

The Clarity Incentive for Issue Engagement in Campaigns

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Introduction

- What issues do parties focus on in campaigns and why?
- Carries implications for:
 - Whether electoral campaigns provide voters with useful information.
 - Whether parties are compelled to address issues voters care about.
 - Who wins elections and why.
 - Whether campaigns help voters select most competent politicians/best policies?

Outline

- A model to account for four “stylised facts” about party campaigns.
- Some empirical evidence for assumptions about voters.

Stylised Facts

1. Parties discuss multiple issues in campaigns.

- Green and Hobolt (2008).

2. Parties often emphasise their “favourable” issues.

- Issues on which position is popular, or which voters trust it to handle.
- Petrocik (1996), Druckman et. al (2004), de Sio and Weber (2014).

3. Parties frequently campaign on same issues as their opponents.

- Sigelman and Buel (2004); Kaplan, Park and Ridout (2006); Meyer and Wagner (2015).

4. Campaigns often emphasise issues considered important by voters.

- Kaplan, Park and Ridout (2006); Sides (2006), Green and Hobolt (2008).

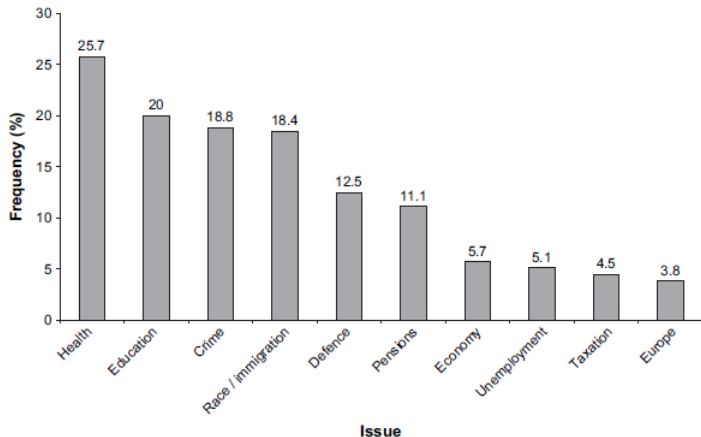
UK Party Election Campaigns 2005

From Green and Hobolt (2008).

	Leader Speeches	Election Broadcasts	Press Releases
Labour	Education Economy Immigration	Economy Education Health	Economy Education Health
Conservatives	Education Crime Immigration	Crime Education Immigration	Crime Taxation Education

- Compare campaigns to pre-campaign MORI survey of voter opinions.
- Issues in bold are those where party was considered to have “the best policies” on the issue by more survey respondents than its opponent.

Most Important Issues To Voters



- Percentage of survey respondents who considered each issue “most important issue facing the country”.

Stylised Facts

1. Parties discuss multiple issues in campaigns.
 2. Parties often emphasise their “favourable” issues.
 - Labour talked about economy, but didn't talk as much about crime.
 - Conservatives talked about taxation, but didn't as much about health.
 3. Parties frequently campaign on same issues as their opponents.
 - In this case: education, immigration.
 4. Campaigns often emphasise issues considered important by voters.
 - In this case: education, health, crime, immigration.
- These patterns appear to hold in other countries and elections.

Theory

- Parties face salience incentive to emphasise favourable issues.
 - Increases salience of these issues for voters.
 - Voters vote based on the issues that are salient to them.
 - Main incentive considered in existing literature.
- Parties face clarity incentive to emphasise already salient issues.
 - Clarifies party position to potentially sympathetic voters.
 - Increases support for the party because voters dislike uncertainty.
- Party strategy determined by combined effect of these incentives.

Related Literature

- **Theoretical Models of Campaigns:**

- Denter (2017), Aragonês, Castanheira and Giani (2015), Egorov (2015), Dragu and Fan (2016).

- **Empirical Literature on Campaign Strategy:**

- Green and Hobolt (2008), Petrocik (1996), Druckman et. al (2004), Kaplan, Park and Ridout (2006).

- **Evidence on Priming Effects:**

- Iyengar and Kinder (1987); Krosnick and Kinder (1990).

- **Evidence of Uncertainty on Vote Choice:**

- Alvarez (1998), Enelow and Hinich (1981); Bartels (1986); Ezrow, Homola and Tavits (2014).

Setup of Model

- Two parties: 1, 2; Two issues: X, Y .
- Nature chooses position $\in \mathbf{R}$ for each party on each issue
 - Known to both parties but unknown to voters.
 - Abstract from factors that determine party positions.
- Each party chooses campaign emphasis on each issue.
 - To maximise vote share.
 - Subject to constraint $e_j^X + e_j^Y = 1$.
 - Party strategy s_j is a mapping from parties' positions to j 's emphasis on each issue.
- Voters have ideal points on both issues, according to distribution F .

Voters

- Voters see at most one party's campaign on one issue.
- Three types of voter: X-focused, Y-focused and impressionable.
 - Proportions of each are $\bar{\pi}_X$, $\bar{\pi}_Y$, $1 - \bar{\pi}_X - \bar{\pi}_Y$.
 - K-focused can only see and care about campaigns on issue K.
 - Impressionable can see campaigns about either issue.
 - Care only about issue on which they see a party campaign.
⇒ Salience effect of campaigns.
- Probability that voter sees party's campaign on an issue:
 - $\eta(e_j^K)$ if issue K focused.
 - $\eta(e_j^K)/2$ if impressionable.
 - $\eta'(\cdot) > 0$, $\eta''(\cdot) < 0$ over $(0, 1)$; $\eta(0) = 0$, $\eta'(1) = 0$.

Information and Vote Choice

- If voter i sees:
 - One party's campaign.
 - sees that party's position with prob 1
 - sees other party's position with prob $\gamma \in [0, 0.5)$.
 - No campaigns.
 - sees both parties' positions with prob γ .

- If voter i sees:
 - Both parties' positions.
 - votes for closest party.
 - One party's position.
 - votes for that party: ambiguity aversion.
 \Rightarrow Clarity effect of campaigns.
 - No party positions.
 - votes for each party with prob $\frac{1}{2}$.

Equilibrium

- Given party positions and strategies, Party j 's vote share is given by:

$$V_j = \frac{\rho_0}{2} + \sum_{K \in \{X, Y\}} (\rho_B^{KF} \psi_j^K + \rho_B^{KI} \psi_j^K + \rho_j^{KF} + \rho_j^{KI})$$

- An equilibrium is a strategy for each party such that each party maximises vote share given the other party's strategy, for any policy positions of the parties.

Existence and Uniqueness

Proposition : *There is a unique equilibrium for all parameter values.*

Intuition of Proof:

- $\frac{\partial^2 V_j}{\partial e_1^K \partial e_2^K} = 0.$

\Rightarrow party j 's optimal best response doesn't depend on its opponent's strategy.

- Strict concavity of $\eta(\cdot)$ ensures unique best response.

Campaigning on Multiple Issues

Proposition : *Both parties emphasise both issues a positive amount in equilibrium, for all party positions.*

Intuition of Proof:

- $\frac{\partial V_j}{\partial e_j^K} > 0$ if $e_j^K < 1$, because of clarity incentive.
- $\frac{\partial V_j}{\partial e_j^K} = 0$ if $e_j^K = 1$, because $\eta'(1) = 0$.

Comparative Statics

Proposition: Equilibrium strategies satisfy:

1. $\frac{\partial e_j^{*K}}{\partial \psi_j^K} > 0$.
2. $\frac{\partial e_j^{*K}}{\partial \pi_K} - \frac{\partial e_j^{*K}}{\partial \pi_{-K}} \geq 0$.

Intuition:

1. Higher $\psi_j^K \Rightarrow$ incentive to emphasise issue K to increase salience.
2. Relatively higher $\pi_K \Rightarrow \uparrow$ clarity incentive to emphasise issue K .

Stylised Facts (Again)

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2. Parties often emphasise their “favourable” issues.
3. Parties frequently campaign on same issues as their opponents.
4. Campaigns often emphasise issues considered important by voters.

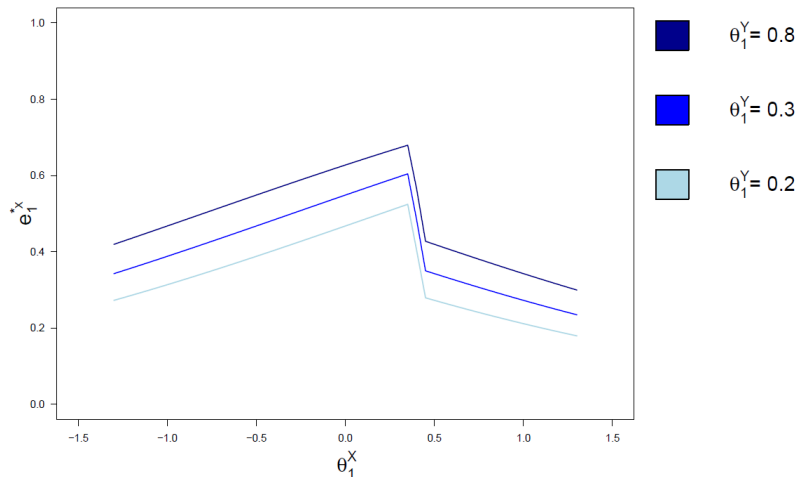
Extension: Voters Maximise Expected Utility

Same model as before, except:

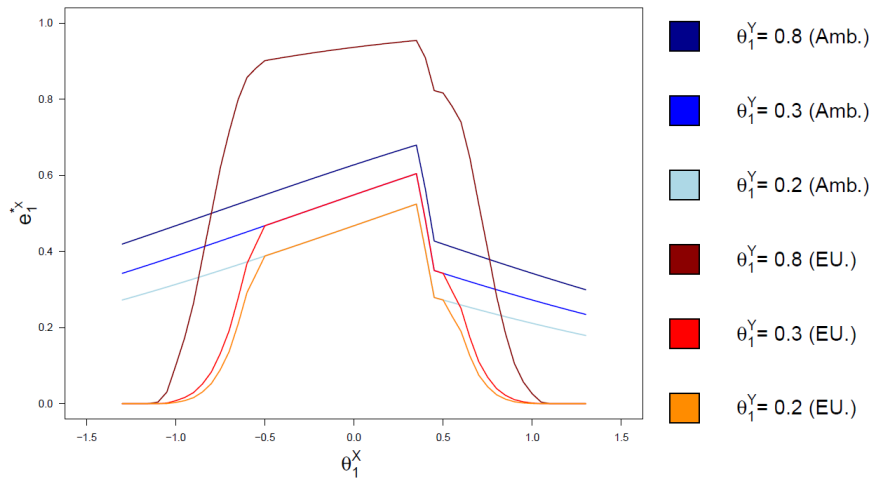
- Nature draws party positions from known distribution G .
 - Positions are iid across parties and issues.
- Voter i gets utility from supporting party j , $U(|x_i - x_j|)$.
 - Maximise expected utility.
- Consider perfect Bayesian equilibrium.

Illustrative Calibration

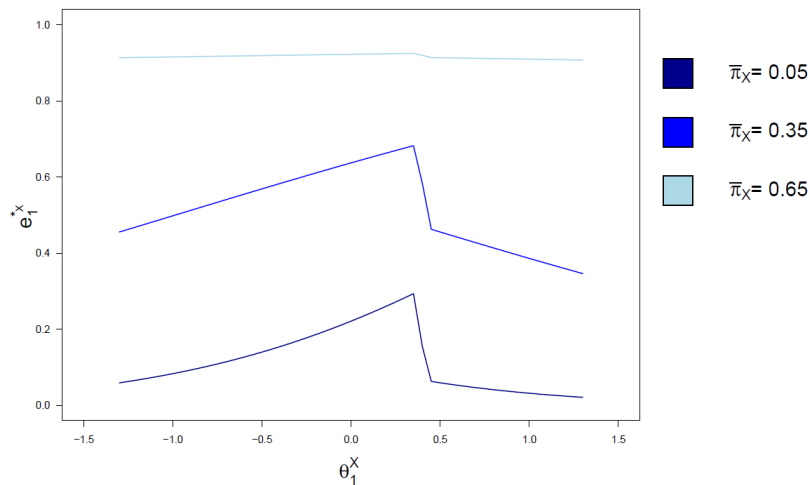
- Voter ideal points uniformly distributed on square $[-1, 1]^2$.
- $\eta = \alpha(1 - (1 - e)^{1+\tau})$.
- $\gamma = 0.5, \bar{\pi}_X = \bar{\pi}_Y = \alpha = \tau = 0.3$.
- Party 2's Position: $\theta_2^X = \theta_2^Y = 0.4$.

Party 1's Emphasis on X as Position Varies: Ambiguity Averse Voters

Party 1's Emphasis on X as Position Varies: EU vs. Amb. Averse

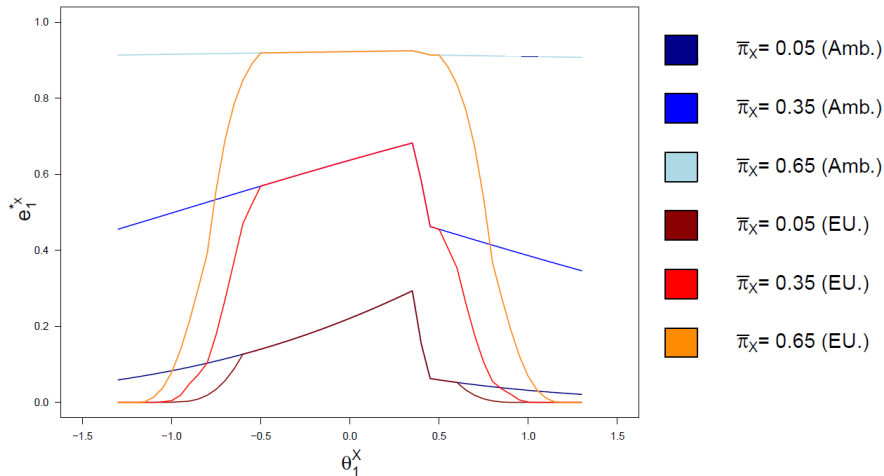


Party 1's Emphasis on X as $\bar{\pi}_X$ Varies: Ambiguity Averse Voters



- $\theta_1^Y = -0.4$.

Party 1's Emphasis on X as $\bar{\pi}_X$ Varies: EU vs. Amb. Averse

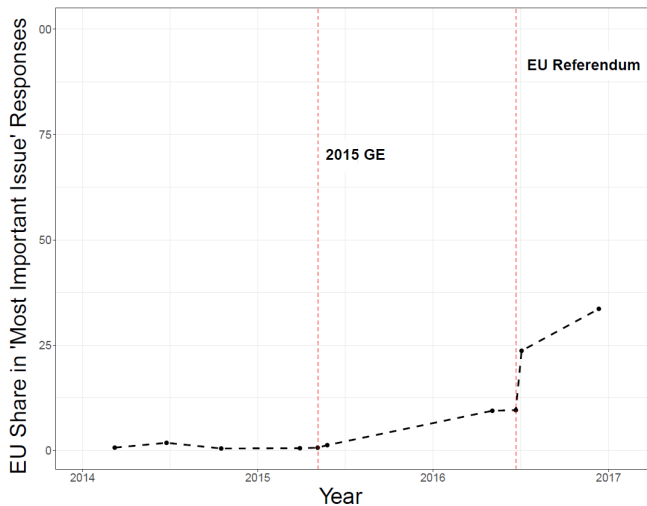


• $\theta_1^Y = -0.4$.

Empirical Analysis

- Do voters behave as the model suggests?
 - Do they punish parties if uncertain of their policies on salient issues?
 - Essential for existence of clarity incentive.
- British Election Study:
 - 9 survey waves over 2014-17 (balanced panel of 7,237).
 - Political salience of EU increased dramatically after May 2015 election.
 - Completely unexpected election result \Rightarrow referendum.
 - Study effect of voter knowledge of parties' EU policies on reported 'likelihood to ever vote for' each party.
 - Were voters less likely to vote for parties whose EU positions were unknown to them?
 - Was this effect larger after May 2015 election?

Saliency of European Union



Empirical Specification

- Estimate:

$$Y_{ijt} = X_{ijt} D_t^{<GE} \beta_1 + X_{ijt} D_t^{>GE} \beta_2 + \alpha_{ji} + \theta_{jt} + u_{ij}$$

- Addressing Endogeneity Concerns
 - What if parties with unclear position on EU just happen to be unpopular?
 - Party-wave and party-constituency FE's address this.
 - What if voters are less likely to know party's position on EU if they don't like it for other reasons?
 - Individual-party FE's control for long term party preferences.
 - Instrument for "don't know" using whether voter knew party position in wave 1 (2014).

Empirical Results

	OLS	IV
$EU_j \text{ DK} \times \text{before GE}$	-0.083 (0.056)	-0.367 (0.143)
$EU_j \text{ DK} \times \text{after GE}$	-0.218* (0.044)	-0.877 (0.306)

Conclusion

- Provide model of campaign strategy.
 - Accounts for four stylised empirical facts about campaigns.
- Parties face two key incentives:
 - Salience incentive: increase importance of an issue for voters.
⇒ tendency to emphasise favourable issues.
 - Clarity incentive : increase voters' certainty about position.
⇒ tendency to emphasise issues considered important by voters.
- Empirical evidence for existence of clarity incentive.

Extensions

- Model can also be extended to cover “competence” issues.
- Normative implications?
 - When are campaigns informative?
 - When are voters manipulated?