,z,i} = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 E_{p,t-z,i} + \varepsilon_1 \quad (8)$$

$$\text{Model 2: } E_{p,z,i} = \alpha_2 + \beta_1 E_{p,t-z,i} + \beta_2 E_{pc,t-z,i} + \beta_3 E_{pc,t,i} + \varepsilon_2 \quad (9)$$

$$\text{Model 3: } E_{p,z,i} = \alpha_3 + \beta_1 E_{p,t-z,i} + \beta_2 E_{pc,t-z,i} + \beta_3 E_{pc,t,i} + \beta_4 Pa_{t-1,i} + \varepsilon_3 \quad (10)$$

where

$PA_{t-1,i}$  is a measure of how much debate on the floor of the parliament has been devoted to issue  $i$  in the year before the election is called,  $t-1$ .

$t$  represents election years,

$t-z$  denotes the time of the previous election ( $z$  varies between 1 and 4 years),

$\alpha$  is the intercept,

$\epsilon$  is an error term, and

$\beta_1-\beta_4$  are estimable parameters.

The other symbols are as defined in equations 2-5 above.

The three models are estimated using a cross-sectional time-series design, in which each of the 23 issues for each party represents a panel consisting of between eight and 20 observations between 1953 and 2005 depending on the number of election campaigns by the given party. More particularly, we estimate each of the three models using a fixed effects OLS regression. The result of a joint F-test supports the inclusion of issue dummy variables. Since preliminary analyses revealed no systematic effects from party and year dummies, the analyses reported in Table 3 include only issue dummies to preserve degrees of freedom. Furthermore, we follow Beck & Katz's (1995) recommendation to apply panel-corrected standard errors to adjust for detected panel heteroscedasticity.<sup>6</sup>

In Model 1 in Table 3 we estimate how much of the variation in the issue emphases of a party's campaign can be explained by that party's issue emphasis at the previous election. As is evident from Table 3, this autoregressive coefficient is positive and statistically significant, which implies a certain amount of stability in the issue emphases of the parties across

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<sup>6</sup> Another option would be to regard each issue as a set of panels within parties, which might make it more obvious to use robust clustered standard errors. However, replicating the analyses shown in Table 3 using robust clustered standard errors leads to the exact same conclusions as when using Beck and Katz' panel-corrected standard errors.

elections. Stability is, however, only the first step in identifying the party component in issue emphases. It could be that issue emphasis was not only similar across elections, but also very similar across parties within a given race. To address this question, we include in Model 2 in Table 3 the lagged and concurrent common issue emphases of all parties – except the one it is regressed upon.<sup>7</sup>

[Table 3 around here]

Model 2 in Table 3 contains two noteworthy results. First, the autoregressive manifesto component is largely unaffected by the inclusion of the campaign agenda variables. Hence, in line with expectations there is a distinct party component to the variation in each party's issue emphasis. Second, however, there is also a clear positive relationship between a party's campaign emphasis and the campaign emphases averaged across the other parties running for election.<sup>8</sup> In fact the summed effect of the lagged and concurrent agenda effects clearly outperforms the effect of the individual parties' lagged campaign emphases. Hence, Model 2 clearly supports the idea of a distinct and rather constant party component in every party's campaign profile but also a strong common agenda component.

In Model 3 in Table 3 we add a measure of the party system agenda in the year before the election is called. This measure is based on a coding of how much debate on the floor of the parliament has been devoted to each of the 23 issues (see the detailed explanation in the data section above). As Table 3 shows, including this measure does not substantially affect the autoregressive party component, which further corroborates the existence of a unique party component to the issue emphasis of each party. However, Model 3 also shows a strong effect from last year's debates in parliament. Hence, Model 3 not only supports the two-

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<sup>7</sup> That is  $E_p c_{z-1,i}$  and  $E_p c_{z,i}$  (see Equation 3 above).

<sup>8</sup> Testing the joint effect of the two coefficients of campaign agendas yields  $F=102.92^{***}$ .

component perspective advanced in this paper, but also highlights that an election campaign does not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, the attention profile of a party's election campaign is highly shaped by the party's previous campaign and in particular by the party's response to the ongoing party system agenda.<sup>9</sup>

## **Issue ownership and campaign emphases**

Having identified both a unique and a strong common component in the campaign emphases of political parties in this section we substantiate these results with a closer look at the underlying distribution of party engagement across issues. In particular, it would corroborate the importance of both components if it can be shown: 1) that parties, on average, do campaign more on their preferred issues than their opponents do, but also 2) that parties do attend more than trivially to non-preferred but important issues. To explore this question further, Table 4 takes a closer look at the patterns of campaign emphases during the last 20 years on four of the most central issues in Danish elections in that period as judged by the Danish national election surveys (see van der Brugge & Voss 2007). The four issues are the environment, social affairs, law and order, and refugees and immigrants. The best indicator of issue ownership comes from the Danish national election surveys, which has measured issue ownership of a number of issues since 1990 (see Goul Andersen 2003; van der Brugge & Voss 2007). To simplify matters parties are grouped by whether they belong to the left-wing or right-wing/bourgeois bloc (Green-Pedersen & Thomsen 2005). Based on the national election surveys for various years (see e.g. Goul Andersen 2003; van der Brugge & Voss 2007) the four issues have further been interpreted as owned primarily by either left-wing or bourgeois parties. Social affairs and the environment have thus been preferred issues for the

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<sup>9</sup> Re-estimating the models shown in Table 3 without the many zeros in the dataset leads to an almost exact replication of the results shown in Table 3 (results are available from the authors upon request).

left-wing bloc, whereas the same has been the case with law and order and refugees and immigrants for the bourgeois bloc.

Consistent with the issue ownership literature, Table 4 shows that left-wing owned issues are emphasized more by left-wing parties than by bourgeois parties, whereas bourgeois owned issues are emphasized more by bourgeois parties than by left-wing parties. Also evident from Table 4, however, bourgeois parties have certainly not ignored social affairs or the environment in their election campaigns where the two issues on average have taken up almost 10 and 5 percent respectively of the bourgeois parties' manifestos. Nor has the left-wing bloc ignored refugees and immigrants or law and order. Thus, parties do line up on the expected side of the average emphases of issues, but they also engage the issues owned by their opponents. In sum, data support the two-component perspective introduced above also when focusing only on the subset of issues that have been decisive in electoral campaigns over the last 20 years. The two blocs have their preferred issues which seem to follow issue ownership logic, but they also engage issues that their opponents prefer. Thus if we look exclusively at the central issues in Danish election campaigns, substantial issue overlap occurs.

A final dynamic illustration based on the perhaps most powerful issue in Danish politics over the last decades, refugees and immigrants, further supports the basic ideas of this paper. In the last 10-15 years this issue has been characterized by a strong politicization, i.e. markedly increasing attention from the political parties (Green-Pedersen 2006; Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008). Furthermore, the politicization has been pushed by the right-wing parties, especially the Liberals, but also the Conservatives, who in opposition after 1993 successfully managed to make it a central issue in Danish party politics; a development, which became central for the bourgeois parties that gained majority with the Danish People's Party after the 2001 election. Through politicization, the parties managed to turn their issue

ownership into votes (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008).

[Figure 1 around here]

A crucial element in the politicization process, however, was the ability to force the Social Democrats to pay attention to the issue despite: 1) internal Social Democratic disagreement; 2) the Social Democrats' disagreement with their coalition partner, the Social Liberals, on the issue; and 3) the Social Democrats' lack of ownership of the immigration issue.

To illustrate the dynamic element, Figure 1 shows the amount of attention devoted to the immigration issue in: 1) parliamentary debates; 2) the Social Democrats' manifestos; and 3) the manifestos of the three major bourgeois parties. The issue received very little attention during the 1980s, but then gained ground in the parliamentary debates around 1990. Until the 1998 election the Social Democrats' campaign strategy was to avoid the issue completely and focus on other issues. However, this strategy never worked (Bale et al. 2009), and when the issue gained permanent footing on the party system agenda up through the 1990s, the Social Democrats finally responded by devoting almost 15 percent of their manifesto to the issue in the 1998 election despite clear right-wing ownership. In the 2001 and 2005 campaigns, the Social Democrats also engaged markedly in this issue, although to a lesser extent than the bourgeois bloc. The example thus provides a dynamic illustration of the crucial role of both the party component and the agenda component in party campaign issue emphasis. Even though the Social Democrats from a narrow issue ownership perspective had every reason to avoid the issue, the issue's continued presence on the party system agenda more or less forced the party to pay considerable attention to it.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The aim of this paper was to present and test a model of party campaign issue focus which provides an integrated explanation of both issue engagement and issue avoidance. The model claims the importance of the party system agenda component alongside the well-established party component in shaping the issue emphasis of political parties during election campaigns. Hence, issue competition among political parties both during and between election campaigns should be understood by focusing on how political parties try to shape the party system agenda, but at the same time are shaped by it. As the example of the issue of refugees and immigrants in Denmark showed, this reciprocal model makes it possible to actually study the dynamics involved in issue competition and thus to begin to explain why parties focus on some issues instead of others. In other words, the model offers a conceptual framework which makes it possible to actually study how different factors affect party issue competition.

This conceptual framework does not imply that issue competition and party campaign emphasis are not affected by external factors like public salience as suggested by Sides (2006; 2007). The framework is an attempt to provide a theoretical account of how political parties compete, i.e. interact, over issues. Modelling party competition as an ongoing process where political parties compete about the future content of the party system agenda also makes it possible to study how issue competition is affected by external factors like public salience and/or media attention. However, we only understand the role of such external factors if we have an adequate framework for understanding issue competition among political parties, i.e. their strategic interaction over issues (see Walgrave & van Aelst 2006; Green-Pedersen & Stubager 2010). Thus the party system agenda is likely to be affected by the public saliency, and vice versa. However, to understand how and when political parties react to public saliency of an issue, we need a theoretical model that goes beyond arguing that parties focus on preferred issues.

Understanding the role of factors external to the party system is only one avenue of

further research based on the framework presented here. Factors internal to the party system are also of obvious interest. Green-Pedersen & Mortensen (2010) show, for instance, that the opposition exerts more influence than the government on the party system agenda and opposition parties are thus in a more favourable position in terms of forcing the government parties to engage their preferred issues than vice versa. Another internal factor which could be studied in continuation of Meguid (2005) is the influence of mainstream versus niche parties. Following Meguid (2005), one would expect mainstream parties to have more influence on the party system agenda than niche parties.

Party systems also vary on several dimensions and their effects on issue competition are also largely unknown. Is issue competition for instance fundamentally different in two-party systems compared to multiparty systems? Multiparty systems also differ in terms of their configuration like whether they have powerful centre parties or not (Keman 1994) and this might also affect the issue competition. The framework suggested here offers a starting point for addressing such comparative questions.

For the specific study of election campaigns, the model also has a number of important implications. Developments like decline of class voting and increasing electoral volatility have boosted interest in election campaigns under the assumption that they have become increasingly important for electoral outcomes (e.g. Farrell & Schmitt-Beck 2002). Which issues parties emphasize is another important component in election campaigns. However, with regard to understanding which issues parties then pick, this paper shows the importance of factors outside of the election campaign. One is well known, namely the relatively stable issue ownership profiles of political parties. The other component has received surprisingly little interest, namely the party system agenda component discussed above. However, it is often crucial in explaining electoral outcomes because it drives parties to pay attention to issues they do not own and thus engage in a dialogue with opponents on issues owned by the

opponent.

## **Appendix**

[Table A1 around here]

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Table 1: Hypothetical example of issue attention distribution (per cent)

	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3
Party A	40	15	45
Party B	50	10	40

Table 2. Interparty and intraparty issue overlap in Danish election campaigns, 1953-2005

Year	Average interparty issue overlap	Average intraparty continuity	Number of parties participating in the election
1953	69.7	-	6
1957	57.8	55.0	6
1960	56.7	56.7	7
1964	67.2	60.3	7
1966	58.0	49.4	7
1968	74.4	64.8	7
1971	48.7	59.1	7
1973	64.4	52.4	11
1975	62.8	57.0	11
1977	63.1	57.5	11
1979	64.1	65.7	11
1981	58.6	61.1	10
1984	61.9	59.0	7
1987	56.3	53.3	6
1988	58.3	56.8	6
1990	44.7	49.2	7
1994	57.0	45.1	8
1998	62.9	58.2	9
2001	63.3	58.0	9
2005	61.3	59.4	9
<i>Mean</i>	<i>60.6</i>	<i>57.3</i>	

Table 3: Agenda and party-specific effects on party campaign emphasis

Dependent Variable: Campaign emphases <sup>1</sup> <sub>z</sub>	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Campaign emphases <sup>1</sup> <sub>t-z</sub>	.281*** (.058)	.242*** (.067)	.223*** (.069)
Campaign agendas <sup>2</sup> <sub>t-z</sub>		.142 (.092)	.080 (.098)
Campaign agendas <sup>2</sup> <sub>t</sub>		.382*** (.093)	.256* (.103)
Parliamentary debate <sup>3</sup> <sub>t-1</sub>			.360** (.126)
Constant	19.144*** (2.204)	6.242* (2.716)	
N	2880	2843	2675
R	.50	.54	.54
R (adjusted)	.49	.53	.54
F-test (issue dummies)	32.50***	1.90**	1.52

Notes: Unstandardized betas with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. Estimated coefficients for issue dummies are not shown to facilitate the presentation. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed). t denotes election time and t-z denotes time of the previous election.

<sup>1</sup>: Defined as  $E_{p,i}$  – see Equation 2 above.

<sup>2</sup>: Defined as  $E_p c_{,i}$  – see Equation 3 above.

<sup>3</sup>: Defined as  $PA_i$  – see Equation 10 above.

Table 4. Issue ownership and Campaign Emphases, 1990-2005

Issues	Left-wing bloc of parties <sup>1</sup> (A)	Bourgeois bloc of parties <sup>2</sup> (B)	Differences (A - B)	Ownership <sup>3</sup>
Social affairs	13.6	9.3	4.3	Left wing
Environment	6.9	4.5	2.4	Left wing
Immigrants and refugees	6.0	11.4	-5.4	Bourgeois
Law and order	2.2	8.0	-5.8	Bourgeois

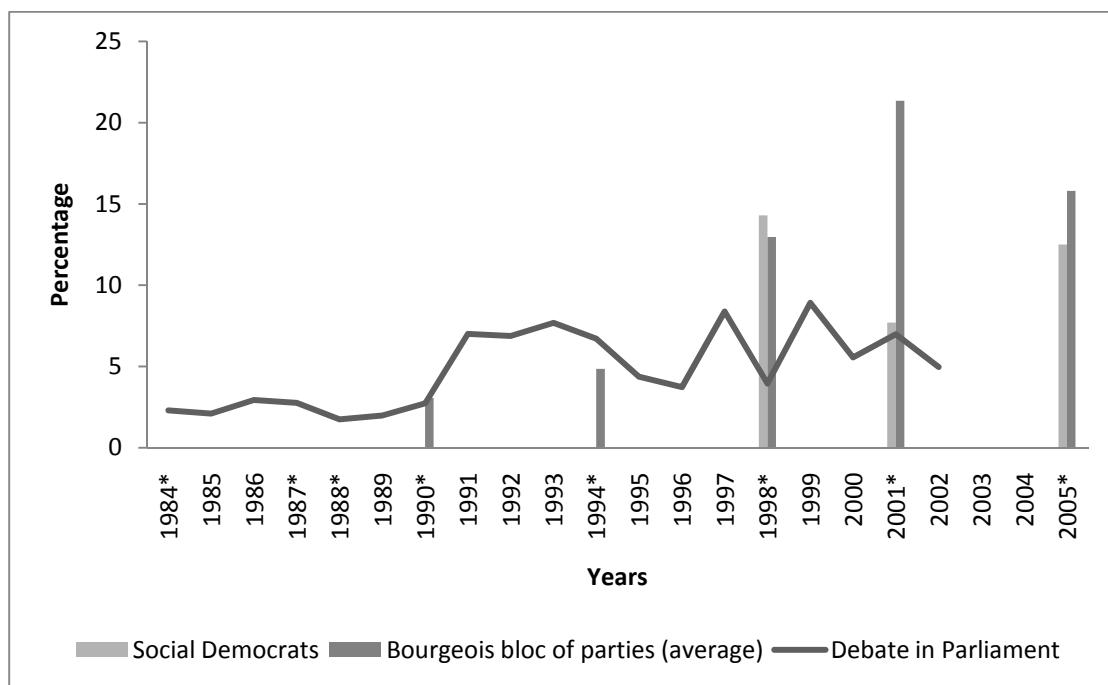
Notes: Cell entries represent average percentages of sentences in the manifestos devoted to the given issue.

<sup>1</sup>: Left-wing bloc: Social Democrats, Socialist People's Party, Unity List, and Social Liberals.

<sup>2</sup>: Bourgeois bloc: Liberals, Conservatives, Danish People's Party.

<sup>3</sup>: Based on the Danish National Election Survey (see van der Brugge & Voss 2007).

Figure 1. Political Parties' attention to the Immigration Issue in Denmark, 1984-2005



Notes: \* = election year. "Social Democrats" represents the percentage of total sentences devoted to refugees and immigrants. "Bourgeois bloc of parties" represents average percentages across Liberals, Conservatives, Danish People's Party and the Progress Party. "Debate in Parliament" represents the percentage of total parliamentary debates (measured in columns) devoted to refugees and immigrants.

Table A1. Hypothetical Example of Issue overlap (with and without zeros)

	Party A	Party B		Party A	Party B
Issue 1	15	5	Issue 1	15	5
Issue 2	5	20	Issue 2	5	20
Issue 3	10	10	Issue 3	10	10
Issue 4	25	5	Issue 4	25	5
Issue 5	5	25	Issue 5	5	25
Issue 6	10	15	Issue 6	10	15
Issue 7	15	5	Issue 7	15	5
Issue 8	5	5	Issue 8	5	5
Issue 9	5	5	Issue 9	5	5
Issue 10	5	5	Issue 10	5	5
			Issue 11	0	0
			Issue 12	0	0
			Issue 13	0	0
			Issue 14	0	0
			Issue 15	0	0
			Issue 16	0	0
			Issue 17	0	0
			Issue 18	0	0
			Issue 19	0	0
			Issue 20	0	0
			Issue 21	0	0
			Issue 22	0	0
			Issue 23	0	0
Issue overlap	60		Issue overlap	60	

Notes: Issue overlap is calculated using equation 1.