ICCP

The Issue Competition Comparative Project
2017-2018 Round

Introductory Guide

Lorenzo De Sio
Vincenzo Emanuele
Nicola Maggini
Aldo Paparo
Davide Angelucci
Roberto D'Alimonte[1]

Introduction

The *Issue Competition Comparative Project* is a comparative, international social science research project about party competition. The theoretical foundation of the ICCP lies in *issue yield* theory (De Sio and Weber 2014; De Sio 2018). In this perspective, party competition is conceived in an *issue competition* perspective, where political parties and leaders are conceptualized as political entrepreneurs that strategically exploit available *issue opportunities* in a context where voters are available across ideological boundaries.

As a result, the project does not assume any predefined ideological alignment or dimension, and it is thus based on an *issue* level of granularity for party competition resources (which indeed allows to *empirically* assess the presence of ideological dimensions and alignments). Moreover, an innovative theoretical conceptualization provides generalization across issues traditionally seen as categorically different (*valence* vs. *positional* issues), with homogenous measurement possibilities allowing to empirically explore the availability and use of different resources by different parties (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2019).

Finally, an *interactive* approach is adopted, where parties design their strategies based on their perceptions of voters' preferences, and voters respond to party strategy. As a result, the project collects data for both voter preferences and party strategy, respectively through public opinion data (CAWI surveys) and party campaign strategy monitoring (collection and coding of official party Twitter feeds).

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[1] All Luiss University Rome, except Nicola Maggini, University of Florence.

The aim of the project is to:

- Describe and explore configurations of party-specific issue resources (in terms of their ideological structuring and consistency) and their use by political parties, especially in terms of a potential emergence, for specific parties, of a- and cross-ideological configurations of issue opportunities and resulting party strategies;
- Describe and explore the availability of different types of issue resources across different parties and countries;
- Explain election outcomes in terms of the ability of parties to conduct *strategic* campaigns, i.e. campaigns that strategically focus on *high-yield* issues (i.e. those issues characterized by an optimal combination of low risk of losing existing voters, and high opportunity to gain new);
- Offer to the scholarly community an *open access dataset* for the analysis of issue competition, which is:
  - multi-component (survey + Twitter data);
  - comparative (six countries, with more planned or in the making);
  - issue-rich (approx. 30 issues in each country);
  - context-aware (country-specific issues selected by country experts in each country);
  - measurement-rich (several aspects are captured for each issue)
  - and that can fit even different theoretical frameworks and a wide variety of research questions.

The first ICCP data collection round has covered six West European countries (Netherlands, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Italy) that held general elections in 2017 and 2018. Findings have been published on a special issue of West European Politics (in press, at the time of this data release) featuring a presentation of the overall project in terms of conceptual and measurement innovation and research design (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2019), an empirical assessment of the overarching research questions of the project in comparative perspective (De Sio and Lachat 2019; De Sio and Weber 2019) and six country-specific analyses (van Ditmars, Maggini, and van Spanje 2019; Lachat and Michel 2019; Vaccari, Smets, and Heath 2019; Franzmann, Giebler, and Poguntke 2019; Plescia, Kritzinger, and Oberluggauer 2019; Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo 2019).

Project team

Principal investigator	Lorenzo De Sio
Team	Vincenzo Emanuele
	Nicola Maggini
	Aldo Paparo
	Davide Angelucci
	Roberto D'Alimonte
Additional support	Luca Carrieri
	Elisabetta Mannoni
	Davide Vittori

(All CISE – Italian Centre for Electoral Studies; all LUISS Rome except Nicola Maggini, University of Florence)

International partners

Sylvia Kritzinger	AUTNES – Universität Wien
Patricia Oberluggauer	
Carolina Plescia	
Romain Lachat	CEVIPOF – Sciences Po Paris
Till Weber	City University of New York
Simon Franzmann	Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf
Thomas Poguntke	
Cristian Vaccari	Loughborough University
Oliver Heath	Royal Holloway University of London
Kaat Smets	
Mark N. Franklin	Trinity College Connecticut
Elie Michel	Universität Luzern
Joost van Spanje	Universiteit van Amsterdam
Mathilde van Ditmars	Universiteit Leiden
Heiko Giebler	WZB Berlin Social Science Center

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Universität Wien

CAWI datasets: questionnaire highlights

Issue selection

The questionnaire was designed to study issue competition in each surveyed country. Before the pre-electoral CAWI fieldwork in each country (usually scheduled to be completed one month before election day), country experts were asked to identify the main issues that would be (or already were) relevant in the campaign, knowing that this list of issues would govern the later coding of campaign tweets (thus suggesting an adequate coverage of most issues). The selection of issues and their framings is deliberately *country-specific*, in order to capture the specific issue structure of each country campaign. This strategy made it possible to select more than twenty issues for all the included countries, covering both *valence* and *positional* issues.[2]

Positional and valence issues

Albeit heavily contested (van der Brug 2004), the literature mostly assumes a categorical distinction between *positional* and *valence* issues (Stokes 1963, 1992). Issue yield theory in fact developed a common conceptualization covering both (De Sio and Weber 2014), but such common conceptualization has not yet been applied in secondary analysis due to measurement incompatibility, in past surveys, for the (alleged) two types of issues. The ICCP study has develop an innovative, encompassing measurement strategy (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2019), first implemented in this study. Its central tenet is that the traditional distinction between *positional* and *valence* issues is overcome by relying on the more general notion of *goal*. In a nutshell, *positional issues* are defined by a *pair of rival goals*, while *valence issues* are defined by (what in a specific context is perceived as) a *single, shared goal*. Once this distinction is acknowledged, common measurement is possible for the relevant properties of each *goal*: i.e. its level of *support* and its specific *association* (worded in terms of issue goal *credibility*) with one or more parties. Moreover, respondent-reported issue goal priority is also measured in the survey.

Issue-related items

In practice (see D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2019), the measurement of issue-related properties is performed as follows:

For positional issues, the respondent (R) is:

1) asked to place herself on a six-point self-anchoring scale, anchored by the two rival goals. The even number of points in fact requires her to select one of the two rival goals.[3]
2) After one of the two rival goals is selected, R is asked to select (in a multiple-choice battery, to limit endogeneity) which parties she deems *credible* to achieve that particular goal.
3) Finally, R is asked to report whether that goal has high, medium or low priority.

For valence issues, only steps (2) and (3) are performed. Instead of a selection of two rival goals in step 1, only the single (assumed as shared) goal is presented for assessing credibility and priority.

As a result, the following batteries of items are generated:

- **pos_[COUNTRY]_[issueID]**
  Only available for positional issues (p[NUMBER])

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[2] Experts were asked to identify as *valence* those issues where there was not a specific debate about different policies on the same goal, but rather disputes on party credibility on achieving a common, shared goal (see in detail D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2019).

[3] The use of a six-point scale (rather than of a simple dichotomous item) is aimed at supporting more sophisticated spatial models for future applications.

Reports the original self-placement on a 1-6 scale, with values 1-3 corresponding to one goal, and values 4-6 corresponding to the rival goal;

NOTE: issueID is a code that uniquely identifies issues within a country; it starts with either "p" or "v" (positional vs. valence issues), then followed by a number.

- **goal_[COUNTRY]_[issueID]**
  Only available for positional issues (p[NUMBER])
  Same as above, but in dichotomous form: values 1-3 are recoded as goal 0, and values 4-6 as goal 1;

- **cred_[COUNTRY]_[issueID]_[PARTY]**
  Available for all issues (p[NUMBER], v[NUMBER])
  These items report whether R deems [PARTY] credible for achieving the goal (she selected on) [issueID]. Multiple parties can be selected.
  IMPORTANT NOTE: for positional issues, this credibility refers to the goal (one of two rival) that R actually selected. Thus, the same variable contains party credibility information for both rival goals (different goals for different respondents). As such, descriptives for these items are ideally run separately for the two rival goals (e.g. by goal_[COUNTRY]_[issueID]). For valence issues, this problem does not apply, as all Rs are assumed to agree on the same shared goal that is solely presented.

- **priority_[COUNTRY]_[issueID]**
  Available for all issues (p[NUMBER], v[NUMBER])
  Reports whether R assigns a high, average or low priority to the goal (she selected on) [issueID].
  IMPORTANT NOTE: for positional issues, this priority refers to the goal (one of two rival) that R actually selected. Thus the same variable contains priority information for both rival goals (different goals for different respondents). For valence issues, this problem does not apply, as all Rs are assumed to agree on the same shared goal that is solely presented.

"Ideological" classification of positional goals

As one of the goals of the project was to assess the degree of "ideological" consistency of party issue opportunities and party strategies, we assigned – for positional issues – each rival goal to a 20th century, idealtypical, "progressive" or "conservative" orientation (Middendorp 1978). These orientations, briefly labeled as "left" and "right" correspond to combinations of pro-State economic positions combined with cultural progressivism vs. pro-market economic positions combined with cultural conservatism.

For convenience, codes for such orientations are reported *directly into value labels* for both *goal** and *pos** item batteries. These short codes also include whether the goal belongs to a broad economic or cultural domain. As a result, each goal is prepended by one of four prefixes:

Prefix	Goal orientation	Domain of the issue
[Lc]	Left-wing (progressive)	Cultural
[Le]	Left-wing (progressive)	Cultural
[Rc]	Right-wing (conservative)	Economic
[Re]	Right-wing (conservative)	Economic

PTV (propensity-to-vote) items

For each of the parties covered in party-specific batteries (e.g. party credibility), a PTV (propensity-to-vote) score (Van der Eijk et al. 2006) was measured. The resulting batteries are named as *ptv_[party]*.

Leadership traits

In addition to issue related variables, the dataset features information about leadership traits. For each leader(s) of the political parties covered in party-specific item batteries (party credibility, PTVs, etc.), respondents were also asked to indicate whether or not a standard set of traits were applicable:

Leader's trait	Variable name	Variable label
Knowledgeable about politics	lead_[COUNTRY]_[PARTY]_knowl	[knowl][LEADER NAME](PARTY)
Strong	lead_[COUNTRY]_[PARTY]_stron	[stron][LEADER NAME](PARTY)
Honest	lead_[COUNTRY]_[PARTY]_hones	[hones][LEADER NAME](PARTY)
Careful	lead_[COUNTRY]_[PARTY]_cares	[cares][LEADER NAME](PARTY)

Twitter dataset

See the detailed Twitter dataset codebook.

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List of common variables in all voter-level datasets

Variable Name	Variable Label	Answer Label
respid_str	Respid	
token	Token	
yearborn	Year of birth	
gender	Gender	0. Male 1. Female
ageclass	Recode of age	1. 18-29 2. 30-44 3. 45-54 4. 55-64 5. 65+
church	Church attendance	1. Never 2. Once A Year Or Less 3. A Few Times A Year 4. At Least Once A Month 5. Once A Week 6. Several Times A Week
edu3	Education	1. Less Than Primary, Primary And Lower Secondary Education 2. Upper Secondary And Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education 3. Tertiary Education
townsize	Would you say you live in...	1. Rural Area Or Village 2. A Small Or Middle Sized Town 3. The Suburbs Of A Large Town Or City 4. A Large Town Or City

Variable Name	Variable Label	Answer Label
profcond	What is your current work situation?	
		1. Working (Part-Time, Full-Time, Etc
		2. Retired
		3. In School
		4. In University
		5. Other Training
		6. Leave (Parental/Education/Etc.
		7. Working In The Household
		8. In Military Service
		9. Unable To Work
		10. Unemployed
		11. Other
profsect	Are (were) you working in...	
		1. Agriculture
		2. Industry
		3. Public Services
		4. Private Services
		5. Other
		66. Never Worked
clasself	Self-assessed social class	
		1. Working Class
		2. Lower Middle Class
		3. Middle Class
		4. Upper Middle Class
		5. Upper Class
		88. Dk/Refuse To Be Classified
livstand	Living standards	
		1. 1 Poor Family
		2. 2
		3. 3
		4. 4
		5. 5
		6. 6
		7. 7 Rich Family

Variable Name	Variable Label	Answer Label
polint	To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?	
		1. Not At All Interested
		2. A Little Interested
		3. Somewhat Interested
		4. Very Interested
ecoretro	Current economic situation	
		1. Is A Lot Better
		2. Is A Little Better
		3. Has Stayed The Same
		4. Is A Little Worse
		5. Is A Lot Worse
ecoprosp	Economic situation in 12 months	
		1. Get A Lot Better
		2. Get A Little Better
		3. Stay The Same
		4. Get A Little Worse
		5. Get A Lot Worse.
pidhas	Party identification	
		1. No
		2. Yes
pidstre	Do you feel yourself to be very close to this party, fairly close or merely a sympathiser	
		1. Merely A Sympathiser
		2. Fairly Close
		3. Very Close
govsat	Do you approve or disapprove of the government's record to date?	
		1. Approve
		2. Disapprove
		88. I Don't Know

Variable Name	Variable Label	Answer Label
lrself_10	Left-Right scale	
		0. 0 Left
		1. 1
		2. 2
		3. 3
		4. 4
		5. 5
		6. 6
		7. 7
		8. 8
		9. 9
		10. 10 Right
lrself_6	Left-Right scale (6-points)	
		1. Left
		2. Center-Left
		3. Center
		4. Center-Right
		5. Right
		9. Np
wdempol		
		weight
wdempol_trim		
		weight_trimmed