Issue selection of niche parties between elections

An analysis of question time in six countries

Enrico Borghetto (New University of Lisbon)

enrico.borghetto@fcsh.unl.pt,

Niche vs Mainstream

- Niche are parties that "focus their issue appeals on a narrow range of segments, that are neglected by mainstream" (Bischof, 2017: 224)
- Electoral competition
  - Emphasise relatively extreme positions (Wagner 2012)
  - Respond to public opinion shifts (Ezrow et al. 2011)
- Parliamentary behaviour
  - They have greater agenda-setting power (Vliegenthart 2011)
  - They vote differently (Jensen & Spoon 2010)

Issue competition using parliamentary questions

- Issue competition theory (e.g. Budge and Farlie, 1983)
- Parties use parliamentary questions as a signalling device directed to voters and journalists to bolster their policy issue profile between elections (Green-Pedersen 2010, Otjes and Louwerse 2018)
- How do parties select the kind of topics to focus on in parliamentary questions?
  - They focus on their manifesto priorities (e.g. Vliegenthart et al. 2013)
  - They follow other parties (party system effect) (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010)

The issue strategy of niche parties in PQ

- Does being a niche party make a difference in the way they react to the two incentives?
- Party-system hypothesis
  - H1 - Less influenced by the party system agenda than mainstream parties.
- Party-programme hypothesis
  - H2 - More influenced by their electoral agenda than mainstream parties.

If we accept that niche parties are (1) more policy-seeking and (2) more influenced by their activists (Adams et al 2006) they should value consistency over flexibility

Data

- DV: number of parliamentary questions asked by a party on a topic during a cabinet

- **PQ content** – Comparative Agendas policy coding of more than 22000 oral pq (re-aggregated in 11 topics, Bäck et al.2011)

country_name	n_elections	n_cabinet	n_party	n_questions	min_year	max_year
Belgium	6	8	15	7388	1988	2009
Denmark	5	6	7	1776	1998	2011
Italy	4	7	19	2730	2001	2013
Netherlands	7	7	9	1184	1982	2007
Portugal	3	3	7	2331	2005	2011
Spain	4	4	8	7253	2000	2011
Total	**29**	**35**	**65**	**22662**		

IV and CV

- IV: **Party system agenda**. Mean percentage of attention in PQ to a topic of all parties during a cabinet but the one for which it is computed

- IV: **Manifesto agenda**. Percentage of attention to a topic of a party using Comparative Manifesto Project coding of party platforms (11 topics)

- IV: **Nicheness.**
  - Green, Radical Right and Communist parties assigned to "niche" category (ParlGov)
  - Bischof (2017)

- CV: **Opposition status** (ParlGov)

- CV: **Party size** (ParlGov)

Baseline models (hierarchical negative binomial model with random intercepts for each topic, party and cabinet)

Predictors	Belgium Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Italy Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Netherlands Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Portugal Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Spain Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Denmark Incidence Rate Ratios	p
Intercept	0.88 (0.34)	0.709	1.87 (0.35)	0.077	0.51 (0.31)	0.028	2.04 (0.60)	0.237	1.13 (0.31)	0.695	4.50 (0.54)	0.005
Opposition party	1.59 (0.07)	<0.001	0.95 (0.06)	0.412	2.41 (0.13)	<0.001	1.62 (0.19)	0.010	2.64 (0.19)	<0.001		
Seat (%)	509.35 (1.20)	<0.001	2.48 (0.28)	0.001	33.52 (0.95)	<0.001	2.13 (0.98)	0.439	310.93 (0.62)	<0.001	0.02 (1.58)	0.015
Party system	427.02 (0.69)	<0.001	51.06 (1.03)	<0.001	6.80 (1.07)	0.074	163.69 (0.97)	<0.001	1097.96 (1.84)	<0.001	42.59 (1.04)	<0.001
Manifesto	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001	1.01 (0.00)	0.055	1.03 (0.01)	<0.001	1.01 (0.01)	0.235	1.02 (0.01)	0.024	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001
Niche	1.69 (0.21)	0.012	1.12 (0.08)	0.132	1.19 (0.26)	0.516	1.10 (0.27)	0.731	0.92 (0.21)	0.699	0.71 (0.67)	0.615
Random Effects												
σ^2	35.50		72.98		18.52		15.57		4.08		27.25	
τ_{00}	0.10 party_id		0.00 party_id		0.02 topic		0.20 topic		0.01 topic		0.08 topic	
	0.08 topic		0.18 topic		0.06 party_id		0.05 party_id		0.03 party_id		0.71 party_id	
	0.53 cabinet_id		0.62 cabinet_id		0.06 cabinet_id		0.50 cabinet_id		0.03 cabinet_id		0.08 cabinet_id	
Observations	726		484		363		198		264		341	

Interaction models (niche defined by political family)

A	Belgium		Italy		Netherlands		Portugal		Spain		Denmark	
Predictors	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p
Intercept	0.87 (0.34)	0.675	1.80 (0.36)	0.099	0.46 (0.31)	0.012	1.70 (0.62)	0.391	1.14 (0.31)	0.666	4.41 (0.55)	0.007
Opposition party	1.59 (0.07)	<0.001	0.95 (0.06)	0.423	2.42 (0.12)	<0.001	1.66 (0.19)	0.009	2.65 (0.19)	<0.001		
Seat (%)	517.30 (1.20)	<0.001	2.48 (0.28)	0.001	33.34 (0.93)	<0.001	2.44 (1.03)	0.385	310.57 (0.62)	<0.001	0.02 (1.58)	0.016
Party system	490.72 (0.71)	<0.001	78.88 (1.06)	<0.001	25.21 (1.26)	0.011	498.86 (1.07)	<0.001	935.70 (1.88)	<0.001	52.50 (1.32)	0.003
Niche (1=Niche)	1.79 (0.22)	0.009	1.38 (0.14)	0.019	1.66 (0.31)	0.101	1.39 (0.30)	0.278	0.85 (0.29)	0.580	0.74 (0.68)	0.663
Manifesto	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001	1.01 (0.00)	0.100	1.03 (0.01)	<0.001	1.01 (0.01)	0.225	1.02 (0.01)	0.024	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001
Party system: Niche (H1)	0.58 (0.75)	0.473	0.14 (1.08)	0.072	**0.03 (1.79)**	**0.049**	**0.15 (0.81)**	**0.018**	2.24 (2.04)	0.694	0.69 (1.45)	0.796
Random Effects												
σ²	35.44		75.22		21.07		17.85		4.08		27.26	
τ₀₀	0.10 party_id		0.00 party_id		0.02 topic		0.19 topic		0.01 topic		0.08 topic	
	0.08 topic		0.19 topic		0.06 party_id		0.05 party_id		0.03 party_id		0.71 party_id	
	0.53 cabinet_id		0.63 cabinet_id		0.06 cabinet_id		0.51 cabinet_id		0.04 cabinet_id		0.08 cabinet_id	
Observations	726		484		363		198		264		341	

Interaction models (niche defined by political family)

B Predictors	Belgium Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Italy Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Netherlands Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Portugal Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Spain Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Denmark Incidence Rate Ratios	p
Intercept	0.90 (0.34)	0.749	1.83 (0.35)	0.088	0.47 (0.31)	0.017	1.54 (0.63)	0.489	1.09 (0.32)	0.785	4.46 (0.54)	0.006
Opposition party	1.60 (0.07)	<0.001	0.95 (0.06)	0.402	2.41 (0.13)	<0.001	1.69 (0.19)	0.006	2.62 (0.20)	<0.001		
Seat (%)	519.64 (1.19)	<0.001	2.51 (0.28)	0.001	33.44 (0.95)	<0.001	2.62 (1.03)	0.351	310.02 (0.63)	<0.001	0.02 (1.58)	0.015
Party system	435.01 (0.68)	<0.001	50.70 (1.03)	<0.001	6.34 (1.06)	0.083	179.55 (0.94)	<0.001	1001.54 (1.84)	<0.001	41.97 (1.04)	<0.001
Manifesto	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001	1.01 (0.00)	0.036	1.04 (0.01)	<0.001	1.02 (0.01)	0.017	1.02 (0.01)	0.012	1.02 (0.01)	0.008
Niche (1=Niche)	1.55 (0.22)	0.048	1.21 (0.12)	0.098	1.47 (0.30)	0.204	1.62 (0.32)	0.130	1.09 (0.26)	0.741	0.73 (0.68)	0.643
Manifesto: Niche (H2)	1.01 (0.01)	0.187	0.99 (0.01)	0.391	0.98 (0.01)	0.148	0.97 (0.01)	0.007	0.99 (0.01)	0.259	1.00 (0.01)	0.824
Random Effects												
σ^2	36.37		73.56		18.91		18.73		4.13		27.37	
τ_{00}	0.10 party_id		0.00 party_id		0.02 topic		0.20 topic		0.01 topic		0.08 topic	
	0.08 topic		0.18 topic		0.06 party_id		0.05 party_id		0.04 party_id		0.71 party_id	
	0.53 cabinet_id		0.62 cabinet_id		0.06 cabinet_id		0.51 cabinet_id		0.03 cabinet_id		0.08 cabinet_id	
Observations	726		484		363		198		264		341	

Interaction models (niche defined by Bischof, 2017)

A	Belgium		Italy		Netherlands		Portugal		Spain		Denmark	
Predictors	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p
Intercept	1.27 (0.36)	0.513	2.12 (0.38)	0.051	0.75 (0.50)	0.556	1.84 (0.58)	0.289	0.96 (0.45)	0.924	2.82 (0.51)	0.041
Opposition party	1.54 (0.07)	<0.001	0.94 (0.06)	0.249	2.38 (0.13)	<0.001	1.58 (0.18)	0.012	2.66 (0.19)	<0.001		
Seat (%)	303.17 (1.18)	<0.001	2.18 (0.25)	0.002	24.86 (0.88)	<0.001	1.68 (0.72)	0.474	348.05 (0.54)	<0.001	0.01 (1.57)	0.007
Party system	745.28 (1.31)	<0.001	13.68 (1.62)	0.106	0.31 (3.34)	0.726	1100.66 (1.81)	<0.001	4342.92 (3.52)	0.017	10.08 (2.43)	0.342
Niche	0.74 (0.28)	0.271	0.86 (0.36)	0.686	0.56 (0.81)	0.478	1.78 (0.60)	0.333	1.30 (0.79)	0.742	1.72 (0.39)	0.161
Manifesto	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001	1.01 (0.00)	0.079	1.03 (0.01)	<0.001	1.01 (0.01)	0.228	1.02 (0.01)	0.024	1.02 (0.00)	<0.001
Party System: Niche H1	0.35 (2.10)	0.617	22.01 (2.94)	0.293	605.31 (6.56)	0.329	0.01 (4.08)	0.205	0.04 (6.41)	0.627	6.57 (2.96)	0.525
Random Effects												
σ^2	37.25		73.18		18.62		15.88		4.04		32.49	
τ_{00}	0.16 party_id		0.00 party_id		0.02 topic		0.21 topic		0.01 topic		0.08 topic	
	0.08 topic		0.17 topic		0.08 party_id		0.05 party_id		0.03 party_id		0.69 party_id	
	0.55 cabinet_id		0.61 cabinet_id		0.05 cabinet_id		0.51 cabinet_id		0.03 cabinet_id		0.09 cabinet_id	
Observations	726		484		363		198		264		341	

Interaction models (niche defined by Bischof 2017)

B	Belgium		Italy		Netherlands		Portugal		Spain		Denmark	
Predictors	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p	Incidence Rate Ratios	p
Intercept	1.33 (0.36)	0.417	1.82 (0.38)	0.115	0.47 (0.44)	0.090	1.55 (0.61)	0.469	1.29 (0.43)	0.546	2.53 (0.48)	0.052
Opposition party	1.54 (0.07)	<0.001	0.94 (0.06)	0.265	2.38 (0.13)	<0.001	1.58 (0.18)	0.012	2.69 (0.19)	<0.001		
Seat (%)	300.49 (1.18)	<0.001	2.19 (0.25)	0.001	25.61 (0.88)	<0.001	1.71 (0.73)	0.464	345.21 (0.54)	<0.001	0.02 (1.58)	0.008
Party system	425.62 (0.68)	<0.001	51.03 (1.03)	<0.001	6.39 (1.07)	0.082	166.44 (0.97)	<0.001	1042.75 (1.84)	<0.001	41.62 (1.01)	<0.001
Manifesto	1.02 (0.01)	0.012	1.01 (0.01)	0.339	1.04 (0.02)	0.021	1.04 (0.02)	0.067	1.00 (0.02)	0.901	1.01 (0.02)	0.393
Niche	0.67 (0.24)	0.102	1.22 (0.29)	0.489	1.41 (0.62)	0.578	2.57 (0.74)	0.200	0.64 (0.74)	0.543	1.98 (0.31)	0.029
Manifesto: Niche H2	1.00 (0.01)	0.943	1.00 (0.02)	0.950	0.98 (0.03)	0.427	0.93 (0.05)	0.135	1.04 (0.05)	0.446	1.00 (0.02)	0.800
Random Effects												
σ^2	37.24		72.43		18.87		15.96		4.11		32.16	
τ_{00}	0.16 party_id		0.00 party_id		0.02 topic		0.20 topic		0.01 topic		0.08 topic	
	0.08 topic		0.18 topic		0.08 party_id		0.05 party_id		0.03 party_id		0.68 party_id	
	0.55 cabinet_id		0.62 cabinet_id		0.05 cabinet_id		0.50 cabinet_id		0.03 cabinet_id		0.10 cabinet_id	
Observations	726		484		363		198		264		341	

Conclusions

- Manifesto priorities and the party system agenda are good predictors of party issue emphasis in parliamentary questions

- Niche vs Mainstream:

  - Mild evidence that niche parties are less constrained by the party system agenda than other parties

  - No evidence that niche parties ask more questions than mainstream on topics prioritised in their electoral platform