

Riding the Covid wave? Party politics and issue emphasis during the pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic created a demanding challenge for parliamentary democracies worldwide. While governments applied special mechanisms and fast-track procedures to reduce the involvement of the parliament and progress legislation faster, opposition parties relied on the available parliamentary tools (e.g., questions to the ministers) to influence the agenda-setting process. Non-incumbent parties, hence, by emphasising (or de-emphasising) certain issues above others, competed with each other and with the government to determine further the political agenda by either emphasizing the issues they own or listening to their voters and the concerns from the general public. Based on the analysis of the questions posed by the opposition parties to the government in the multi-party parliament of Denmark during the first COVID-19 wave (March-June 2020), the present paper aims at determining what explains issue emphasis during the crisis. The findings suggest that right-wing parties emphasised the issues they hold a good reputation for but also “rode the wave” and devoted special attention to the most salient issues of the crisis (e.g., health, education) traditionally owned by the left-wing, and international affairs. Notably, left-wing parties who at the same time supported the government did not emphasize mostly the issues they own but rode the Covid wave.

Keywords: COVID-19; issue competition; issue emphasis; issue ownership; issue saliency; riding-the-wave theory.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created a demanding challenge for parliamentary democracies worldwide where the decision-making process was drastically constrained by its effects, requiring effective and quick responses to address the crisis. While governments applied state of emergency mechanisms or fast-track procedures to reduce the involvement of the parliament and progress legislation faster, opposition parties relied on the available parliamentary tools (e.g., questions to the ministers, thematic committee meetings) to influence the agenda-setting process. Although a ‘rally round the flag’ emerged from both the general public and the political elites (Louwse et al, 2021; Hegewald & Schraff, 2020), politics as usual quickly restarted. Non-incumbent parties, by emphasising (or de-emphasising) certain issues above others, competed with each other and the government to determine further the political agenda.

In Denmark, one of the available resources for opposition parties to influence the political agenda are the §20 questions. These are written or oral inquiries about an issue that are posed by members of the parliament to the different ministers (Pedersen, 2020). In routine times, opposition parties ask questions in parliament on the issues in which they either have a clear advantage (Green-Pedersen, 2010) or hold issue ownership. In times of crisis, political parties are expected to pose parliamentary questions not only to address the crisis but also to put forward and discuss new political issues. Despite being a well-studied field, most existing issue competition literature has focused exclusively on elections and scarce attention has been devoted to the day-to-day party competition that takes place during the electoral cycle. Moreover, despite emerging, little research has been done on how it develops under times of disruption as the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the present research aims at filling these gaps and contributing to the literature of issue competition in multi-party systems during the electoral cycle under both stable and turbulent times.

Based on the hand-coding and analysis of the 743 questions posed by the opposition parties to the government cabinet in the Danish parliament during the first COVID-19 wave (March 2020 to June 2020), the present paper aims at determining what explains issue emphasis during the crisis.

In multi-party systems, political parties compete with each other over a large number of political issues setting the landscape for issue competition (Carmines & Stimson, 1993) where political parties are expected to emphasise their preferred issues and de-emphasise the least beneficial. Taking into account voters' perceptions, parties will devote special attention to the issues they are more competent, issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996), despite they might simultaneously or instead listen to the voters and “ride the wave” on the issues that are more salient among them (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994).

In the present study, I expect that despite the context of crisis, opposition parties both supporting the government and not supporting the government emphasised the issues they have traditionally owned with parties from the red/left bloc stressing the welfare state domains and environment, and parties from the blue/right bloc stressin immigration and law and crime. Moreover, I expect that while some of the issues emphasised by political parties responded to the ownership logic, opposition parties as well “rode the wave” in some issues and emphasised the most salient issues from the crisis such as health or education.

In the following section, the theoretical framework and hypotheses section is introduced before heading to the case selection. The fourth section presents the data and method applied for the

analysis. The fifth section offers the results drawn from the analysis and the last section provides the final discussion and conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Political parties compete with each other to dominate and set the political agenda. Two theoretical approaches are the most recurrent in the existing literature on party competition (Green-Pedersen, 2006; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Dolezal, Ennser-Jedenastik, Müller, & Winkler, 2014; Spies & Franzmann, 2019): “positional competition” and “issue competition”. According to the positional competition perspective, a fixed political agenda exists, and political parties adopt different positions (e.g., left-right scale; authoritarian-libertarian dimension) within this agenda (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2015). Positional competition, hence, suggests that political parties compete exclusively by positioning themselves in a stable political agenda rather than contributing with new issues to the agenda-setting process. In contrast with this approach and according to issue competition (Carmines & Stimson, 1993), based on the salience theory proposed by Robertson (1976) and the notion of “selective emphasis” later developed by Budge & Farlie (1983), political parties emphasise the issues they want to dominate the political agenda, and which are more favourable to them. In the context of multi-party systems, this strategy forces political parties to pay attention not only to the issues they want to dominate the agenda but also to the issues that are more salient among voters (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994).

The reputation that a party holds on a certain issue leads voters to perceive certain political parties as best to handle specific problems leading to a situation of issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996). To earn issue ownership, political parties must therefore adopt and respond to the policy positions that benefit the largest number of voters (Stubager, 2018). Despite in Petrocik’s

original work (1996) issue ownership was defined as a “performance-based” phenomenon, recent research has observed stability rather than change on issue ownership over time (Seeberg, 2017). This stability has led to the association between left parties and issues related to the welfare state and the environment; and right parties to issues ranging from taxation to law and crime and immigration (Seeberg, 2017). The party-issue association, therefore, leads to special attention on certain matters above others to increase its salience among voters and the political elites, and determine further the political agenda. Consequently, building upon the issue ownership approach, and hence assuming that political parties hold a higher reputation on certain issues above others and that voters are aware of this issue ownership in order to cast their vote, during the first COVID-19 wave opposition political parties expectedly devoted higher attention to the issues they own to influence the political agenda.

Hypothesis 1: *During crisis periods, opposition parties emphasize the issues they own.*

In multi-party systems where multiple actors and interests are involved, however, the ownership of an issue might not solely explain the attention that parties devote to political issues. According to the “riding the wave” approach (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994), the attention that political parties devote to an issue is explained by the saliency it has among the voters. Spoon & Klüver (2014), in testing parties’ responsiveness to voters in 17 countries and 84 national and European elections, showed that a positive effect exists between voters’ issue priorities and parties’ issue attention. By addressing and emphasising the most salient issues for the public opinion, therefore, parties show responsiveness to voters and increase in return their election and political resources prospects (Klüver & Spoon, 2014). Focusing exclusively on the environmental issue in multi-party systems, Spoon et al. (2014) concluded that non-green

parties engage in environmental issues if they perceive either the green issue as a potential electoral threat or as a potential electoral opportunity.

In times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by riding the wave on the most salient issues among voters, parties demonstrate responsiveness on the issues dominating the general public agenda, improving not only their image but also their future electoral and political prospects. Accordingly, based on the riding the wave theory, I expect opposition parties to adopt this strategy and emphasise the issues that raised more concerns among voters during the first COVID-19 wave.

Hypothesis 2: *During crisis periods, opposition parties “ride the wave” and emphasise the salient issues of the crisis.*

The Danish Case

Denmark is selected as the case for the study of issue competition under the COVID-19 crisis and test the two hypotheses formulated. Different reasons motivate the case selection.

Firstly, Denmark is a multi-party system with currently 14 political parties represented in the “Folketing”, the Danish Parliament. The presence of multiple political actors in the parliament involves a large number of different interests and preferences that lay the ground for a complex issue competition. Secondly, Denmark has a long-term trend to minority governments considering that since 1909 no single party has obtained enough representatives to hold an absolute majority and govern on its own (Christiansen & Damgaard, 2008), leading to a higher dependence on external support from the opposition parties. The dependence that governments have has hence allowed for a higher influence of the opposition parties on the political agenda.

By posing questions to the ministers, being part of the committees and establishing informal legislative agreements, non-incumbent parties have taken an important role in the agenda-setting process. Thirdly, opposition parties offer support to the government following two different blocs: the red bloc (centre-left parties) and the blue bloc (centre-right parties). Before the elections and throughout the investiture process, parties following these blocs provide support by for example voting favourably in the investiture or even joining the cabinet. The existence of these two blocs leads later to the division of non-governing parties into two groups: the supporting parties (investiture, agreements, etc) and the non-supporting parties. By this division, a different type of issue competition can be expected between the two blocs. The parties supporting the government are expected to influence the agenda-setting process by making use of the existing legislative agreements with the government whereas the parties not supporting the government are likely to use the debates and questions in parliament to bring issues forward. Fourthly, with regards to crises, no legal framework exists in the Danish law that allows for a state of emergency mechanism to entrust certain powers to specific institutions. In consequence, during the COVID-19 crisis, the government, despite it mostly applied fast-track procedures, had to rely on opposition parties to build up legislative majorities to determine and progress the political agenda (Pedersen & Borghetto, 2021) setting, therefore, the basis for government-opposition issue competition. Lastly, all the legislative and parliamentary action in the Folketing, including among others the section 20 questions to the ministers, are publicly published and available on the parliament website, allowing for the analysis and study of opposition parties' issue attention in the Danish parliament during the first COVID-19 wave.

Methodology

Method of Analysis

In order to test the hypotheses and hence the two theoretical approaches proposed, a congruence analysis is performed. A congruence analysis is a middle ground between an explanatory qualitative and quantitative theory-testing approach that draws inferences on the relevance that a certain theory or theories have on the predictions that are made regarding a set of observations or data (Beach & Pedersen, 2016, Blatter & Haverland, 2012; Mills et al, 2012). Different pathways are proposed to draw conclusions and determine the explanatory power that a certain theory has on the observations of the study. Four steps are involved in a congruence theory-testing analysis (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). Firstly, the relevant theory is stated. Secondly, the observable implications from the theory are deduced. Thirdly, the congruence between the observable implications proposed and the data is tested, and finally, the certainty and uniqueness of the deduced predictions to assess the strength of the congruence test is evaluated.

In the next section, I present the dependent variable, issue emphasis. Later the proposed two pathways and the control variables are presented as are the deduced observable implications.

Issue Emphasis

Political parties emphasise or de-emphasise certain issues above others in order to contribute to the political agenda-setting process. I argue that two theoretical approaches, issue ownership and the issue salience (riding-the-wave theory) can potentially explain how political parties devote attention to particular issues and neglect others. To develop the study of issue emphasis of opposition parties in Denmark during the first COVID-19 wave, therefore, the whole set of “§20 questions” that are posed by the members of the parliament to the ministers were hand-coded and analysed according to political opposition party and issue (following the

Comparative Agendas Project classification). Among other sources such as press releases or social media, questions to the government are a useful measure to the approach of issue attention. Parliamentary questions as a standardized and institutionalized tool that get attention not only from the legislative chamber but also from the media, easily allow us to observe patterns of party competition, including issue attention. Despite being mostly symbolic (Van Aelst & Vliegenthart, 2014), parliamentary questions are a tool for a “permanent election campaign” (Otjes & Louwse, 2017) in which political parties put forward their interests to influence the political agenda setting the ground for issue competition.

The questions were coded for the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis which lasted from March 2020, with the outbreak of the crisis in Denmark, until June 2020, when all European countries initiated the process of re-opening and started the so-called “new normality”, resulting in a novel dataset of 743 questions, after excluding the ones withdrawn, the ones asked by Alternativet, by the members of parliament with no parliamentary group or from the governing party (S&D), and the questions asked by the political parties of Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

Explanatory Paths

The first of the explanatory paths, *issue ownership*, was measured according to the classification developed by Seeberg (2017) for Denmark. The data cover 35 issues and the ownership of an issue was based on the proportion of respondents that preferred a party for handling a certain issue. Summarized in Table 1, for Denmark, considering the latest available data from 2015, health, education, environment, labour, taxation, and social welfare were coded as left-wing ownership, and finance, law and crime, and immigration as right-wing ownership. The rest of the issues were considered as not owned by any political bloc.

Table 1. Issue ownership in the Danish Parliament

Left-wing ownership	Right-wing ownership
Health; Education; Environment; Labour; Taxation; Social Welfare	Finance; Law and Crime; Immigration
No ownership	
International Affairs; Agriculture; Civil Rights; Culture; Defence; Domestic Commerce; Energy; Foreign Trade; Government Operations; Housing; Transport	

The second of the explanatory paths, *issue saliency* from the riding-the-wave theory, takes into account the most salient issues among the voters. Voters’ main concerns at the time, according to IPSOS data (2021), included the COVID-19 crisis and the issues related to it (health, labour, social welfare, international affairs), the environment, and immigration.

Table 2. Share of biggest worries in Denmark from March 2020 to June 2020.

	March 2020	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020
<i>Coronavirus</i>	67%	65%	39%	33%
<i>Environment</i>	43%	31%	37%	38%
<i>Immigration</i>	25%	12%	19%	20%
<i>Social Welfare</i>	54%	11%	15%	18%
<i>Health</i>	22%	14%	16%	19%
<i>Finance</i>	20%	36%	46%	45%
<i>Labour</i>	6%	15%	17%	20%

Two control variables can strengthen or weaken the implications of the paths proposed. Since supporting parties due to arrangements with the government have more influence on determining the political agenda, non-supporting parties are expected to ask more parliamentary questions. Therefore, parties were divided between *supporting parties* and *non-supporting parties*. At the same time, larger parties are expected to ask more questions than smaller parties. This can be deduced firstly from the fact that especially in times of COVID-19, the number of members of parliament present in the legislative chamber was drastically reduced, and secondly due to the tendency of populist parties to be more absent in parliamentary sessions when compared to mainstream parties. Hence, *party size* was considered according to the number of

members in the parliament by political party. Table 3 summarizes the opposition political parties, their role, and their size based on members in parliament.

Table 3. Opposition political parties in the Danish Parliament by size and role.

Party	Size (MP)	Role
S&D – Social Democrats	49	Incumbent
V – Liberal Party	39	Non-supporting
DF – Danish People’s Party	16	Non-supporting
SF – Socialist People’s Party	15	Supporting
RV – Social Liberal Party	14	Supporting
EL – Red-Green Alliance	13	Supporting
KF – Conservative People’s Party	12	Non-supporting
NB – New Right	4	Non-supporting
LA – Liberal Alliance	3	Non-supporting

Observable Implications

If as the issue ownership theory suggests, political parties emphasise mainly the issues they hold ownership for, the questions in parliament should show higher attention to health, education, environment, labour, taxation, and social welfare which are owned by the left-wing parties who are therefore expected to advocate for them. Correspondingly, greater attention from the right-wing parties to finance, law and crime, and immigration should be expected. Concerning the issues without ownership (international affairs, agriculture, civil rights, culture, defence, domestic commerce, energy, foreign trade, government operations, housing, and transport), lower attention is expected from both political blocs. Consequently, the observable implication of the issue ownership pathway is that the issues owned by political parties represent the greatest part of the issue emphasised during the COVID-19 first wave.

If as the riding the wave theory suggest, issue emphasis is based on issue saliency and political parties emphasise the issues which are most salient for the voters, the questions in parliament should show higher attention from all parliamentary parties to the COVID-19 crisis and the issues related to it (health, labour, social welfare, international affairs), the environment, and

immigration, which were the most salient issues among the general public (IPSOS, 2021). Consequently, the observable implication of the issue saliency pathway is that the COVID-19 crisis and the issues related to it (health, labour, social welfare, international affairs), the environment, and immigration represent the greatest part of the issues emphasised during the COVID-19 first wave.

The role that a party performs in parliament, supporting or non-supporting the government, as well as its size can strengthen or weaken the effect of the two pathways proposed. Consequently, if a party is part of the non-supporting bloc, a greater number of issue emphasis in parliament is expected when compared to supporting parties. Likewise, and regarding party size, the bigger the party in members is, the higher emphasis of issues in parliament is expected.

Results

The attention that issues attract varies across political domains with some political issues receiving more attention than others from the opposition parties. As Table 4 shows, the issues of health (12.25); international affairs (11.71); and education (11.57) received the greatest share of attention in parliamentary questions and more than a half of the total of questions posed during the period of study, 53.70%, were related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Not only some political issues are more emphasised than others but also the number of parliamentary questions that the opposition actors pose varies across parties (Table 5). As expected, the main two parties in the opposition and not supporting the government, the Liberal Party and the Danish People's Party, posed most of the parliamentary questions with a share of 47.51 and 23.45 respectively. The three parties supporting the government (Social Liberal Party, Red-Green Alliance and the Socialist People's Party) posed a relatively lower number of

questions with a share of 8.21, 6.46 and 6.06. Finally, the smaller parties in parliament included in the study, the Liberal Alliance and the New Right, asked a very little number of questions with a share of 1.08 and 0.18 respectively. Out of the questions posed by the Liberal Party, 66.86 were related to the COVID-19 crisis. Around half of the questions posed by the Danish People’s Party, the Conservative people’s Party, the Socialist People’s Party, the Red-Green Alliance and the Social Liberal Party were in connection with the crisis. From the small parties, only 12.50% of questions from the Liberal Alliance involved the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4. Number of questions by issue and share of COVID-19 related.

Issue	n (%)	COVID-19 related
Health	91 (12.15)	78 (85.71)
International Affairs	87 (11.71)	74(85.06)
Education	86 (11.57)	49 (56.98)
Environment	64 (8.61)	0 (0.00)
Immigration	56 (7.54)	17 (30.36)
Domestic Commerce	52 (7.00)	46 (88.46)
Culture	48 (6.46)	37 (77.08)
Social Welfare	45 (6.06)	10 (22.22)
Taxation	35 (4.71)	12 (34.29)
Labour	32 (4.31)	23 (71.88)
Law and Crime	32 (4.31)	13 (40.63)
Transport	31 (4.17)	6 (31.58)
Finance	24 (3.23)	18 (75.00)
Agriculture	19 (2.56)	6 (31.58)
Housing	15 (2.02)	3 (20.00)
Energy	8 (1.08)	0 (0.00)
Defence	7 (0.94)	0 (0.00)
Government Operations	5 (0.67)	4 (8.00)
Civil Rights	4 (0.54)	1 (25.00)
Foreign Trade	2 (0.27)	2 (100.00)
Total	743 (100.00)	399 (53.70)

Table 5. Total number of questions by political party.

Party	n (%)	COVID-19 related
V	353 (47.51)	236 (66.86)
DF	174 (23.42)	75 (43.10)
RV	61 (8.21)	23 (37.70)
KF	53 (7.13)	25 (47.17)
EL	48 (6.46)	20 (41.67)
SF	45 (6.06)	19 (42.22)
LA	8 (1.08)	1 (12.50)
NB	1 (0.13)	0 (0.00)

In the present paper, I argued that if the issue ownership explanatory pathway proposed holds, political parties in the opposition would emphasise the issues they hold ownership for during crisis periods. Table 6 presents the political issues and the share of attention devoted by each political party, highlighting in light grey the issues owned by the right-wing parties (blue bloc), in dark grey, the issues owned by the left-wing parties (red bloc), and in white the issues with no ownership. The issues owned by the right-wing (immigration, law and crime, and finance) received most of the attention from the blue bloc, therefore the issue owners. For immigration, the biggest share of attention came from DF (51.79), followed by RV (17.86) exception since it does not own the issue, V (12.50), and KF (8.93). The issue of law and crime was mostly emphasised by DF (68.75) and followed by the supporting party SF (18.75). For finance, the vast majority of attention came from V (54.17) and DF (37.50). Contrary to the expectations, the attention to issues owned by the red bloc did not come mainly from these parties. DF and V emphasised the most the issue of health with a share of 36.26 and 35.16 respectively. The share of emphasis drastically decreased for the red bloc parties with 9.89 for RV, and 6.59 for SF and EL. The same phenomenon was observed for the issue of education, social welfare, taxation, and labour with most of the emphasis coming from the blue bloc parties. The environment was the only issue that despite being emphasised mostly by the Liberal Party with a share of 35.94%, got a high share of attention from the party owners, especially from the Socialist People's Party (28.13) and the Red-Green Alliance (20.31).

Within a crisis taking place, the coronavirus and its related issues such as health, labour, social welfare and international affairs, as well as the environment and immigration produced more concerns among voters and hence were the most salient among the general public in Denmark. Figures 1, 2 and 3 present the results to determine the explanatory power of the “riding the wave” theory. Bigger parties and those not supporting the government posed most of the questions in parliament during the period of study, especially the Liberal Party and the Danish People’s Party. For V, the greatest share of emphasis was devoted to the issue of international affairs with most of the questions (92.28) being related to COVID and concerning Danish borders opening, entry to the country criteria and future travelling plans for Danish citizens. A high emphasis on the issue of domestic commerce was observed with a special focus on help packages to mitigate the consequences of the crisis for companies and alike. Relevant attention to the issues of education, health and social welfare, issues owned by the left, was devoted focusing mainly on the crisis consequences, except for social welfare. Opening of schools, universities and other educational centres was on the scope of the questions on the education issue whereas, from health, questions ranged from concerns about the Statens Serum Institute, the institution in charge of monitoring the crisis, to visits to nursing homes and testing strategy. The environment, an issue undoubtedly owned by the left, received a relatively high amount of attention as well despite not being framed as an issue of the crisis. The issues owned by the party received a considerably low attention being in those cases framed as COVID-19 questions. For the Danish People’s Party, two opposed patterns arose. On one hand, a high emphasis on issues owned by the left (health and education) but being predominately framed as COVID-19 inquiries and on the other hand great attention to the issues traditionally owned by the party (immigration and law and crime) without a connection to the pandemic. Despite a lower association of these two issues with the crisis, some of the inquiries were framed as a COVID-19 concern with for example questions on the restriction of the freedom of assembly

within the law and crime, or on the hand-shake ceremonies or the assembly ban in mosques within immigration. Remarkably, some of the questions with a clear background on the immigration issue were framed as health concerns such as the inquiry on “Black Lives Matter” demonstrations, virus contention, and assembly ban.

Figure 1. Issues by political party (big parties from the blue bloc).

Issue	V (n)	COVID-19 related	Issue	DF (n)	COVID-19 related
International Affairs	16.43 (58)	98.28 (57)	Health	18.97 (33)	78.79 (26)
Domestic Commerce	12.75 (45)	88.89 (40)	Immigration	16.67 (29)	24.14 (7)
Education	11.90 (42)	66.67 (28)	Education	13.22 (23)	47.83 (11)
Health	9.07 (32)	100.00 (32)	Law and Crime	12.64 (22)	22.73 (5)
Social Welfare	8.78 (31)	22.58 (7)	Culture	5.75 (10)	60.00 (6)
Culture	8.22 (29)	82.76 (24)	Social Welfare	5.17 (9)	2.22 (2)
Environment	6.52 (23)	0.00 (0)	Finance	5.17 (9)	5.56 (5)
Labour	5.67 (20)	80.00 (16)	International Affairs	4.02 (7)	42.86 (3)
Transport	4.82 (17)	23.53 (4)	Taxation	2.87 (5)	0.00 (0)
Finance	3.68 (13)	84.62 (11)	Domestic Commerce	2.30 (4)	100.00 (4)
Taxation	3.40 (12)	50.00 (6)	Energy	2.30 (4)	0.00 (0)
Immigration	1.98 (7)	57.14 (4)	Labour	2.30 (4)	75.00 (3)
Housing	1.70 (6)	0.00 (0)	Transport	2.30 (4)	0.00 (0)
Agriculture	1.42 (5)	60.00 (3)	Defence	1.72 (3)	0.00 (0)
Defence	1.13 (4)	0.00 (0)	Government Operations	1.72 (3)	100.00 (3)
Energy	0.85 (3)	0.00 (0)	Environment	1.15 (2)	0.00 (0)
Foreign Trade	0.57 (2)	100.00 (2)	Agriculture	0.57 (1)	0.00 (0)
Law and crime	0.57 (2)	50.00 (1)	Civil Rights	0.57 (1)	0.00 (0)
Government Operations	0.28 (1)	0.00 (0)	Housing	0.57 (1)	0.00 (0)
Civil Rights	0.28 (1)	100.00 (1)	Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)

Issue	KF (n)	COVID-19 related
Taxation	18.87 (10)	10.00 (1)
Education	16.98 (9)	55.56 (5)
Culture	11.32 (6)	83.33 (5)
Immigration	9.43 (5)	20.00 (1)
International Affairs	7.55 (4)	50.00 (2)
Health	7.55 (4)	75.00 (3)
Transport	7.55 (4)	25.00 (1)
Agriculture	3.77 (2)	50.00 (1)
Finance	3.77 (2)	100.00 (2)
Labour	3.77 (2)	50.00 (1)
Law and Crime	3.77 (2)	50.00 (1)
Social Welfare	1.89 (1)	100.00 (0)
Civil Rights	1.89 (1)	0.00 (0)
Domestic Commerce	1.89 (1)	100.00 (1)
Environment	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Housing	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Defence	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Energy	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Government Operations	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)

The Conservative People’s Party focused the attention firstly on the issues of taxation and education owned by the left with only the latter being framed within the crisis context. The issue of culture, with no political ownership, was as well highly emphasised mostly under the framing of COVID-19, with concerns on the opening plan of the sector.

Figure 2. Issues by political party (red bloc).

Issue	RV (n)	COVID-19 related	Issue	SF (n)	COVID-19 related
Immigration	16.39 (10)	40.00 (4)	Environment	40.00 (18)	0.00 (0)
Education	14.75 (9)	4.44 (4)	Health	13.33 (6)	83.33 (5)
Health	14.75 (9)	5.56 (5)	Law and Crime	13.33 (6)	100.00 (6)
International Affairs	14.75 (9)	77.78 (7)	Education	6.67 (3)	33.33 (1)
Environment	9.84 (6)	0.00 (0)	Labour	6.67 (3)	100.00 (3)
Transport	8.20 (5)	0.00 (0)	Agriculture	4.44 (2)	50.00 (1)
Social Welfare	4.92 (3)	0.00 (0)	Social Welfare	2.22 (1)	0.00 (0)
Housing	4.92 (3)	33.33 (1)	Culture	2.22 (1)	100.00 (1)
Labour	4.92 (3)	0.00 (0)	Domestic Commerce	2.22 (1)	0.00 (0)
Agriculture	1.64 (1)	100.00 (1)	Government Operations	2.22 (1)	100.00 (1)
Culture	1.64 (1)	0.00 (0)	Immigration	2.22 (1)	0.00 (0)
Domestic Commerce	1.64 (1)	100.00 (1)	Transport	2.22 (1)	100.00 (1)
Energy	1.64 (1)	0.00 (0)	International Affairs	2.22 (1)	0.00 (0)
Defence	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Energy	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Government Operations	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Housing	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Civil Rights	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Taxation	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Law and Crime	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Civil Rights	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Finance	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Defence	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Taxation	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Finance	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)

Issue	EL (n)	COVID-19 related
Environment	27.08 (13)	0.00 (0)
Agriculture	16.67 (8)	0.00 (0)
International Affairs	14.58 (7)	71.43 (5)
Health	12.50 (6)	100.00 (6)
Housing	10.42 (5)	40.00 (2)
Taxation	10.42 (5)	100.00 (5)
Immigration	4.17 (2)	50.00 (1)
Civil Rights	2.08 (1)	0.00 (0)
Culture	2.08 (1)	100.00 (1)
Law and Crime	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Education	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Labour	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Finance	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Defence	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Energy	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Transport	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Government Operations	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Domestic Commerce	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Social Welfare	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)

Parties supporting the government posed fewer questions when compared to non-supporters. Figure 2 presents the issue emphasis of the red bloc during the first wave. The Social Liberal Party issue attention was spread among policy domains. Immigration, an issue owned by the right, was the most emphasized of the issues. Nonetheless, the focus of these questions was on for example the dispensations of certain rules in the Danish citizenship procedure or on concerns on how to assist during COVID-19 Danish citizenship applicants whose constitutional ceremonies had been postponed. Contrary, to the content of the questions of the blue bloc, the issues of education and health were not exclusively framed under the context of the crisis and included among other questions on the completion of higher education programs or the investment on hearing clinics.

Environment, a highly salient issue among voters, was the most emphasized issue by both the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance who exhibited similar behaviour during the first wave, emphasizing mostly issues in connection to the crisis. Remarkably, law and crime had a notable presence in the questions from SF which were all framed within the crisis proposing for example the use of video communication for prisons' inmates or in courts to avoid the accumulation of cases during the pandemic. Attention on international affairs was as well relatively high for EL with an interest in the cooperation with the rest of Nordic countries during the crisis.

As Figure 3 shows, the smaller parties in the present study, NB and LA, posed a very small number of questions in parliament with the former inquiring only once and about the immigration issue and the latter on the salient issues from the voters (environment, immigration and international affairs) and taxation, despite framing exclusively one of the questions in the crisis (doubts on the effectivity of a residence ban in an area of Copenhagen).

Figure 3. Issues by political party (small parties from the blue bloc).

Issue	NB (n)	COVID-19 related	Issue	LA (n)	COVID-19 related
Immigration	100 (1)	0.00 (0)	Taxation	37.50 (3)	0.00 (0)
Education	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Environment	25.00 (2)	0.00 (0)
Culture	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Immigration	12.50 (1)	0.00 (0)
Taxation	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	International Affairs	12.50 (1)	0.00 (0)
International Affairs	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Health	12.50 (1)	100.00 (1)
Health	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Education	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Transport	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Culture	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Agriculture	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Transport	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Finance	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Agriculture	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Labour	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Finance	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Law and Crime	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Labour	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Social Welfare	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Law and Crime	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Civil Rights	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Social Welfare	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Domestic Commerce	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Civil Rights	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Environment	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Domestic Commerce	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Housing	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Housing	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Defence	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Defence	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Foreign Trade	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Energy	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Energy	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)
Government Operations	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)	Government Operations	0.00 (0)	0.00 (0)

Conclusions

(in process)

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