

Appealing broadly or narrowing down? The impact of government experience and party organization on the scope of parties' issue agendas

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Abstract

Why do parties offer broad or narrow policy agendas to voters? Taking up the call to focus more on 'issue diversity' in election campaigns, this article argues that agenda scope is informed by (1) parties' experience with government participation and (2) their internal organizational structure. Non-governing challengers, which are losers in the current system, seek to change the political status quo by focusing on a few issues only, whereas mainstream parties have an incentive to reinforce existing patterns of competition and thus distribute their attention across a wide range of issues. However, the extent to which parties respond to these external stimuli depends on intraparty politics. Party leaders seek to satisfy vote- and office-seeking motivations and want to 'appeal broadly', whereas activists want the party to 'speak to the base' and narrow down its issue appeals. Analyses of party agendas in 18 European democracies (1950–2013) support these expectations.

Keywords

election strategy, issue attention, issue diversity, party politics, party organization

Introduction

What explains the scope of parties' issue agendas? Although traditional theories of issue competition predict stable issue profiles, with parties selectively emphasizing the issues they 'own' (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996), empirical studies demonstrate the dynamics of salience strategies (see, e.g. Abou-Chadi, 2016; Damore, 2004; Van De Wardt, 2015). Greene (2015) recently introduced a new research agenda focusing on *issue diversity* in election campaigns, highlighting that our understanding of why parties shift attention across issues is underdeveloped (cf. Tavits and Potter, 2015).

Indeed, only few studies deal with the breadth of issue agendas. Hobolt et al. (2008) examine issue diversity in party leaders' speeches but only in two countries. Other studies consider 'issue diversification' a vote-seeking strategy. By increasing agenda scope, parties appeal to a broader electorate and become more 'catch all' (Somer-Topcu, 2015). However, sometimes it might be rational for parties to *decrease* issue diversity and pursue core vote strategies (Green, 2011).

This article seeks to further the study of issue diversity by employing Greene's (2015) concept of the effective number of manifesto issues (ENMI). It departs from previous studies by highlighting two arguments. First, the crucial distinction in issue diversity is not between opposition and government parties but between challenger and mainstream parties, as the latter distinction more adequately describes parties' relative competitive positions in multiparty systems. Second, intraparty politics, specifically the balance of power between activists and leaders, affects the scope of parties' issue agendas.

The first argument reflects the assumption that challengers want to change the political status quo by promoting new lines of conflict (i.e. new issues) (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). They focus their attention on these issues and present confined and specific

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policy agendas. Previous research has demonstrated how challenger parties (CPs) adopt issue entrepreneurial strategies and politicize European integration issues (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and De Vries, 2015; Van De Wardt et al., 2014). This article considers a party's platform as a whole and argues that non-governing CPs also respond to their unfavourable position by presenting narrow issue agendas. Mainstream parties, on the other hand, seek to reinforce existing patterns of competition and distribute their issue attention broadly.

The second argument highlights that there is a struggle over issue strategies within parties: activists want the party to focus on its core issues, while the leadership of the party is tempted by the potential electoral gains of a strategy of issue diversification. Thus, parties in which the leadership is dominant should have a broader issue profile than parties in which activists have more of a say. Analyses of the ENMI of 259 parties in 18 European countries between 1950 and 2013 lend support to these propositions.

The politics of issue attention diversity

Issue salience decisions are as much a part of the strategic toolkit of parties as issue positioning (Meguid, 2005), and a crucial decision is how many issues to select for an election campaign (Aragonès et al., 2015). The literature suggests two alternative strategies.

First, parties may choose to present a specific and focused agenda, confining their attention to issues on which they have an advantage. This view is informed by salience theory, which argues that politicians 'selectively emphasize' issues that are favourable to them while deemphasizing issues that might harm them (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Robertson, 1976) – a logic that Riker (1993) formalized in the principles of dominance and dispersion.¹ A party stands to gain from an issue when it establishes 'ownership' (Petrocik, 1996). An idea that is closely related to this is the 'core vote strategy', which implies that parties focus on issues of interest to the party base rather than the larger electorate (Green, 2011: 736).

Second, parties may go beyond their core issues and broaden their focus. This involves presenting diverse agendas including many different issues. Parties might pursue such a strategy because issue ownership is a dynamic process rather than a stable condition (Damore, 2004; Walgrave et al., 2009) and parties can attempt to 'steal' ownership from competitors (Holian, 2004) or try to 'claim' new issues. More generally, a 'broad appeal' strategy is attractive insofar, as it is likely to bring electoral advantages (Kirchheimer, 1966; Somer-Topcu, 2015). One way to achieve this goal is for parties to moderate their positions (Downs, 1957); an alternative strategy is to add more issues to the agenda in the hope of appealing to a broader electorate.

Issue strategies are thus characterized by a trade-off for parties between 'speaking to the base' by presenting a specific agenda that is limited in scope and reaching out to a wider electorate by presenting a broad and diversified agenda (see also Aragonès et al., 2015; De Sio and Weber, 2014). The extent to which parties prefer one strategy to the other depends, I argue, on (1) past experience in government and (2) the balance of power between party activists and leaders. In the following, I develop these arguments in more detail.

Experience in government and issue diversity

Like De Vries and Hobolt (2012), I assume that party competition in multiparty settings can be described as an iterative strategic game between challenger and mainstream parties (see also Hobolt and De Vries, 2015). The basic insight is that multiparty systems consist of mainstream parties that regularly participate in coalition governments but are sometimes excluded from office, and CPs that have not previously held office (and might never hold office in the future) (see also Hobolt and Karp, 2010). One can thus distinguish, in any given election, between *CPs*, *mainstream opposition parties (MOPs)* and *mainstream government parties (MGPs)*. There are two reasons why these different types of parties would pursue different issue diversity strategies.

First, incumbent parties are tied to their record in office, which they need to defend because voters hold them responsible. Government parties are expected to have stances on all the important issues of the day. To some extent, the same holds for opposition parties with office aspirations, as they need to show that they present credible alternatives for government. On the other hand, empirical studies show that opposition parties are less constrained in their programmatic issue strategies than government parties and that they pick specific issues to attack incumbents on (Bevan and John, 2016; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Meyer and Wager, 2013; Seeberg, 2013). Greene (2015) likewise suggests that out-of-office parties are not forced to respond to all issues in the same way government parties are and instead focus strongly on selected issues that they deem strategically favourable. Hence, we would expect opposition parties to present policy agendas that are narrower in scope than the agendas of incumbents.

Second, the distinction between CPs and mainstream parties corresponds to the divide between political losers and winners in multiparty systems (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and De Vries, 2015). According to theories of issue evolution and issue entrepreneurship, losers seek to advance their position by promoting conflict on new issues, while winners aim to maintain the status quo (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Riker, 1986). Mainstream parties regularly alternate between opposition

and government, and therefore they ‘have an incentive to reinforce existing patterns of political competition and the policy issues underlying them’ (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012: 250). They do not want to politicize specific issues but seek to stabilize the structure of the political issue space. As a result, mainstream parties appeal broadly, distributing their attention across a wide range of issues.

CPs, on the other hand, attempt to upset the political status quo and confine their issue appeals. They focus, for example, strongly on issues that are largely neglected by mainstream parties, such as European integration (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Van De Wardt et al., 2014). As a result of such issue entrepreneurial strategies, the diversity in these parties’ issue appeals is reduced. They alter their strategies once their relative position within the party system has improved; challengers cease to be ‘agents of issue evolution’ (Hobolt and De Vries, 2015: 1159) after they have been rewarded with access to office. Parties use a ‘reference point’ when devising their issue strategies. If they gain access to office, government membership becomes their reference point and they will adjust their issue salience strategies accordingly (Van De Wardt, 2015). Office inclusion thus induces parties to switch to more mainstream issue profiles. Case studies of the impact of government membership on green parties’ electoral strategies largely confirm this argument (see also Bischof, 2015: 12; Rihoux and Rüdig, 2006). The German Greens, during their first period in office, adopted a political programme that outlined a new ideological direction for the party (Rihoux and Rüdig, 2006: S20). Similar to many other European green parties, they sought to broaden their issue appeals beyond environmental matters (Bischof, 2015: 5). Staying in power, after the experience of attaining power, has increasingly become an end in itself for these parties. Rihoux and Rüdig (2006: S20–S21) expect green parties’ strategic goals to be ‘significantly modified by participation in power’. I formalize these considerations about the impact of experience in government on issue diversity in the following hypotheses:

H1a: MOPs present more confined agendas than MGPs.

H1b: Challenger parties present more confined agendas than mainstream parties.

Intraparty politics and issue diversity

I argued above that experience with government participation influences agenda scope. But parties differ in the extent to which they in fact seek access to office. Parties’ strategic decisions are the result of the complex interplay between their vote, office and policy objectives (Müller and Strøm, 1999; Strøm, 1990). A party’s motivation to adopt a broad issue profile is likely driven by its vote- and office-seeking incentives. If parties present diverse issue agendas, they aim to reach out to voters beyond their core supporters,

seeking to represent large and diverse shares of the electorate. Such catch-all strategies may convince different groups of voters that the party will represent their interests when in office. These strategies are often associated with vote gains; Somer-Topcu (2015: 842) calls a broad appeal strategy a ‘recipe for electoral success’. Larger vote shares suggest greater coalition bargaining power and increased chances of participating in a coalition government. Hence, adopting a broad issue profile likely serves parties’ office-seeking motivations.

However, parties’ optimal vote- and office-seeking strategies often conflict with the pursuit of policy objectives (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Pedersen, 2012). Parties that mainly seek to satisfy policy goals will strongly emphasize key issues that are of central importance to them (Wagner and Meyer, 2014). Parties are commonly associated with specific issues in voters’ minds (Walgrave et al., 2012). Often these are issues that define the party and have played an important role in its emergence. A policy-seeking party is likely to prioritize advancing these issues over adopting a broad issue profile. A party of this kind focuses strongly on a few core issues, which implies presenting a specific and confined policy agenda. Policy-oriented parties are, therefore, expected to narrow down their issue appeals, while office-oriented parties are expected to appeal broadly.

What determines how parties resolve the trade-off between office and policy objectives? Parties’ goals are shaped by the considerations of actors within parties and the balance of power between them. Internal organizational structures thus affect party behaviour (Kitschelt, 1989, 1994; Lehrer, 2012; Pedersen, 2010, 2012; Schumacher et al., 2013; Wagner and Meyer, 2014; Ware, 1992). The key actors here are party leaders and party activists. Leaders, motivated primarily by the spoils associated with political office, are pragmatic ‘office-seekers’, whereas activists are ‘policy-motivated’ and less pragmatic (Aldrich, 2011; Müller and Strøm, 1999; Panebianco, 1988; Schlesinger, 1975; Strøm, 1990). Activists prefer the party not to deviate too much from its original agenda. Leaders have wider ‘policy limits’ (Pedersen, 2012: 901) than activists and are tempted by the possible electoral gains of the ‘appeal broadly’ strategy. However, to secure their survival, even pragmatic office-seeking leaders will have to cater to an internally powerful activist base. Activist-dominated parties are ‘under pressure to maintain the party’s focus on its key traditional areas of strength’ (Wagner and Meyer, 2014: 1023). In sum, I expect parties whose leaders are less constrained to have a broader issue focus than parties in which activists are more dominant:

H2a: Activist-dominated parties present more confined agendas than leadership-dominated parties.

In addition to having a direct effect, party organization is also likely to condition the extent to which parties

respond to external stimuli (Schumacher et al., 2013). Given the incentives for office-oriented parties to appeal broadly and for policy-oriented parties to narrow down their issue appeals, it is not likely that both types of parties will respond in the same way to experience with government participation. Specifically, out-of-government parties in which activists dominate are likely to pursue core vote strategies and present narrow issue agendas, while non-governing leadership-oriented parties are likely to give in to vote- and office-seeking pressures. As such, party organizational features should have a conditioning impact on the differences in issue diversity between MOPs and MGPs (H1a) and between CPs and mainstream parties (H1b). This leads to the following conditional hypotheses:

H2b: The effect of MOP status on ENMI is greater for activist-dominated parties than for leadership-dominated parties.

H2c: The effect of challenger status on ENMI is greater for activist-dominated parties than for leadership-dominated parties.

Data and methodology

I test these hypotheses using a data set covering 259 political parties in 18 European democracies between 1950 and 2013.² Agenda scope, the dependent variable, is measured using data from the party manifesto project (MARPOR) (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Volkens et al., 2014). MARPOR categorizes quasi-sentences in party manifestos in 56 issue categories, making it possible to assess parties' relative emphasis on issues. It is the only data set available that is suitable for measuring parties' issue strategies over a long period of time. The methodological debates associated with MARPOR mainly relate to inferring policy *positions* from the data (Gemenis, 2013). Here, I am interested in issue diversity – that is, in how narrowly or widely attention is distributed across issues in manifestos.³

Whereas some studies use a transformation of the Herfindahl–Hirschman index (Hobolt et al., 2008; Lacewell, 2013) to capture issue diversity, I employ Greene's (2015) ENMI concept. ENMI is based on a transformation of Shannon's H , a measure of entropy that has been shown to have certain advantages over the Herfindahl–Hirschman index (Boydston et al., 2014; Greene, 2015). ENMI is calculated as follows:

$$\text{ENMI} = \exp\left(-\sum_{i=1}^n \left(p(x_i)\right)\right) \times \ln\left(p(x_i)\right),$$

where: x_i represents an item; $p(x_i)$ is the proportion of total attention the item receives and $\ln(x_i)$ is the natural log of the proportion of attention the item receives. Of the 56 issue categories in the MARPOR data, 28 are paired categories (e.g. European Integration 'negative' and 'positive').

I collapse these into 14 issues (Greene, 2015; Lowe et al., 2011) so that the range of the ENMI variable is between 1 and 42. The empirical range is 1.5–31.2 (descriptive statistics of all variables are presented in the Appendix 1). The main results, presented below, are robust to an alternative operationalization of ENMI, based on a regrouping of the MARPOR data into 10 issue categories describing ministerial portfolios (Bäck et al., 2011). Although some effects weaken, this robustness check accommodates the argument that voters are likely to conceptualize parties' issue agendas in terms of broader issue categories.⁴

Figure 1 displays the distribution of ENMI by party type and by time period using box plots. Parties have increased their issue diversity over time (cf. Greene, 2015), which fits descriptions of party agendas becoming more diverse (Green-Pedersen, 2007). CPs consistently show narrower issue profiles than do their mainstream counterparts.

Turning to the predictors, I distinguish between challenger and mainstream parties based on past experience in government (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). A CP is defined as a party that has not previously held office; it becomes a mainstream party once it enters government (see also Van De Wardt, 2015; Van De Wardt et al., 2014). A MGP enters the election as an incumbent, whereas MOPs have governed in the past but are currently (i.e. in the period preceding the election) in opposition.⁵

I rely on expert survey information (Laver and Hunt, 1992) to measure the intraparty balance of power between leaders and activists. Specifically, I use two items gauging the power of the party leadership and activists over party policy, similarly to Pedersen (2012), Schumacher et al. (2013) and Wagner and Meyer (2014).⁶ I subtract the score indicating activist power from the score indicating the power of leaders resulting in an intraparty balance of power scale, with higher scores indicating more power for the leadership. I label this variable 'leadership dominance'. The measure is time-invariant, assuming that parties do not change their organizational features dramatically over time. Parties are conservative organizations that generally resist changing their rules and structures (Harmel and Janda, 1994), and aspects of party organizations such as candidate selection rules exhibit remarkable stability over time (Bille, 2001; Lundell, 2004). Kernell (2015: 1824), surveying party organizations over the past 40 years, concludes that internal party rules remain stable 'even as parties are swept in or out of office, undergo significant turnover in leadership, and at times dramatically change their policy positions'. Hence, although the measure is a constant, there are good reasons to believe that it is a reasonable proxy for parties' organizational structures.⁷

The models control for vote change at the previous election (i.e. vote share changes between election $t-2$ and election $t-1$) since past election results affect parties' willingness to change their issue profiles (Somer-Topcu, 2009). I also add party size (i.e. vote share at election

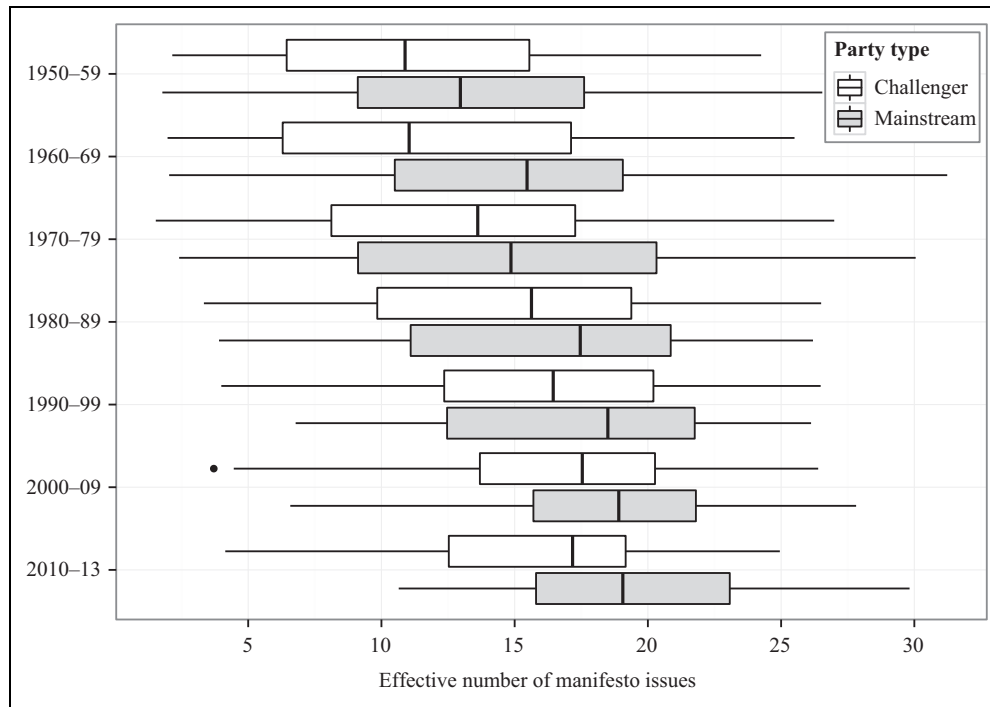


Figure 1. Effective number of manifesto issues by party type, 1950–2013.

$t-1$) as a control, since larger parties are expected to have a greater ENMI. Large parties have more resources, allowing them to pursue and maintain a broad issue profile, distributing their attention over multiple issues (Wagner and Meyer, 2014). Further, I control for ideological extremism. Parties on the fringes of the ideological spectrum are expected to be less diverse in their issue attention as they tend to emphasize the issues on which they take outlying positions (Rovny, 2012; Wagner, 2012b). I use Franzmann and Kaiser's (2006) transformation of the MARPOR data to infer parties' ideological positions. It is beyond the scope of this article to engage with the extensive debates on how to infer valid left–right estimates from the MARPOR data (for a recent discussion, see Budge and Meyer, 2013). Franzmann and Kaiser (2006) provide time- and country-specific positional estimates, incorporating arguments that the meaning of left–right varies across time and space (Benoit and Laver, 2006). Extremism is measured as the absolute difference between a party's position and the midpoint of the scale.

The estimation technique deals with both the cross-sectional and the time-series structure of the data. I use a party-election year set-up and add country dummies to the right-hand side of the equation to absorb unobserved differences between countries. Panel structures commonly cause problems related to panel heteroskedasticity, serial correlation and contemporaneous correlation, and tests indicate that this is indeed the case.⁸ Panel-corrected standard errors are therefore used to correct for panel heteroskedasticity and cross-sectional dependence (Beck and Katz, 1995). I address the AR(1) error structure of the

panels by using a Prais–Winsten feasible generalized least squares procedure, which is preferred over the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable, as this would reduce the N and can lead to estimation problems (Achen, 2000; Plümper et al., 2005). Unit root tests ensure that the dependent and independent variables are stationary.⁹

Results

I estimate two models to predict parties' ENMI. Model 1 explores the differences between MGPs (reference category), MOPs and CPs (H1a and H1b), while simultaneously examining the unconditional effect of leadership dominance on ENMI (H2a). Model 2 includes interaction terms between the MOP and CP variables and the leadership dominance variable in order to test the conditional hypotheses (H2b and H2c). The models are specified as follows:

$$(1) \text{ENMI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{MOP}_{i,t}) + \beta_2(\text{CP}_{i,t}) \\ + \beta_3(\text{leadership dominance}_i) + \text{controls} \\ + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

$$(2) \text{ENMI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{MOP}_{i,t}) + \beta_2(\text{CP}_{i,t}) \\ + \beta_3(\text{leadership dominance}_i) \\ + \beta_4(\text{MOP}_{i,t} \times \text{leadership dominance}_i) \\ + \beta_5(\text{CP}_{i,t} \times \text{leadership dominance}_i) \\ + \text{controls} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

Table 1. Results of the regression models.

	Model (1)	Model (2)
MOP	-0.105 (0.225)	-0.541 (0.990)
CP	-1.262*** (0.317)	-2.520*** (0.908)
Leadership dominance	-0.00344 (0.0204)	-0.0495 (0.0411)
Vote change	0.00176 (0.0212)	0.00348 (0.0213)
Party size	0.0184 (0.0120)	0.0191 (0.0120)
Ideological extremism	-0.639*** (0.103)	-0.639*** (0.105)
MOP × Leadership Dominance		0.0236 (0.0528)
CP × Leadership Dominance		0.0711 (0.0482)
Constant	16.32*** (0.979)	17.14*** (1.167)
Observations	996	996
Wald	5368.90	4329.73

Note: MOP: mainstream opposition party; CP: challenger party; Prais–Winsten regression coefficients with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses and country dummies (not shown in table). The dependent variable captures the effective number of manifesto issues.

*** $p < 0.01$.

where subscript i denotes parties and t indicates time (election year). Table 1 reports the results of the regression analyses.

Model 1 indicates no support for the hypothesis that MOPs present narrower issue agendas than MGPs; the coefficient ($b = -0.1$) is small and not statistically significant. The statistically significant and negative coefficient for CPs ($b = -1.3$) indicates that challengers are more confined in their issue appeals than MGPs (the reference category). The difference between CPs and MOPs is, accordingly, -1.2 , lending credence to the argument that the issue appeals of challengers are more confined in scope than those of mainstream parties, in line with H1b.¹⁰ Model 1 finds no support for an unconditional effect of leadership dominance (H2a) since the coefficient ($b = -0.003$) is indistinguishable from zero.

Model 2 includes interaction terms between leadership dominance and the party type variables to test the conditional hypotheses that the effects of CP and MOP status are more pronounced for parties dominated by the leadership (H2b and H2c). The inclusion of the interaction terms does not alter the effects of the covariates in the model. However, the effect of CP status now increases. It suggests that when the intraparty balance of power favours activists (i.e. when the leadership dominance variable is zero), the difference between challenger and governing parties (the reference category) is on average about -2.5 in ENMI, all else equal. I note that the ENMI variable has a standard deviation (SD) of six; the coefficient thus amounts to an effect of nearly half the SD.

Both interaction terms in model 2 denote positive coefficients but fail to reach statistical significance. However, marginal effects can turn out to be significant for substantively relevant values of the conditioning variable (i.e.

leadership dominance) even if the coefficient on the interaction term is statistically insignificant (Brambor et al., 2006). Figures 2 and 3 therefore depict the interaction effects graphically.

Figure 2 shows the effect of MOP status on ENMI for different levels of leadership dominance. Contrary to H2b, no conditioning effect of intraparty politics is found, as the differences between mainstream parties in and out of government remain statistically insignificant independent of leadership dominance. Figure 3 shows the effect of challenger status on ENMI. When activists constrain leaders in setting the party's strategic course, there is a negative and statistically significant effect of CP status on ENMI. This effect dwindles for higher values of leadership dominance. For parties with a score of 23.5 or higher on the intraparty balance of power variable, indicating strong dominance of leaders (180 party-year observations), the effect of CP status is no longer statistically significant.¹¹ Hence, if leaders are dominant, challenger status no longer has an impact on ENMI, in line with H2c. To give an example, the Swedish green party (MP) has a leadership dominance score of 8.29, indicating that it is an activist-centred party. Its average ENMI between 1988 and 1998, when it was a CP, was 5.97. The Swedish left party (V) is like many former communist parties much more leadership-centred (with a score of the leadership dominance variable of 16.05). The party, also a CP in the same 10-year period, presented issue agendas with an average ENMI of 10.38. I note that the leadership dominance variable exhibits meaningful variation both across parties that are defined as challengers in this study (mean: 17.75 and SD: 6.67) and across mainstream parties (mean: 18.59 and SD: 4.50). This finding corroborates the thesis that party organization conditions the extent to which external stimuli influence parties' issue strategies (Lehrer, 2012; Schumacher et al., 2013; Wagner and Meyer, 2014).

Figure 3 presents indicative evidence that activist-centred challengers are the parties that present the narrowest issue agendas. Activist-centred challengers include many of the green parties such as the German greens before they entered national government in 1998. In addition, many of the socialist parties such as the socialist left party (SV) in Norway (until 2005) are included in this category. Other CPs, such as radical right parties, have internal organizational structures that are, on average, more dominated by the party leadership (see also Schumacher et al., 2013: 470). The impact of challenger status on agenda scope, Figure 3 suggests, differs accordingly. Socialist and green parties respond to their unfavourable position by narrowing down their issue appeals; some of the green parties, for example, focus almost exclusively on environmental issues (Spoon et al., 2014). Radical right parties, although mobilizing voters predominantly on the basis of their stances on immigration, are more likely to abandon their single-issue strategies (Mudde, 1999).

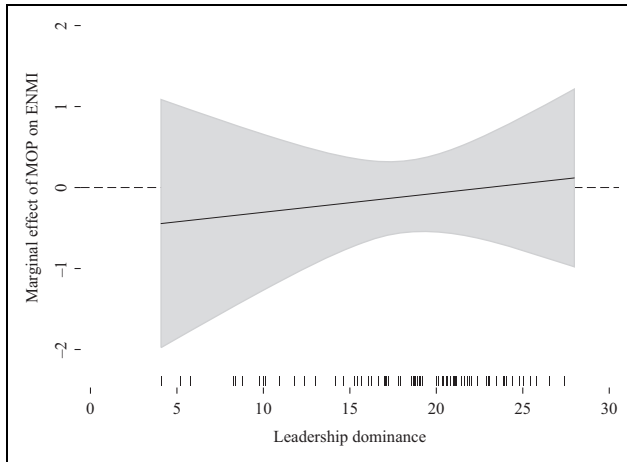


Figure 2. Marginal effect of MOP status on ENMI conditional on leadership dominance. The shaded area indicates the corresponding 95% confidence bounds. The rug on the horizontal axis indicates the observed values for leadership dominance. ENMI: effective number of manifesto issues; MOP: mainstream opposition party.

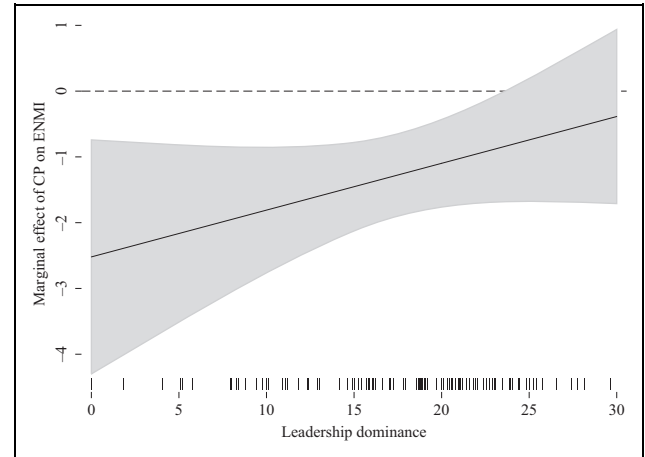


Figure 3. Marginal effect of CP status on ENMI conditional on leadership dominance. The shaded area indicates the corresponding 95% confidence bounds. The rug on the horizontal axis indicates the observed values for leadership dominance. ENMI: effective number of manifesto issues; CP: challenger party.

Turning to the control variables, ideological extremism performs as expected. The coefficients in both models are negative and statistically significant and suggest that for each one-point deviation from the centre of the ideological 0–10 left–right scale, parties decrease agenda scope by about 0.6, on average and all else equal. This gives credence to the idea that parties strongly publicize the issues on which they take outlying positions (Rovny, 2012; Wagner, 2012b). Their attention to other issues decreases and consequently their issue diversity is reduced. Party size denotes statistically insignificant, albeit positive, estimated coefficients, indicating no support for the notion that larger parties are more likely to pursue broad issue agendas. This finding is in line with results reported by Wagner and Meyer (2014: 1032), who find no support for the claim that larger parties are more likely to pursue ‘ride the wave’ strategies and address issues of public concern rather than issues of interest to the party base. The insignificant effects of the vote change variable across the models suggest no support for the argument that previous electoral gains or losses affect parties’ ENMI. Hence, past election results influence parties’ issue positions (Somer-Topcu, 2009) but not the scope of their issue appeals.¹²

Taken together, the analysis supports the core expectations of this article. Government experience affects the scope of issue agendas; the crucial difference is, however, not between parties currently in and out of office. The evidence presented here seems to suggest that MGPs and MOPs present issue agendas similar in scope, whereas CPs appeal more narrowly. Moreover, there is indicative evidence that intraparty politics has a conditioning effect: CPs differ from mainstream parties in terms of the scope of their issue appeals, but the difference is greatest for CPs that are activist-centred.

Discussion

I argued that parties’ ENMI – that is, how narrowly or how broadly parties distribute attention across policy issues – is influenced by their participation in government and by the internal balance of power between the party leadership and the activist base. The findings have several implications for the study of issue competition and issue diversity as well as for the study of party behaviour more generally.

First, the findings suggest that the distinction between challenger and mainstream parties matters when it comes to differences in issue diversity across parties. As such, this article corroborates previous work that analyses party interaction in multiparty settings through the lens of the mainstream-challenger framework (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Van De Wardt, 2015; Van De Wardt et al., 2014).

Second, the findings presented here have implications for studies of issue avoidance and engagement (Damore, 2005; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Meyer and Wagner, 2015; Sigelman and Buell, 2004). Issue engagement in election campaigns (i.e. parties addressing the same issues) should help voters reach informed electoral decisions. If parties increase agenda scope, it is more likely that they talk about the same issues, whereas narrow policy profiles imply that parties address different issues and talk past each other. Thus, challenger status and parties’ internal organizational structures influence the probability that election campaigns are characterized by issue engagement or avoidance.

Third, the results make a specific contribution to the literature on issue entrepreneurship in multiparty competition. Most studies examine the extent to which CPs pursue issue entrepreneurial strategies by emphasizing European integration issues in an attempt to increase the dimensionality of the political issue space (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and De Vries, 2015; Meijers, 2015; Van De

Wardt et al., 2014). This article adds the insight that non-governing challengers respond to their unfavourable political position by campaigning on a confined issue agenda, narrowing down their attention to a few issues. However, the extent to which challengers present narrow issue appeals depends, as the indicative findings presented above suggest, on internal party organizational structures. As such, this article relates to a literature that considers party organization to be an important conditional variable when it comes to parties' issue strategies in election campaigns (Lehrer 2012; Schumacher et al., 2013; Wagner and Meyer, 2014). That being said, this article makes rather generalized claims about the issue preferences of leaders and activists. Case studies should look more closely at the assumed micrologic and further specify how internal decision-making mechanisms affect parties' issue strategies.

Moreover, it would be insightful to connect the findings presented in this article to a wider literature on party emergence. New parties are, by definition, CPs. What determines the extent to which new challengers are activist-centred or leadership-centred? What is the role of party system characteristics in this regard? These questions are beyond the scope of this study but could advance research on CPs. In addition, it is important that we learn more about the *dynamics* of issue diversity in party policy agendas. While this article has examined differences in levels of ENMI, future research should look at *changes* in agenda scope.

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Supplemental material

Supplementary material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. According to Riker (1993: 81–82), the principles of dominance and dispersion guide the rhetorical efforts of politicians. The dominance principle holds that when one side successfully wins

the argument, the other side ignores the issue whereas the winner continues to exploit it. The principle of dispersion states that when both sides fail to win the argument on an issue, both sides will cease to discuss it and look for another issue instead.

2. The following countries are included: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. I have selected parties operating in western European party systems as varying patterns of issue diversification have been observed in these systems (Green-Pedersen, 2007). For countries that were not democratic during the entire period, the data starts with the first democratic election.
3. It should be noted that the party manifesto project (MARPOR) uses a coding scheme that is constant over time. New issues that appear on the political agenda are categorized into existing issue categories. Hence, measures of issue diversity are not affected by the appearance of new issues.
4. I re-group the data from the party manifesto project (MARPOR) into broader issue categories following the coding scheme developed by Back et al. (2011). This involves aggregating MARPOR issue categories to the level of ministerial jurisdiction (such as 'finance', 'education' and 'environment'). In total, 10 issue categories are defined, leading to an alternative measure of the effective number of manifesto issues (ENMI) with a theoretical range of 1–10. It correlates strongly with the original measure of ENMI ($r = 0.77$). The models yield similar results for this alternative specification of the dependent variable: challenger parties (CPs) have lower ENMI than mainstream parties. The difference between MOPs and MGPs remains insignificant, in line with the results presented using the original ENMI variable. The conditioning effect of leadership dominance on CP status weakens, however, suggesting that the results on intraparty politics presented here depend partly on how issues are categorized in the MARPOR coding scheme. The complete results of the robustness checks are presented in the Online Appendix of this article.
5. The challenger concept is closely related to that of 'niche' parties (Meguid, 2005) but is analytically distinct. Whereas the original niche party concept is based on party family designations (Adams et al., 2006; Meguid, 2005) and therefore time-invariant, the challenger-mainstream distinction is dynamic. Parties cease to be challengers once they have governed, in line with arguments that parties switch between niche and mainstream profiles (Meyer and Wagner, 2013; Wagner, 2012a). Moreover, even in 'updated' conceptualizations, niche party measurements employ issue salience information (see Bischof, 2015). For the purpose of this study, however, it would be tautological to explain issue salience strategies (i.e. the scope of parties' agendas) with a party type classification that is based on issue salience information (for a similar argument, see also De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Van De Wardt, 2015).
6. The exact wording of the questions is: 'assess the influence that party leaders have over the formation of party policy' and

- 'assess the influence that party activists have over the formation of party policy'. The correlation between the two answer scores is -0.72 .
7. For similar arguments, see Schumacher et al. (2013: 470); Wagner and Meyer (2014: 1026).
 8. A Wooldridge test (Drukker, 2003; Wooldridge, 2002) indicates the presence of serial correlation in the data. A modified Wald test (Baum, 2001; Greene, 2000) suggests rejection of the null-hypothesis of no group-wise heteroskedasticity. The panels in the data are too unbalanced to perform a Pesaran test for contemporaneous correlation (De Hoyos and Sarafidis, 2006; Pesaran, 2004). Nevertheless, the estimation technique addresses this type of autocorrelation.
 9. I use Fisher-type tests (Choi, 2001) since conventional unit root tests (e.g. the augmented Dickey–Fuller test) are unavailable for unbalanced panel data structures.
 10. Tests indicate that the difference in the effective number of manifesto issues between challenger parties and mainstream opposition parties is also statistically significant.
 11. I obtain substantively similar results when mainstream opposition party (MOP) is the reference category. The difference in the effective number of manifesto issues between challenger parties and MOPs is -1.979 when leadership dominance is zero. This difference becomes less pronounced for higher values of leadership dominance and is no longer statistically significant for values of 23.2 and higher (full results available upon request).
 12. Somer-Topcu (2009) argues that parties change their issue profiles after vote losses. To test whether this affects the effective number of manifesto issues, I re-estimate the models with a variable indicating vote loss instead of vote change at the previous election. The effects also turn out to be statistically insignificant. The inclusion of this variable does not alter the effects of the other variables in the models (results available upon request).
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Appendix I

Table A1. Descriptive statistics.

	Count	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
ENMI	1895	15.457	6.025	1.532	31.234
Vote difference	1433	−0.060	4.031	−18.595	22.731
Leadership dominance	1408	18.306	5.357	0	29.630
Party size	1636	15.808	13.528	0	54.373
Ideological extremism	1527	1.600	1.140	0.002	5.000
Nominal variable		%			
MGP/all parties	625	32.98%			
MOP/all parties	454	23.96%			
CP/all parties	816	43.06%			

ENMI: effective number of manifesto issues; MGP: mainstream government party; MOP: mainstream opposition party; CP: challenger party.