

The issue strategies of niche parties between elections: an analysis of question time in six countries

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The role of niche parties in issue competition has recently been granted increasing scholarly attention and a debate is under way on how to define them in opposition to mainstream parties. Most of the works on the subject focus on electoral competition and use the content of programmatic platforms as their empirical base. Although elections remain focal points for party competition, they represent only one arena where issue competition takes place. This paper sets out to explore the strategies of issue emphasis implemented by niche parties in the course of the electoral mandate by analysing the kind of topics they address in their oral questions to the government. It analyses whether, in comparison with mainstream parties, niche parties' issue profile in parliamentary questioning is more congruent with their electoral manifesto priorities and less likely to be affected by the issue profile of their competitors. The paper builds on a data set providing information on the issue content of oral questions in six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Portugal) created using the Comparative Agendas Project coding protocol.

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The increasing political relevance of “niche parties”, parties limiting their programmatic appeal to a limited set of non-economic issues (like environmental and radical right parties do), has long been recognised in academic research (Dalton, 2009; Inglehart, 1997). However, only recently scholars devoted systematic attention to their conceptualization and measurement as a category worth studying on its own terms (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2012a). In most cases, their electoral success does not originate from a greater availability of material resources, but from being associated to and perceived as competent on an issue ranking high on the political agenda.¹ On the other hand, this association must be constantly renovated and strengthened so as not to allow issue trespassing by competitors (Damore, 2004). Devoting special attention to one’s own topic during electoral campaigns – e.g. in programmatic platforms – or through media appearances (Walgrave et al., 2009) are only some of the tools available to maintain this ownership. The goal of this paper is to analyse how niche parties play the game of issue competition (Petrocik, 1996; Robertson, 1976) in parliament. More specifically, it focuses on their selective issue emphasis during parliamentary oral questioning.

There is already an extensive literature on the use of parliamentary questions in issue competition (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Otjes and Louwerse, 2018; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011), namely the pursuit of votes by selectively emphasising issues that are beneficial to one’s own party rather than by taking positions different from one’s competitors on similar issues (e.g. Budge and Farlie, 1983; Green-Pedersen, 2007). Parties use parliamentary questions as a signalling device directed to voters and

¹ The linkage with the issue is normally rooted in history and its origin can be traced back to a time where the issue was still marginal in the agenda.

journalists to bolster their policy profile between elections. As effectively put by Otjes and Louwerse (2018: 497), “parliamentary questions are the continuation of election campaigns by different means”. After all, oral parliamentary questions are cheap but effective devices for a party willing to mark its own territory, because they are available *de jure* to all parliamentary groups (no matter their size), their drafting does not require extensive resources and, usually, they are televised, which increases their overall visibility.

But how do parties select the kind of topic to focus on in parliamentary questions? As expected by issue competition theory, recent studies found out that parties tend to focus their parliamentary questioning on topics that are also central in their programmatic platforms (Borghetto and Russo, 2018; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Otjes and Louwerse, 2018; Vliegthart et al., 2013). This is reasonable if one understands the party mandate model “as a model of representation, rather than as a model of electing a particular government programme” (Louwerse, 2011: 430). Given that voters elect MPs on a specific party platform, they expect them to get those policies implemented if in government or, at least, to advocate them in parliament if in opposition.

Another insight from issue competition theory is that parties do not act in a void, blindly sticking to their owned issues, but constantly interact and, thus, are constrained by the issue strategies of their competitors (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015). As shown by a consistent body of evidence, party issue emphases do overlap to some extent (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Sigelman and Buell, 2004). Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010, 2015) developed the concept of “party system agenda” to refer to the contingent and ever-changing hierarchy of issues that all parties try to influence but that, simultaneously, constrain them. No matter a party track record

on an issue, if this climbs to the top of the agenda, it is risky for the party not to address it.

Based on these two expectations, the following analysis explores whether, in comparison with mainstream parties, the issue emphasis of niche parties is: 1) more likely to remain congruent between the electoral and post-electoral period; 2) less likely to be influenced by the party system agenda. For instance, it is reasonable to expect that environmental parties, which strongly campaigned on environmental issues, should be more prone to ask parliamentary questions on the environment. The same should hold true for radical right-wing parties and the issue of immigration. On the other hand, oral questions can be not only a device to signal one's commitment to a cause but an opportunity, for instance, to attack the cabinet on those topics where it is most vulnerable and to ride the public opinion or media wave (Vliegenthart et al., 2016). Whereas mainstream parties should be particularly prone to jump on these opportunities, niche parties should show less flexibility in their agenda-setting choices.

There are good reasons to expect this different behaviour. By definition, niche parties tend to be more responsive to their activists and more policy-oriented (Ezrow et al., 2011a; but see also Lehrer, 2012; Schumacher et al., 2013) than their mainstream counterparts. As a result, they should over-value consistency and they should be less responsive to changes in the environment such as voter shifts, electoral defeat, as well as changes in rival parties' strategies and real-world developments.²

² Of course, we do not expect total rigidity on the part of niche actors. An environmental party that does not respond to the issue of the day, e.g. the rise in unemployment during the recent economic crisis, and keeps talking of the depletion of the ozone layer can lose credibility in the long run.

This paper contributes to our theoretical and empirical understanding of the difference between niche and mainstream parties by integrating information on the party programmatic profile, which is often used to define “niche” in the first place, with that on parliamentary behaviour. The study is based on data from six countries (Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain) drawn from two main data sources: comparative manifesto projects were used to reconstruct the programmatic content of 66 parties across 31 elections; comparative agendas project data to track their issue emphasis in parliamentary oral questions.

The article proceeds in three stages. In the next section I frame the guiding research questions in the literature on party competition and legislative behaviour. Next, I present the data and method. I conclude by presenting the preliminary results from the analysis.

Literature review

The distinction between the “niche” and “mainstream” status of a party is important because it entails different resources, strategies and outcomes in party competition. The reason to focus on it is not only to zoom in on the functioning and electoral fortunes of niche parties or incorporate the mainstream/niche dichotomy in models of party competition as a control variable, but to learn about how mainstream parties are affected by the electoral threat of niche parties (e.g. Bale et al., 2010; van Spanje, 2010) and, more generally, their “lasting impact on the content of the political debate.” (Meguid, 2005: 357).

Meguid’s seminal definition of niche parties (2005; see also Wagner, 2012a) rests on two main characteristics: rejection of the class-based dimension of politics and emphasis on a narrow set of issues not located on the traditional left-right continuum. Recent definitions

opted for relaxing the requirement whereby the issue profile of niche parties should be essentially on non-economic topics (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015). In this paper, I adopt Bischof's more flexible and continuous definition of "niche-ness" as a property of parties that "in order to assure their market advantages [...] need to focus their issue appeals on a narrow range of segments, that are neglected by mainstream" (Bischof, 2017: 224).

Turning to the use of the concept, so far, a good portion of research on niche parties has focused on their acting and interacting in electoral competition. It was shown, for instance, that niche parties differ from their mainstream opponents in the way their electoral platforms respond to public opinion shifts (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow, 2010; Ezrow et al., 2011b) or in the overall content of their platforms (Wagner, 2012b). In terms of issue competition, it was demonstrated that they do have an impact on the electoral agendas of mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi, 2016) and they are less influenced by the party system agenda and show less continuity in their issue attention than other parties (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015).

The focus on electoral campaigns is not surprising: they are crucial events where parties engage in issue competition. From the point of view of issue competition theory, the narrower focus of niche parties is expected to be an advantage when their "owned" issue becomes more prominent in the political agenda (Budge, 2015). In marketing terminology, they can boast "a first mover advantage on the market making it difficult for competitors to incorporate this niche segment" (Bischof, 2017: 224). On the other hand,

there might be incentives for mainstream parties to try to steal the issue/s of the successful niche party (Abou-Chadi, 2016).³

On the other hand, the dynamics of party issue competition are clearly not confined to the short electoral window. Parties constantly engage in a struggle to affect the party system agenda and the use of parliamentary questions is certainly one of the available and increasingly used tools (Green-Pedersen, 2010). Existing research has already focused on parliamentary questioning to learn about the behaviour of niche versus mainstream parties. Vliegenthart et al. (2011) found that Belgian niche parties have greater agenda-setting power (in this case, influence over other parties' issue strategy) than their competitors. Van de Wardt (2014) showed that Danish mainstream parties do respond to the issue emphasis of niche parties but only indirectly, namely after other mainstream opposition parties shifted their emphasis in the same direction. On the other hand, there is still little comparative work focusing explicitly on the determinants of their issue selection in parliament.

Oversight tools come in a great variety and, on top of that, existing procedures may also undergo revisions over the years (Wiberg, 1995). This paper focuses on oral parliamentary questions. The main difference with written parliamentary questions is that they receive an oral response by the relevant minister. The cabinet can respond in

³ Additionally, during electoral times, the stakes are particularly high for niche parties. They have normally smaller representations in parliament and even a relatively minor increase in their number of representatives can mean a lot for their chance of survival and policy influence. Secondly, they are usually endowed with less resources in comparison with their mainstream competitors, so the electoral stage represents a short window of visibility that must be exploited.

committee meetings or on the floor, during a special and periodic debate session which is often – but not exclusively - referred to by the British name of question time. Because of the limited time slots available for asking questions (a few hours a week in the best case scenario), the content of oral questions is mostly controlled by party elites (Martin, 2011). Additionally, in some countries, especially when the Prime Minister takes the parliamentary floor to answer, these sessions are televised, thus granting greater visibility to the event. Consequently, they can be of strategic importance to drive attention to specific issues, whereas other tools (e.g. written questions) should be preferred if the goal is collecting information.

Predominantly vote-seeking (or mainstream) parties are expected to use oral questions to bring attention to those issues that are the most electorally advantageous. These are not confined to “owned” issues. Sometimes, for instance, opposition parties can decide to ride the media wave (Vliegenthart et al., 2016) and bring attention to those issues that are awkward for government parties (Vliegenthart et al., 2013). Similarly, majority MPs can decide to ask questions that provide the minister with an opportunity to claim credit for a successful cabinet measure.

Predominantly policy-seeking (or niche) parties should, on the contrary, privilege a more rigid approach to selective issue emphasis because they mainly respond to the preferences of their core supporters (e.g. Adams et al., 2006), at least with regard to the issue they own (Giger and Lefkofridi, 2014; Klüver and Spoon, 2016). Therefore, as far as the issue emphasis in parliamentary questions is concerned, we develop two expectations.

First, niche parties should be less inclined to follow other parties and engage in a debate on the issue of the day. Using a concept developed by Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010), we can say that niche parties differ from mainstream in their

responsiveness to the common party system agenda. Although their focus is on electoral competition, Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2015) formulate a similar expectation when they state that, because of the necessity for mainstream parties “to be closely aligned with the broader party system agenda to maintain their pivotal role and support in the electorate [...their issue profiles] are probably closer to the average issue agenda of the party system than are other parties’ issue attention profiles.” (Ibid, p. 751). Looking at the same hypothesis from a different angle, I expect that niche parties should be less susceptible to the party system agenda in comparison with mainstream parties.

H1: Niche parties’ issue emphasis in parliamentary activities is less influenced by the party system agenda than mainstream parties.

If niche parties are not influenced by other parties’ agendas as much as their competitors, what criteria do they use then to choose the topic of their parliamentary questions? My expectation is that their selection should be driven by their programmatic platform. Ultimately, electoral manifestos are documents expressing a party’s policy commitments in front of the electorate. When the latter is mainly composed by hard core militants, such as in the case of niche parties, one should expect greater congruence between manifesto and parliamentary agendas.

H2: Niche parties’ issue emphasis in parliamentary activities is more influenced by their electoral agenda than mainstream parties.

Data and methods

The following analysis relies on data from six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain). As table 1 shows, country data have different temporal coverage, ranging from 25 years in the Netherlands to 8 years in Portugal. This

is mainly due to data availability. Data on the issue content of parliamentary questions were collected and coded by different national teams of the Comparative Agendas Project network using the shared topic codebook (www.comparativeagendas.net).

The dependent variable is the number of parliamentary oral questions asked by a party on a topic during a cabinet. The unit of temporal aggregation is the cabinet and not the legislature, because during a legislature a cabinet reshuffle or a party shifting from government to opposition (or vice versa) may occur. The 21 policy codes of the Comparative Agendas Codebook were aggregated into 11, which broadly reflect the major cabinet portfolios as defined by Bäck et al. (2011). Table 2 shows the distribution of questions across country and topic. Finally, since some parties barely participated to the national question time or they merged with others after elections, I selected only parties asking at least 11 questions (hypothetically, they could ask 1 question per topic).

The two main independent variables are issue emphasis in party manifestos and in the party system agenda, always for each party and across 11 topics. For the former, I used the attribution of attention to each topic made by Bäck et al. (2011) using Comparative Manifesto data (Volkens et al., 2015). For the latter, I computed the mean percentage of parliamentary attention (i.e. in oral questions) to each topic during a cabinet considering all parties but the one for which it is calculated. In fact, the goal is to capture the impact over each party of the attention paid by its competitors.

The categorization of parties into niche or mainstream uses both a dichotomous division based on party families (Adams et al., 2006) and a continuous measure (Bischof, 2017; see also Meyer and Miller, 2015). Using the division in party families provided by the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow, 2018) and following the classification by Adams et al. (2006), I assigned Green, Radical Right and Communist parties to the “niche”

category (special issue parties in Spain were also categorized as niche). A list of the parties classified as niche with their corresponding party family and cabinets where they were active can be found in table 3. Finally, I computed the nicheness score according to the operationalisation devised by Bischof (2017), whereby a party is niche if it is competing on a narrow set of issue segments neglected by its competitors.⁴ This conceptualization provides flexibility in comparison with the time-invariant and binary family-based division. At the same time, it does not overlap with the previous categorization (as exemplified in Figure 1) since most of the extreme-left parties are not competing on the issue segments identified by Bischof. Given the exploratory nature of this work, I decided to include both measurements in the analysis. Binary niche takes 1 if the party is categorized as member of one of the niche party families. Continuous niche takes positive values ranging from 0.13 to 1.23 (mean 0.503), where higher values indicate a higher degree of nicheness.

The final models incorporate two control variables, which have been found to affect the number of questions. First, I control for whether the party asking questions is part of either the opposition or the majority. Legislative oversight is mainly the domain of opposition parties since majority parties can employ other channels to interact with cabinet actors. From this point of view, the Danish case stands out since only opposition parties participate to question time. In general, opposition parties are expected to rely more on oversight activities, so it is necessary to control for that. Second, I control for the share of seats of the parliamentary group. Although there exist cross-national variations

⁴ I relied on the ManifestoR (<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/information/documents/manifestoR>) package to calculate the party-specific “niceness” score formulated by Bischof (2017)

in the procedures regulating oral parliamentary questions, in most countries their party quota is directly proportional to the size of its representation in parliament. As a result, I expect smaller parties to ask less questions. Both variables were built using data retrieved from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow, 2018).

The choice of the statistical model was driven by two characteristics of the data. First, the count of sponsored oral questions is an integer featuring high over-dispersion (i.e. the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean). Second, data are organized as a hierarchical panel with topic nested into party, which on their turn are nested into cabinets. This might result in correlated outcomes for the same topic, party and cabinet. As a result, I fitted a hierarchical negative binomial model with random intercept for each topic, party and cabinet.⁵

Preliminary results

Table 4 show the results of 6 regressions, one for each country, constituting the baseline model (namely the model not including the interaction). Table 5 and 6 report the regression results using the two versions (respectively binary and continuous) of “niceness” as conditional variable in interaction with “Party system” (H1) and “Manifesto” (H2). Model effects are presented as incidence rate ratios (IRR), where values smaller than 1 indicate a negative effect, equal to 1 no effect and greater than 1 a positive effect. According to H1, the interaction between “Party system” and “niche” should be negative, which indicates that niche parties are less sensitive to the party system

⁵ To account for the presence of zeros in the data sets we ran Vuong tests comparing the zero-inflated model negative binomial with an ordinary negative binomial regression model. The results indicate that the ordinary negative binomial is preferred.

agenda than other parties. Vice versa, H2 expects that the interaction between attention for one of the 11 issues in the manifesto and “niche” should be positive. The congruence between electoral and parliamentary priorities should be higher for niche parties than for other parties.

It is worth starting from table 4 because it provides us with a yardstick. The IRR values of “Party system” and “Manifesto” represent the effects of respectively party system agenda and electoral agenda on the number of questions, *ceteris paribus*. Remarkably all of the coefficients are positive and most of them are significant at least at the 0.05 confidence level. This implies that both factors have a positive impact on the number of questions an average party asks, which support previous findings in the literature (e.g. Borghetto and Russo, 2018; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). Finding no effect at all would have made meaningless the testing of my hypotheses.

Turning to my central question, whether niche parties behave differently from the mainstream, preliminary results are mixed. Starting from table 5A (binary niche, test of H1), the direction of the effects is negative as expected, but for Spain – probably due to the inclusion of special issue parties which do not entirely fit in the “niche” categorization (Canary Coalition, Republican Left of Catalonia). On the other hand, only for the case of the Netherlands and Portugal I detect a statistically significant difference in the slopes. The IRR for the interaction in table 5B show a less clear pattern. For the most part, being a niche party affects only marginally the conditional impact of manifesto priorities on the number of parliamentary questions and, contrary to my expectations, it tends to diminish the congruence for high values of manifesto attention (see the significant negative IRR for Portugal).

When the same models including interactions are run using Bischof’s operationalization of nicheness as conditional variable, results are less clear and they

never reach statistical significance. With regard to H1, parties with high niche scores in Italy and the Netherlands tend to be deeply affected by the party system agenda, which goes against my expectations. With regard to H2, results once again vary across countries.

Conclusion

Are niche parties behaving differently from other parties as far as their issue strategy in parliamentary questions is concerned? This work started from two main determinants that, according to the literature on party issue competition, affect the selective issue emphasis of parties in parliament: their programmatic profile and the party system agenda. In both cases, niche party should display a slightly different conduct from mainstream parties. They should stick more strictly to their platform agenda and be less prone to follow the cue of other parties. These two expectations were tested using data on the policy content of oral parliamentary questions from six countries.

The preliminary findings presented above reveal that both mechanisms are somewhat at play in the agenda decision of the average party actor. The confirmation of insights drawn mostly from single-country case studies in a larger pool of countries is already a remarkable result. As regards the distinctive trajectory of niche parties, I found only mild evidence that niche parties, when defined according to their party family membership, tend to be less influenced by the party system agenda. On the other hand, the impact of manifesto priorities does not seem to differ between mainstream and niche. A justification for this result might be that different incentives drive parties when deciding the topic of parliamentary questions and that of electoral pledges. A possible analogy is the distinction between playing a repeated (question time occurs on a weekly or bi-weekly basis) and one-shot (elections occur every n years) game. In repeated games, it is acceptable and sometimes even recommended to change strategy in response to new

environmental incentives. Using the language of issue competition, one can say that even niche parties do at times deviate from their historically associated issues.[...]

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Tables and figures

Table 1- Data overview

country_name	n_elections	n_cabinet	n_party	n_questions	min_year	max_year
Belgium	6	8	15	7388	1988	2010
Denmark	5	6	7	1776	1998	2012
Italy	4	7	19	2730	2001	2014
Netherlands	7	7	9	1184	1984	2009
Portugal	3	3	7	2331	2005	2015
Spain	4	4	8	7253	2000	2015
Total	29	35	65	22662		

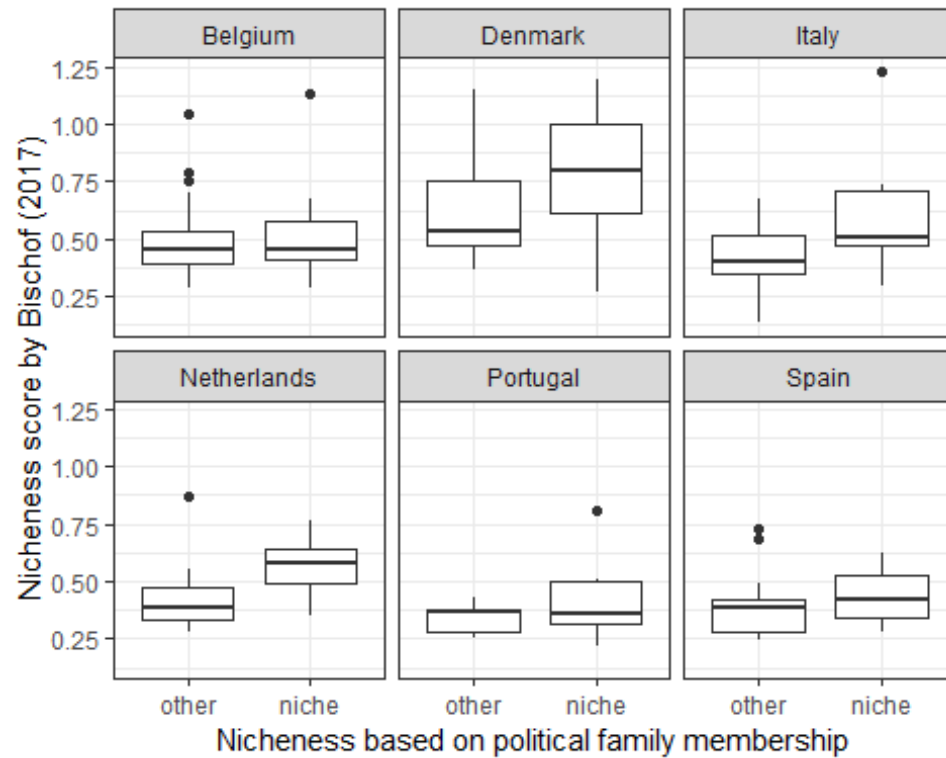
Table 2 – Distribution of parliamentary oral questions by country and topic

Country	Defence	Education	Environment	Finance & Economy	Foreign	Health	Industry	Interior	Justice	Labour	Social Affairs
Belgium	307	154	364	1234	429	682	858	1049	1527	479	305
Denmark	78	174	157	234	169	236	118	217	233	88	72
Italy	69	171	234	437	102	331	332	334	464	186	70
Netherlands	56	88	77	123	126	139	104	161	131	102	77
Portugal	24	138	148	843	62	167	166	339	98	137	209
Spain	280	571	619	1475	447	591	788	1036	841	382	223

Table 3 Niche parties by party family

country_name	party_name_english	family_name	cabinet
Belgium	Agalev – Green	Green/Ecologist	Rompuy,Dehaene II,Verhofstadt I,Leterme II,Verhofstadt IV,Martens VIII,Dehaene I
Belgium	Confederated ecologists for the organisation of original struggles	Green/Ecologist	Verhofstadt II
Belgium	People’s Union	Right-wing	Dehaene II,Martens VIII,Dehaene I
Belgium	Flemish Block	Right-wing	Dehaene II,Verhofstadt I,Verhofstadt II,Martens VIII,Dehaene I
Denmark	Red-Green Alliance	Communist/Socialist	Rasmussen L I,Rasmussen F II,Rasmussen F I,Rasmussen N IV,Rasmussen F III,Thorning-Schmidt I
Denmark	Socialist Peoples Party	Green/Ecologist	Rasmussen L I,Rasmussen F II,Rasmussen F I,Rasmussen N IV,Rasmussen F III
Denmark	Danish Peoples Party	Right-wing	Rasmussen L I,Rasmussen F II,Rasmussen F I,Rasmussen N IV,Rasmussen F III,Thorning-Schmidt I
Italy	Communist Refoundation Party	Communist/Socialist	Prodi II,Berlusconi II,Berlusconi III
Italy	Party of the Italian Communists	Communist/Socialist	Prodi II
Italy	Left (Ecology) Freedom	Communist/Socialist	Letta I
Italy	Federation of the Greens	Green/Ecologist	Prodi II
Italy	Five Star Movement	Green/Ecologist	Letta I
Italy	North League	Right-wing	Prodi II,Berlusconi II,Berlusconi III,Berlusconi IV,Monti,Letta I
Netherlands	Socialist Party	Communist/Socialist	Balkenende V,Balkenende III,Kok I,Kok II
Netherlands	Pacifist Socialist Party	Communist/Socialist	Lubbers II
Netherlands	GreenLeft	Green/Ecologist	Balkenende V,Balkenende III,Lubbers III,Kok I,Kok II
Netherlands	Radical Political Party	Green/Ecologist	Lubbers I,Lubbers II
Portugal	Portuguese Communist Party	Communist/Socialist	Socrates I,Socrates II,Passos Coelho I
Portugal	Bloc of the Left	Communist/Socialist	Socrates I,Socrates II,Passos Coelho I
Portugal	Ecology Party – Greens	Green/Ecologist	Socrates I,Socrates II,Passos Coelho I
Spain	United Left Communist Party	Communist/Socialist	Aznar II,Zapatero I,Rajoy I
Spain	Canary Coalition	Special issue	Aznar II,Zapatero I
Spain	Republican Left of Catalonia	Special issue	Zapatero II,Zapatero I

Figure 1 Niche party score by Bischof (2017)



Note: Niche if party family is Green, Radical Right and Communist (Special issue for Spain)

Table 4 Baseline models (niche defined by political family)

Predictors	Belgium		Italy		Netherlands		Portugal		Spain		Denmark	
	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	0.88 (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	

Table 5 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												
σ^2	35.44		75.22		21.07		17.85		4.08		27.26	
τ_{00}	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	

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	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	

Table 6 Interaction models (niche as 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	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	

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	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	