

# MAPPING PARTIES' ISSUE AGENDA IN DIFFERENT CHANNELS OF CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION: A WILD GOOSE CHASE?

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## Abstract

Measuring party agendas is a central enterprise in agenda-setting studies, but there is no consensus on which empirical material to use to capture such agendas, and no study systematically compares different communication channels of individual parties. A crucial question arises: To what extent do political parties campaign on the same issues in different channels of campaign communication? Using quantitative content analysis to measure the agendas of Danish parties in six campaign channels during five national elections, the article empirically demonstrates that parties emphasise quite different issues in different channels, most likely due to strategic considerations. Potentially, this conclusion has profound implications for the research field: acknowledging the dissimilarity of the same party's issue attention in different empirical material, scholars may not be able to directly compare agenda studies based on e.g. election manifestos and commercial ads. Thus, future agenda-setting studies should include multiple channels or begin a search for a standard source.

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## Introduction

This article reveals an important empirical problem in the literature on agenda-setting: Parties simply emphasise different issues in different channels of campaign communication. This is problematic because “measures of the policy agenda vary from study to study much more than do measures of the media agenda and the public agenda which are fairly standard” (Dearing and Rogers 1996, 94). Parties’ agendas are moving targets that are difficult to compare to e.g. the media agenda in studies of parties’ agenda-setting power – using different empirical material to gauge the issue agenda of individual parties may simply yield different results, which in turn might explain some of the inconclusiveness in the literature on the media-party power nexus (see e.g. Brandenburg 2002; Strömbäck and Nord 2006; Ridout and Mellen 2007).

As argued by Walgrave and van Aelst (2006, 94), “[d]efining and measuring the political agenda is the trickiest choice to be made by political agenda setting students. There is no such thing as the political agenda but only an archipelago of different loosely associated political agendas.” Parties of course communicate through a variety of channels, but only few scholars engage in comparisons. Norris (2006) finds that British voters in some respects were affected differently by the 2005 campaign depending on which channel they used to gain information. No study, however, has systematically documented how similar or dissimilar the individual parties’ issue agendas in different communication channels are. On this backdrop the central empirical ambition of this article is to document *to what extent political parties campaign on the same issues in different channels of campaign communication*.

If the issue agenda of a given party varies in different communication channels – if it focuses on e.g. the economy in its election manifesto, but social welfare in press releases or the party leader’s speeches – which is the “right” agenda? Which of these different agendas should be compared to e.g. the media agenda to determine causal effects and agenda building capacities of the parties and the media? These questions merit considerable scholarly thought and cannot be answered here; however, a couple of possible solutions will be discussed in the final section. The main value added by this study remains the fundamental provision of empirical documentation that parties in fact emphasise different issues in different channels *and* that future agenda-setting studies need to engage in theoretical considerations when selecting empirical material.

The article proceeds in four sections: The first section discusses why parties may or may not stick to the same issue agendas in different outlets. The second section describes the empirical material and the methods applied in the analysis. The findings are presented in the third section, and the final section summarises the findings and discusses some directions for future research on the topic.

## Theoretical Framework

Given the fact that very little scholarly energy has been devoted to agenda (dis)similarity in parties (see Norris et al. 1999, 62-66 for an exception), the implicit assumption in the literature seems to be that parties convey the same messages across different channels of communication. In fact, the mentioned study by Norris and colleagues supports this assumption: In their study of the 1997 UK General

Election they argue that “in many countries parties have become increasingly sophisticated in the use of strategic communication in the attempt to retain control of the agenda or to stay ‘on message’” (Norris et al. 1999, 10). To test this proposition, the authors compare the issue agendas of press releases and Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) to the election manifestos for the three major parties. Some variation was expected because both press releases and PEBs need to respond to the agendas of other parties and cannot stick completely to the issues laid out in the election manifestos. The Liberal Democrats and Labour stayed on message in their press releases as they correlate at .82 and .77 with the election manifestos (using Pearson’s  $r$ ). Conservative press releases and PEBs were somewhat weaker correlated (.67 and .72 respectively; Norris et al. 1999, 65).

One might hypothesise that parties do not campaign on the same issues in different channels. The following subsections offer two main arguments why parties might choose to emphasise different campaign issues in different outlets.

### Party Strategy

Modern parties are well aware that different voter segments (delimited by e.g. geography, income, education, or religion) have different political interests and desires. Instead of broadcasting the same message to all voters, parties “narrowcast” (Gandy 2001; O’Shaughnessy 1990, 69-75) specific messages to specific groups of voters (Farrell and Webb 2000; Norris 2002).

It is difficult – at least in the present article – to determine how many and thus precisely which subgroups the individual Danish parties narrowcast their campaign messages to. The analysis considers just one, but central distinction: Internal versus external communication. Whereas different parties most likely operate with different sets of subgroups of voter segments, most parties face the dilemma of communication to either the ideological partisans or the more politically indifferent swing-voters without party identification (i.e. May 1973). Most Danish parties are old mass-parties or initially modelled on the basis of such, which means that they traditionally had high membership and strong party identifiers. However, like parties in most other European countries, Danish parties have experienced a substantial decline in membership and the electorate has become more volatile in the past decades (Bille 1994). The electoral arena has thus become more important but most parties maintain a mass party organisation and are keen on the idea of internal party democracy (Elmelund-Præstekær and Frederiksen 2008).

This could generate a cross-pressure when parties communicate politics in election campaigns: On the one hand parties need to cater to the political desires of the ideologically inclined members; on the other hand parties need to present pragmatic solutions to concrete problems in order to attract swing voters without any deep-rooted party identification. In other words, parties need to communicate via both “internal” and “external” channels at the same time and emphasise different issues in the two channels. For example, the Conservatives can focus on a typical conservative issue, say the economy, in internal channels, and on more a popular issue, such as the environment and global warming, in external channels (see example below).

Next, a campaign is as much a process as it is an event (Brandenburg 2002), which is acknowledged by Norris *et al.* (1999, 62) when they distinguish between “ideal”

and “tactical” agendas. The ideal agenda, they argue, is strategically chosen by the party and laid out in the election manifesto. The tactical agenda is found in other channels and is based on the ideal agenda but continually modified to counteract the agendas of both the media and political adversaries. Because any campaign is a process, the ideal agenda may change during a campaign. In that case, a party may emphasise a different set of issues in the beginning of a campaign (in e.g. election manifestos) and at the end of the same campaign (in e.g. party leader debates). Such dynamic issue attention has been empirically found in election campaigns in countries as different as Norway (Karlsen 2004) and the UK (Harris et al. 2005). As parties can thus be expected to change issue focus during an election campaign, we cannot expect a party to have the same issue agenda in communication channels that are utilised in different phases of the campaign.

### Media Distortion

Politics in most European countries are mediatised in the sense that the so-called media logic has infused and reshaped the way political actors formulate and communicate politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). When politics become mediatised, parties need to adapt to the media by learning when and how to present which pledges, arguments, and events. At the same time the media has become an independent institution that is no longer constrained by partisan affiliations (Cook 1998). In the latest phases of the mediatisation process, parties “not only adapt to the media logic and the predominant news values, but [they] also *internalise* these and, more or less consciously allow the media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become a build-in part of the governing processes” (Strömbäck 2008, 239-240, italics in original). This entails that the parties may consider the journalistic standards for good stories not only when asked for comments in the news media but also when they write letters-to-the-editor and formulate press releases. This way no party communication is shaped exclusively by the parties themselves – the communication is always conceived with the media’s demands in mind. However, it is reasonable to think of varying degrees of media influences in party communication (discussed more thoroughly below): while parties’ letters-to-the-editor are written to meet the demands of the editor of the opinion pages, election manifestos could in theory be published without such concerns. Hence, one might expect parties to be more in control of the issue agenda in some channels than others – which in turn could affect agenda similarity across a party’s campaign outlets.

In summary, I argue that parties may campaign on different issues in different channels of communication because they have a strategic desire to do so, *and* because the media forces them to do so. Thus, individual parties’ issue agendas are expected to be different in different channels of campaign communication.

From the theoretical considerations it follows that individual parties’ issue agendas might not be as different in all channels: In channels used to address the same audience and channels in which parties can exercise the same degree of control over the content, the agendas may be rather similar. On the other hand, if two channels of campaign communication target different audiences or if they are influenced by competing agendas of other parties or certain news values of the media, the issue agendas of the two channels are most likely rather dissimilar. The issue agendas of a given party are hypothesised to be more dissimilar in channels

that address different audiences than in channels that address similar groups of voters, and more dissimilar in channels that are influenced by the media than in channels that are completely party controlled.

A possible dissimilarity of issue agendas in different channels may have increased over time. If parties indeed have an ideal agenda to which they wish to stick, it has become more difficult to do so due to the mediatisation of politics – a process that forces political parties to increasingly consider the media demand for certain news and events. If the professionalised parties also try to narrowcast their messages to specific internal and external audiences, we must expect an even more dramatic increase of dissimilarity over time.

## Methodological Design

### Denmark as a Case

The article analyses the campaign communication of Danish parties in five national elections (1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, and 2007). Danish election campaigns are appropriate in this study because multiple parties of varying size run for parliament in each election. At the same time, Danish parties – like their European counterparts – have become professionalised during the analysed period and are quite familiar with narrowcasting and the mantra “to stay on message” (Esmark and Ørsten 2008). Due to the process of mediatisation (Elmelund-Præstekær et al. 2011), most people gather information about elections and politics via some kind of media outlet and face-to-face communication is rare. The professionalisation requires parties to hire media experts and adapt to the logic of the media (Esmark and Ørsten 2008) just as parties in other Nordic (Strömbäck et al. 2008) and European countries, such as Belgium (van Aelst et al. 2008) and the Netherlands (Brants and van Praag 2006) have done. Hence, the Danish case is typical, at least for the so-called Democratic-Corporatist media systems in Northern Europe (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

### Selecting Six Channels to Compare

Concerning empirical material, the article analyses the widest possible selection of campaign channels. Political parties communicate via multiple channels, but unfortunately some of them are difficult to study *ex post*, because nobody keeps records of the content, especially web-content, but also more traditional means of communication such as press releases, campaign posters, leaflets, and transcripts of speeches. The chosen material certainly does not cover the full content of parties' campaigns, but it is diverse and represents different aspects modern campaigns and therefore constitutes an appropriate empirical base for testing the hypotheses.

The empirical material includes some of the most important channels of party communication during an election campaign and channels often used as an empirical basis in agenda-setting studies, namely election manifestos, newspaper ads, letters-to-the-editor, television presentation programmes, and televised party leader debates. Since I wish to discuss the measurement of *party* agendas – not *media* agendas – all kinds of news reporting, interviews, and the like are excluded. Even though all included channels are influenced by the media to some extent – either indirectly via the mediatisation process or directly by journalistic moderators in e.g. the debates – they all belong to what Asp and Esaiasson (1996, 77-78) call “party controlled sources.” The degree of party versus media control

as well as the primary audience of the different channels are discussed below and summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Varying Degrees of Party Control and Primary Audiences of the Studied Campaign Channels

Party control		Internal audiences	
↑ ↓	Election manifestos	↑ ↓	Election manifestos
	Newspaper ads		
	Letters-to-the-editor		
	Party presentation programmes		Party presentation programmes
	Party leader debates		Letters-to-the-editor/Newspaper ads
	News bulletins		Party leader debates
Media control		External audiences	

The first empirical source is election manifestos, which probably are as close as we get to a standard tool for measuring party agendas: “The collection of campaign communication output of political parties is still mostly reduced to the content analysis of election manifestos” (Brandenburg 2002, 41). The predominance of the election manifestos is also evident in political science (e.g. Klingemann et al. 2006) and in the study of political communication where e.g. Asp (2006) uses election manifestos to judge whether or not the media depicts the parties’ issues fairly during national elections, and where Green-Pedersen (2007) uses them to demonstrate that issue competition is increasingly important for understanding party competition in European countries. The advantage of election manifestos (in contrast to party manifestos) is that they are formulated and presented by the parties just prior to or in the very beginning of the campaign. Thus, they are clearly campaign documents, but they still provide a rather “undisturbed” expression of what the parties want, since neither the media nor other parties can interfere with the message. This is why Norris and colleagues argue that the so-called ideal party agenda is found exactly here. Election manifestos are usually not intended for close scrutiny by the average voter, but serve as a common political base for candidates. The audience of election manifestos is therefore more internal than external.

As the second and the third channel of campaign communication, I include the parties’ ads and letters-to-the-editor published in the five largest national newspapers (*Politiken*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Jyllands-Posten*, *Ekstra Bladet*, and *B.T.*). Regarding campaign ads, the analysis relies on newspaper ads, not television ads as most American studies, since televised political advertisement is prohibited in Scandinavia. Instead printed ads in national newspapers have become a central element in Nordic parties’ campaign culture (Kjeldsen 2008). Newspaper ads are similar to the election manifestos in terms of party control as the papers will print virtually anything that is paid for. The audience is quite different, however, since ads are designed to directly affect people, e.g. convince them to vote for the party. Not all voters read newspapers, but the papers included here are national omnibuses read not only by partisans (as the election manifestos) but by politically aware voters in general. Next, letters-to-the-editor<sup>1</sup> are a vehicle for elite communication in the Danish context (Wahl-Jørgensen 2004), and they share the audience with the ads (they are per definition printed in the same newspapers). The two channels differ because letters cost nothing to produce and can be written by individual

politicians without tight coordination with the party leader and the central party strategy. Moreover, letters are only published if a newspaper's editor chooses to do so. When deciding what to print, the editor relies on new criteria such as relevance to the current public debate which delimits the candidates' freedom to choose issues as they like. Since editors may try to get candidates from different parties to interact and discuss the same issue, not all issues in a party's election manifesto are suitable for the opinion pages. The degree of party control is therefore lower in letters than in ads and election manifestos.

Next, I include the so-called party presentation programmes. The Danish Broadcasting Corporation (*Danmarks Radio* or *DR*) invites all running parties to present themselves in individual 30 minute programmes with a fixed structure: First, a five minute video produced by the invited party is shown, and afterwards two representatives of the party are cross-examined by a journalist on the basis of the presentation video. The central idea is to take seriously the pledges and ideas put forward by the party by scrutinising them and holding the party responsible for possible unintended consequences. Even though presentation programmes are more influenced by the media than election manifestos, they are still essentially party controlled. The presentation programmes have a wider audience than election manifestos; they are watched by approximately one eighth of the eligible voters. However, we expect that people typically watch only the presentation of their preferred party and that the presentation programmes thus are somewhat internal.

Finally, two televised party leader debates are included for each election. Both the public service broadcaster, DR, and the semi-commercial broadcaster, TV2 Denmark, arrange lengthy all-against-all debates among all running parties' leaders. Such "Elephant Rounds" (Maier and Strömbäck 2009) are well known in Sweden (Esaiasson and Håkansson 2002) and Norway (Allern 2006), but especially in Norway more journalist controlled debate formats have evolved (Thorbjørnsrud 2008). Such new formats are not common in Denmark and not included here. An assessment of the media-party power relation concludes that "in the Danish debate, the journalists intervened at various points in the free debate with questions; most of the debate, however, was held without any input from that quarter" (Håkansson 2001, 37). Even though the Danish debate format changes slightly from election to election it seems fair to argue that the political issues discussed were primarily chosen by the parties and not the media. This does not mean that the parties' issue agendas are expected to be congruent in debates and election manifestos: In debates multiple parties compete for attention and all parties are constrained by the debate format, e.g. time limits and questions chosen by the broadcaster and the moderating journalist. The party leader debates are considered to be the channel with the least party control in this study. Finally, it is evident that the debate audience differs from the audiences of election manifestos, ads, letters and presentation programmes. The debates simply have such high viewer rates (often more than one fourth of the eligible voters) that they reach more ordinary voters than any other channel of campaign communication.

### Measuring and Comparing Parties' Issue Agendas in Different Channels

For the "small" units of analysis (i.e., letters-to-the-editor and newspaper ads), I code one issue per item and the salience of every issue is calculated separately

for each party in each election in both channels. For the “large” units of analysis (i.e., the three kinds of televised programmes and the election manifestos), I code one issue per message – a message can consist of one or several sentences, depending on how much the speaker elaborates on a specific point. Hence, messages are semantic entities delimited by a change of meaning of the text or speech.<sup>2</sup> Again, the total salience of each issue is computed separately for each source and for each party in each election. During this coding procedure I used a coding scheme consisting of initially 28 issue categories. To confirm this reliability of the procedure an inter-coder reliability test was performed by two trained coders on a randomly picked subsample of the data. The agreement of the two coders was computed using Krippendorff’s alpha algorithm (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007), and it reached a satisfactory alpha value of at least .73 across all channels of communication. To improve the general reliability of the data three very small issue categories were collapsed into other categories.

To compare the issue agendas of the six channels of communication for each party (at each election) I use the so-called Duncan dissimilarity index (Duncan and Duncan 1955) (for recent, similar adoptions of the index see Brandenburg 2002; Hopmann et al. 2009). The index compares the salience of a given issue pair wise in two different agendas and ultimately expresses how large a proportion of issue attention must be reallocated in one agenda to make it identical to the other. Hence, it is necessary to pick a baseline agenda to which the other five are compared one at the time. The choice of a baseline is not important per se, but since the election manifestos enjoy a “near standard” status in the literature I use the parties’ agendas in this channel as baseline. An index value 0 signifies perfect correspondence of the two compared agendas, whereas a value 100 signifies a complete lack of correspondence.

### Similarities and Differences across Parties and Changes over Time

Danish political parties do indeed communicate different issues in different outlets during the same election campaign. Table 1 provides an overview of all index values, and the overall average across all parties, channels and election years (a total of 191 index values) is 63. Remember here that each index value reports how large a proportion of the issue attention within the agenda of the channel in question needs to be reallocated to make it identical to the agenda of the same party’s election manifesto. If the election manifestos are believed to represent parties’ “ideal” issue agendas at each election, the parties had to reallocate almost two thirds of their issue attention in letters, ads, televised presentation programmes and party leader debates to focus their campaigns on the “ideal” issues. Some variation will always exist, but I argue that a dissimilarity value of 63 indicates substantial differences. Hence, the expectation that individual parties’ issue agendas are different in different channels of campaign communication is empirically supported.

The average value of dissimilarity obviously does not tell the complete story, since the average might vary in different election years, in different channels of communication, and among different parties. Before exploring such possible differences, I explain Table 1 in more detail: A total of 12 parties ran during the five elections studied, but the table does not provide index values for all channels or all



Table 1: Dissimilarity Values Comparing Agendas of Party Election Manifestos to Five Other Channels of Communication, All Channels and Parties, Including Average Values for Parties and Channels (Duncan's Index)

Ch.	Year	Parties											Avg.	Avg. in channels		
		V	A	C	F	B	K	D	Ø	O	Z	M			Y	
Ads	'94	48	51	92	56	71	90	91			98				75	73
	'98	52	45	81	55	98	100	65	87	100	69				75	
	'01	63	66	58	56	97	55	93	56						68	
	'05	41	42	71	42	76				71	53		97		62	
	'07	58	94	84	87	89				88					83	
Letters	'94	52	57	59	48	51	53	72			68				57	65
	'98	54	46	49	78	52	56	90	70	64	54				61	
	'01	63	68	66	72	53	45	85	65						65	
	'05	58	56	73	84	70	98	92	98	67		90			79	
	'07	56	76	67	64	51	19			83				73	61	
Presentations	'94	53	52	46	45	57	46	55			58				51	55
	'98	44	49	47	65	53	55	47	52	64	54				53	
	'01	70	59	49	51	51	49	68	63						57	
	'05	77	55	73	45	59	44			67	62		46		59	
TV2 Debate	'94	60	43	59	51	71	78	72			59				61	62
	'98	57	67	47	60	76	66	58	68	59	49				61	
	'01	65	52	49	36	64	67	76	62						59	
	'05	38	62	62	61	71	61	92	82	75		65			67	
DR Debate	'94	56	56	47	61	61	38	60			61				55	59
	'98	53	50	58	68	53	52	45	58	42	62				54	
	'01	58	66	41	41	63	78	78	67						61	
	'05	58	50	61	58	67	69	80	77	71		57			65	
Avg.		56	57	61	58	66	61	73	71	66	63	71	73	63		

Legend: V = Liberal, A = Social Democrats, C = Conservatives, F = Socialist Peoples' Party, B = Social Liberals, K = Christian Democrats, D = Centre Democrats, Ø = Red/Green Alliance, O = Danish Peoples' Party, Z = Progress Party, M = Minority Party, and Y = New Alliance.

years for all the parties. This is primarily because not all parties ran for parliament at every election, but in a few cases I simply lack data: televised material for the 2007 election (the '07 row is absent in Presentations, TV2 Debates, and DR Debates); in 2001 and 2007 the Danish Peoples' Party did not publish an election manifesto; and finally, some of the minor parties (e.g. New Alliance and the Christian Democrats) did not buy ads in every campaign.

Given the small number of data points for some of the parties, a direct comparison of the parties is not possible. For the four major parties (Liberals, Social Democrats, Conservatives, and the Socialist Peoples' Party) the average dissimilarity

(across all years and channels) does not vary much (between 56 and 61) and is only statistically insignificant (ANOVA, LSD). These average party values certainly hide larger differences at the disaggregated level, but there are no systematic patterns in this variation. In sum, the level of congruence between different channels of party communication seems to be more or less equal, at least between the major parties.

As I have suggested earlier, some channels are more congruent than the others. The far-right column of Table 1 is key to testing this proposition as it presents the average dissimilarity values of each channel (across all parties and elections). Even though none of these average agendas come close to a perfect match with the agendas in the election manifestos, some are closer than others: The dissimilarity between manifesto agendas and newspaper ad agendas is significantly greater than the differences between the manifesto agendas and the agendas of the other channels, while it is significantly smaller for the televised presentation programmes and the DR debate (ANOVA, LSD).<sup>3</sup> The fact that ads and election manifestos are the most dissimilar channels suggests that the distinction between the completely internal channel of campaign communication (manifestos) and the external channels is important – and more important than the distinction between completely party controlled channels (manifestos and ads) and more media influenced channels (presentations and debates). Actually, it turns out that the most media influenced channels are the *most* similar to the party controlled election manifestos. In other words, the media does not seem to distort the messages of the political parties (for similar conclusions in other Scandinavian countries see Asp 2006; Hopmann and Elmelund-Præstekær 2010); rather parties seem to narrowcast their messages and communicate different issues in different communicative outlets.

Finally, on average, the parties' agendas in different channels of communication have become more dissimilar over time. This is only indirectly visible in Table 1, but is quite clear in Table 2, which shows that the average dissimilarity has increased from an index value of 60 in 1994 to 72 in 2007 (and 66 in 2005). Statistical analysis (ANOVA, LSD) confirms that most of these overall year-by-year differences across every party and channel are significant; i.e. the test reveals that the 1994 and 1998 elections have significantly lower average dissimilarity values than the 2005 and 2007 (note that the televised channels are absent in the 2007 data) elections. Table 2 also provides the disaggregated values for each channel, and despite variation in the development in the different channels, the trend is the same in each one: average dissimilarity increases slightly from 1994 to 2007 (2005 for televised channels). The finding suggests that even though the media is not found to distort the party communication in general, it distorts the party agendas slightly more in 2005 and 2007 than in 1994 and 1998. Of course one should be cautious when concluding on longitudinal developments on the basis of a few points in time, so this conclusion is preliminary and needs to be verified by future studies. The preliminary conclusion is, however, in line with the concept of mediatisation and parties' increasing adaptation to and adoption of the media logic as discussed above.

As an illustration of what the rather high dissimilarity values mean in practical terms, Table 3 compares the issue agendas of the six campaign channels of the Conservatives in the 2005 election. From Table 1 it is evident that the dissimilarity values of exactly this party in this election varies from 61 to 73, but Table 3 shows which issues the Conservatives emphasised in the campaign: If one read only the

**Table 2: Average Dissimilarity Values Comparing Agendas of Party Election Manifestos and Five other Channels of Communication, All Parties 1994-2007 (Duncan's Index)**

	Ads	Letters	Presentations	TV2 Debates	DR Debates	Average
1994	75	57	51	61	55	60
1998	75	61	53	61	54	61
2001	68	65	57	59	61	62
2005	62	79	59	67	65	66
2007	83	61	-	-	-	72

**Table 3: The Conservative 2005 Issue Agendas in Different Channels of Communication, Percentages (Rankings within Channels are Shown in Parentheses)**

Issue	Election manifesto	TV presentation	TV2 Debate	DR Debate	Letters	Ads
Family and children issues	12 (1)	3 (8)	-	2 (7)	-	7 (5)
The economy	12 (1)	-	-	-	-	-
Pensions and the elderly	11 (3)	-	25 (1)	15 (3)	5 (5)	-
Public health care	10 (4)	1 (11)	-	2 (7)	-	-
Democracy issues	9 (4)	-	-	-	-	-
Education and science	7 (5)	-	11 (4)	7 (6)	-	11 (3)
Immigrants and integration	7 (5)	-	11 (4)	22 (2)	-	-
Taxation	6 (7)	13 (3)	22 (2)	11 (5)	5 (5)	27 (2)
Environment	6 (7)	22 (2)	3 (8)	-	20 (1)	9 (4)
Foreign policy and aid	5 (9)	6 (6)	-	-	20 (1)	-
Meta	4 (10)	1 (11)	8 (6)	15 (3)	-	-
Misc.	4 (10)	2 (10)	-	-	15 (3)	46 (1)
Law and order	2 (12)	28 (1)	-	-	-	-
EU	2 (12)	-	-	-	-	-
Public schooling	1 (14)	3 (8)	6 (7)	24 (1)	5 (5)	-
Employment policies	1 (14)	-	-	-	5 (5)	-
Social services	1 (14)	-	-	-	-	-
Business, farming and fishing	-	10 (4)	-	-	5 (5)	-
Housing	-	-	14 (3)	-	-	-
Transportation	-	7 (5)	-	-	5 (5)	-
Culture and sports	-	4 (7)	-	-	15 (3)	-
Equal rights	-	-	-	2 (7)	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Dissimilarity	-	73	62	61	73	71
n*	84	99	36	46	20	44

Note: The category "unclear" is used whenever it is not clear which issue a unit of analysis is about. This is the case when more issues are addressed at the same time, but none of them stand out as the primary or most important one. The category is also used to code units containing very broad statements that cannot be covered by any single issue. The category "meta" is used whenever a unit of analysis addresses the political "game" rather than a substantial political issue. This is the case when parties talk about opinion polls, government formation, and the like. \* refers to the number of messages within the election manifesto, the debates and presentation programme, and the numbers of published ads and letters.

election manifesto, one would believe that the Conservative 2005 campaign was about family and children, the economy and the elderly. Watching the televised presentation programme, however, one would think that the party was keen to put law and order, the environment and taxation on the agenda. In other channels other issues made their way to the top three of the party's issue agenda: In the TV2 debate housing was important, in the DR debate it was public schooling and meta-discussions, in the party's letters-to-the-editor foreign policy was the most important issue, whereas the newspaper ads were so unfocused that almost half were categorised as miscellaneous. In general, only few issues were highly ranked in more than one channel.

To quantify the differences in the six Conservative issue agendas shown in Table 3, five Duncan index values of dissimilarity are computed: When comparing the issue agenda of the election manifesto with the agendas of each of the five other channels, it is evident – and already shown in Table 1 – that between 61 and 73 percent of the issue attention in the different channels should be relocated in order to match the agenda of the manifesto. This final example clearly illustrates that dissimilarity values of 60-70 signify rather huge differences in the amount of attention allocated to a given issue in the different channels of campaign communication.

## Conclusion

Reporting the first study of its kind, the article empirically documents that Danish parties emphasise different issues in different channels of communication during national elections. Obviously, one cannot expect the parties to devote exactly the same amount of attention to the same issues in different campaign channels, but when the parties need to reallocate almost two thirds of their issue attention in newspaper ads, letters-to-the-editor, presentation programmes, and party leader debates in order to align it with the issue attention of their election manifestos, it is safe to speak of genuine differences.

The main conclusion – that mapping parties' issue agendas in different channels might prove to be a wild goose chase because of diverging issue attention in different outlets – is important to the student of agenda-setting for two reasons: First, it highlights a fundamental challenge to accumulate and compare results based on different empirical material. If a party, for instance, is deemed successful in influencing the media agenda in an analysis based on election manifestos, another analysis might conclude the opposite using press releases, citations in the news or another source of communication.

Second, the main conclusion exhibits a profound need to conceptually develop the understanding of party agendas. Here Norris *et al.* (1999) take a first step with the idea of an "ideal" communication source in which the "real" agenda of the parties can be measured. Another way to approach the problem is to include a wide range of channels and construct an average of the party issue agenda without privileging anyone specific. Alternatively one might simply analyse all included channels individually to illuminate possible differences as done by Norris (2006).

The study does not allow me to conclude this discussion, but I will suggest a different approach. First, the empirical conclusion: Some channels are more different from the election manifestos than others; the parties' issue agendas in the most media controlled channels, i.e. the presentation programmes and the debates on

DR and TV2, are *most* congruent with the issue agendas of manifestos. The agendas of the most party controlled channel, i.e. newspaper ads, are *least* congruent with the issue agendas of manifestos. This conclusion might come as a surprise, and it suggests that the reason parties communicate different issues in different channels is neither media distortion nor strategic considerations about different policy demands of partisans (the internal audience) and median voters (the external audience). If that were the case, the channels with the narrowest audience (i.e. presentations programmes, letters, and ads) should have been more similar to the election manifestos than the channel with the widest audience (i.e. the debates), but that is not the case.

Hence, the present investigation rejects both initial theories explaining why parties emphasise different issues in different campaign channels and leaves us in need of a new one. Obviously, this paper cannot provide a final answer, but as long as the reason is not media distortion, it is most likely another aspect of party strategy than suggested here. The fact that exactly newspaper ads stand out suggests that parties adjust their strategy, including their issue focus, continuously during an election campaign. If this is the case, parties might not have just one “ideal” agenda, which is presented early in the campaign, but multiple ones – perhaps one for each phase or period in an election campaign. This idea entails that future students of party agendas should consider including dynamic and not (only) static channels of campaign communication such as election manifestos or debates that are utilised by the parties only once.

The empirical focus of the article is Danish election campaigns, and an intriguing question of course is: Are the results illustrative in a broader, international setting? As argued above, Denmark is a typical case of at least the Democratic-Corporatist media model, and political leaders in similar systems such as the Netherlands and the rest of Scandinavia are assumed to be guided by the same considerations as discussed. However, the idea of dynamic strategic considerations of parties during a campaign may also apply in quite different political systems, e.g. the UK or France. This only reemphasises the need for future work on the concept of the ideal party agenda.

## Notes:

1. Only letters authored by leading party officials (defined as party leaders, party spokespersons, and ministers) are included.
2. In total I analysed 586 letters; 1,310 ads; 1,097 messages in TV2 debates; 1,611 messages in DR debates; 3,873 messages in party presentation programmes; and 4,051 messages in election manifestos.
3. Some parties publish only few newspaper ads, but if only one or two ads are published addressing the same low number of issues, it is impossible to have a near-perfect match between the issue agendas in the longer election manifestos and the ads. This caution only applies to a few parties; hence, the level of dissimilarity might be artificially high but still regarded as reliable.

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