

Valence Attacks in Multi-Party Systems

Daniel Weitzel

June 23, 2023
Department of Political Science
Colorado State University

Research Question

- ① When do political parties in multi-party systems attack each other?

Theoretical Argument

My argument summarized

- Multi-party systems have more political parties and require coalition governments.
- This increases the electoral uncertainty for political parties competing for votes.
- Valence attacks are a very risky strategy (rather uncommon, backlash, spillover effect).
- Parties will only use valence attacks that minimize the risk of unintended consequences.

Theoretical Argument

My argument summarized

- Multi-party systems have more political parties and require coalition governments.
- This increases the electoral uncertainty for political parties competing for votes.
- Valence attacks are a very risky strategy (rather uncommon, backlash, spillover effect).
- Parties will only use valence attacks that minimize the risk of unintended consequences.

What we know about attack behavior in elections?

- ① Most of the research focuses on the two party competition in the United States (Kahn and Kenney, 1997; Lau and Pomper, 2001; Bratcher, 2001; Lau and Pomper, 2004)
- ② Longer history of empirical research in the U.S.
 - ▶ more data available
 - ▶ only one language
 - ▶ two party case is theoretically and methodologically easier to model.

What we know about attack behavior in elections?

- ① Most of the research focuses on the two party competition in the United States (Kahn and Kenney, 1997; Lau and Pomper, 2001; Bratcher, 2001; Lau and Pomper, 2004)
- ② Longer history of empirical research in the U.S.
 - ▶ more data available
 - ▶ only one language
 - ▶ two party case is theoretically and methodologically easier to model.

Attack behavior in multi-party systems

- ① We cannot just transfer findings or theories from the two-party case to the multi-party case.
- ② History of programmatic competition makes valence attacks stand out and seem unusual (backlash).
- ③ More parties means that voters have lower cost of switching their vote if they don't like a party anymore (spillover).
- ④ Parties need to form coalition governments and attacks can increase the post-election bargaining costs.

Attacks should be rare in multi-party systems

Table: Valence Attacks Totals in the Campaign Periods Coded by the CCDP

Election	Attacks	Election	Attacks	Election	Attacks
CZ 2010	166	ES 2008	283	UK 2005	299
CZ 2013	141	ES 2011	211	UK 2010	318
CZ 2017	149	ES 2015	271	UK 2015	364
DE 2009	157	ES 2016	412	UK 2017	67
DE 2013	159	ES 2019	340	NL 2010	175
DE 2017	50	HU 2006	412	NL 2012	163
DK 2007	167	HU 2010	152	NL 2017	213
DK 2011	136	HU 2014	97	PO 2009	353
DK 2015	80	HU 2018	68	PO 2011	499
PL 2007	209	PL 2015	196	PO 2015	284
PL 2011	152	PL 2019	167	PO 2019	337

Attacks should be rare in multi-party systems

I argue that the risk of attacks is minimized in highly uncertain electoral environments through attacks that appear *legitimate* to voters. Three factors increase the perceived legitimacy of a valence attack:

- ① The target should be an incumbent.
- ② The target should be attacked on issues and not on its character.
- ③ The attacking party should attack competitors on issues that itself owns.

Research Design

- ① Campaign Discussions from the Comparative Campaign Dynamics Project.
- ② Three elections each in ten European countries, between 2005-2019.
- ③ Party dyads for each week in the one-month campaign period.
- ④ Issue-ownership classification based on Seeberg (2017).

Data set structure

Election	Week	Sender	Receiver	Valence Attacks (DV)				PM Sender	Party Receiver
				Binary	Agg.	Issue	Non-issue		
UK 2015	15	Labour	Tories	1	25	12	13	0	1
UK 2015	16	Labour	Tories	1	16	3	13	0	1
UK 2015	15	Tories	Labour	1	30	12	18	1	0
UK 2015	16	Tories	Labour	1	28	12	16	1	0

Figure: Dyadic data set structure.

Methods

- ① DV: Valence statements in party-dyads, binary and weekly statement counts.
- ② Key IV: *Target is Incumbent*, a dummy for government participation before the start of the campaign period.
- ③ Models: Logit for Model 1 and count models for dependent variables 2-6.
- ④ All models are estimated with dyad robust standard errors (Aronow et al. 2015) and country fixed effects.

Data

Fig. 1: Dependent Variables

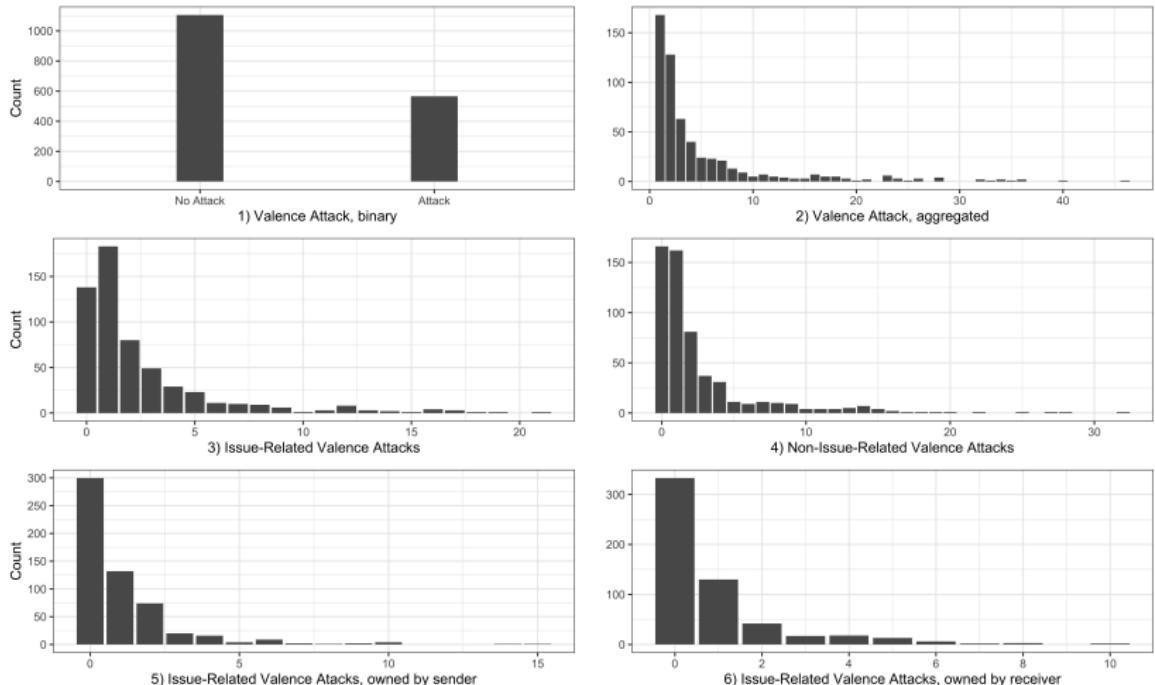


Figure: Distribution of the dependent variables.

Model

$$y_{ijct} = \alpha + \beta \mathbf{Z}_{jct} + \gamma \mathbf{V}_{ict} + \delta \mathbf{X}_{ijct}$$

- y_{ijct} , the dependent variable, is a vector of dyadic outcomes.
- \mathbf{Z}_{jct} is a matrix of characteristics of the receiving party
- \mathbf{V}_{ict} , a matrix of characteristics of the sender or attacking party
- \mathbf{X}_{ijct} is a matrix with dyad specific characteristics

Results: Decision to attack

Fig. 2: Attack occurrence and intensity

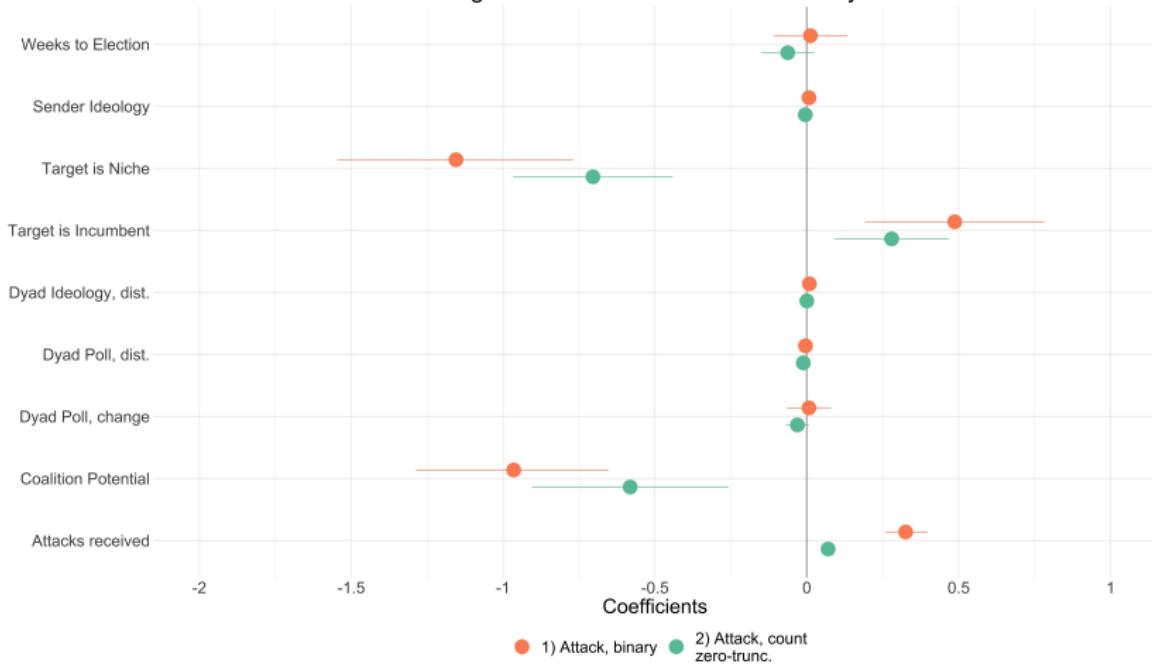


Figure: Analysis of Attack Decisions.

Results: Decision to attack

Fig. 2: Attack occurrence and intensity

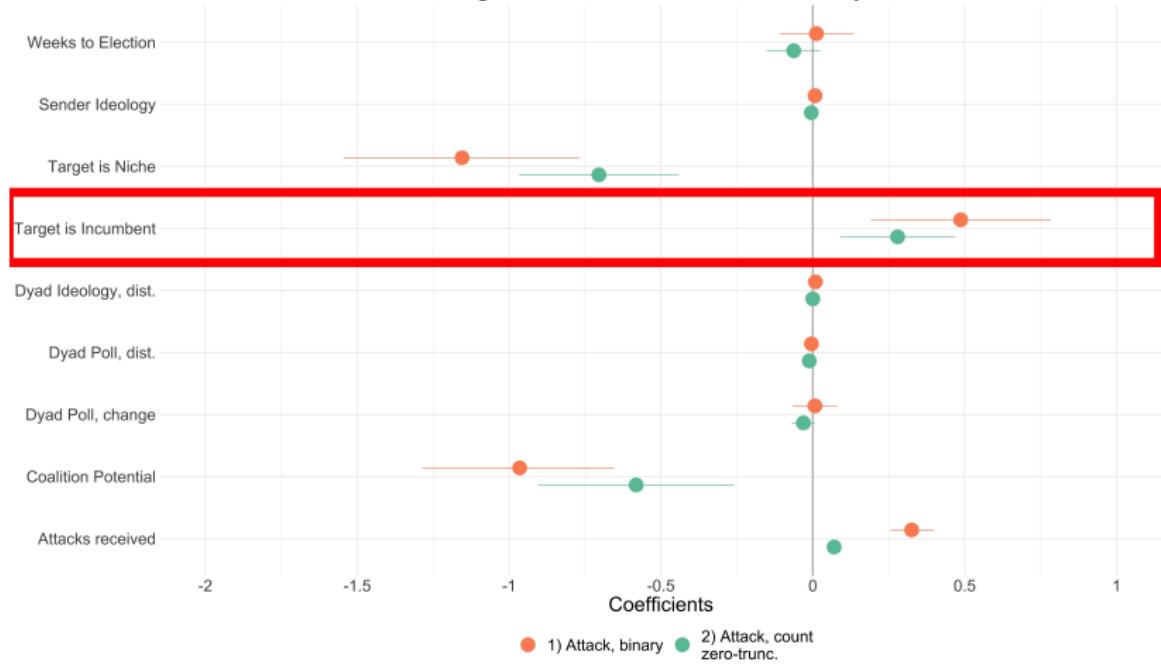


Figure: Analysis of Attack Decisions.

Results: Attack Intensity

Fig. 3: Issue and Issue-Ownership in Valence Attacks

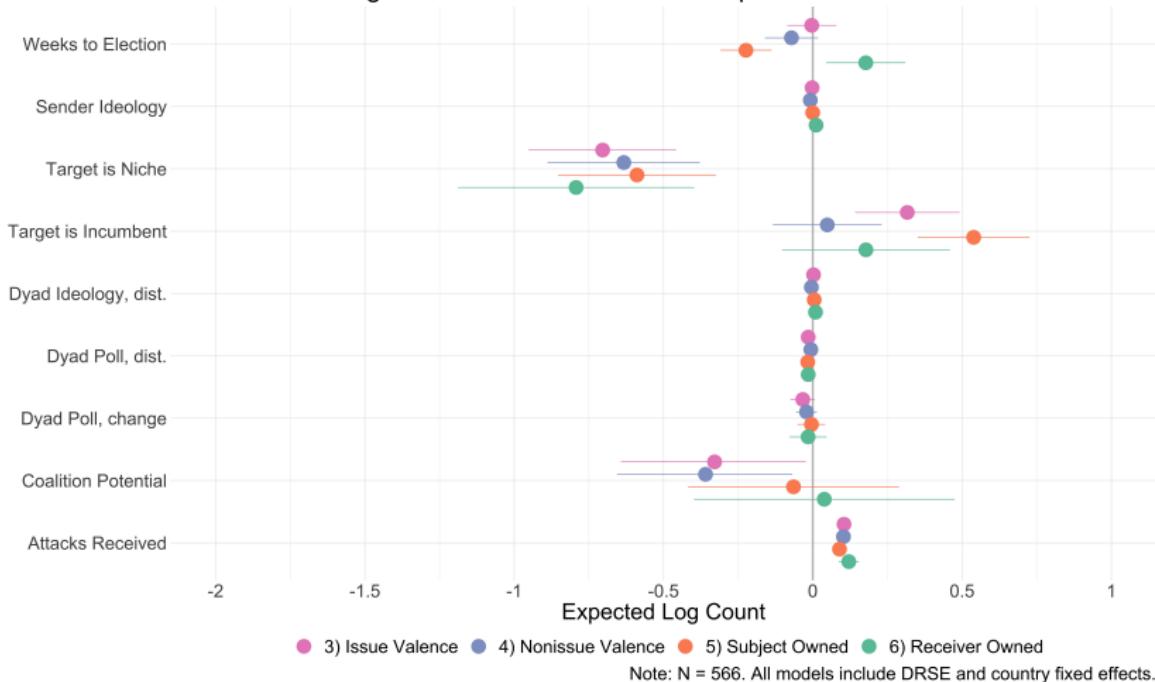


Figure: Analysis of Attack Intensity.

Results: Attack Intensity

Fig. 3: Issue and Issue-Ownership in Valence Attacks

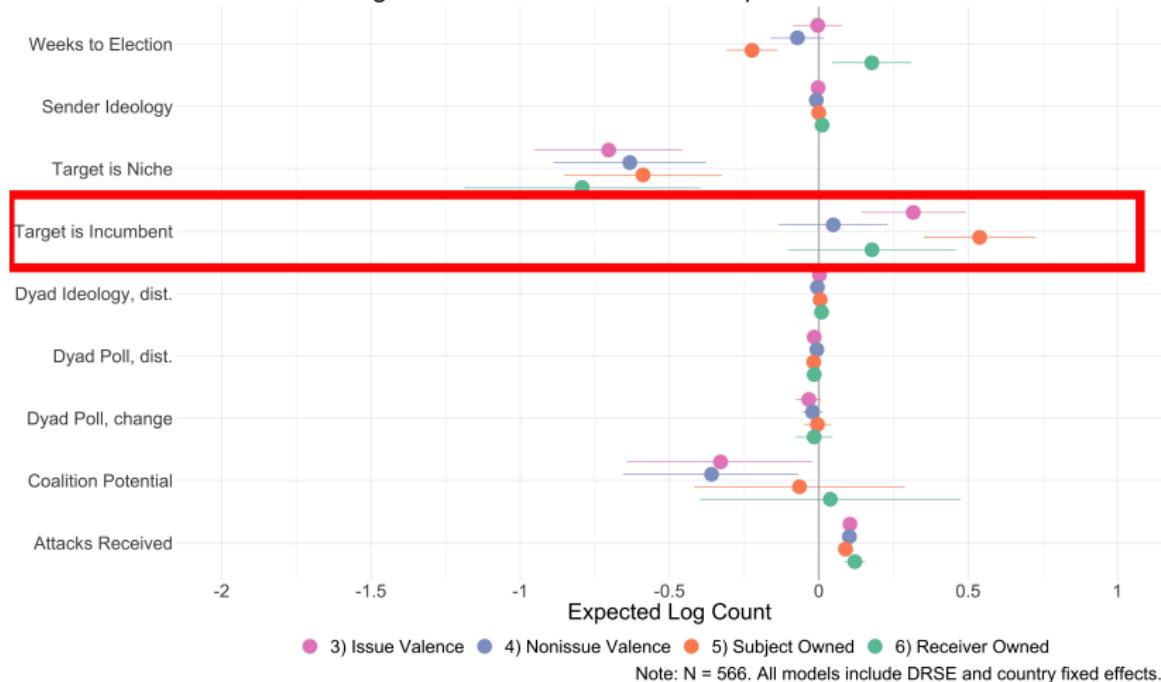


Figure: Analysis of Attack Intensity.

Results: Summary

Support for Hypothesis 1 in Models 1 and 2:

- Odds of receiving an attack are 71% higher for incumbents.

Support for Hypothesis 2 in Models 3 and 4:

- Parties are more likely to attack incumbents on issues than on nonissues.
- There is no effect for nonissue attacks.

Support for Hypothesis 3 in Models 5 and 6:

- Parties are more likely to attack incumbents on issues owned by the attacker.

Results: Summary

Support for Hypothesis 1 in Models 1 and 2:

- Odds of receiving an attack are 71% higher for incumbents.

Support for Hypothesis 2 in Models 3 and 4:

- Parties are more likely to attack incumbents on issues than on nonissues.
- There is no effect for nonissue attacks.

Support for Hypothesis 3 in Models 5 and 6:

- Parties are more likely to attack incumbents on issues owned by the attacker.

Results: Summary

Support for Hypothesis 1 in Models 1 and 2:

- Odds of receiving an attack are 71% higher for incumbents.

Support for Hypothesis 2 in Models 3 and 4:

- Parties are more likely to attack incumbents on issues than on nonissues.
- There is no effect for nonissue attacks.

Support for Hypothesis 3 in Models 5 and 6:

- Parties are more likely to attack incumbents on issues owned by the attacker.

Conclusion

- ① In multi-party systems attacks are used but parties try to minimize the risk of unintended consequence.
- ② Attack behavior is not driven by electoral performance or ideology.
- ③ There is a strong element of reciprocity in attack behavior.
- ④ Niche parties and potential coalition partners are significantly less likely to receive an attack in the first place. If attacked, they receive fewer attacks.

The End

Feedback and comments appreciated!

- daniel.weitzel@colostate.edu
- [@dweitzel](https://twitter.com/dweitzel)

Thank you and have a great conference!

The End

Feedback and comments appreciated!

- daniel.weitzel@colostate.edu
- @dweitzel

Thank you and have a great conference!