Paper prepared for presentation at the Workshop "Voters, Protest and Policies: Bridging Public Opinion, Social Movement Outcomes and Policy Responsiveness Research", University of Leicester, 16-17 June 2014

Word is silver, but silence is golden? Policy agenda, responsiveness, and competitive incentives

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Abstract

Do governments (de-)emphasise certain issues in their policy agendas under some specific incentives coming from party competition? Are government agendas more responsive to public priorities under such incentives? In order to address these questions, this paper presents a theoretical framework in which government vulnerability and issue competence are the main competitive incentives for rhetorical responsiveness. Using time-series cross-section data where executive speeches are the dependent variable, this paper produces very preliminary findings that have implications for both the policy agenda of governments and government responsiveness to citizens' priorities. Competitive incentives matter but results are mixed. However, as previous research has already pointed out, no pattern across countries or issues is visible. This paper is still a work in progress, so additional controls and robustness checks will be implemented in future versions.

(This is an early draft and is not suitable for citation as yet)

1. Introduction

Previous literature on issue ownership and issue competence has mostly been associated to election campaign and vote choice, developing arguments for strategies adopted by parties to win elections (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003; van der Brug 2004; Bellucci 2006; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008; Meguid 2008; Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2013; Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2013). Only recently scholars' attention is also moving onto how these theories can help explaining policy agenda dynamics. Hence, the focus switches from the pure electoral arena towards the governmental arena. To the best of my knowledge, only one work has started filling this gap (Green and Jennings 2012*a*). Green and Jennings (2012*a*) extend the importance of issue ownership and issue salience during election campaigns to the period of time in which parties and presidents are in government. They aim at proposing a theory of party competition applicable to the policy agendas of governments. Their expectations imply that parties in government would behave in the way suggested by issue ownership theories, that is, highlighting, in their agendas, the issues they own or have a reputation on. However, these effects are mediated by the salience of those issues prioritised by the public and the government popularity.

The expectations of this paper are similar to the ones proposed by Green and Jennings. Yet we start from a different premise. Though the assumption - that parties care about winning elections - is shared, the argument suggested here is alternative. Since parties are interested in seeking reelection, they will be more likely to achieve this goal if they respond sympathetically to public preferences and priorities (Bartolini 1999). The premise differs because the most relevant electoral incentive in this paper is given by government vulnerability and not by other incentives coming from issue ownership/issue competence theories. The argument is rather that the effect of electoral vulnerability on government responsiveness on a given issue can be mediated by the competence or reputation governing parties have on that issue. Since we are talking about policy agenda and not policy output, I define responsiveness in the following way: when the importance of an issue for the public increases and the level of attention in the government agenda on that issue increases consequently, then a responsive move occurs. Some scholars call it *dynamic agenda representation* (Bevan and Jennings 2014), but I prefer to use the term *rhetorical responsiveness*, in line with other studies (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008), to distinguish it from policy responsiveness. It appears, thus, clear that rhetorical responsiveness is a relationship-wise concept linking citizens' priorities (public issue salience) and government activity (policy agenda). The theory suggested in this paper, applicable to governing parties that care about winning elections, expects an effect of electoral vulnerability on government responsiveness, but this effect is mediated by governing parties' issue competence.

However, note that agenda responsiveness is not simply an increase in government attention to citizens' priorities since it can be translated into policy. In fact, there is evidence of consistency between executive agendas and legislative outputs both in the U.S. (Edwards and Wood 1999) and in the U.K. (Bara 2005; Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011). The issue of whether responsiveness can be found also in executive speeches is highly controversial in the discipline. While policy agenda scholars are open to talk in terms of policy-opinion responsiveness (see Bevan and Jennings 2010; John, Bevan, and Jennings 2011), students of responsiveness/representation are, instead, more conservative narrowing responsiveness to policy only (Powell 2004; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

This paper produces two main preliminary findings. The first finding has implications for the policy agenda of governments. When governments are electorally safe, compared to their opponents, they tend to increase the attention assigned to certain issues in their executive speeches. This seems to be confirmed when government issue advantage is included in the picture. The second finding has implications for government responsiveness to citizens' priorities but results are mixed. In some case vulnerability seems to increase responsiveness while in other cases responsiveness increases when governments are safe. This is mediated by whether governments hold or not an advantage on the issue. When the latter is included, electoral vulnerability seems to have a beneficial effect on responsiveness in some issues.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

2.1. Issue Ownership, Issue Salience, and Vulnerability

Issue ownership theories tell us how political parties compete for elections. Developed after Stokes' (1963; 1992) classic distinction between position issues and valence issues, these theories were born as an answer to the failure of the assumptions of party convergence towards the median voter and the lack of party's positional shift (Downs 1957). If parties do not always compete in the way the Downsian's proximity theory predicts, how do they compete then? According to issue ownership/issue competence theories, parties give priority only to those issues for which they have a historically good reputation for competence (Petrocik 1996). Parties who own the issue and have a good reputation on it will be more likely to emphasise that issue in their political agenda. Conversely, parties are more likely to avoid those issues they do not own and for which their reputation is bad in order to avoid electoral damages (Green and Hobolt 2008; van der Brug 2004). This is actually in line with the salience theory (Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994), according to which parties emphasise and de-emphasise issues based on the developments of electoral competition. What matters is not the party position as expressed in the Downsian theory, but the importance a party gives to those issues raised in the campaign [1].

Issue salience and issue ownership are interconnected. From the studies on issue salience and issue ownership we know that, on one side, voters are better informed about party positions when dealing with issues they care of (Iyengar et al. 2008; Krosnick 1990); on the other side, party issue ownership helps voters to distinguish parties from each other and parties become owners of an issue because the issue is salient to the party (Walgrave and De Swert 2007; Bélanger and Meguid 2008). So, when an issue is salient to a party, this means that such an issue is important for that party and for its voters, too (Walgrave and De Swert 2007; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). If the issue is salient for the voters and, consequently, becomes salient for the party too, then a responsive move occurs. As previous research has widely outlined, responsiveness is more likely to occur for those issues that are salient to the public (Miller and Stokes 1963; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Jennings and John 2009). Evidence from Belgium reveals that incongruence between parties and voters decreases when a party owns an issue and that the effect on congruence is even greater when interacting party ownership and voter salience (Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). Yet it is less clear from an empirical standpoint whether issue ownership has a positive effect on responsiveness.

Beyond issue ownership and issue salience, this paper argues that another element of party competition is essential for responsiveness to be achieved. This dimension of competition is called electoral vulnerability (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1977; Bartolini 1999, 2000; Immergut and Abou-Chadi 2014) [2]. The unintended responsive effect of competition is achieved by introducing Friedrich's (1963) "mechanism of anticipated reactions". Only if politicians are worried about the reactions of voters will they be "constantly piloted by the anticipation of those reactions" (Sartori 1977: 350). These are Mansbridge's (2003) anticipators. This mechanism occurs in-between elections and is similar to the mechanism of rational anticipation identified by Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson (1995) (see also Hakhverdian (2010)). Here the anticipatory pressure from the upcoming election should bring governments to formulate policies in line with what voters expressed through the previous election outcome; in other words, what it is called vulnerability, which is at the core of the connection between responsiveness and competition. If the mechanism of democracy stems on the potential electoral sanctions or on the will of being reelected, if the incumbent government aims to achieve this goal, it will need to anticipate sympathetically the voters' needs. This mechanism will perform better if the incumbent gov-

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[1] Green-Pedersen (2007) leans to a slightly different argument emphasising the importance of issue competition (Carmines and Stimson 1993), meaning competition for the issues that should dominate the party political agenda. This view is very similar to Robertson's (1976) theory of selective emphasis, for "issue competition means that political parties will emphasise issues which they would like to see dominate electoral competition" (Green-Pedersen 2007: 609). However, and this is what distinguishes issue competition from selective emphasis, a party will not select and emphasise some issues ignoring all the others, rather its aim "is to get other parties to pay attention to the issues that it would like to see dominate electoral competition" (ibidem). This approach builds on Riker's (1993) dominance and dispersion principles of agenda formation. The dominance principle occurs "when one side successfully wins the argument on an issue, the other side ceases to discuss it, while winner continues to exploit it"; conversely, the dispersion principle follows "when both sides fail to win the argument on an issue, both sides cease to discuss it and search for some other, more profitable issue" (Riker 1993: 81-2).

[2] Other authors refer to the concept of vulnerability but they call it differently (above all, see Strom 1989, 1992; Bartolini 2000).

ernment perceives itself vulnerable thus vulnerability is related to the potential uncertainty of electoral result (Bartolini 1999). Vulnerability then acts as a great electoral incentive for governments to respond. In fact, when governing parties are safe such an incentive would not occur, leaving room for possible unresponsive behaviours.

2.2. Implications for Policy Agenda and Responsiveness

A crucial point relates to how issue ownership, issue salience and vulnerability are linked to each other. The relationship among these dimensions may lead to different scenarios. First, we can expect that the effect of electoral vulnerability may be different when governing parties own the issue and when the issue is salient for the public. The effect of vulnerability may be stronger if the issue is salient for the public and the governing parties (or one of them at least) own the issue. Parties tend to increase the salience of an issue they hold an advantage position on and ignore or try to mute those issues that do not benefit them (Rovny 2012, 2013), simply because they will not be credible in the eyes of voters and this would only be a safe road to an electoral defeat. In contrast with the literature on issue ownership, cases of "issue trespassing" and "issue convergence" are well documented in the United States (see Damore 2004, 2005; Sigelman and Buell 2004) and it seems plausible that issue overlap is more frequent in multi-party rather than two-party systems given the crowdedness of the political space (Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2013). In this case, the government will try to challenge its main competitor on an issue it has not a good reputation on in order to desperately attempt to gain votes and improve its popularity in opinion polls. The latter strategy is surely more risky than the former but still finds empirical evidence in cases of issue convergence and issue trespassing. Nevertheless, it is important noticing that only the competence dimension of issue ownership can be stolen from a party by another party while the associative dimension of issue ownership (i.e. voters associate a certain issue to a certain party) is much more stable over time (Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2012; Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2013).

Different implications for government agendas can be thought depending on whether the government is electorally vulnerable or not. When the government is afraid of losing elections (i.e. it is vulnerable) it may emphasise those issues it has a good reputation on in order to gain popularity. This might be a winning strategy if the issues are also very salient to the public. Previous research on government agendas tells us that, given the complexity and the amount of public demands, attention is a scarce good and this has consequences for agenda representation (Kingdon 1995; Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Jones, Larsen-Price, and Wilkerson 2009). Governments cannot pay attention to any issue the public is concerned about therefore they will select those issues that are salient for the public and avoid those ones the public is less concerned about. Therefore, when the issue is less salient to the public the choice for the government is more unclear and ambivalent. If an issue is salient for the public and the government owns the issue, the government can in theory make a responsive move emphasising, in turn, the issue in its policy agenda, but this move will be more likely if the government is vulnerable. When the electoral incentive is low or inexistent, i.e. the government is safe, the government might be more confident of its own popularity and free from electoral pressures therefore it might increase the attention on issues in which does not hold an advantage on. This might be a less likely scenario when the government is under electoral pressure. However, in relation to responsiveness, one can expect that if the electoral incentive is low or not existent responsiveness will be less likely no matter if the parties in government own the issue or not. If the government is safe it can still be (rhetorically) responsive but this would be less likely because government is confident in opinion polls and hence not significantly worried of losing elections. If some comparative studies linking institutional variables and rhetorical responsiveness exist[3], only a few works focus on incentives coming from party competition and rhetorical responsiveness/dynamic agenda representation.

Green and Jennings (2012*a*) try to fill this gap merging two different kinds of literature, the one based on issue ownership theories and the policy agenda tradition. According to them, governing parties would behave

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[3]Jones and Baumgartner (2004) find that there is a substantial evidence of congruence between the priorities of the public and policymakers in the U.S. but this is attenuated in comparison to agendas and when institutional friction is high (Jones, Larsen-Price, and Wilkerson 2009). Similar results have been found outside the American context. Comparing the U.K. and the U.S., Bevan and Jennings (2014) find that responsiveness of policy agendas to public priorities decreases as the level of institutional friction increases and as attention scarcity decreases. Evidence from Spain confirms the inverse relationship between correspondence of public and policymakers priorities and institutional friction, but it also reveals that policymakers are more responsive to public priorities immediately after elections and when the executive governs without a majority (Chaqués Bonafont and Palau 2011).

in the way suggested by issue ownership theories, highlighting the issues they own or have a good reputation on. This strategy is, however, mediated by the salience of those issues prioritised by the public and the government popularity. Using both executive speeches and legislative outputs in the U.K. and the U.S., the authors conclude that theories of party competition applied to policy agendas of government raise exciting prospects but they also remark that findings cannot be generalised across policy domains and different institutional contexts, confirming the existence of an issue-specific pattern. When the hypothesis of issue ownership effects mediated by party popularity is considered, the interaction between issue ownership and popularity is more encouraging for legislative outputs than executive speeches in the direction hypothesised by the authors (that is, issue ownership evaluations on governing policy agendas will be attenuated by the electoral popularity of the governing party, suggesting that "an issue ownership strategy is particularly likely for parties with relatively weak electoral support" (Green and Jennings 2012*a*: 10)).

Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008) propose a different approach for rhetorical responsiveness. Assuming that issue salience is a key component of political competition, Hobolt and Klemmensen select two main institutional factors. On the one hand, they use a different conceptualisation of competition where electoral contestability is defined as the uncertainty facing the executive in electoral contexts. This way of approaching competition is somehow problematic as it leads to a kind of conceptual stretching, for contestability and incumbent uncertainty mean two distinct things. The former is the potential or opportunity to take part in competitive interactions; the latter is more related to the electoral vulnerability perceived by the incumbent (see Strom 1989, 1992; Bartolini 1999). On the other hand, executive discretion refers to the constraints faced by the executive in the legislative process. Institutional features such as direct election of the executive, whether the electoral system is plurality or proportional, whether separation of powers occurs, and whether a conflict of interest between the executive and the legislature is present are tested in their hypotheses. However, the most interesting hypothesis is the one regarding the electoral uncertainty: the greater the uncertainty about future electoral contests, the higher the responsiveness of the executive (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008: 314). Using vote intentions for the government as a proxy for incumbent vulnerability, the authors find that its interaction with public priorities matters in several policy domains, but not in others. Collapsing government speeches into a single left-right policy dimension, the same hypothesis has also been tested for Britain by Hakhverdian (2010), who finds that the marginal effect of public preferences on government policy increases as electoral pressures rise.

Though this paper starts from the same assumption than Green and Jenning's (2012*a*) that parties are election-seekers, I attribute a special attention to the role played by electoral vulnerability in triggering responsiveness of government's agendas to public priorities. I argue that responsiveness is more likely to occur when governments are electorally vulnerable, but that this relationship is mediated by two additional elements: public issue salience and government's relative advantage on issues. Since this paper is interested in governing parties, it would be misleading to propose hypotheses directly linked to the concept of issue ownership. In fact, nowadays only a few number of issues are still owned by certain parties. What matters, instead, is whether a party has a relative advantage on the issue compared to another party. Figure 1 proposes a graphical version of the framework for responsiveness used here. The arrow connecting issue advantage and the relationship between citizens' priorities and policy agenda is dashed to indicate the mediating role of the variable in the vulnerability-responsiveness relationship. However, I stress that the effect of the two competitive incentives on the policy agenda is direct, though not shown in the figure.

Given the theoretical premises outlined above, this paper proposes two competing hypotheses linking competitive incentives and policy agendas, on the one hand, and competitive incentives and rhetorical responsiveness, on the other hand.

Hypothesis 1a. When the government is electorally vulnerable, it will be likely to emphasise those issues it holds an advantage on (especially if the issues are very salient to the public).

Hypothesis 1b. When the government is electorally safe, it will also emphasise issues in which it does not hold an advantage on (independently of the salience of the issue).

Hypothesis 2a. Government responsiveness to citizens' priorities is likely to occur when the government is electorally vulnerable and holds an advantage on the issue.

Hypothesis 2b. Government responsiveness to citizens' priorities is likely to occur when the government
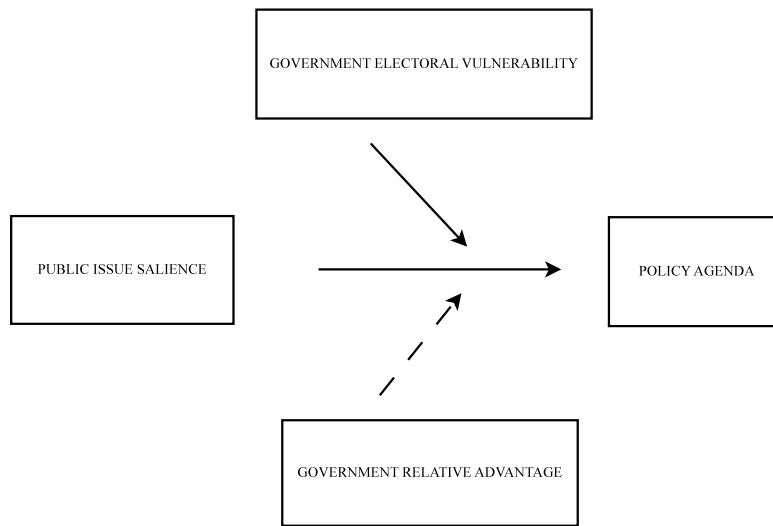
Figure 1: A framework of competitive incentives for rhetorical responsiveness

is electorally safe and does not hold an advantage on the issue.

3. Data and Measures

Rhetorical responsiveness on the government side is measured using data on executive speeches as collected by the Comparative Agendas Project following the codebook created by the Policy Agendas Project [4]. The policy content of these speeches is divided into quasi-sentences, with each quasi-sentence assigned a single unique topic code [5]. The dependent variable is then the number of quasi-sentences assigned to each macro topic in a series of policy domains (see Table 1) in four advanced democracies: Germany (1987-2005), Spain (1982-2007), the United Kingdom (1960-2010), and the United States (1947-2013). The head of state or head of government, depending on the political system, delivers an annual formal statement on behalf of the executive, setting out the government agenda for the year ahead (Cohen 1995; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005, 2008; Jennings, Bevan, and John 2011; Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011). Executive speeches have then a prospective function communicating the government's general priorities as well as more specific measures that the executive intends to address in the following year. For this reason, speeches are a costly signal and "create future potential costs for the prime minister and the government, if the priorities in the speech are not followed by policy outputs" (Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011).

Public issue salience is measured using the most important problem/issue (MIP/MII) question, which gives citizens the opportunity to state their priorities. While some surveys ask respondents to spot the most important *problem* their country is facing, other surveys ask them to spot the most important *issue*. Though the MIP/MII question is widely used as indicator of public opinion, such a question has been harshly criticised for several reasons, especially for the conceptual fuzziness between importance and salience, on the one hand, and issues and problems, on the other hand (see Wlezien 2005; Jennings and Wlezien 2011). Nevertheless, when comparing MIP and MII, Jennings and Wlezien (2011) find that they essentially mean the same for respondents. While the MIP/MII question might be more problematic when associated to indicators of government activity that contain policy directionality (for instance, more or less spending on a given issue), it matches quite well with government priorities and is frequently used in studies on dynamic agenda representation (Jones and

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[4] For the U.S., the data used here were originally collected by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, with the support of National Science Foundation grant numbers SBR 9320922 and 0111611, and were distributed through the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. Neither NSF nor the original collectors of the data bear any responsibility for the analysis reported here. See Jennings, Bevan, and John (2011) for the British data, Chaqués Bonafont, Palau, and Muñoz (2014) for the Spanish data, and Breunig (2014) for the German data.

[5] For a critical evaluation of this assignment, see Dowding, Hindmoor, and Martin (2013).

Table 1: Policy Agendas Project major topic codes

1. Macroeconomics
2. Civil Rights, Minorities, Migration and Civil Liberties
3. Health
6. Education
7. Environment
12. Law, Crime and Family Issues
13. Social Welfare
14. Community Development, Planning and Housing Issues
16/19. Defence, International Affairs and Foreign Aid

Source: UK Policy Agendas Topic Codebook, see www.policyagendas.org.uk

Baumgartner 2004; John, Bevan, and Jennings 2011; Bevan and Jennings 2014). Data on citizens' priorities have been recoded in line with the Policy Agendas Project codebook to make them more comparable [6]. Table 2 compares the three most important issues for the government and the public in Germany, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S. in the respective period of reference. At a glance there is a quite high cross-country correspondence between government and public priorities. If on average the economic situation represents the first priority for the public in all the four countries, it is second in the government agenda after defence and international affairs, which is the most salient topic for the government. This is so because, taken together, defence and international affairs have always been assigned a very considerable portion in the government speech (Cohen 1995; Jennings, Bevan, and John 2011).

Table 2: Government and Public Agendas

Germany (1987-2004)	Spain (1982-2007)	U.K. (1960-2010)	U.S. (1947-2012)
Government Priorities			
Defence/Foreign Affairs	Defence/Foreign Affairs	Defence/Foreign Affairs	Defence/Foreign Affairs
Economic Situation	Economic Situation	Economic Situation	Economic Situation
Social Welfare	Law and Order	Law and Order	Health
Public Priorities			
Economic Situation	Economic Situation	Economic Situation	Economic Situation
Defence/Foreign Affairs	Defence/Foreign Affairs	Defence/Foreign Affairs	Defence/Foreign Affairs
Minority Rights and Immigration	Law and Order	Health	Law and Order

Source: see Note 4 and Appendix A.2.1.

Electoral vulnerability represents the most relevant incentive of electoral competition for responsiveness. Often in the literature measures of electoral competitiveness, closeness of electoral result, frequency of turnover are used to capture this concept. However, such measures suffer from a major issue: they are based on aggregate electoral data; in other words they measure *actual* vulnerability. What is rather needed is a measure of *potential* vulnerability. The reason is twofold, both theoretical and methodological. First, responsiveness occurs in-between elections (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999; Narud and Esaiasson 2013) therefore we need a measure that covers vulnerability diachronically and not only at the election time. Second, such measures of actual vulnerability are time invariant, meaning that they keep the same value for the whole election cycle, consequently depressing the variance of the explanatory variable. A measure of government vulnerability is

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[6]Since time-series of MIP/MII in the U.K. and Spain are available from Gallup/Ipsos-MORI and the CIS Barometer, respectively, in more than one data point per year (depending in which months the question has been asked) and polling institutes in these countries provide the two and three most important problems/issues combined, respectively, responses are then averaged on a yearly basis and standardised to total 100 percent to make them comparable to the Politbarometer's MIP series in Germany and the Gallup's MIP series in the U.S. Since data for the Gallup's MIP question in the U.K. are not available after 2001, Ipsos-MORI's MII data are also used. When overlapping in the period 1980-2000, the two series are combined and averaged.

then proposed using data on vote intentions.

Government's electoral vulnerability is computed subtracting for each year the vote intentions for the government parties to the vote intentions for the relevant opposition parties. By relevant opposition I mean those parties receiving vote intentions the government might be vulnerable from, including those who are not direct rivals in the competition for government but that might still be able to change the electoral result to the detriment of the government. The exception is given by the U.S., for which data on presidential approvals are used. Although being approved is not necessarily the same as being popular (Stimson 1976), presidential approvals can be used as a reliable indicator of government popularity (Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004). In this case, approvals for the governing party are subtracted to the approvals for the opposition party. My measure of vulnerability differs from the one implemented in other works linking electoral competition to responsiveness (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Hakhverdian 2010; Green and Jennings 2012*a*), where vote intentions for the government as such are taken. The strategy followed by these studies assumes that governing parties do not care about how good or bad their main competitors are doing at the polls. What they only care about is their own popularity. However, the concept of vulnerability implies that a party is vulnerable in relation to another party, while, if a party is unpopular, it does not necessarily mean that its main opponent is popular. From a conceptual point of view, less vote intentions for the government do not necessarily end up in more vote intentions for the opposition. This is the reason why I propose a more fine-grained measure of government electoral vulnerability that directly takes into account the threat caused by the relevant opposition parties.

Since the Liberals (FDP) played a pivotal role in Germany almost in all Christian Democrats (CDU-CSU) and Social Democrats (SDP) coalition governments until the 1998 election (Mair 1997: 208), they are also included when in opposition. In Spain, beyond the main competition for government between the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the People's Alliance/People's Party (AP/PP), the threat for PSOE comes not only from its main competitor but also from the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), before, and the United Left (IU), after. The creation of the IU mostly lies in the electoral incentive felt by the leaders of PCE, who considered the PSOE no longer a left party, given the moderate policies the Socialist Party was promoting in government (Ramiro-Fernández 2004). For this reason, PCE and IU are included when the Socialist Party is in government. The measure for the U.K. always includes the Liberals/Alliance/LibDem since they increase the electoral vulnerability of both Conservative and Labour governments. A clear example is given when in combination with the Social Democratic Party, born from a rib of the Labour Party, the Liberals attracted more support in the opinion polls than either of its two big rivals in the two years before 1983 election (Butler and Kavanagh 1984: 3).

Government's relative advantage on issues represents the other main electoral incentive that this paper considers. The measure used here is strongly dependent on data constraints. In fact, it is really hard to find survey data across countries and over time such as to build a reasonably long time-series of issue competence. For this reason, I lean to Petrocik's (1996) definition of issue ownership emphasising in my measure the importance of the citizens' perception of party issue competence from a *historical* perspective rather than focusing on how such a perception changes from an election to another. Since the question wording in the surveys differs across and within countries, only the questions asking to rate both the government and the main opposition party are considered. The measure is then constructed taking the mean value of each available data point on a given issue (issues have been recoded in line with the major topics used for the dependent variable). If the mean value for the governing party is higher than the mean value for the main opposition party, then the government will be assigned a value equal to one; zero otherwise. Note that, because of the reasons explained above, this value will be the same every time that party is in government for the whole period of reference. For instance, if the Democratic Party in the U.S. has a relative advantage on education compared to the Republican Party (the mean value of education for the former is higher than the mean value of education for the latter), the Democratic Party will always get a 1 when in government while the Republican Party will always get a 0 when in government (see Table 4 in Appendix A.1.). I am aware of the existence of more elegant and sophisticated measures of issue competence (see, for instance, the ones recently proposed by Green and Jennings 2012*a*), but the inclusion of a dummy variable capturing a party's historical advantage on the issues can be considered an acceptable solution given the pauperism of over time data for some of the countries included in the paper (see Appendix A.2.3).

4. Method

In this very preliminary version, this paper aims at exploring whether electoral vulnerability has an impact on the government agenda and government responsiveness, and whether this effect is mediated by the fact that the government has an advantage on the issue. To do so, I proceed step by step. First, a simple model (Table 3) is run to assess what kind of effect vulnerability has on the government speeches across issues. A second model (Table 4) introduces the other competitive incentive, that is, government issue advantage on the issue, to see how the effects of vulnerability change when the interaction with issue competence is included. The third and the fourth models look at the impact of electoral vulnerability on rhetorical responsiveness (Table 5) and how this is mediated by issue competence (Table 6). As previous literature clearly state, responsiveness is strongly dependent on issue differences (see Miller and Stokes 1963; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010) therefore I model each policy area separately. At this stage, given the limited sample size, no additional controls such as unemployment, inflation, GDP per capita or war are included in order not to overfit the models. The complete models would take the following form:

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\begin{aligned}
Speech_t = & \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot MIP_{t-1} \\
& + \beta_2 \cdot Vulnerability_t \\
& + \beta_3 \cdot Competence_t \\
& + \beta_4 \cdot (Vulnerability_t * Competence_t) + \epsilon_t
\end{aligned}
\tag{1}
$$

$$
\begin{aligned}
Speech_t = & \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot MIP_{t-1} \\
& + \beta_2 \cdot Vulnerability_t \\
& + \beta_3 \cdot Competence_t \\
& + \beta_4 \cdot (MIP_{t-1} * Vulnerability_t * Competence_t) + \epsilon_t
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

The dependent variable is given by the executive speeches at time *t*. To capture whether governments respond to citizens' priorities, the lag of MIP/MII is included. This is common practice in the studies of responsiveness aimed at establishing causal relations (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010), since citizens' priorities of the past year (time *t-1*) are supposed to influence government activity at the present year (time *t*). The two competitive incentives are included in the equation at time *t*, since it is the current electoral vulnerability and the current perception of government issue competence I expect to have an influence on the executive speeches. Since this paper is interested in the impact of the competitive incentives on agenda responsiveness, I create a three-way interaction between public issue salience, government vulnerability and government's historical advantage on issues (equation 2), in order to test my hypotheses. When testing the effects of competitive incentives on the policy agenda, the interaction excludes public opinion (equation 1).

A time-series cross-section AR(1) model is estimated [7]. The pooled models are estimated with panel corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995, 1996), which controls for panel heteroscedasticity and contemporaneous correlations of the errors and fitted with the Prais-Winsten method to test for serial correlation (Plümper, Troeger, and Manow 2005: 342). The assumption is that, within panels, there is first-order autocorrelation (AR1) and that the coefficient of the AR(1) process is common to all the panels [8]. Time-series cross-section data are seldom independent along the time dimension within units and the Prais-Winsten estimator is one of the several ways to deal with serial correlation in the data and is suggested for small samples (Fortin-Rittberger N.d.) [9]. I follow Green and Jennings (2012*a*) who chose panel-corrected standard errors with the

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[7] Before modelling the data, the dependent variable was tested for stationarity using the Augmented Dickey-Fuller test and in all instances rejected the presence of unit root at the 95 per cent confidence level

[8] I also run a model in which the coefficient of the AR(1) process is specific to each panel, as a robustness check. Results for the three-way interaction are similar to the ones obtained in Table 6 without this specification - with the difference that the coefficient of an additional policy area became significant and that R^2 values are higher - and can be found in Appendix A.1.

[9] Other studies modeling executive speeches (in the U.K. and the U.S.) use an error correction model (De Boef and Keele 2008) in

Prais-Winsten method using the same data on the dependent variable. This choice is preferred by Plümper, Troeger, and Manow (2005: 342-3), as "the elimination of serial correlation by inclusion of the lagged residuals gives more appropriate coefficients than the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable", which would also absorb more time-series dynamics leaving less variance for the substantive explanatory variables (see also Achen 2000).

5. Preliminary Results

Before looking at the effects of the competitive incentives on responsiveness, the impact of the former on the dependent variable (executive speeches) is assessed. My theoretical expectations (Hypotheses 1a and 1b) were that governments will tend to talk more about the issues they have a better reputation on when they are electorally vulnerable, in order to climb up again the ladder of popularity. If, instead, governments do not have a relative advantage on the issue, when vulnerable they will try to talk less about the issue in order not to worsen their already critical position. Such a constrain would not occur when governments are electorally safe. This is assessed in two steps. Table 3 includes only the lag of public issue salience and government vulnerability, but leaves out issue competence. In general, given the positive sign of the lagged MIP/MII, governments seem to respond to citizens' priorities in their speeches in several policy areas. The impact of government vulnerability on the executive speeches is positive and significant in 7 out of 9 policy areas, meaning that governments tend to talk more about the issues when they are electorally safe. This implies an important issue of causality that will be only addressed here but investigated in depth in future versions. This results seem to suggest that the more the government is electorally safe, the more it talks about certain issues. However, one can also say that governments are safe in the first place because they talk about what the voters want them to talk about. I try to address this concern in Table 5 when the interaction between citizens' priorities and vulnerability is included.

When the effect of vulnerability is mediated by holding an advantage on the issue (Table 4), results are mixed. Vulnerability is still positive and significant in several policy areas but the interaction is significant in only two of them (defence and foreign affairs and social welfare). According to these preliminary findings, governments tend to talk more about defence and foreign affairs when they have an advantage on the issue (compared to when they do not have it) and they are electorally safe; rather, governments tend to talk more about social welfare when they do not hold an advantage on the issue (compared to when they hold it) and they are electorally safe. This is visible in Figures 2 and 3, which show the marginal effects of government vulnerability on the executive speeches in these two policy areas, mediated by issue competence. Two slopes are then presented, one for when the government holds an advantage on the issue (black slope) and one for when the government does not hold an advantage on the issue (grey slope). What matters is that, beyond the fact that governments hold or not an advantage on the issue, the slopes are both positive meaning that emphasis on the agenda increases when governments are safe rather than the opposite. This finding seems to suggest that governments talk more when they are safe and not when they are vulnerable therefore electoral vulnerability does not incentivise them to increase the emphasis in their speeches.

order to account for both short-term and long-term effects on the government policy agenda (Jennings and John 2009; Bevan and Jennings 2014). I chose not to implement this model because of the small number of observations in my dataset that would make it hard to detect long-term effects. Moreover, such models imply the loss of additional observations not well suitable with already small samples.

Table 3: Time-Series Cross-Section AR(1) Model of Electoral Vulnerability and Policy Agenda

Dependent Variable: Executive Speeches

	Economy	Defence	Education	Environment	Health	Housing	Immigration	Law and Order	Welfare
MIP (lag)	0.218	1.867***	0.957	1.058***	0.316	0.462**	0.619*	0.854***	0.176
	(0.187)	(0.527)	(0.651)	(0.367)	(0.326)	(0.188)	(0.332)	(0.266)	(0.575)
Vulnerability	0.423***	0.587**	0.164***	0.0657**	0.0716	0.121**	0.196***	0.0279	0.159***
	(0.103)	(0.293)	(0.0608)	(0.0323)	(0.108)	(0.0474)	(0.0564)	(0.0604)	(0.0617)
Constant	21.72***	24.36**	7.203**	2.262**	6.299**	2.525**	5.394***	6.155***	7.344***
	(7.632)	(11.72)	(2.838)	(0.938)	(3.198)	(1.207)	(1.991)	(2.387)	(2.473)
Observations	144	144	118	93	108	91	103	133	131
R^2	0.100	0.161	0.094	0.189	0.008	0.128	0.121	0.095	0.041

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Immigration does not include Germany. Linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors and AR1 autocorrelation structure.

Table 4: Time-Series Cross-Section AR(1) Model of Competitive Incentives and Policy Agenda

Dependent Variable: Executive Speeches

	Economy	Defence	Education	Environment	Health	Housing	Immigration	Law and Order	Welfare
MIP (lag)	0.094	1.866***	0.961	1.375***	0.340	0.465**	0.645*	0.865***	0.192
	(0.181)	(0.510)	(0.654)	(0.379)	(0.324)	(0.187)	(0.351)	(0.267)	(0.558)
Vulnerability	0.452***	0.162	0.164**	0.042	-0.009	0.166**	0.290***	0.029	0.301***
	(0.142)	(0.392)	(0.065)	(0.062)	(0.118)	(0.068)	(0.084)	(0.103)	(0.089)
Issue Advantage	-8.434	-3.526	3.204	1.912	0.675	-0.910	2.169	-2.698	-1.092
	(5.420)	(12.27)	(2.695)	(2.205)	(4.037)	(1.622)	(2.919)	(3.239)	(2.485)
Vuln * Issue Adv = 1	-0.051	0.927**	0.053	0.066	0.056	-0.076	-0.122	0.000	-0.239**
	(0.169)	(0.461)	(0.099)	(0.100)	(0.207)	(0.094)	(0.091)	(0.114)	(0.116)
Constant	31.11***	25.54*	5.735**	0.698	5.865	2.791**	4.083	7.578**	8.147***
	(8.257)	(13.32)	(2.905)	(2.095)	(3.643)	(1.386)	(2.764)	(3.040)	(2.674)
Observations	144	144	118	55	108	91	103	133	131
R^2	0.115	0.201	0.132	0.374	0.003	0.154	0.141	0.101	0.088

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{*}\ p < 0.10,\ ^{**}\ p < 0.05,\ ^{***}\ p < 0.01$

Immigration does not include Germany. Linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors and AR1 autocorrelation structure.
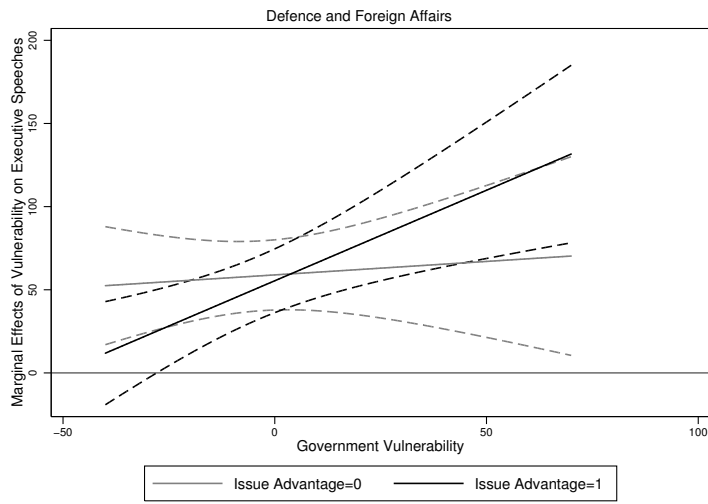
Figure 2: Marginal effects of government vulnerability on policy agenda in defence and foreign affairs, mediated by government advantage on the issue (based on Table 4). Dashed lines are 95 percent confidence interval.
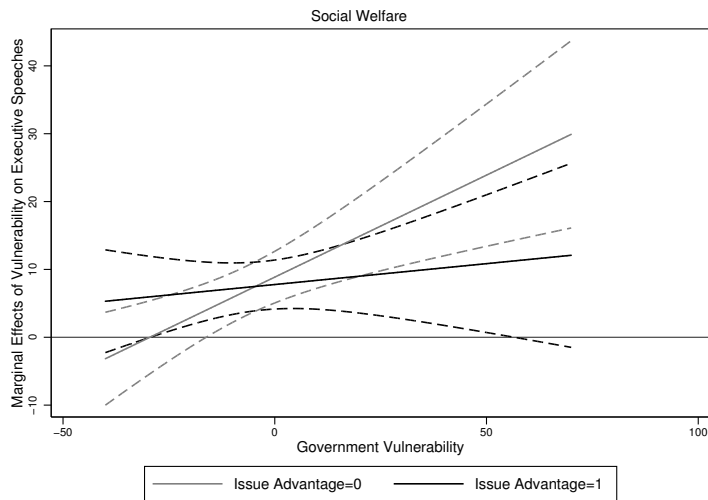

Figure 3: Marginal effects of government vulnerability on policy agenda in social welfare, mediated by government advantage on the issue (based on Table 4). Dashed lines are 95 percent confidence interval.

So far the attention was drawn on the impact of the competitive incentives on the government agenda. The next steps assess whether such incentives have an effect on agenda responsiveness to citizens' priorities. This first analysis presented in Table 5 leaves out issue competence and focuses on electoral vulnerability only. In order to test whether vulnerability matters for responsiveness, I created an interaction term between vulnerability and the lagged MIP/MII. The pooled analysis reveals that vulnerability has an effect on responsiveness only in 3 out of 9 policy areas: the macroeconomic area, environmental protection, and minority rights and immigration. Whereas in the first and third cases the sign of the coefficient is positive, suggesting that responsiveness increases when governments are safe, the negative sign of the coefficient in the second case implies, instead, that government vulnerability increases responsiveness. These results are shown in Figure 4, which presents the marginal effects of vulnerability on responsiveness in these three policy areas. The interaction for the macroeconomics issue (panel a) is significant only when the government is abundantly safe, that is, when the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval are both above the zero line. The effect of the interaction for the minority rights and immigration issues (panel c) is again positive but starts to be significant already when the government is still vulnerable. Only for the environmental issue (panel b) electoral vulnerability seems to have a different effect on responsiveness: the negative slope shows that the more the government becomes electorally safe, the more responsiveness decreases. The effect stops to be significant when the government is no longer vulnerable (when the measure of vulnerability is over 6 percent, meaning that the government is fairly safe).

The picture shown in Table 5 did not account for the role played by issue competence. As the theory suggests, the effect of government vulnerability on responsiveness can be mediated by whether the government has or not a historical advantage on a given issue. This is taken into consideration in Table 6. The effect is captured by a three-way interaction among public issue salience, government vulnerability and issue advantage (the reference category for the issue advantage dummy is zero). Table 5 showed that electoral vulnerability has an effect on rhetorical responsiveness on macroeconomics, environment, and minority rights and immigration. When issue advantage is included, only the effect for environment remains significant. The marginal effects are plotted in Figure 5. Though the coefficient of the interaction is significant (only at p<0.10), the slope for when the government holds a historical advantage on the issue is positive and lies within the zero line. The slope for when the government does not hold a historical advantage on the issue is slightly negative and the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval are both above the zero line only when the government is vulnerable. This means that the effect of government vulnerability on responsiveness in the environmental issue is significant when the government does not have an advantage on the issue.

Including issue advantage makes the effect of government vulnerability on responsiveness significant (at the 90 percent confidence level) in another policy area: crime, law and order. Figure 6 plots the effect and shows that holding an advantage on the issue mediates the impact of vulnerability on responsiveness. The effect starts to be significant when the government is vulnerable and stops when it is safe. The slope is negative meaning that the more the government becomes safe, the more responsiveness decreases.

Table 5: Prais-Winsten AR(1) Model of Government Vulnerability and Rhetorical Responsiveness

Dependent Variable: Executive Speeches

	Economy	Defence	Education	Environment	Health	Housing	Immigration	Law and Order	Welfare
MIP (lag)	0.319	2.386***	1.389*	1.080***	0.649**	0.535**	1.466***	0.785**	-0.021
	(0.215)	(0.568)	(0.753)	(0.384)	(0.294)	(0.262)	(0.527)	(0.351)	(0.610)
Vulnerability	0.030	0.604	0.167**	0.165***	0.078	0.126*	0.103*	0.011	0.161
	(0.169)	(0.392)	(0.070)	(0.055)	(0.117)	(0.066)	(0.061)	(0.089)	(0.108)
MIP (lag) * Vulnerability	0.013***	0.003	0.010	-0.051**	-0.012	0.004	0.043**	-0.003	0.008
	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.012)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.008)	(0.023)
Constant	24.32***	34.52***	7.873***	2.311**	6.447**	2.670**	4.472***	8.544***	8.009***
	(5.475)	(9.364)	(2.216)	(0.933)	(2.760)	(1.078)	(1.511)	(2.296)	(2.071)
Observations	144	144	118	93	108	91	103	133	131
R^2	0.156	0.197	0.125	0.214	0.043	0.137	0.211	0.062	0.050

Standard errors in parentheses

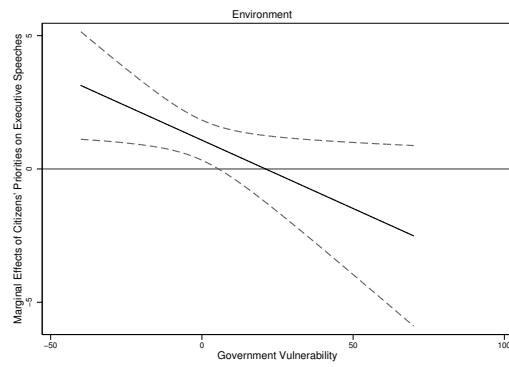* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Immigration does not include Germany. Linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors and AR1 autocorrelation structure.
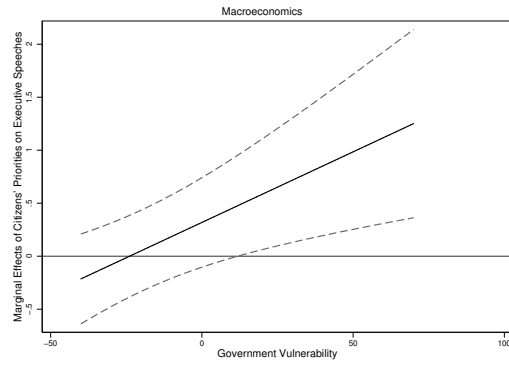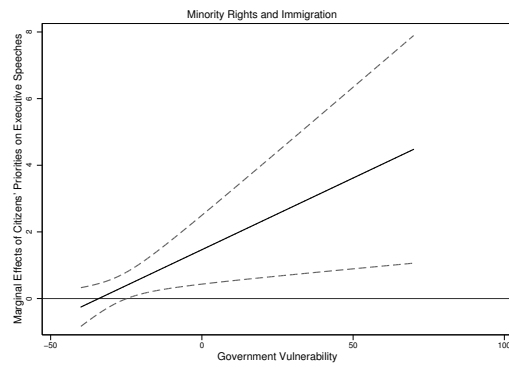
(a) Macroeconomics

(b) Environment

(c) Minority Rights and Immigration

Figure 4: Marginal effects of government vulnerability on rhetorical responsiveness (based on Table 5). Dashed lines are 95 percent confidence interval.

Table 6: Prais-Winsten AR(1) Model of Competitive Incentives and Rhetorical Responsiveness

Dependent Variable: Executive Speeches

	Economy	Defence	Education	Environment	Health	Housing	Immigration	Law and Order	Welfare
MIP (lag)	-0.008**	2.816**	0.533	1.274***	0.308	0.355	0.903	0.192	-0.224
	(0.169)	(0.356)	(0.620)	(0.308)	(0.189)	(0.356)	(0.635)	(0.428)	(0.617)
Vulnerability	0.099	0.106	0.099**	0.044	-0.054	0.124*	0.173*	-0.066	0.176**
	(0.096)	(0.204)	(0.045)	(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.064)	(0.091)	(0.094)	(0.089)
Issue Advantage	-12.15	-32.72**	3.005	0.418	-2.424	-0.813	-2.536	-8.709**	-1.577
	(8.449)	(15.27)	(3.245)	(2.812)	(3.978)	(1.891)	(2.919)	(4.192)	(3.688)
Vuln * Issue Adv = 1	0.239	0.376	-0.013	-0.081	-0.011	-0.114	-0.055	0.142	- 0.215
	(0.267)	(0.542)	(0.116)	(0.132)	(0.220)	(0.113)	(0.095)	(0.118)	(0.148)
MIP (lag) * Vuln	0.014***	0.003	0.023	-0.008	-0.004	0.001	0.021	0.022**	0.019
	(0.003)	(0.013)	(0.019)	(0.035)	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.019)
MIP (lag) * Issue Adv = 1	0.056	1.611***	0.251	2.741	0.592	0.370	1.190	0.822	0.315
	(0.214)	(0.598)	(0.575)	(2.307)	(0.361)	(0.260)	(0.747)	(0.508)	(0.802)
MIP (lag) * Vuln * Issue Adv = 1	-0.012	0.016	0.055	0.153*	0.029	0.044	0.016	-0.031*	0.020
	(0.009)	(0.021)	(0.038)	(0.092)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.016)	(0.040)
Constant	37.12***	54.96***	7.619***	-0.079	7.439***	3.106**	5.706***	13.55***	8.808***
	(4.294)	(10.42)	(2.005)	(1.964)	(2.879)	(1.432)	(2.096)	(2.711)	(1.918)
Observations	144	144	118	55	108	91	103	133	131
R^2	0.178	0.211	0.173	0.454	0.088	0.146	0.250	0.090	0.088

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Immigration does not include Germany; issue advantage on environment not available for the U.S. Linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors and AR1 autocorrelation structure.

Figure 5: Marginal effects of government vulnerability on rhetorical responsiveness in environment, mediated by government advantage on the issue (based on Table 6). Dashed lines are 95 percent confidence interval.
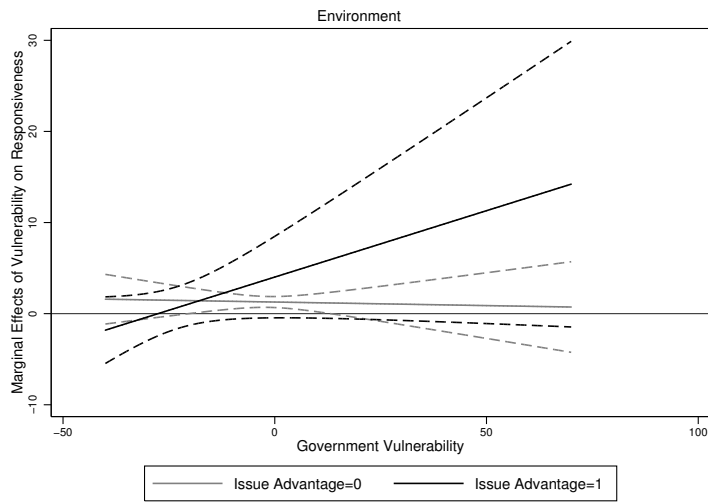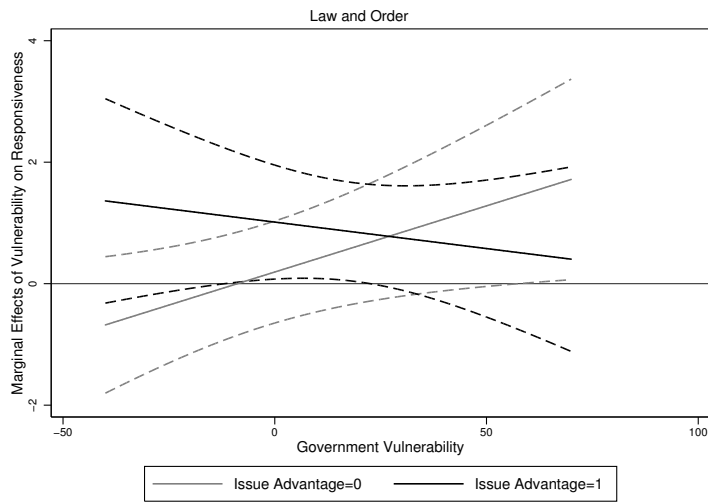

Figure 6: Marginal effects of government vulnerability on rhetorical responsiveness in crime, law and order, mediated by government advantage on the issue (based on Table 6). Dashed lines are 95 percent confidence interval.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has reported empirical analysis of data from four advanced democracies on the linkages between policy agenda, public opinion, and incentives from party competition. Preliminary findings suggest that a general pattern between competitive incentives and policy agendas as well as rhetorical responsiveness of governments to citizens' priorities is not visible. This is in line with previous comparative research (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Green and Jennings 2012*a*), which has rather found support for an issue-specific pattern.

From an empirical standpoint, this paper contributes to the existent literature on dynamic agenda representation/rhetorical responsiveness (Bevan and Jennings 2010; John, Bevan, and Jennings 2011; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Hakhverdian 2010; Green and Jennings 2012*a*). My very preliminary findings present additional evidence for the influence of public priorities on the policy agenda of governments and find some support for the role played by competitive incentives, that is, government electoral vulnerability and government historical advantage on issues. Such incentives have an influence on executive speeches as indicator of policy agendas in some issues but not in others. What seems to be consistent across policy areas is that governments tend to talk more about the issues when they are electorally safe, not when they are vulnerable. This finds confirmation also when the effect of vulnerability on the speeches is mediated by government historical advantage on the issue. Concerning the relationship between government vulnerability and rhetorical responsiveness, results are mixed. In some issues responsiveness increases when the government is safe, while in other issues vulnerability incentivises responsiveness. When issue advantage is included in the picture, the effect of vulnerability seems to be beneficial for responsiveness, though significant only in a few number of issues.

I recall this is a very first version of the paper and therefore requires substantial improvements. I enumerate some of them. First, the causal link between electoral vulnerability and the dependent variable requires additional investigation: do governments increase the emphasis in some issues because they are safe or, rather, they are safe because they talk more about issues the public is more concerned about? I tried to address this question establishing the causal direction when interacting the lag variable of citizens' priorities with electoral vulnerability, but the point requires more attention. Second, while the measure of electoral vulnerability is well developed, the measure of issue competence needs to be more fine-grained. Given the lack of data over time, in this paper I simply propose a measure of issue competence that is averaged for the whole time period, which depresses the cross-time variance. That is the reason why I deliberately used the term historical issue advantage. The measure can be initially improved averaging the values of issue advantage at least by decades, in anticipation of collecting more data. Third, this paper uses the major topics as coded by the Comparative Agendas Project. In order to reduce noise amplified by the use of such macro categories, the analysis could be done choosing more specific categories, i.e. micro topics. Fourth, this version of the paper excludes any variable other than the ones that are central for the analysis. Other controls and model specifications will then be included in future versions to assess the robustness of results.

These findings also raise questions for future research. For instance, previous literature suggested that responsiveness is higher when the issue is salient to the public (Miller and Stokes 1963; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010). However, if we accept that within the most important problems/issues pointed out by the public some of them are more salient than others, then the findings presented here suggest that an increase in responsiveness due to competitive incentives can occur even in issues that are not in the public top list. Second and consequently, we should better understand why competitive incentives have an impact in some issues but not in others: is this due to the way policy agendas are formed, is this due to government ideology or to other country-specific factors?

I conclude with the question raised in the title: word is silver, but silence is golden? The aphorism is certainly true in politics and, as this paper suggested, sometimes is the most convenient strategy politicians follow to pursue their interests.

A. Appendix

A.1. Data

Table 7: Historical Advantage on Issues

	CDU-CSU	SPD	PP	PSOE	CON	LAB	REP	DEM
Macroeconomics	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Minority Rights/Immigration	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
Health	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Education	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Environment	0	1	0	1	0	1	n.a.	n.a.
Crime/Law and Order	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Social Welfare	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Housing	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
Defence/Foreign Affairs	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Speech Defence/Foreign Affairs	60.9	61.2	0	461	161
Speech Macroeconomics	31.6	26.2	0	163	161
Speech Education	9.8	12.4	0	65	161
Speech Environment	4	7.6	0	48	161
Speech Health	7.4	12.5	0	106	161
Speech Housing	3.3	5	0	47	161
Speech Minority Rights/Immigration	7.1	10.5	0	76	143
Speech Crime/Law and Order	13.2	17.5	0	85	161
Speech Social Welfare	8	11.5	0	68	161
MIP Defence/Foreign Affairs	17.6	15.8	0.5	64.8	148
MIP Macroeconomics	38.7	21.2	6.3	84.3	148
MIP Education	2.5	2.4	0	11.4	122
MIP Environment	2.2	3	0	16.9	97
MIP Health	5.5	6.6	0	34.7	112
MIP Housing	2.7	3.1	0.1	15.2	93
MIP Minority Rights/Immigration	4.7	6.9	0.1	43.6	124
MIP Crime/Law and Order	7.7	7.3	0.1	32.7	137
MIP Social Welfare	3.7	2.7	0.1	14.1	135
Government Vulnerability	3.3	23.5	-43.2	66.8	161
Competence Defence/Foreign Affairs	0.6	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Macroeconomics	0.5	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Education	0.5	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Environment	0.5	0.5	0	1	95
Competence Health	0.5	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Housing	0.5	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Minority Rights/Immigration	0.5	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Crime/Law and Order	0.6	0.5	0	1	161
Competence Social Welfare	0.5	0.5	0	1	161

Table 9: Time-Series Cross-Section PSAR(1) Model of Competitive Incentives and Rhetorical Responsiveness

Dependent Variable: Executive Speeches

	Economy	Defence	Education	Environment	Health	Housing	Immigration	Law and Order	Welfare
MIP (lag)	0.193***	0.540**	0.711**	0.755***	0.012	0.500**	1.062**	0.186	0.585**
	(0.067)	(0.222)	(0.346)	(0.121)	(0.086)	(0.249)	(0.427)	(0.251)	(0.275)
Vulnerability	0.014	0.141	0.092**	0.033	0.004	0.110*	0.146*	-0.117*	0.008
	(0.069)	(0.171)	(0.045)	(0.059)	(0.050)	(0.056)	(0.082)	(0.062)	(0.055)
Issue Advantage	-6.467	-30.90**	0.659	0.462	-4.778	-0.840	-2.654	-4.321	1.742
	(8.121)	(14.92)	(3.252)	(2.210)	(3.736)	(1.841)	(2.783)	(3.683)	(3.251)
Vuln * Issue Adv = 1	0.194	0.092	-0.032	-0.109	-0.036	-0.073	-0.051	0.131	- 0.201
	(0.257)	(0.543)	(0.110)	(0.123)	(0.203)	(0.103)	(0.089)	(0.119)	(0.129)
MIP (lag) * Vuln	0.008**	0.000	0.019	-0.035	-0.006	0.004	0.014	0.025**	0.016
	(0.003)	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.031)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.017)
MIP (lag) * Issue Adv = 1	0.055	1.503**	1.020	3.895*	1.356***	0.347	0.812	0.512	-0.679
	(0.192)	(0.593)	(0.658)	(2.131)	(0.417)	(0.224)	(0.684)	(0.418)	(0.593)
MIP (lag) * Vuln * Issue Adv = 1	-0.008	0.017	0.068*	0.182**	0.030	0.036	0.016	-0.030*	0.044
	(0.008)	(0.021)	(0.038)	(0.089)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.034)	(0.015)	(0.035)
Constant	35.79***	68.56***	8.621***	-0.524	11.71***	3.246**	5.665***	10.95***	9.879***
	(3.765)	(11.86)	(2.151)	(1.260)	(3.102)	(1.327)	(2.065)	(2.621)	(1.992)
Observations	144	144	118	55	108	91	103	133	131
R^2	0.510	0.298	0.253	0.652	0.215	0.190	0.434	0.121	0.269

Panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Immigration does not include Germany. Linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors and panel-specific AR1 autocorrelation structure.

A.2. Data Sources

A.2.1. Most Important Problem/Issue

Germany: Politbarometer
    Spain: CIS Barometer
    United Kingdom: Gallup; Ipsos-MORI (UK Policy Agendas Project)
    United States: Gallup (Roper Center)

A.2.2. Vote Intentions

Germany: Politbarometer
    Spain: CIS Barometer
    United Kingdom: WJFFP dataset (see Wlezien et al. 2013; Green and Jennings 2012*b*)

A.2.3. Issue Competence

Germany: Politbarometer (1978-2008); Gesis Election Study (1987, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002); EES (1999, 2004)
    Spain: CIS Barometer (2006-2011); EES (1999, 2004)
    United Kingdom: Ipsos-MORI (1977-2012)
    United States: ANES (1972-2002)

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