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The Politics of Constraints

Electoral promises, pending commitments, public concerns and policy agendas in Denmark, France, Spain and the United Kingdom (1980-2008)

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"The familiar maxim *to govern is to choose* is reductionist in the extreme. It implies that government is carried out by individual decisionmakers who have as much freedom of choice as an individual in a shopping mall trying to decide whether to have a pizza or an ice cream cone, and then free to decide what kind of pizza or ice cream cone to have ".

Richard Rose, 1994 *Inheritance in Public Policy*, p.1.

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Acknowledgments

I am writing the last page of my PhD dissertation sitting in the living room of two (soon three) great passengers that I met over this journey: Markos, and Myrssini/Fagiolo. The thesis has been a 4 years one, and like all journeys I will remember it not only for what I learnt and for the places I saw, but in particular for the people I met on the road, in the bars, at gas stations, and those who brought new wheels when mine were flat.

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Summary of the thesis

Who sets lawmakers' priorities? The aim of the thesis is to provide a convincing theoretical argument able to identify what are the policy problems that demand lawmakers' attention, but also to test this empirically for France, Denmark, Spain and the United Kingdom between 1980 and 2008. This research shows how accounting for the way in which lawmakers deal with competing policy problems integrate two major accounts of the way in which governments set their priorities: party mandate approaches and public policy approaches. The thesis does so by suggesting that given their double role of representatives and administrators, lawmakers have to deliver policies consistent both with electoral and non-electoral mandates. In this framework, parties' promises, administrative commitments, and the priorities of the public originate policy problems that compete for lawmakers' attention to enter the policy agenda. Compared to classic party mandate approaches, this research does not conceive parties as being the key actors of the game or the major agenda-setters. Compared to public policy approaches, the study does not dismiss the role of parties. The theory argues that a problem-solving approach is key to account for lawmakers' priorities and for the way in which lawmakers select policy problems that need to be addressed in the policy agenda.

In this framework, different policy problems demand lawmakers' attention and problems-solving scholars have illustrated that the types of issues that need to be addressed are different in "nature". Existing accounts of the composition of policy agendas distinguish between problems ranging from "compulsory" to "discretionary" concerns (Walker 1977; Adler and Wilkerson 2012) where the former derive from "periodically recurring demands" and the latter from "chosen problems" (Walker 1977:425). Building on these contributions, the theoretical model of the dissertation discusses the "nature" of different policy problems by identifying some 'ideal types' that originate from the double functions that lawmakers shall perform in contemporary democracies as "representatives" of voters' interests and as "responsible" administrators (Mair 2009). In this sense, the dissertation contends that different policy problems emerge from the electoral promises of the governing parties, from commitments related to the responsibility of being in office, and from the 'external world', and that the balance between them determines the composition of the policy agenda.

There are four propositions of this study to existing knowledge in the field of policy agendas. The first is that the content of the policy agenda is stable across countries with different institutional settings. Lawmakers' priorities are no less stable in institutional systems that are more 'open' to accommodating policy problems brought by the electoral promises of the parties. At the same time stability persists even when elections approach, questioning the long-lasting assumption that lawmakers may manipulate policies to their will in order to assure re-election. The second is that policy problems brought by the electoral promises of the governing parties impact lawmakers' priorities, but this is only half of an old story. The results show that the policy problems originating from the electoral promises of the opposition influence the content of the policy agenda confirming that the agenda-setting power of parties is not limited to those who are in office. The third proposition is a theoretical effort and empirical contribution to conceptualise and measure "policy commitments". Studies of public policy have stressed the importance of inherited commitments in everyday law making (Rose 1994; Adler and Wilkerson 2012) since some decisions take longer than a legislature to be realised. Classic analyses have emphasised the importance of budgetary constraints on policy agendas, but the thesis suggests that there is also another striking case of policy commitments for European polities: EU integration, since decisions on EU affairs and delegation of powers taken from previous governments are hard (if not impossible) to reverse by their successors. In this sense, EU decisions are inherited by all governments, and they add complexity to the problem-solving capacity of Member States because they produce extra policy problems that require lawmakers' attention. For lawmakers respecting legally binding EU decisions, this is a way to avoid "reckless and illegal decision making" (Mair 2009). The results highlight that when reflecting on the divisions of competences between the Union and its Member States (MSs), policy commitments derived from the EU directives are concentrated on a narrow set of policy areas. The results show that in most fields where commitments are higher, the agenda-setting power of parties' electoral promises is weakened. Finally, this research suggests that policy problems originating from the agenda of the public (as approximated by media coverage) are another explanatory factor of policy priorities, but in a very narrow set of policy areas. Media effects appear to be limited to policy areas with the special characteristics of newsworthiness and sensationalism (Soroka 2002) that contribute to boost their policy appeal. In addition, the findings highlight that the agenda-setting power of the media is mediated by the interaction with the electoral promises of the opposition, probably as a result of a blame avoidance game to discredit incumbents.

Chapter 1 introduces the concepts of policy agenda and policy problem before summarising existing accounts of the content of policy agendas. Two theoretical traditions are identified. The first one is the "partisan account" highlighting the importance of partisan preferences for lawmakers' priorities. The second is made up of the "public policy accounts" proposing incrementalist and agenda-setting approaches to representatives' priorities. Chapter 2 sets up the theoretical framework that will be tested in this research. Drawing upon theories of "representative and responsible" government (Mair 2009) the research provides an encompassing model of how different policy problems compete for attention in order to enter the agendas of lawmakers. The thesis highlights that different agenda-setters have to be considered as creating policy problems: the electoral promises of the governing parties, the demands addressed to lawmakers by the EU agenda, and the issues that are important for the public as reported by the media. Starting from existing typologies of problems that must be addressed in the policy agenda (Walker 1977; Adler and Wilkerson 2012), the research roughly distinguishes between discretionary and compulsory policy problems, discussing how the three agenda-setters considered in this study fit into those ideal types, as well as the incentives for lawmakers to prioritise one over the other. Chapter 3 presents the data, models and methods that are used to test the theoretical framework. The dissertation relies on data from the Comparative Agendas Project modelled in the form of time series cross sectional models. Chapter 4 introduces the empirical investigation of the content of the policy agenda. It focuses on stability and change in lawmakers' priorities, to understand the extent to which priorities change (or remain the same) across elections. Chapter 5 moves a step further and will assess the connection between policy problems brought by parties' electoral promises and the content of the policy agenda. Chapter 6 will account for one of the most debated sources of policy problems among public policy scholars: policy commitments. This chapter will test the agenda-setting power of policy commitments deriving from the content of the EU directives on lawmakers' priorities and proposing an "EU acquiescence index" to shed light on the 'overlaps' between EU and domestic policy agendas. Finally, Chapter 7 aims at analysing the connection between lawmakers' priorities and media coverage (in terms of print and, where appropriate, audio media) and each of the two relevant types of policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention identified in the previous chapters.

In sum the thesis offers a theory of the composition of policy agendas grounded in a problem-solving understanding of politics, and an empirical assessment of its validity. In this sense the study is about how policy problems originating from the dual role of lawmakers in

contemporary democracies (representation and administration) affect everyday policy making. More precisely the thesis considers the impact of different agenda venues (parties, EU commitments, and the media) on the way in which lawmakers deliver policies.

Who sets lawmakers' priorities?

This dissertation aims at exploring the way in which lawmakers set their priorities in a comparative perspective. In this sense, the key question that will be addressed is who sets the policy agenda or, in other words, what are the issues that capture lawmakers' attention. Understanding the way in which issues capture politicians' attention is extremely important for at least three reasons. First of all, because this is a basic function performed by all political systems. Second, because whether an issue enters (or not) the policy agenda is an indicator of the interests that lawmakers take into account when legislating. In a political system, interest groups, government agencies, parties, media and other social and economic actors all demand lawmakers' attention. Each of them brings information to the system but they have no guarantee that they will receive a policy response to their demands. Most scientists argue that these interests struggle and conclude that those that prevail are simply the interests that are supported by more resources. I do not disagree with this, but I also argue that dynamics are complex and that policy responses depend also on the way in which legislatures distribute their attention among competing policy problems, e.g. the way in which legislatures process information (Baumgartner and Jones 2005) to find a balance between representing citizens' interests (and assure re-election) and administrating the state (to avoid illegal decision-making). In this sense, resources are important but it is hard to understand lawmakers' priorities without considering the "nature" of different problems that have to be addressed when ruling a polity. Finally, the way in which the interests of diverse actors are accommodated (or not) among the policy priorities of lawmakers has important consequences in particular for the conduct of democratic representatives that are held accountable by voters for their decisions to prioritise certain issues instead than others.

The aim of my work is not only to provide a convincing theoretical argument able to identify what the policy problems that demand lawmakers' attention, but also to test this empirically. By doing so, I show how accounting for the way in which lawmakers deal with competing policy problems integrate two major accounts of the way in which governments set their priorities: party mandate approaches and public policy approaches. I do so by suggesting that given their double role of representatives and administrators, lawmakers have to deliver policies consistent both with electoral and non-electoral mandates. In this framework, parties'

promises, administrative commitments, and the priorities of the public originate policy problems that compete for lawmakers' attention to enter the policy agenda. Compared to classic party mandate approaches, my research does not conceive parties as being the key actors of the game or the major agenda-setters. Compared to public policy approaches, my study does not dismiss the role of parties. In the theory I argue that a problem-solving approach is key to account for lawmakers' priorities and for the way in which lawmakers select policy problems that need to be addressed in the policy agenda. In this framework, different policy problems demand lawmakers' attention and problems-solving scholars have illustrated that the types of issues that need to be addressed are different in "nature". Existing accounts of the composition of policy agendas distinguish between problems ranging from "compulsory" to "discretionary" concerns (Walker 1977; Adler and Wilkerson 2012) where the former derive from "periodically recurring demands" and the latter from "chosen problems" (Walker 1977:425). Building on these contributions, the theoretical model of the dissertation discusses the "nature" of different policy problems by identifying some 'ideal types' that originate from the double functions that lawmakers shall perform in contemporary democracies as "representatives" of voters' interests and as "responsible" administrators (Mair 2009). In this sense, I argue that different policy problems emerge from the electoral promises of the governing parties, from commitments related to the responsibility of being in office, and from the 'external world', and that the balance between them determines the composition of the policy agenda. Although the theory does not account specifically for the demands of interest groups or other policy communities, the argument may be extended (at least intuitively) to these political actors as well, under the general assumption of my work: policies do not originate only from electoral mandates, but also from policy responsibility.

Thus the aim of my dissertation is to assess the impact of competing policy problems on policy agendas in a cross-national European perspective including different political systems such as Denmark, France, Spain and the United Kingdom between 1980 and 2008. Existing comparative contributions on lawmakers' priorities fail to address the importance of competing problems that representatives face in at least three ways. The explanations provided for partisan influence on policy agendas assume an 'orderly policy process' (Walgrave et al. 2006) based on the direct transmission of parties' electoral pledges into policy outputs. This interpretation considers political parties as the main actors of the game, neglecting that electoral promises of the governing parties compete for attention with other issues risen by other political actors and that do not necessarily originate from electoral mandates. Hence, in these studies electoral promises are used as an *explanandum* that is not

dependent on the existence of other sources of policy problems that demand lawmakers' attention and that may affect their decision to prioritise (or not) partisan pledges. Secondly, classic public policy approaches acknowledge that the way in which lawmakers set their priorities is a 'non-orderly process' (Walgrave et al. 2006) driven by different problems originating from various agents (focusing events, changing policy images, shifts in advocacy coalitions, issue expansion). However, these approaches tend to dismiss the policy problems brought by the electoral mandates of the parties instead of understanding if partisan promises interact with other problems (brought by other agents) demanding lawmakers' attention. This is problematic since parties are still the only actors in government. Thirdly, more recent agenda-setting studies of policy agendas inspired by the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) have acknowledged that lawmakers must balance their desire to deliver on electoral mandates with a need to continuously adapt their policy priorities in response to other problems emerging from public concerns and other "compelling problems that require attention no matter who is in office" (Carammia and Borghetto 2014, 80). Yet, apart from acknowledging that constraints on decision-makers exist in the policy agenda, these have not been exhaustively conceptualised and tested empirically.

Therefore, the "magnitude" of these constraints in everyday decision-making still needs to be assessed, as well as if (and how) 'constraints' interact with other policy problems demanding representatives' attention. To summarise, in all these contributions the focus on only certain types of policy problems that representatives address has overlooked the fact that competition for attention exists among different types of policy problems in the policy agenda. Since different policy problems exist in every political system and they all aim at the same goal (a policy response) within the same arena (the policy agenda) there are reasons to think that all of them may be meaningful predictors of lawmakers' priorities. In addition, given that lawmakers' attention is limited and a scarcity of time and resources characterises policy agendas (Baumgartner and Jones 2005; Adler and Wilkerson 2012; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014) it is also reasonable to expect that different policy problems compete for lawmakers' attention and that this competition produces important consequences for the way in which lawmakers set their priorities and respond to different interests. There are at least two reasons why differentiating across policy problems is a good strategy to revisit and enrich existing theories of lawmakers' priorities.

1. First, policy problems exist in every polity (democratic or not). They originate from different agenda-setters (parties, media, agencies, etc.) and they pertain to different policy

areas that all governments cover such as Economics, Environment, Defence etc. The same policy problems may have different importance in different political systems, with some problems being more important in certain polities than in others. This approach provides a good opportunity to account for the cross-national variation of the agenda-setting power of different policy problems, i.e. how are they incorporated in lawmakers' priorities.

2. Second, a problem-solving approach seems to cross-cut the traditional divide in the literature between partisan and public policy explicators of lawmakers priorities. Or, at least, it accounts for both not only by acknowledging that different agenda-setters (within and outside the system) contribute to shape the content of the policy agenda, but also by shedding light on whether one (or several, or none) of them enjoys a privileged channel of communication with lawmakers, providing a more realistic picture of the policy process.

As will be further illustrated in the next chapters, there are four crucial propositions of this study to existing knowledge in the field of policy agendas. The first is that the content of the policy agenda is stable across countries with different institutional settings. Lawmakers' priorities are no less stable in institutional systems that are more 'open' to accommodating policy problems brought by the electoral promises of the parties. At the same time stability persists even when elections approach, questioning the long-lasting assumption that lawmakers may manipulate policies to their will in order to assure re-election. In fact, in different countries, major changes in the policy agenda occur, often abruptly, and they do not appear to be related to partisan alternation in office. What seems to matter is instead the issue considered with certain policy areas (such as Government Operations, Transportation and Economics) characterised by higher levels of stability than others.

The second is that policy problems brought by the electoral promises of the governing parties impact lawmakers' priorities, but this is only half of an old story. The transmission of party promises in the policy agenda takes place not only via the party that wins the elections, but also via the opposition. The results show that the policy problems originating from the electoral promises of the opposition influence the content of the policy agenda confirming that the agenda-setting power of parties is not limited to those who are in office. In addition, I illustrate that whether the electoral promises of the parties impact the policy agenda does not depend on the partisanship of the majority. This suggests that political families (at least those of the mainstream parties) raise policy problems that are more homogeneous than what is

expected by proponents of the issue ownership school. These findings remain valid in different institutional systems.

The third proposition of my research to existing contributions on the study of policy agendas is a theoretical effort and empirical contribution to conceptualise and measure "policy commitments". Studies of public policy have stressed the importance of inherited commitments in everyday law making (Rose 1994; Adler and Wilkerson 2012) since some decisions take longer than a legislature to be realised. Classic analyses have emphasised the importance of budgetary constraints on policy agendas, but there is also another striking case of policy commitments for European polities: EU integration, since decisions on EU affairs and delegation of powers taken from previous governments are hard (if not impossible) to reverse by their successors. In this sense, EU decisions are inherited by all governments, and they add complexity to the problem-solving capacity of Member States because they produce extra policy problems that require lawmakers' attention. For lawmakers respecting legally binding EU decisions, this is a way to avoid "reckless and illegal decision making" (Mair 2009). More precisely the results highlight that when reflecting on the divisions of competences between the Union and its Member States (MSs), policy commitments derived from the EU directives are concentrated on a narrow set of policy areas. I find that in most fields where commitments are higher, the agenda-setting power of parties' electoral promises is weakened.

Finally, this research suggests that policy problems originating from the agenda of the public (as approximated by media coverage) are another explanatory factor of policy priorities, but in a very narrow set of policy areas. Media effects appear to be limited to policy areas with the special characteristics of newsworthiness and sensationalism (Soroka 2002) that contribute to boost their policy appeal. In addition, the findings highlight that the agenda-setting power of the media is mediated by the interaction with the electoral promises of the opposition, probably as a result of a blame avoidance game to discredit incumbents. In this sense, my contribution adds to existing knowledge the fact that the agenda-setting power of the media is not ubiquitous but conditional on the type of issue considered. In particular, media attention is concentrated on a small number of sensational issues, whereas attention in the policy agenda is spread across several policy areas – and only occasionally do the two overlap. This suggests that most of the policy activities of lawmakers are of no interest for the media and that if media compete to raise policy problems to obtain a policy response, this is limited to a narrow set of policy areas. In sum the chapters that follow constitute a theory of the composition of policy agendas grounded in a problem-solving understanding of politics,

and an empirical assessment of its validity. In this sense the study is about how policy problems originating from the dual role of lawmakers in contemporary democracies (representation and administration) affect everyday policy making. More precisely I consider the impact of different agenda venues (parties, EU commitments, and the media) on the way in which lawmakers deliver policies. The last section of the introduction outlines the structure of this research.

Structure of the dissertation

To explore how policy problems originating from partisan electoral promises, policy commitments and media coverage are relevant predictors of lawmakers' priorities across different European political systems, I follow an analytical structure rooted in two major steps. The first is an overview of what I am focusing on, i.e. the policy agenda, whereas the second involves the identification of different sources of policy problems competing for representatives' attention. This process starts by exploring the extent to which lawmakers' priorities change or remain stable, and it subsequently focuses on the different policy problems that drive these priorities (parties, policy commitments and media). Each chapter includes a set of research hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework of this research. In general these are structured in order of growing conceptual intricacy. I always begin by testing whether (and to what extent) electoral promises, policy commitments, and media coverage influence the content of the policy agenda, before disentangling the mechanisms via more complex hypotheses. Testing these preliminary and "simple" hypotheses is not without interest, since to the best of my knowledge this is the first empirical study on the composition of lawmakers' priorities to include several countries with a cross-issues perspective.

Chapter 1 introduces the key concepts, the literature, and the agenda-setting approach on which this study is grounded. I define the concepts of policy agenda and policy problem before summarising existing accounts of the content of policy agendas. Two theoretical traditions are identified and discussed. The first one is the "partisan account" highlighting the importance of partisan preferences for lawmakers' priorities. The second is made up of the "public policy accounts" proposing incrementalist and agenda-setting approaches to

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representatives' priorities. Within this tradition, the former highlights that policy agendas are driven by the logics of stability and incrementalism. The latter stress that policy priorities are characterised by continual changes and adaptations where lawmakers' priorities derive from the continuous interplay between the political system and the external world, and not only from the responses to the promises of the governing parties. I conclude this section by discussing some theoretical and methodological limitations of these two major approaches and I argue for the need to consider both "partisan" and "public policy" accounts to understand the way in which lawmakers set their priorities in the framework of problem-solving, where electoral and non-electoral policy problems compete for lawmakers' attention.

Chapter 2 sets up the theoretical framework that will be tested in this research. Drawing upon theories of "representative and responsible" government (Mair 2009) I provide an encompassing model of how different policy problems compete for attention in order to enter the agendas of lawmakers. I also introduce the general expectations of the study that will be further specified through research hypotheses in each chapter. In this sense, Chapter 2 draws the guidelines to answer the research question presented earlier. Based on the literature review of Chapter 1, I argue that different agenda-setters have to be considered as creating policy problems: the electoral promises of the governing parties, the demands addressed to lawmakers by the EU agenda, and the issues that are important for the public as reported by the media. Starting from existing typologies of problems that must be addressed in the policy agenda (Walker 1977; Adler and Wilkerson 2012), I roughly distinguish between discretionary and compulsory policy problems, discussing how the three agenda-setters considered in this study fit into those ideal types, as well as the incentives for lawmakers to prioritise one over the other. The general argument is that the three agenda-setters contribute to determine lawmakers' priorities in Denmark, France, Spain and United Kingdom because, on the one hand, lawmakers deliver policies to respond to voters' interests to maximise the chances of being re-elected. On the other hand, however, policies must also respond to non-electoral incentives (commitments) in order for lawmakers to avoid illegal decision-making. The results and shortcomings of these theoretical arguments are discussed in the conclusion of my work.

Chapter 3 presents the data and methods that will be used to test empirically the theoretical framework. When necessary, each chapter has specific sections where the data used and the operationalisation are discussed. Overall, most of the datasets come from the

Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al. 2006). In addition to the special attention paid to quantitative cross-sectional variation of the agenda-setting power of different policy problems, the design of this study also includes qualitative assessments, where relevant, to clarify the outputs of the quantitative analyses.

Chapter 4 introduces the empirical investigation of the content of the policy agenda. It focuses on stability and change in lawmakers' priorities, to understand the extent to which priorities change (or remain the same) across elections. Hence, before assessing who sets these priorities, the dissertation assesses empirically whether lawmakers' priorities change or remain the same. Previous research on policy change has shown that governments' priorities are stable, in the sense that they are very unlikely to change from one legislature to the other. In general, most of the lawmakers' attention is dedicated to what their predecessors did (and even those that came before them), in order for governments not to grind to a halt. Therefore, instead of just assuming that important portions of lawmakers' agendas are occupied by what other governments have done, I begin by providing a figure for this. In a nutshell, the results suggest that there is a high level of stability and path-dependence in lawmakers' priorities across the four European systems considered.

Chapter 5 moves a step further and will assess the connection between policy problems brought by parties' electoral promises (basically in terms of party manifestoes) and the content of the policy agenda. My goal here is to analyse the extent to which policy problems originating from electoral promises are good predictors of what lawmakers do once in office. When studying how partisan electoral promises enter the agenda of the parliaments, I argue that one needs to consider that this relationship is not straightforward (as argued by the party mandate literature) but conditional. In particular, I identify and discuss two sets of determinants of whether partisan promises enter the policy agenda: issue salience in the party system and for each party family, and the institutional setting in which lawmakers make decisions. The former gives us an idea about the importance of the issue not only for the governing party but also for the opposition to understand whether electoral promises enter the policy agenda only via the agenda-setting capacity of the governing party/ies or also by the opposition. The second (institutional setting) sets the structural opportunities for representatives to insert electoral promises in the policy agenda.

Chapter 6 will account for one of the most debated sources of policy problems among public policy scholars: policy commitments. More precisely, this chapter will test the agenda-setting power of policy commitments deriving from the content of the EU directives on lawmakers' priorities. Here, the cross-sectional design of my study will be useful to understand the extent to which policy commitments follow similar agenda-setting dynamics across countries and influence important portions of policy agendas. Differently from existing studies that acknowledge theoretically the existence of these "constraints" on lawmakers' attention, I show that policy commitments do exist but are not equally distributed across all policy areas. They affect only specific areas that are less important for domestic legislators, and they tend to be among the older (and shared) competences of the Union and its Member States. In particular, by analysing the content of the EU directives and calculating the share of those that have been transposed by France, Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom, I show that policy commitments are not ubiquitous in the policy agenda and that their extent has changed over time. Conversely, commitments exist only on specific policy areas that in general do not coincide with the issues that are emphasised in the electoral promises of the parties, suggesting that these policy problems are somewhat "disconnected" from electoral mandates. In sum, "constraints" exist but, and with very few exceptions (such as for Agricultural policy in France that I will discuss), they appear to be 'detached' from the other issues that lawmakers address in the policy agenda.

Finally, Chapter 7 aims at analysing the connection between lawmakers' priorities and media coverage (in terms of print and, where appropriate, audio media) and each of the two relevant types of policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention identified in the previous chapters. The goal here is to observe the extent to which media coverage affects policy priorities. When analysing how certain highly mediatized issues enter the policy agenda, it is also important to understand if they enter the policy agenda directly or whether electoral promises of the parties or existing policy commitments may strengthen or weaken the agenda-setting power of the media. The former scenario opens up an agenda-setting dynamic for which media coverage directly influences lawmakers' priorities – indicating that policy problems brought by the media have a stronger agenda-setting power independent from those brought by the electoral pledges of the parties or by policy commitments. The second scenario, where the agenda-setting power of policy problems raised by the media depends on the interaction with the electoral promises of the governing parties, suggests that media influence on policy may also be indirect, in the sense that it may depend on the interaction

with the electoral promises of the opposition. The latter, where the agenda-setting power of media coverage depends on the interaction with the policy commitments of lawmakers, sheds light on whether media agenda and policy commitments have a joint agenda-setting power. The findings in this chapter reveal a limited agenda-setting power of the policy problems brought by the media and suggests that the transmission is not mediated by the policy commitments of lawmakers but instead by the electoral promises of the opposition party.

Finally, in the Conclusion I summarise the main findings of the dissertation, and address some shortcomings of this contribution, as well as paths for future investigations in the field of the composition of policy agendas privileging a policy-problem approach.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding lawmakers' priorities: an overview of the different accounts of the policy agenda

According to John Kingdon (1995; 3), the policy agenda is the list of issues to which governments and other decision-makers pay attention. In this understanding, the policy agenda of different governments may include issues such as education, defence, environment, civil rights, health, foreign policy, and the content of the policy agenda may change according to the amount of attention that each issue receives. In this sense, issue attention reflects the importance that governments pay to different policy areas (John et al. 2013, 1) and it reveals how lawmakers direct their action toward different policy problems. Once in power, however, a majority cannot focus exclusively on one single issue and neglect completely the others; not only because treating one issue may have consequences in other policy domains (Adler and Wilkerson 2013) but also because focusing on only one concern would stop policymaking. For example, when a government is debating whether to join (or not) a war operation, it cannot concentrate only on this issue: it will still be obliged to pay attention to internal policy matters − such as industrial policy or crime prevention. Essentially, and unsurprisingly, a government's attention is always spread across different domains.

Yet, the number of problems that may be tackled by lawmakers and specialised civil servants is limited (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones 1995; 1999; 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2005), and priority-setting is among the most important tasks of lawmakers. Each legislature is different according to the way in which it sets its issue priorities. For example, when the Falklands were occupied by Argentina, in 1982, the Conservative governments of the UK decided to pay more attention to foreign policy than to other issues. Conversely, when in the mid-1990s New Labour decided to initiate major ideological changes endorsing market economy and altering Clause IV of its statute, the Blair government focused more on welfare reforms and economic growth. In this understanding, public policy scholars consider that the policy agenda approximates the issues prioritised by lawmakers. It is important to highlight, however, that the policy agenda is different from day-to-day rivalries

or provocative standpoints across parties – even if those events may (and often do) drive policy decisions (John et al. 2013). An issue that is highly debated in the press or by a candidate does not necessarily receive high levels of attention in the policy agenda due to information-asymmetry between the severity of a demand (produced by interest groups or other policy entrepreneurs) and the response of a government (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; 8).

For a long time, scholars have debated the way in which policy agendas are set, and there is a broad literature on the nature of agenda setting (Cobb and Elder 1983), its biases (Schattschneider 1960), the mechanisms used by policy entrepreneurs to push their interests onto the agenda (Button 1978; Majone 1989; Stone 1989), and the way in which policies change (Lindblom 1964; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Here, however, I am interested in presenting two approaches dealing more precisely with the understanding of what drives the composition of policy agendas and hence lawmakers' priorities. In this research tradition, the role of political parties is paramount to understand policy outputs. Thus, for ease of understanding I artificially distinguish between two major approaches dealing with the content of policy agendas: the party-models and the non-party models; and, as I will illustrate, these headings encompass an enormous variety of arguments. Being aware that this is a question that has attracted deep interest in political science, my literature review aims at summarising these accounts of the policy agenda by presenting only a few icy chips from a big scholarly iceberg.

The party-accounts of the policy agenda: mandate and saliency theories

The first approach is made of the party-models of the policy agendas stressing that parties are the most important actors in the policy process under the assumption that they connect citizens' expectations to the policy process. The classic research question associated with this tradition is "do parties matter?" and it is inspired by a traditional understanding of party government in party democracies (Klingemann et al. 1994) "where parties acquire a *mandate* through elections and go on to implement the chosen policies while in government" (Mair 2009; 11). In this sense, studying policy agendas implies examining the relationship between voters' preferences and the policies that parties enact once they are in power, under

the assumption that a functioning party democracy suggests a relatively simple and planned policy process, where party preferences drive policy priorities (Walgrave et al. 2006).

Studies dealing with the so-called "partisan hypothesis" have been based on a theoretical and methodological repertoire tackling the impact of government partisanship on macroeconomic policies and public spending mainly in a comparative perspective and over time (Cameron 1978; Castles and McKinlay 1979; Castles 1982; Blais et al. 1993; Bawn 1999; Boix 2000). The main idea is that the varying emphasis placed on different issues in parties' electoral statements is reflected in the policy priorities measured as the percentage of government spending in different policy areas. Similar contributions have been grounded in the issue ownership assumption (Petrocik 1996), for which left-wing and right-wing 'party families' have different preferences in terms of spending patterns.

Overall this research assumes the association between Keynesian political economy and social-democratic governments at the heart of their theories in order to justify the impact of parties on policy priorities. In this framework, researchers have argued that the Keynesian model was the pillar of the political economies of post-war social-democratic parties and that this marked the principal difference with conservative governments (Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1988). The economies of countries that have experienced long periods of left-wing government are characterised by higher levels of public spending, associated with very low levels of unemployment and high inflation. And vice versa, countries historically governed by the right or the centre are characterised by high levels of unemployment and weak inflation (for an overview, see Lewis-Beck 1985). Social-Democratic parties are expected to spend more on welfare, whereas Conservative parties would invest more on defence (Hibbs 1977; Boix 2000). Brown, Cote Jr. and Lynn-Jones (2000), in their volume devoted to the strategic choices of the United States in international relations after the Cold War, show that the maintenance of the role of superpower of the new continent rests on massive increases in its defence budgets, most notably under Republican governments. Wildavsky (1964) identified these characteristics in his case study on England. In 1975 he widened his classical study and suggested a comparative theory of budget processes. On the basis of data for seven European countries and the American States for the periods 1950-1960 and 1970-1980, he infers that the partisan composition of governments (but also differences in political cultures) translates into different choices over the allocation of State resources.

Cameron (1978) shows that under left-wing governments public spending is 2% more than the increase brought in by right-wing governments. Notably, he underlines that in countries where left-wing parties hold the majority of seats (such as Norway, Sweden and

Denmark), public spending is higher than in countries governed by a right-wing majority or in which left-wing parties are "constrained" in a coalition (Japan, France and Italy).

More recently, the argument that parties matter for lawmakers' policy priorities was developed using party platforms as predictors of spending preferences in the framework of the 'mandate theory of party democracy' (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; 1992). Budge and Hofferbert's work analyses the links existing between the U.S. party platforms in the post-war period (1948-1985) and the policies adopted. They demonstrate the existence of a link between partisan preferences and government spending also in a system where parties are weak, as in the US. In addition, these scholars concluded that party mandate is at work not only for the parties holding office, but that governing parties may implement the pledges of opposition parties and that they define collectively the outline of the policies implemented (Klingemann et al. 1994). The actual importance of the partisan influence on governments' priorities has been qualified by other research exploring the conditions under which parties may matter for policy outputs. The impact of parties may indeed be qualified by the role of institutions (Schmidt 1996, 2002) and large partisan effects characterise majoritarian democracies where the executive and the legislature are "sovereign" (Schmidt 2002, 155).

Differently, it seems more difficult to identify partisan influence on governments' priorities in consensus democracies where political and institutional circumstances allow for co-government between several parties and in particular of the opposition party. In addition, the influence of parties on governments' priorities may be also qualified by other socio-structural forces such as changes in the occupational structure (from agrarian to industrial and to service employment), urbanisation and ageing of the population that become the driving forces for state intervention, regardless of the extant political parties in government (Keman 2002). More recently, and building on this substantial literature on the party-policy link, agenda-scholars tested the partisan hypothesis by comparing issue attention in partisan agendas and policy agendas, rather than spending or macroeconomic outcomes, concluding that partisan preferences are at best only one source of policy outputs among others (Walgrave et al. 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2010; Green Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; John and Jennings 2010; Bonafont et al. 2011; Jennings et al. 2011; Persico et al. 2012), and that partisan influence on policy priorities should be regarded as conditional depending on partisan, institutional and policy determinants (Mortensen 2011; Broaurd et al. 2014). Other scholars have concluded that parties matter for determining governments' priorities not so much because they implement their platforms, but rather because the majority party controls

the policy agenda, i.e. it decides on which bills representatives will have the opportunity to vote (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

Within the party-accounts of the policy agenda, other contributions suggest that parties were more likely to matter for policies during the "Golden Age" of embedded liberalism (from the 1950s to 1970s), when they could act without constraints in shaping the policy outputs for their electorate rather than in the later decades (Scharpf 2000; Scharpf and Schmidt 2002; Mair 2009). More precisely, their influence started to dwindle in the 1970s, with the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system and the first oil-price crisis, when parties lost the capacity to control autonomously the domestic economy. By then, the integration of the global capital markets – and, more broadly, the globalisation process – seemed to have eroded the "traditional instruments of economic policy" that usually allowed parties to shape policy outputs that may be relevant for their voters (Garrett and Lange 1989; Keohane and Milner 1996; Ruggie 1996).

Various other explanations for declining differences or in support of the so-called thesis of the "end of ideology" have been put forward. While some authors have renewed industrial society convergence theory (Pryor 1968; Parkin 1971), others claim that extra factors may decrease the likelihood of partisan influence on policy outputs. Researchers also demonstrated that increasing levels of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1989) and international capital mobility (Goodman and Pauly 1993; Frieden and Rogowski 1996; Garrett 1998; Simmons 2001) sharply decrease the probability of partisan influence on lawmakers' priorities. More generally, arguments about the cartelisation of parties (Katz and Mair 1995; Blyth and Katz 2005), the decline of the social basis of party politics (Crouch 2004; Mair 2005; Bartolini and Mair 2007), and increasing electoral volatility (Bartolini and Mair 1990), come to similar conclusions concerning declining party influence on policy outputs over time.

The non-party accounts of the policy agenda: public policy theories

In spite of a plurality of contributions in this field it is possible to identify a common core of this research tradition, which is the idea that partisan preferences play a minor role in determining policy priorities since the policy agenda is shaped by a variety of determinants that reduce the influence of parties. Factors like economic growth, demographic variation (Cutright 1965; Wilensky 1975; Haniff 1976), governments' past commitments (Rose and

Davies 1994), policy experts and other governing subsystems (Lindblom, 1959), or issue intrusion (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; 2005) are more likely to explain lawmakers' preferences than party alternation. According to these scholars the real question is not so much where policy priorities come from, rather how policy priorities are set considering the constraints on lawmakers coming from the policymaking itself or from the "external world". In this understanding, governments' priorities are not set following an orderly process driven by the governing parties but quite the contrary: governments' priorities are set by a non-orderly process mainly characterised by stability and/or sudden changes that are difficult to predict and that may bring different issues to the policy agenda. As John (2003) has illustrated these influential approaches in public policy scholarship grant parties at best a marginal role in determining governments' policy agendas. Within this public policy tradition, Peter John (2013) identifies three major approaches: classic studies, early agenda studies, and the more recent punctuated equilibrium model.

Early contributions to this field emphasised the stability of governments' priorities due to elite policy communities. Here policies are shaped by the competition between ideas brought about by different advocacy coalitions. Coalitional patterns of policy preferences change only in case of important socio-economic events that change the "ideas of policy" (Allison 1971; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; see for an overview John 2003 and 2013). The stability of governments' priorities has been also explored through incrementalist approaches to policy making (see Lindblom and Dahl 1953; Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963; Davis et al. 1966; 1974). These scholars claim that policy priorities are also stable and that only small-scale and non-radical changes are possible. In this understanding policy is about gradual, incremental steps and not about dramatic initiatives. In addition, incrementalist theories stress the importance of policy pre-commitments in shaping governments' priorities where policymakers inherit policy commitments from previous governments that become the base from which to define the new policy priorities. It was in this framework that Lindblom argued "what will be the case tomorrow will not differ radically from what exists today" (1979: 517).

Another strand of classic studies has focused on sector-level politics to understand policy priorities. One of the most influential contributions in this area has been a series of articles by Theodor Lowi in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Lowi, 1964, 1972). The author developed a counter-intuitive approach. Turning early understandings upside down, he argued that policies create specific types of policy conflict according to whether they are redistributive, distributive, or regulatory in nature. While his classification has been

abandoned for being too deterministic, the general thrust of the slogan "policy shapes politics" has survived. Put differently, actors that want to influence a given policy are constrained by existing definitions, framing, institutions, cleavages etc. of those same policies. Any strategy for changing policy priorities will have to take those existing structures into account.

Lowi's theory has inspired sector-level analyses of policymaking and interest among a wide array of different types of actors. The policy-subsystem literature and the wider literature on policy communities and networks (Marsh and Rhodes 1992, Le Galès and Thatcher 1995) have concentrated on understanding those institutions and the political battles that take place at the sector level. Case studies and theoretical work in this field look at sector-level political institutions and structures, actors and rules. Rather than political parties, such research focuses on interest or citizen groups, experts, bureaucrats and related actors. Sector level studies thus do not reject the influence of politics in policymaking but show that politics is made up of bureaucrats, interested citizens, experts and other types of stakeholders. Political parties and electoral representatives *may*, on occasion, play a role, but rarely in the way that classical mandate theories of politics would expect. In this view, the policy process is conceived of as non-ordered, where not only parties but also external and internal factors contribute to shape policy outputs.

Entire libraries of case studies lend support to those findings. Among the most influential is Mayhew's work (1991), in which he concludes, from his analysis of US policymaking since World War 2, that policymaking transcends partisan politics to the extent that a divided government does not have the estimated negative consequences for the policymaking capacities of either the presidency or Congress. Mayhew also shows that policy change is determined by "surges", i.e. policymaking trends. In his qualitative analysis, Mayhew identifies "progressive" policy periods and more conservative ones. These periods, however, do not coincide with periods of Democratic or Conservative governments. For example, Republican President Nixon's government adopted probably one of the most progressive pieces of legislation with regard to social housing, while Democratic President Carter initiated a new cycle of more conservative policies that later culminated under Reagan.

A second approach within public policy theories accounting for governments' priorities is the agenda-setting approach that started blending theories of decision-making into agenda-setting dynamics. This agenda-tradition has been initiated by Schattschneider (1960) and enriched by Kingdon's theory of policy streams and policy windows (Kingdon 1984; 1995). In this understanding, governments' priorities are subject to continuous change. More

precisely, policy outputs derive from the continuous interplay between different elements in the political system: ideas, individual agents, institutions and external events so that policy priorities are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Hence the definition of governments' priorities is about problems (problem stream), solutions (policy stream), and participants (political stream). The occasional convergence of the three streams creates 'windows of opportunity' for issues to be attended to by entering the policy agenda.

Developing from Kingdon's theory, the third approach to study the composition of governments' priorities is the Punctuated Equilibrium Model (PEM) elaborated by Baumgartner and Jones (1993; 2009). Here, the formation of policy priorities results from periods of partial equilibrium (stability) and punctuated changes that can be defined as "sudden jumps" in lawmakers' attention due to large shifts in society (public opinion, media coverage, interest groups, etc.) and/or government (partisan alternation for example). Once issues have gathered momentum and have had enough impetus to be prioritised, policy changes according to a mechanism of positive feedback (Baumgartner and Jones 1993: 125). According to Baumgartner and Jones policy priorities depend on the way in which policy issues rise and fall on the lawmakers' agenda that is strictly related to the way in which governments process information. Within policy agendas, different issues compete for attention because the lawmakers' bounded rationality prevents them from dealing with all problems and their solutions at all times. Policymakers often ignore issues or pay them an unusual amount of attention. The lack of attention to most issues helps explain why most policies are never prioritised by governments. Given that policy agendas are crowded and the resources for attending to problems are scarce, in this theory policymaking mostly occurs in the "policy subsystems", which are stable arrangements of institutions and organised interests that favour the status quo (i.e. friction against change). Other 'Policy entrepreneurs' can mobilise interests excluded from subsystems, especially through issue redefinition (framing). To challenge a policy monopoly in one venue (issue monopolies can cluster around the executive, or one type of government at a particular level), groups may seek an audience in another (such as the legislature, the courts, or another type or level of government). In this way, new issues can spread, destabilising existing subsystems, and generating large changes in the policy agenda.

Competing accounts of the policy agenda?

Party and public policy accounts of the policy agenda rely on different assumptions about the formation of lawmakers' priorities. In particular, party-theories assume that governments' agendas result from an orderly and planned process that is driven by the policy priorities previously announced by the governing parties during electoral campaigns in their manifestos. Differently, public policy accounts of the policy agenda contend that governments' priorities result from a disorderly and unplanned process in which parties are not the major agenda-setter. According to the latter framework, policy entrepreneurs other than parties destabilise the policy agenda "sweeping away parties' carefully designed electoral preferences and elaborated manifestos" (Walgrave et al. 2006; 1023). Different critiques have been addressed to both traditions and they concern some of their theoretical assumptions as well as the methodology used to test them.

Concerning party-models of governments' priorities, recent contributions have pointed out two major limitations with respect to the use of national budgets and/or public spending as indicators of partisan preferences and one major problem with the use of party manifestos to approximate partisan agendas. With regard to the use of macroeconomic indicators, it should be acknowledged that they shed light exclusively on the final stage of the policy process, when priorities are already set, which is characterised by higher levels of stability (Ryu 2009). In this respect existing studies have discussed how the majority of every budget is determined by the preceding one (cf. Rose 1990; Siné 2003). Secondly, budget and/or public spending are indicators that account exclusively for issues with financial consequences (Siné 2006; Bezes and Siné 2011; Broaurd et al. 2014) but in everyday lawmaking governments also deal with "symbolic" issues with little or no financial consequences (think for example of gay marriage). In respect of the use of party manifestos to approximate parties' preferences two major critiques should be taken into account. The first is about the extent to which parties' preferences as expressed in the manifestos change during a legislature (Walgrave et al. 2006).

In this respect, existing contributions have stressed that governing parties do not update their preferences only once every four or five years when they write the programmes for electoral campaigns. Parties continuously adapt their preferences to respond to new challenges emerging in politics and society. Hence a better proxy to measure parties' swinging preferences is badly needed and roll call votes would be perhaps a more precise measure. The second issue that must be addressed when relying on party manifestos concerns

the credibility and concrete value of these documents in everyday politics. On the one hand, party manifestos are a sort of "wish list" for parties and hence they tend to be biased since manifestos are potentially "catch-all" in terms of distribution of attention towards different issues. On the other hand, it is unclear to what extent party manifestos really correspond to voters' expectations since the number of citizens that form their voter intentions by reading party manifestos is limited and other sources of information are more likely to be used.

Public policy accounts of the policy agenda are also not without criticisms. Incrementalism has received important criticism, which unsurprisingly originated with party scholars who questioned the idea that policy priorities change only smoothly. According to these studies, there is empirical evidence that demonstrates that there are critical junctures that redirect the policy agenda when the partisanship of the government changes (Castles 1982; Hofferbert and Budge 1992) or when punctuations occur (Howlett and Migone 2011). Advocacy-coalition scholars also suggest that important (even if rare) external shocks may occur and influence the membership of the policy coalitions and create changes in the policy agenda (Sabatier and Jenkins-smith 1993). In addition, incrementalism does not seem to provide convincing explanations to account for situations when a new policy programme that cannot be divided (such as space exploration) demands a large-scale policy change (Schulman 1975; 1980).

Other critics have stressed the methodological fallacies of incrementalist studies, arguing that confirmation or rejection of the paradigm largely depends upon the type of data and the sources used (Natchez and Bupp 1973; Gist 1982). In an exhaustive literature review of incrementalist studies, Berry (1990) highlights that there is no common agreement on the definition of incrementalism, which sometimes incorporate any policy change regardless of whether it is large or very limited. Furthermore, Berry wonders if different case studies are actually measuring the same phenomena since the data, sources and concepts that dominated the field are not easily comparable. In spite of these major critiques the incremental model of decision-making is very important for highlighting that a portion of the policy agenda is concerned with administrative matters and "represents how policy-makers seek predictability and order in the policy process" (John et al. 2013: 7).

The agenda-framework approach and the Punctuated Equilibrium Model (PEM) have also not escaped criticism. Even if these approaches have been successfully tested with data on different institutional venues in different countries (for an overview see Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014), Prindle (2006; 2012) points out that they are mainly descriptive accounts of policy dynamics rather than causal explanations about when policy priorities

change. In particular, Prindle concludes that the punctuated equilibrium model is "a metaphor rather than a causal theory" (Prindle 2006: 11). Being mainly descriptive the PEM is only able to capture "how many policies change" instead of clarifying the type of policies (more or less progressive) that emerge, which is one of the common limits to all agenda approaches. In a recent contribution, Peter John (2013) also emphasises that the PEM is mainly a bottom-up approach to policy agendas. In their model, Baumgarter and Jones assume that under favourable conditions actors "outside the policy process" may intervene and challenge the existing patterns of decision-making. Yet, this interpretation fails to account for when decision-makers shape policy priorities from above, such as when the UK Conservative government in the 1980s shaped preferences by privatising industries, which may have had an impact on the long-term preferences of voters (Dunleavy 1992).

These important appraisals notwithstanding, the two research traditions are fundamental to understand governments' priorities and enrich our understanding of the dynamics at stake in the "Pandora's box" that is the policy agenda. They are not competing or mutually exclusive and recent research has found empirical evidence for the validity of both models (Walgrave et al. 2006). Hence what needs to be done is to try to integrate the two to grasp a more complete understanding to the way policy agendas come about. Taken together, party and public policy accounts suggest the presence of both stability and change in government's priorities resulting from several competing pressures or policy problems on the policy agenda. Specifically, these contributions highlight the importance of electoral and non-electoral mandates such as party promises, policy commitments, and public priorities for policy outputs. They crystalize the intuition that a problem-solving approach could be fruitful to understand the different sources of lawmakers' attention.

In a recent study by Adler and Wilkerson (2013) dealing with the US Congress, the authors define problem-solving as an approach to the study of lawmakers' priorities that allows to understand "why and how the Congress is able to address public problems in the light of the many reasons mustered for why it cannot" (p.5). Following Adler and Wilkerson I problem solving can be considered as a strategy for allocating scarce policy attention between what lawmakers 'would like to do' (implement electoral mandates) and the factors 'for why they cannot' (policy responsibility of cabinets). In my opinion, this approach to the study of policy agendas is particularly fruitful, since it allows to combine (instead than just opposing) two traditional approaches to the study of policy priorities: partisan and non-partisan accounts of policy agendas. Hence, I now move to focus on contributions that have tried to identify these different policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention. Building

on the foregoing approaches, Chapter 2 suggests a redefined theoretical framework to understand the composition of policy agendas.

Conclusions

In Chapter I introduced the concepts of policy agenda, policy problems, and issue attention and summarised existing accounts on the composition of policy agendas. In particular, two distinct traditions have been identified (the party-models and the public policy models) and the various schools of thought under these headings have been presented. Starting from this theoretical background, Chapter 2 proposes a third model to account for the content of the policy agenda. Instead of conceiving these two models as antithetic, I discuss how party-models are also part of the business of non-partisan problem solving, aiming at adding further complexity both to the original partisan and non-partisan perspectives. The theory developed in Chapter 2 suggests that policy outputs result from the translation of different interests in the policy agenda that do not follow the same agenda dynamics. I argue that a convincing theory of the composition of the policy agenda may result from integrating these two traditions. The literature review crystallises the intuition that policy agendas have to accommodate different policy problems, but not all issues can be processed by lawmakers in the same way. Not all policy problems may be prioritised or dismissed, and lawmakers have different incentives to prioritise or dismiss certain issues over others. Hence, I will now discuss why the structure of the policy agenda – i.e. the different types of policy problems to which lawmakers must pay attention – is so important for understanding the way in which governments process information and set their priorities.

CHAPTER 2

Competing pressures on the policy agenda: lawmakers as representatives and administrators

Partisan and public policy theories explaining law makers' priorities offer convincing arguments regarding the compositions of policy agendas that reflect strategic choices of elected parties and politicians to address different policy problems. The latter have been defined as the set of issues competing for policy attention and originating from electoral mandates and other information streams brought by various policy entrepreneurs (Baumgartner and Jones 2005). Yet, the way in which these issues compete for attention is still unclear. More precisely, it remains to be further explored how lawmakers conciliate electoral promises and other policy problems in everyday lawmaking. This calls for redefining the way in which policy agendas are studied, inspired by a renewed set of research questions: *How do lawmakers distribute their attention across different policy problems?*

More precisely, *how do policy responsibilities, electoral promises and public concerns enter everyday policymaking?* My theoretical framework proposes an explanation of the composition of policy agendas conceived to address these challenges attuned to partisan preferences, policy commitments, and public priorities. The most important claim of the theory is that policy agendas reflect the "responsible" and "representative" functions of lawmakers in representative democracies (Mair 2009). In this sense, once in office, lawmakers must build on electoral mandates but at the same time formulate policies that address "inherited" commitments and respond to public concerns. Performing this dual role allows lawmakers to appear as good administrators and to avoid future electoral sanctions. I argue that the link between electoral promises and policy agendas is mediated by the updating of policy problems in light of issues of public concern (related to new problems and changing contextual conditions) and the need to respect pending policy commitments. In this sense, policy agendas are the result of the way in which lawmakers "juggle" the balance between responsibility and representation, or in other words electoral mandates and other information streams, in order to produce public policies.

Having introduced in Chapter 1 the party mandate and public policy theories of the composition of the policy agenda, I discuss here how the problems brought by electoral mandates (discretionary problems), existing commitments (compulsory problems), and outside events can all impact lawmaking and, in particular, how they are processed to produce public policy. This theoretical framework is based on four major assumptions:

1) Broadly speaking, in contemporary democracies, lawmakers play two key functions: they represent voters' interests and they have the responsibility of administrating the state (Mair 2009). In this sense, policy agendas reflect this dual role of lawmakers as representatives and governors. Coherently, the policy agenda shall accommodate both policy problems related to the function of "representing" – hence originating from the formal chain of delegation (e.g. electoral mandates) and emerging public concerns, and from demands from principals outside the formal chain of delegation related to the function of "governing" (e.g. policy commitments). The first function allows lawmakers to represent voters' interests and avoid electoral sanctions. The latter allows them to be responsible administrators and avoid illegal decision-making.

2) Based on party-theories of policymaking, I expect that lawmakers try to push their electoral promises in the policy agenda. In doing so, they adjust issue attention in the policy agenda in order to better process information and assure re-election.

3) Based on public policy-theories of decision-making, I expect that, on the one hand, lawmakers have to respond to existing commitments. On the other, they also have to respond to emerging problems in the society. In doing so, they adjust issue attention in the policy agenda to avoid "reckless or illegal decision-making" (Mair 2009 :12) and to address public concerns.

4) Lawmakers are policy-, office-, and vote-seeking. When they face a trade-off between these objectives, they are expected, in line with the argument of Katz and Mair (1995) and because winning elections and seizing power are necessary to implement policies, to privilege office and votes over policy.

Lawmakers pursue policy programmes according to internal and strategic considerations. In this framework, decision-makers have a set of priorities that they address in the electoral campaign, and which they advertise in the programmes of their party and will try to implement once in power. Governments are aware that if this does not happen, they may be sanctioned by the voters and the government may grind to a halt. However, for lawmakers, time and agenda space are scarce resources (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Cox 2006; Adler and Wilkerson 2013), so that decision-makers in office cannot deal with the whole set of policy problems that the country faces, but have to set priorities for legislative action. In addition, policymaking does not "restart" from scratch at every election, but each government inherits certain "responsibilities" from previous ones, here understood as commitments and programmes that need to be accommodated by the current policy agenda. Hence decision-makers have to balance their desire to address policy problems emerging from their electoral mandates with a need to continuously adapt their priorities to existing policy commitments and in response to changes of the political context. According to my model there are two major competing pressures on lawmakers' attention. They originate from the dual function of lawmakers as representatives and as administrators: discretionary problems and compulsory problems. To state it simply, parliaments' priorities result from the interaction between compulsory and discretionary problems that must be addressed in the policy agenda for governing parties to be re-elected and for policymaking not to stop.

Deconstructing the policy agenda: discretionary, compulsory and public matters

The idea that there are competing pressures on lawmakers' attention is not new for political scientists. In his pioneering study on the agenda of the US Senate, Walker (1977) describes the Senate's agenda as reflecting different sets of policy problems ranging from "required" to "chosen" matters as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Walker's typology of issues on the Senate's Agenda

Required ←—————————————————————————————→ **Discretionary**

Periodically	Sporadically	Crisis and	Chosen
Recurring	Recurring	pressing	Problems
Problems	Problems	Problems	
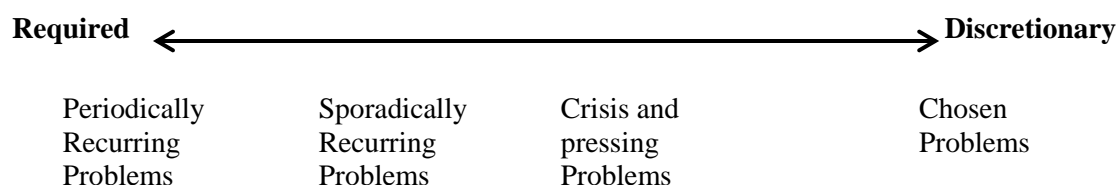
Source: Walker 1977

In his theory of problem-selection, Walker explains that the composition of the policy agenda depends on the way in which senators allocate their attention between these sets of problems considering that the time and resources at their disposal are limited. In Walker's understanding, the first set of "required issues" are those with which "the Senate is required to deal, either by law or political necessity" (Walker 1977: 425), therefore they are predictable from past decisions. For example, according to Walker the budgetary process, the annual appropriations, the modifications of exiting statutes produce a big "periodically *(and predictable)* recurring agenda" (Walker 1977: 425). The second set of issues are the "discretionary issues", which according to Walker depend on the activism of the Senators "engaged in promoting (*few*) proposals for change" (Walker 1977: 426). According to Walker, in the Senate agenda, discretionary problems compete with required problems for attention "to overcome the natural tendency of legislatures to become mainly deliberative, passive bodies" (Walker 1977: 426).

This agenda scarcity assumption that appears in Walker's research is based on the idea that lawmakers face a "constant pressure on their time" (Döring 1995: 223) with the result that governments are often exposed to many more demands than they can reasonably expect to deal with. Agenda scarcity has important implications for the composition of policy agendas if there is not enough time to deal with every possible policy problem, namely: what are the issues that will be addressed? Walker's answer is quite straightforward. Given that required issues *have* to be addressed, the Senate's possibility to address discretionary issues is limited. Walker's intuition has also been discussed by Kingdon who in a similar fashion presented two possible "windows of opportunity" for policy change in the American Congress (Kingdon 1995: Ch.8). Kingdon distinguishes between "*predictable* policy windows" (such as the expiration of a programme, or the annual State of the Union address by the President), and

"*unpredictable* policy windows" (i.e. external and unpredictable events). According to Kingdon, predictable or unpredictable policy problems offer lawmakers the possibility to advance their policy preferences (Kingdom 1995: 16). Recently, Walker's typology has been updated and validated empirically in a study on the American Congress by Adler and Wilkerson (2013). The more recent typology of issues competing for lawmakers' attention is represented below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Adler and Wilkerson's typology of issues on the Congress' Agenda

Compulsory ◄───► **Discretionary**

| Recurring issues | Important issues | Ordinary issues | Minor issues |
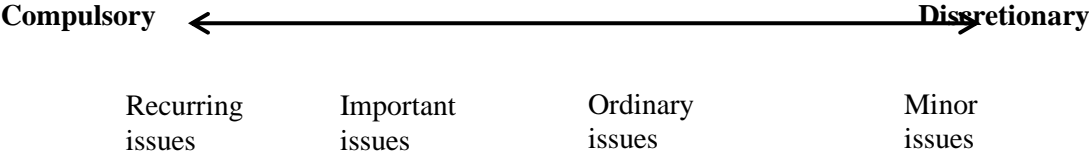
Source: Adler and Wilkerson 2013

In this issue typology, policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention range from "compulsory" to "discretionary". Here, the demands of compulsory issues limit the room to address discretionary issues and exhibit different agenda-setting characteristics. This latter typology is similar to the original one – even if the authors propose a more nuanced interpretation of "required" issues that they term "compulsory issues". In the US context, they consider as "compulsory" those issues that are predictable and related to exogenous developments, existing policy programmes, and to the galaxy of the temporary legislation (temporary or short terms authorisations, appropriations, and policy renewals). In other words, according to this definition, compulsory issues include "all the bills that address recurring and pressing issues" (Adler and Wilkerson 2013: 49). Everything else is a "discretionary issue". The authors find that the compulsory issues represent an increasing portion of the Congress' agenda limiting the room for discretionary issues. The aim of my thesis is to apply this typology to the study of the composition of policy agendas in Western European democracies, in order to evaluate whether the same mechanism is at work. To achieve this goal, however, some adjustments from the original models are necessary. Based on previous research on the composition of the policy agenda by Walker (1977) and by Adler

and Wilkerson (2013), I have developed a stylised typology to describe the policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention in the policy agenda (Figure 3).

Figure 3: A typology of the issues that drive policy agendas

Compulsory $\longleftarrow$ ~~Dis~~cretionary

| Issues originating from | Issues originating from | Issues originating from |
| Existing policy commitments | public debate | electoral promises |
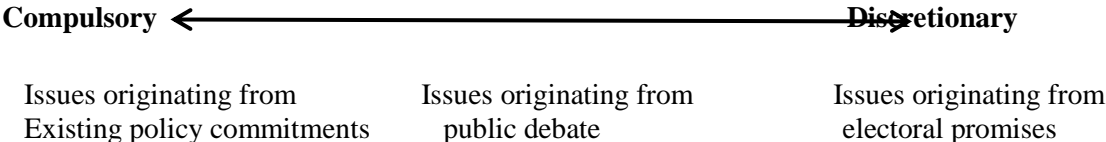
In my typology, competition for attention in the policy agenda results from the tension between the dual function that lawmakers perform as "representative and responsible" administrators (Mair 2009). These are the keys "to the legitimation of representative government in democratic political systems" (Mair 2009 : 5)". Even if tracing normative implications of this goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, it should be acknowledged that the dangers of performing this dual role are high. Without their representative function, lawmakers would lose one of their key claims to legitimacy: "They might well be able to represent without governing, but they have difficulty when they seek to govern without representing. […] Without representation, it is difficult to make the case for privileging parties above administrators and experts, however effective they might be at managing government." (Mair 2009: 10).[1]

Discretionary problems or law-makers as representatives

A first set of policy problems competing for attention on policy agendas are what I call the discretionary issues, i.e. *a set of issues reflecting the electoral mandates of the governing party/ies and the preferences of their constituency* hence originating from the formal chain of delegation (i.e. elections). In this sense, discretionary problems are the issues originating from the function of lawmakers to represent voters' concerns.

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[1] For a more exhaustive normative account of the consequences of the tension between responsible and representative functions of lawmakers see the literature review in: Froio and Little (2014).

Partisan promises are likely to enter the policy agenda for three main reasons linked to the *instrumental* use that parties may make of the policy agenda: electoral reciprocity, electoral profitability, and party discipline. The first one (electoral reciprocity) is the most obvious: if voters see that parties have done what they promised, then they will return the favour by voting for them again. This is the classic "party mandate" assumption presented in Chapter 1.

The second one (electoral profitability) is always linked to electoral reasons, but in this case it concerns the "jumping on the bandwagon" effect of a very popular issue. As studies on party competition have illustrated (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010), if an issue that is not amongst parties' priorities becomes salient in the electoral campaigns or in the parliamentary debates, then parties would have the incentive to adopt it, if they deem it profitable for electoral reasons.

Finally, the third reason why party agendas enter the policy agenda, in my view, is linked to party discipline. As the literature on the politics of coalition has often shown (Laver 1998; Mitchell 1999; Martin et al. 2004), when parties are in power they have to bargain and negotiate in order to maintain their position. To preserve an "equilibrium", parties have to endorse issues that in other circumstances they might have avoided, or dismiss other issues that may be extremely conflicting. Therefore, parties may use the "discretionary" section of the policy agenda as a "sweetener" or a "sop" for their allies and/or opponents, but also as a powerful tool for blackmail. Clearly, there may be other possible sections and/or sub-sections of the discretionary issues to those detailed here. Yet, it seems that the way in which partisan agendas enter the policy agenda generally follows one of these three categories, both in systems with a single-party government or a coalition. Having clarified the possible reasons why parties' electoral promises should enter policy agendas, I now move on to specify what drives this discretionary portion of the policy agenda, highlighting the role of policy problems brought by the majority party government and opposition.

Majority party/government issues are the discretionary problems that are emphasised by the majority party/government. Those are the policy problems that parties, once in power, want to advocate for at least two main reasons. First, these issues represent the interests of their constituencies and the most salient points of their programmes. In other words, parties will have some "preferred issues" that they want to emphasise for ideological, strategic or issue ownership reasons (Budge 1994; Petrocik 1996). Second, voters recognise the expertise of this party (and not another) regarding these issues (Sniderman et al. 1991; Lodge, Taber, Galonsky 1999; Huckfeldt 2001). For example, following party mandate theories of policy making described in Chapter 1, one can suppose that for a social democratic party, social

policy would be a "preferred" issue and its voters will expect this party to include it on the policy agenda. Conversely, for a moderate-right party, defence is likely to be among the "preferred" issues. In addition, existing contributions on the influence of partisan preferences on policies have proved that governing parties may also respond strategically to the *issues brought by their opponents* in order to capture support from across the political spectrum (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010) but also to avoid issues that may be problematic for their reputation (Damore 2004; Sides 2007). To say this in broader terms, policy agendas respond to the interactions between majority and opposition preferences resulting from party competition and electoral profitability (Walgrave and van Aelst 2006; Strömbäck and Nord 2006).

According to classic studies on party mandate, the extent to which partisan preferences reflect the policies implemented is likely to depend on the institutional configuration in which parties govern (Schmidt 1996; 2002). Scholars of electoral mandates (Klingemann et al. 1994: 17-19) have argued that the impact of parties on policies has to be stronger in majority-party systems where clarity of responsibility is higher (Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999), than in multiparty coalition systems where the governing parties are required to negotiate their policy priorities with coalition partners. In my sample, the United Kingdom is the archetypical majoritarian democracy, characterised (for the period considered) by single-party governments, where high clarity of responsibility should boost partisan influence on policy. France's two-round majoritarian electoral system is strongly disproportional, but does not yield as clear majorities. Spain and Denmark both have parliamentary governments with proportional electoral systems. However they differ in terms of government type. In Spain, even if minority governments have been frequent, the strongly varying magnitude of constituencies makes it a more majoritarian example than Denmark, where there is a long tradition of minority governments that are often coalitions, diminishing the clarity of responsibility of lawmakers. Hence, according to existing theories, stronger partisan effects shall appear in more majoritarian contexts with a smaller number of parties represented in government.

Another condition that should be taken into account when assessing the influence of discretionary issues on policy agenda is related to electoral expectations and election proximity. Following the party mandate literature, electoral expectations and the timing of the mandate affect the incentives for lawmakers to prioritise discretionary problems in the policy agenda. Elections adjust lawmakers' behaviour and the logics of "electoral business cycles" originating from electoral proximity (Blais and Nadeau 1992; Schultz 1995) may lead

lawmakers focusing on re-election to manipulate the content of the policy agenda to favour their chances of re-election, in particular at the beginning of their mandates. During this 'honeymoon' period in the aftermath of their election, representatives are more likely to pass policies coherent with electoral promises, while this is likely to regress in the middle of the electoral cycle (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995) and to increase again during the lead up to a new election (Tufte 1978). In other words, legislating on discretionary issues is more likely when elections are impending since responsiveness is affected by the electoral cycle (Canes-Wrone 2006). From this section of the theory I draw a first set of hypotheses that will be further specified and tested in Chapter 4 (addressing country dynamics) and Chapter 5 (focusing on issue dynamics).

Compulsory problems or lawmakers as administrators

Another set of problems competing for lawmakers' attention includes what I call *compulsory issues, i.e. a set of customary and often mechanically performed policy outputs resulting from principals outside the formal chain of delegation*. Unlike discretionary problems that are brought to the policy agenda due to the necessity of lawmakers to deliver on their electoral mandates, compulsory problems are brought to the policy agenda by the necessity to conform to existing rules to avoid illegal decision-making. In this sense they are "commitments" that mediate the link between discretionary issues brought by party platforms and policy outputs. For each government there are certain commitments that simply cannot be avoided. The policy responsibilities of governments derive from the necessity to conform to previous decisions, established procedural norms and practices (Birch 1964; Mair 2009), or policy inheritance (Rose 1990) in order to avoid "reckless or illegal decision-making" (Mair 2009: 12). Hence, policy commitments mean abiding by the "rulings and procedures" of multiple new principals, such as non-majoritarian and supranational institutions – including EU institutions – to which governments have obligations (Mair 2009: 13; Mair 2013: Ch. 4).

In all political systems, "every government inherits a very large number of open-ended commitments" (Rose 1996: 178) that lay the foundations for part of the activities of whoever will come after it. For Rose and Davies, this is particularly evident in post-war Britain when the Conservative governments of the 1950s accepted Labour's post-war reconstruction measures as part of the status quo. The legacy of commitments, however, is not only circumscribed to post-war periods, and it is not only generated by national boundaries, but also by transnational binders

(Rose 2014). The legacy of past choices and the necessity to conform to established procedures continues to exist under new forms in almost all existing countries. Let us consider for example the case where a country is selected to host a major sporting event, for example, the Olympic Games or a World Cup. In this case, significant logistical and financial efforts are demanded and this country will have some fixed policy deadlines (and a long policy legacy) before and after the event. Other possible examples include fiscal agreements that regulate spending commitments and debt, unemployment levels, or even a military alliance (such as NATO) that commits a country to fulfil the goals identified in international treaties[2].

Several others may be mentioned and might fit in this archetypal category, yet in European polities the membership of the European Union (EU) represents an intuitive and exemplary (even if not unique) source of policy commitments for national governments. In this case, the doctrine of the *acquis communautaire* requires that once an EU policy is enacted, each member state (MS) must accept it even if the approval was reached by a predecessor government of a different party or a policy was adopted long before it joined (Nugent 2010). As Rose (2013: 5) points out: "The cumulative growth in EU treaties and legislation makes the *acquis* a significant constraint on a newly elected national government. It is not only faced with the legacy of its domestic predecessors but also with a legacy of past EU decisions that it cannot reverse". Being a member of the EU implies conforming national legislation to the decisions that are taken at the EU level, to achieve policy convergence among Member States (MSs). Hence, as a result of EU membership, important portions of national legislation follow some forms of "external input" (Papadopoulos 2013: 80). As highlighted by Hix and Høyland "the EU Treaty and the practices and norms that have evolved around how the EU works […] have established a clear division of competences between the EU and its Member States" (2013: 3).

EU law enters national polities in different ways. Some instruments are indirect (for example, policy convergence or voluntary agreements such as the Bologna process to uniform higher education systems). Others are direct (such as the legal instruments of the EU). The EU organisation and functioning is very legalistic and European integration has been largely achieved via legal instruments: regulations, recommendations, directives, and decisions. How demanding an EU commitment is for domestic lawmakers is likely to depend on the type of legal act addressed to MSs to achieve the goals fixed by the EU treaties, and on the policy

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[2] While the characteristics of predictability are shared by all compulsory problems, it should be acknowledged that compulsory problems may differ from one other, with some being more subject than others to politicisation, i.e. their exploitation by parties to obtain electoral benefits and avoid burdens. Either way, policy attention (and timely actions) are required.

area considered. Concerning the former, some acts are binding and others are not, and some are directly applicable (i.e. without needing a formal timely transposal into domestic legislation) and others are not. According to the treaties of the Union, the EU adopts legislation that MSs then implement. The goals set by the treaties are achieved by different legal acts: regulations, directives, decisions (which are binding acts), and recommendations and opinions (which are non-binding acts).[3] Among the binding acts, however, only directives are indirectly applicable, in the sense that they demand a formal transposition into domestic legislation and they set deadlines for that transposition (in general 5 years). However, directives leave the decision for how they must be implemented to the MSs. Differently, regulations and decisions are directly applicable and hence do not need deadlines or timely policy activities. Opinions and recommendation are instead non-binding acts and they do not create any legal obligation on the MSs.

Apart from the type of legal act, how demanding an EU commitment is for domestic legislature is also likely to depend on the policy area considered given that there is a division of competences between the EU and its Member States. This was set for the first time by the Treaty of Maastricht (1993), which introduced the so-called "Pillar structure" of division of competences, and has recently been modified by the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) when, for the first time, competences have been extended to a broader set of policy areas. In this sense, the current division of competences did not change radically the pre-existing division, but it specifies better the original Maastricht ones. Thus, sectors that in the Treaty of Maastricht were under the "first pillar, e.g. community integration method" (with stronger autonomy from the EU in cooperation with MSs), are now part of the "shared competences". For example, this is the case with Environmental policy and Agriculture.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) clearly defines the division of competences between the union and the MSs. The TFEU makes the distinction between exclusive (Art. 3 of the TFEU), shared (Art. 4 TFEU), and supporting competences (Art. 6 TFEU). Exclusive competences are those over which only the EU can legislate and adopt binding acts. Shared competences are those over which the EU and the MSs are authorised to adopt binding legislation and, finally, supporting competences are those over which the EU might intervene only to complement the decisions of the MSs. Policy areas that are among the shared and exclusive competences (such as Agriculture, Environment, Transport and Energy) are the ones where EU commitments are more visible in domestic agendas, as has been highlighted by comparative

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[3] For a detailed definition of each of these acts see: http://europa.eu/eu-law/decision-making/legal-acts/index_en.htm. Consulted 13.09.2014.

studies on the transposal of EU legislation (for an overview, see the argument of Brouard et al. 2012). In this sense, policy agendas are shaped by the non-electoral mandate communicated by the EU directives.

To summarise, I define as "compulsory issues" those that originate from legally binding, and timely policy commitments originating from the EU directives. In this sense, they are also predictable since they have to be accomplished into fixed-terms to avoid illegal decision-making. In this understanding, the EU directives constitute a non-electoral mandate that signals compulsory issues that must be attended by domestic legislators in due time, and that may mediate the transmission of discretionary issues in the policy agenda. From this section of the theory I draw a second set of hypotheses that will be further specified and tested in Chapter 6.

Beyond elections and commitments: responding to "real world" events

Delivering on electoral mandates and respecting existing commitments however is not the whole story if one wants to understand the composition of policy agendas. Decision-making takes place in the real world and lawmakers are exposed to disruption from policy problems on a daily basis. While parties in government may be seeking to deliver on electoral platforms and existing policy commitments, the necessities of competent and responsible government (but also the fear of future electoral sanctions) require them to be adaptive to the emergence of new policy problems originating from the societal agenda.

Giving attention to a problem that becomes particularly visible in the public debate may also be profitable to avoid losing popularity between elections. For instance, this is the strategy that Bill Clinton used with the Republican issue of Crime in the 1992 US Presidential elections. The same happened in France in the 2007 Presidential elections when Sarkozy used the Front National issue of "immigration" to build up electoral support at the expense of Le Pen. Media coverage plays a very important role in shaping the visibility of systemic issues since it offers lawmakers additional information about voters' preferences between elections. Studies of agenda representation assess the degree to which the policy priorities of a government correspond to the issue priorities of the public (McCombs and Shaw 1993; Dearing and Rogers 1996; Ghanem 1996) across different domains and institutional venues of decision-making (Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Jones et al. 2009; Chaqués Bonafont and Palau 2011; Lindeboom 2012). This representational relationship can be conceived as a

dynamic process, with public priorities and the policy agenda equilibrating in response to one another over time (Jennings and John 2009; Bevan and Jennings 2013). Dynamic agenda representation implies that the priorities of policymakers respond to the concerns of citizens, selectively assigning their attention across issues and dealing with policy problems on their behalf (Bevan and Jennings 2013). Distinct from indirect representation via the mechanism of elections (i.e. mandates), direct adjustment of the policy agenda in reaction to changes in public priorities is expected due to the logic of 'rational anticipation' (Stimson et al. 1995), as policymakers anticipate future electoral costs of unpopular decisions (via retrospective voting). This gives rise to a continuous process of adaptation in response to public concerns (Froio et al. 2014).

Reflecting both the rational anticipation of future election outcomes (Stimson et al. 1995) and external pressures and disruption from policy problems on a day-to-day basis, the proposed theory posits that the policy agenda shall be responsive to the current issue priorities of the public. The latter can be approximated to the supply of information about new policy problems on the societal agenda in general, thus it reflects both the agenda-setting power of the mass media and pressure from public opinion. Yet the literature studying the relationship between media and political agendas has highlighted that media influence on lawmakers' attention is conditional. First, it depends on the type of issue considered – with sensationalistic issues (such as Crime) exhibiting a stronger agenda-setting power (Soroka 2002). Secondly the agenda-setting power of the media depends on the timing of the mandate and – somewhat counter-intuitively – lawmakers are more responsive to the media's priorities in non-electoral times (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006 ; Sciarini and Tresch 2013). Similarly, the relationship between media coverage and policy agendas is shaped by the interactions with the preferences of the opposition parties, that are less constrained by the responsibilities of governing than governing parties and hence may be much more reactive to media coverage (Sciarini and Tresch 2013; Thesen 2013) .

In this framework, the linkage between electoral promises and policy agendas is also mediated by issues that capture public attention, or in other words, that originate from the "real world". This "systemic" component is very important since it allows us to bridge static electoral promises and policy commitments to more dynamic public concerns. Policy agendas carry out the discretionary policy problems of the governing parties, of the opposition and of the public as those collectively outline an agenda for strategic policy action. From this section of the theory I draw a third set of hypotheses that will be further specified and tested in Chapter 7.

Conclusions

Existing contributions formalise the intuition that lawmakers need to address diverse policy problems, and that legislators are motivated to tackle them by various incentives. Legislators must reconcile problems that derive from their dual function of representatives and administrators. In this sense, policy agendas must accommodate different types of issues. As representatives, lawmakers are under pressure to respond to the electoral promises made to their constituency. In this sense electoral platforms reflect discretionary issues, which are the source of party reputations and images. However the transmission of discretionary issues in the policy agenda is mediated by other problems that lawmakers face as state administrators. In this sense, as responsible administrators, lawmakers have to respond to existing obligations derived from longstanding commitments, and to emerging problems in the society. Binding decisions adopted at the EU level via directives constitute an important heritage for domestic legislatures, and public expectations constitute another important source of information. Rational anticipation of future electoral costs and policy responsibility pressure policymakers to respond to these issues that are constantly in conflict.

In government, representatives must balance their desire to deliver on electoral mandates with a need to continuously adapt their policy priorities, both to existing commitments and in response to changes in public concerns that lead to the emergence of new problems. Elected officials also have incentives to respond to issues prioritised by the platforms of their rivals. In a nutshell, this theoretical framework constitutes an expectation about the competing pressures on the policy agendas of lawmakers. The theory suggests that lawmakers are required to deliver on their electoral mandates (while being attentive of the opposition); and on policy commitments deriving from EU demands while at the same time updating priorities in response to more immediate matters of public concerns that emerge on the agenda abruptly, and are sensationalistic.

The fact that lawmakers must divide their scarce attention between competing alternatives has important implications for theories of representative governments. Lawmakers' ability to stick to their mandate largely depends on how they balance their attention between their electoral promises, the promises of their opponents, the existing commitments, and the issues salient to the public at the present time. Lawmakers face various

competing concerns, some of which may require them to tear up their pledges, others which may require them to postpone existing commitments. Given the importance of such a topic, existing research on the composition of the policy agenda has tackled these questions – mostly by assessing the extent to which electoral platforms, or the agenda of the public influence policymaking. In this dissertation I try to integrate the two and move one step further. I introduce another source of policy problems (existing commitments) that mediate the transmission of partisan promises and of the agenda of the public in public policy.

CHAPTER 3

Measuring parties' electoral promises, pending commitments, public concerns and policy agendas: rationale, data and methodology

In this chapter I discuss how the theory presented in Chapter 2 can be addressed empirically. As illustrated in the literature review (Chapter 1), existing studies focusing on the composition of policy agendas have developed different approaches. This research builds on from an approach that has been developed by scholars associated with the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) that has been applied both to study single countries (see for a selection of case studies, Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014) and in comparative studies (such as Bevan and Jennings 2010; Jennings et al. 2011; John et al. 2011; Mortensen et al. 2011). In general, the CAP method is to observe the relationship between issue emphasis in different policy areas in party manifestos (or other venues) and the proportion of passed legislation (or another proxy of the policy agenda) on the corresponding policy areas. I use the same approach which enables me to compare systematically the policy content of party platforms, policy commitments, public concerns, and passed legislation. At the same time, I depart from existing CAP studies in the way in which policy commitments are operationalised since I combine existing CAP datasets on the policy content of the EU directives with a new index of EU acquiescence that is used to measure the extent to which the demands addressed by the EU to the Member States (MSs) in different policy areas are 'absorbed' in domestic policy agendas.

In this framework, my research makes use of datasets capturing the policy content of diverse agendas in four western democracies (Denmark, France, Spain and the United Kingdom) between 1980 and 2008. The coding scheme used has been developed by the Comparative Agendas Project and it is summarised in Table 3.1 below. Starting from 1980, I consider passed legislation to approximate the content of policy agendas, party platforms to measure the electoral promises of the parties, the EU directives as a proxy of policy commitments, and media to control for public concerns. In this chapter I discuss the rationale

(and limitations) of studying the composition of policy agendas following the CAP approach, present the data in detail, and describe the coding scheme focusing on each data series in turn. For the reader unfamiliar with the CAP, I begin by providing a short outline of the project, including a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of using this approach to study politics. Afterwards, I introduce each data series and present the models for testing different accounts of the composition of policy agendas. Before closing the chapter, I discuss the case selection of this research, which building on a small-N of countries (coherently with existing agenda contributions) privileges a focus on issue attention to different policy areas instead of a focus on institutional variations across countries (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014: 9-11).

Table 3.1: Comparative Agendas Project: major codes

Code	Name
1	Economics
2	Civil Rights
3	Health
4	Agriculture
5	Labour
6	Education
7	Environment
8	Energy
10	Transport
12	Justice and Crime
13	Social Welfare
14	Housing
15	Banking and Finance
16	Defence
17	Science and technology
18	Trade
19	Foreign Affairs
20	Government operations
21	Lands and water management

The Comparative Agendas Project : an introduction

The Comparative Agendas Project (www.comparativeagendas.info) originates from the Policy Agenda Project created by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones in the 1990s to

explore lawmakers' priorities and the dynamics of policy change in the US. Early case studies on the US (e.g. Baumgartner and Jones 2002; Jones et al. 2003; Jones and Baumgartner 2004) culminated in the book *The Politics of Attention* (Jones and Baumgartner 2005) that more recently has been followed by studies of policy agendas in other countries (for a review see Baumgartner et al. 2006; and more recently Green-Pedersen et al. 2014). With the aim of exploring policy-agenda dynamics in the US, Baumgartner and Jones collected longitudinal data on Congressional hearings, opinion polls, interest groups and print media that have been coded according to a codebook[4] enabling scholars to classify the content of each document according to 19 categories (or policy issues) capturing major aspects of public policy from the economy and defence, to education and beyond, as well as a set of subtopics within these categories, which now number 225.[5] Using the original codebook as a guideline, several national projects have been developed and today the Comparative Agendas Project includes 15 countries within the European Union (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and outside it (Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, Turkey and the US). In addition, a special EU Policy Agenda Project has been created to focus precisely on the policy agendas of the Union.[6]

The CAP has developed not only as a comparative test of the original theory of the punctuated equilibrium, but it has also moved more in the direction of the traditional comparative-politics literature focusing on political parties, elections, the functioning of political institutions and (very recently) interest groups and less-institutionalised actors, such as social movements (see Jennings and Saunders 2014; Walgrave et al. 2014), to account for the influence of political actors that are constantly at work to influence policy – not only during elections.[7] Today the Comparative Agendas Project results from a tight collaboration

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[4] The original codebook of the Policy Agendas Project is available at: http://www.policyagendas.org/. Consulted 23.04.2014.

[5] The Policy Agendas Project has produced important information about the functioning of US politics in particular concerning policy change in different policy areas (e.g. see the edited volume by Baumgartner and Jones 2002 presenting contributions on: health care, national security, and telecommunications), about the dynamics of policymaking in the US Congress (Adler and Wilkerson 2013) and in Congress Committees (Adler 2002), and about the relationship between the agendas of the Congress and of the Supreme Court (Baumgartner and Gold 2002). The publications related to the project continue to grow and it seems that there is still a lot to be learned from coding policy documents (for reviews see Baumgartner et al. 2011).

[6] More information about the Comparative Agendas Project and country project is available at http://www.comparativeagendas.info/. Consulted 23.04.2014.

[7] Adaptations of the original US codebook and data series have been necessary not only because certain aspects of the US political system have no direct parallel in other polities, but also because US federalism originates a range of State activities between federal and state governments that can be hardly found in other polities, yet comparative adaptations need to be sensitive to these specificities. In addition, in other political systems than the US party politics seems to play a stronger role in policymaking, hence data on parties that were not considered as particularly important in the original project have been included elsewhere.

between several research teams in different countries interested in studying agenda-setting dynamics under the understanding that the way in which political systems process information is crucial for comprehending public policy and policy change (Walgrave and Green-Pedersen 2014).

Starting from these ideas the CAP country teams collect similar data capturing political attention to issues in different countries. The venues whose issue attention is coded (hereinafter referred to as "agendas") may vary from country to country depending on the interests of each research team (for example, party manifestos, budgets, media, passed legislation, government decisions). The periods covered may also vary. For certain countries some agendas are coded for the entire period after World War II, for others, agendas are coded for shorter periods. Being comparative in nature this contribution had to cope with both these limitations. First of all, to be reliable it had to include comparable agenda venues across countries, which generated a first limitation of the sample. Second, it had to focus on similar time spans to avoid bias; once again this is not homogeneous across all countries participating in the CAP.

Even acknowledging the influence of these comparative constraints on my research design, this does not mean that I developed the case selection of this study in an intellectual vacuum, as I will discuss in a specific section at the end of this chapter. The CAP has collected a great number of comparable times series of varying length on Danish, French, Spanish and British political institutions and actors extending the original US codebook to the four countries. The codebooks for each country are available on the website of the national projects, accessible from the official page of the Comparative Agendas Project (www.comparativeagendas.info). In this study I focus exclusively on the major code levels that are listed in Table 3.1.[8] To date, the Comparative Agendas Project has produced a series of relevant publications analysing the content and dynamics of policy agendas (see for an overview Baumgartner et al. 2006; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Chaqués and Palau 2011), media agenda (see Walgrave et al. 2008), budgetary agenda (see Breunig 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2010) partisan agenda (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Persico et al. 2012) as well as on the interactions among different institutional venues (Walgrave et al. 2006;

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[8] At the time of writing (September 2014) checks for comparative reliability of the data have been realised only for major policy categories, and not for policy subcategories. This is why the analysis relies exclusively on the former which may lead to broader approximation of the phenomena explored, a limitation that I shall consider when discussing the results.
Originally, the codebooks of the four countries exhibited some minor differences, hence to assure comparability certain topics have been omitted from the analysis and recoding operations have been realised following the procedures described in the Appendix to Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Jennings et al. 2009). My work is largely inspired by these contributions and it aims to nourish the debate tackling the dynamics of politics.

The CAP approach to the study of politics: limits and advantages

After having briefly introduced the CAP, the next step is to analyse the limits and advantages of this approach to the study of policy agendas. The original work by Baumgartner and Jones (2002 and 2003) and the recent accounts provided by the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al. 2006) share two core concepts. On the one hand, that issue attention (e.g. political attention to different issues) is among the most important processes in politics. On the other, that issues compete for attention given the fact that lawmakers' attention is selective and scarce due to the limits of human cognitive processing (Baumgartner and Jones 2005: 20). Together these two ideas have consequences for the way in which issues enter the agenda and become policies. Given that the main feature of the CAP approach to the study of policy agendas is its emphasis on issue attention, issue(s) attention is the basic unit of analysis in most of the empirical studies. In a very recent publication, agenda scholars define issue attention as the "tracer liquid" for the functioning of political systems (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014: 4). This issue focus is not arbitrary, quite the opposite, it derives from the theoretical assumption that politics is about competition for issue attention, and that political attention is required for any type of political action. In this sense, "focusing on issues allows us to study agenda setting, the crucial process of winnowing the number of potential issues to a workable amount of issues" (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014: 9). In this framework, an issue approach intuitively helps to understand how issue attention by an actor (or institution) is related/followed or leads to issue attention by another institution or actor.

Beyond sharing this common theoretical background, studies within the CAP also share a specific methodological approach. Notwithstanding a predetermined coding frame that has the risk of falling into the 'streetlight effect' trap, the coding system makes it possible to measure the content of policy agendas allowing the observation of how issue attention changes over time in different polities. Even if the political venues considered may be enlarged, the codebook may certainly be improved and it does not aim at providing the final word on how (and what) policies should be coded, it is also true that most political systems perform the same basic distinction between the simple agenda venues and policy areas

identified by the Comparative Agendas Project. Clearly, as highlighted in a literature review of the current state of public policy theories by John (2003), this theoretical and methodological approach faces important limitations. More precisely, the scope of the agenda-approach and the way in which most of these studies are operationalised remain limited to issue attention and do not inform about the type of decisions that are taken. In this sense, the CAP approach is mainly descriptive rather than predictive.

In this respect, for example, the CAP coding system measures the attention of the parliament, government, media, and political parties to specific areas of public policy, rather than capturing left-right positions on these issues. Hence, the scope of the approach is limited to issue attention and data is unable to capture whether the policy agenda moved to the right or to the left under different Prime Ministers, or under different party leaders, or whether the media tone or the public opinion on a certain policy issue was positive or negative. Yet, by limiting its scope exclusively to issue attention the data captures fully the salience of different policy areas in different institutional venues through the period considered. In this sense, for example, what is coded as a Transportation issue in passed legislation is also a Transportation issue in party manifestos and in the media. Beyond its undeniable limitations, the current coding system allows reliable quantitative (and qualitative) comparisons to be made between different agendas, over time and in a comparative perspective both across issues and across countries.

There is little doubt, however, that this largely quantitative approach leads to an oversimplification of the logics and dynamic of the political process and that each operationalisation of political dynamics produces gains and losses in terms of the validity and reliability of the results (Pétry and Collette 2009). Yet, the main advantage of an issue-attention approach for this study is that it allows comparability: "using the same currency: issue attention" (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014: 10) to compare across actors, institutions and political systems. It is true that focusing quantitatively on issue attention may lead to high approximation of the policy process, and the CAP approach favours a simplistic "more" or "less" understanding of attention, or more precisely a simple "amount of attention" approach. Yet, as this dissertation will show, this type of simple approach is useful to map issue attention across different institutional venues, longitudinally, across actors and policy areas, and it provides meaningful and interesting results concerning the macro-logics driving policy agendas in different countries. In the light of that, the validity of each of the measures that I will describe in this chapter may (and must) be debated – is the title of a law the best way to capture issue attention in legislation? What about laws that address different issues?

Are newspaper headlines sufficient to approximate issue attention in the media? What about newspaper partisanship? Are party manifestos a good proxy of partisan preferences even in non-electoral periods? Is salience without positioning enough to capture partisan preferences? My claim is that quantitative indicators of issue attention accounting for "how much attention" are a fairly good tool to gauge the way in which actors and institutions distribute attention.

If these reasons related to comparability are not fully convincing for the most exigent reader, then it is important to remember here that almost all the datasets used in this dissertation include the original text of the coded items (or a summary thereof) leaving room for qualitative and more in-depth assessments of the general quantitative trends highlighted in my research from which shortcomings of the macro-dynamics detected by this study may highly benefit. For these reasons, the methodology of this research follows the CAP guidelines on how agenda-setting dynamics may be studied, relying on issue attention as the basic unit of analysis across different agendas. Before presenting the models in the following chapters, I report summary statistics for each of the variables included in the study in the four countries. This will be useful to offer a first picture of the dynamics at stake. I present each dataset in detail, listing major differences such as the coding units. Particular detail is provided for political parties and EU directives. Not because they are more important than other data series, but rather because the party data are the pillar of the present research and their gathering represents an innovative contribution to the original US project and to the classic Comparative Manifestos Approach to the study of party preferences. Concerning the EU directives, the theoretical framework in which they are used to approximate policy commitments makes a more detailed discussion necessary.

The datasets and variables of this research

The analysis is based on data on passed legislation, party platforms, EU directives and media stories from 1980 to 2008 coded according to the policy content coding system of the Comparative Agendas Project. The datasets used for this study are listed in Table 3.2. [9]

Table 3.2: Summary of the data series used in this study

Country	Dataset name	Years	Unit of analysis
Denmark	Adopted bills*	1980-2007	Laws
France	Laws of the Fifth Republic	1980-2008	Laws
Spain	Laws	1982-2008	Laws
United Kingdom	Acts of the parliament	1980-2008	Laws
Denmark	Party manifestos	1980-2007	quasi-sentence
France	Party manifestos	1980-2007	quasi-sentence
Spain	Party manifestos	1980-2008	quasi-sentence
United Kingdom	Party manifestos	1980-2008	quasi-sentence
Denmark			
France			
Spain	EU directives	1980-2008	Directive
United Kingdom			
Denmark	Media_Radio news	1984-2003	Feature
France	Media_Le Monde	1981-2008	Front-page headlines
Spain	Media_El Pais	1996-2008	Front-page headlines
United Kingdom	Media_The Times	1980-2008	Front-page headlines

More information available at: www.comparativeagendas.info .
*From the original dataset, I consider only the adopted bills.

The dependent variable: the passed legislation as a measure of the policy agenda

Lawmaking provides opportunities both for agenda-setting and the signalling of the priorities of policymakers (e.g. Mayhew 1974; Schiller 1995), as well as for the enactment of

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[9] In addition to the datasets listed in Table 3.2, the Project also coded other data series. More information available at: www.comparativeagendas.info .

substantive policy outputs. In this sense, passed legislation is the main means through which the parliament enacts its agenda and is able to fulfil policy promises, policy commitments, and to respond to the public in the four countries. The reasons for privileging this specific agenda venue (and not, for example, that of the executive or the Head of State) are threefold. First, because existing case studies have proved that parliaments are the arena in which party interests should be more influent since it is here that government and opposition clash with each other (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Froio 2013). Second, passed legislation has been retained over other parliamentary activities (such as interpellations and questions) because the former approximates the 'real' parliamentary agenda, i.e. the enactment of substantive policy outputs. Whereas interpellations and questions represent a 'symbolic' parliamentary agenda not necessarily entailing tangible consequences of party government (Walgrave et al. 2014: 152). Finally, existing comparative contributions exploring the content of policy agendas in a comparative perspective mainly focus on executives' agendas (e.g. Mortensen et al. 2011). Despite some cross-national variation in the format, passed legislation represents a comparable function in the four systems. In this sense, passed legislation is a common form of policy agenda that can be used in comparative studies and that is consistent despite differences in political institutions.

For these reasons, the dependent variable used here is the policy content of the passed legislation (hereinafter referred to as policy agenda or lawmakers' priorities), as identified by the CAP and reported in Table 3.2. Each law is coded with a single code indicating the primary focus of the legislation. The unit of analysis is the proportion of adopted bills in a particular sector aggregated on a yearly basis.[10] For this dissertation the law dataset includes 13.529 laws from 1980 to 2008 distributed across countries as represented in Figure 3.1 below.[11]

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[10] According to the CAP coding protocol, all laws have been blind-coded by two or more researchers according to the content of the title of the law. Coders assigned a single major topic code to each law and, where appropriate, also a sub-topic code. This has led to 85 per cent inter-coder reliability and remaining cases have been solved by the project leaders. For each law, the original dataset provides also information about the day, month and year of promulgation of the law, its official ID, and the complete title of the law.

[11] The original dataset is available at http://www.agendas-france.fr/index.php?lang=en. Consulted 23.04.2014.

Figure 3.1: Agenda volume in four countries (1980-2008)
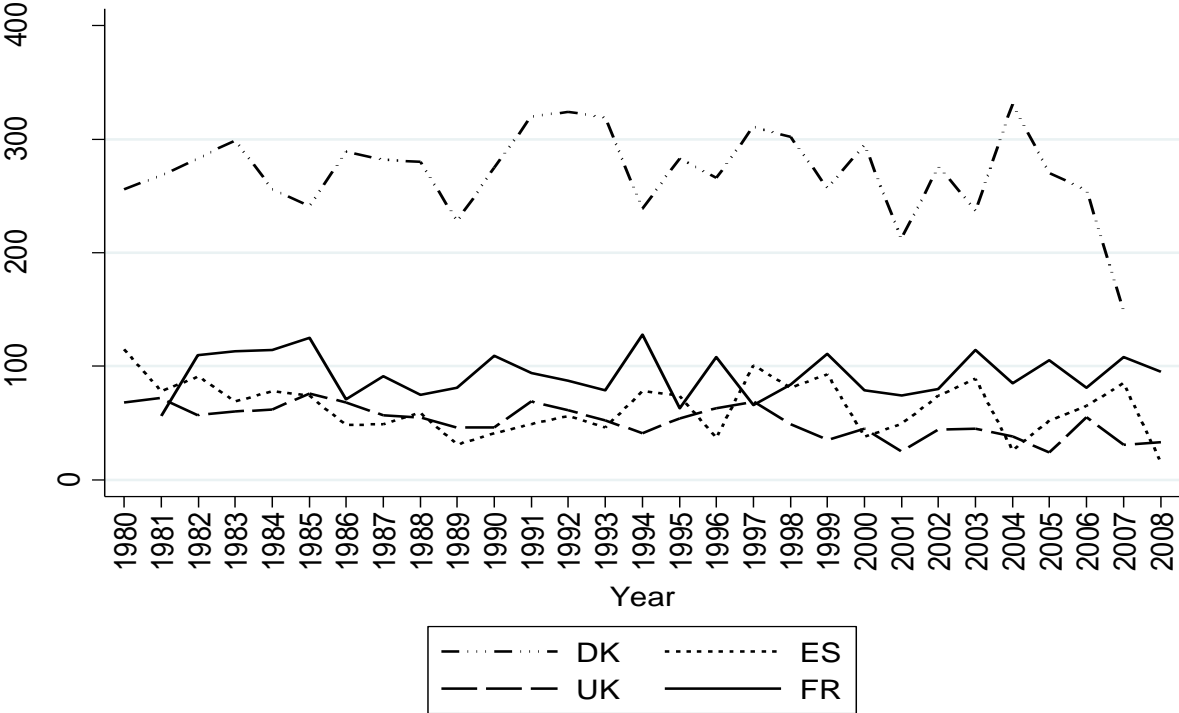
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the volume of the policy agenda across the four countries. The mean number of passed laws is (in descending order) 271 in Denmark, 92 in France, 63 in Spain, and 51 in the United Kingdom. This highlights a certain degree of cross-national variation in the size of the policy agendas across countries. The annual number of laws is also plotted over time in Figure 3.1. This shows a similar "cyclical" structure of the policy agendas characterised by recurrent variations in the time series that do not last for very long and are regular both in amplitude and in length. This suggests that both the volume and the format of the policy agenda are quite stable over time, both within and across countries. Concerning the content of policy agendas, Figure 3.2 compares issue attention in passed legislation of the four countries.

Figure 3.2: Issue attention in passed legislation of the four countries (1980-2008, %)
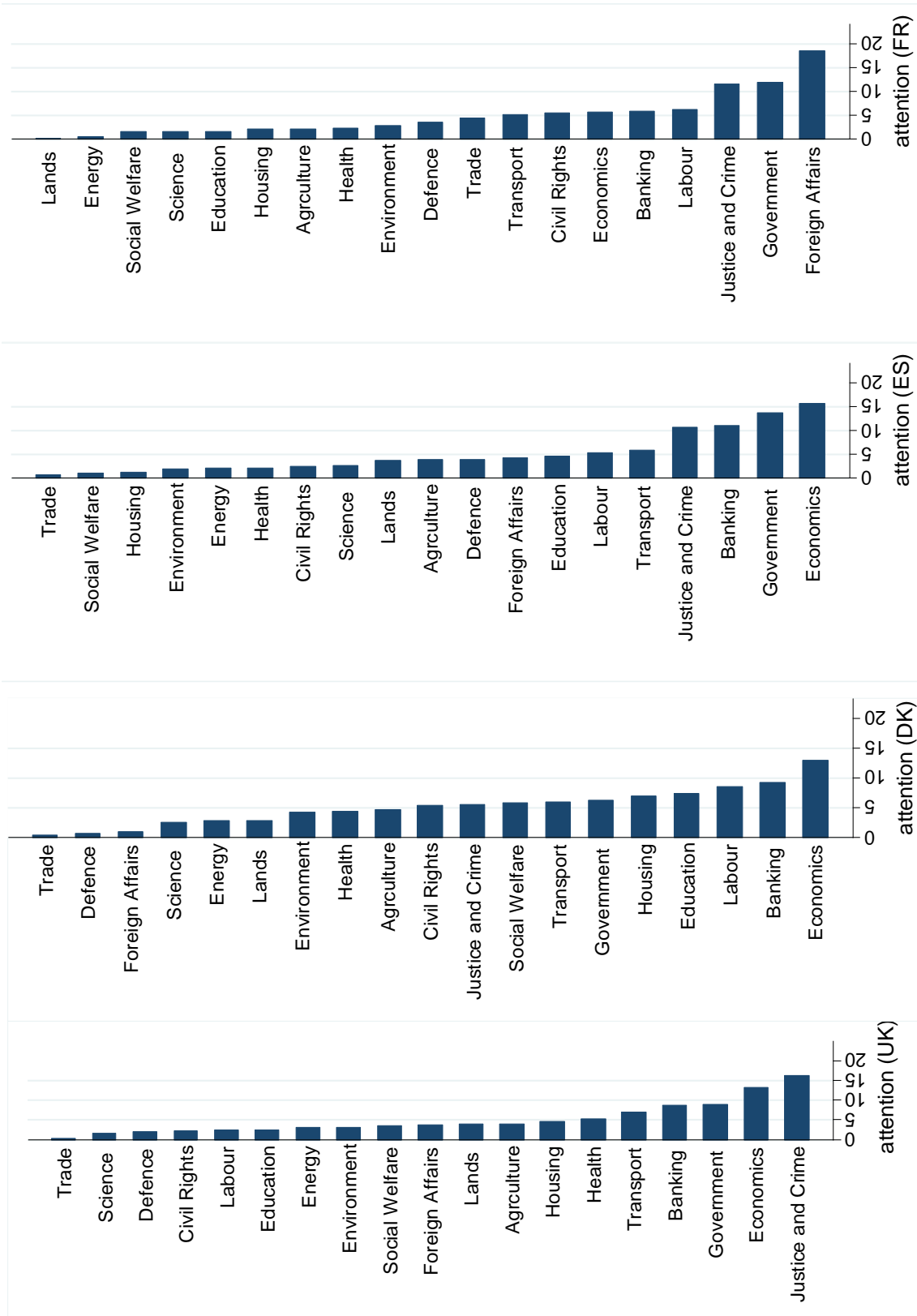
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

With small exceptions, Figure 3.2 reveals that patterns of attention are similar across countries with certain issues receiving little attention (such as Trade, Science, Lands and Water management) whereas others capture most of parliaments' attention (such as Government operations, Economics, Banking). This reveals a certain degree of cross-national similarity in the composition of the policy agendas in terms of distribution of attention. The standard error is high for all of these measures indicating high levels of issue volatility in the policy agenda, confirming what is highlighted in Figure 3.1., i.e., that its composition is relatively unstable across years, accommodating major changes in issue attention.

Independent variable: the party manifestos as a measure of partisan agendas

Party manifestos have been used as an important data source in political science for decades, and in particular after the development of the international research project known as the "Comparative Manifestos Project" (CMP) (cf. Budge et al. 2001). In my study, party manifestos approximate partisan electoral promises (hereinafter also referred to as partisan agenda or partisan promises), which represent a very important independent variable of this study. The manifestos data include the platforms of the governing party (i.e. the party of the Prime Minister) and the largest opposition party.[12] The research teams of the countries included in my study created a new dataset on the policy content of the election manifestos of political parties between 1980 and 2008 to map party election issue emphasis.[13] The text of each manifesto has been coded following the traditional quasi-sentence approach (Laver and Garry 2000; Laver 2001), with each quasi-sentence assigned a single unique topic code capturing its issue attention. A quasi-sentence is defined as an expression of a single policy idea or issue that does not necessarily imply a complete sentence but simply an argument (Volkens et al. 2002).[14]

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[12] The list of the names of each party by country is available in the Appendix of this Chapter.

[13] At the beginning of my dissertation, data on party manifestos were available only for Denmark and for the Spanish governing parties, i.e. the party of the Prime Minister. During these years (starting since my masters) I participated in the collection of party data for France, and more recently thanks to a generous research grant from the French Agency of Research (ANR) the French agendas team (Research Project EP-620) and the precious logistic support of Pepper Culpepper and Martina Selmi at the European University Institute I obtained funding to collect and code the data for the United Kingdom and for the Spanish opposition parties that are now included in this study.

[14] The challenge of the quasi-sentence approach with regards to reliability is that quasi-sentences require that coders will not only attribute to them the correct codes, but that coders will consistently delineate quasi-

The variable *partisan agendas*, as operationalised here, represents the proportion of quasi-sentences devoted to a particular issue in the electoral platform of the main governing party, i.e. the Prime minister's party (independent of whether this party holds a majority in the cabinet or not) and of the largest opposition party at the most recent election. Given the high degree of personalisation of politics and the central brokerage position of the Prime Minister, I consider her to be the single most important player in government. The original data are transformed into government/opposition manifestos based on the political affiliation of the Prime Minister or of the leader of the opposition. Figure 3.3 compares the composition of partisan agendas in the four countries under investigation between 1980 and 2008.

Figure 3.3: Issue attention in the partisan agendas of the four countries (1981-2008, %)
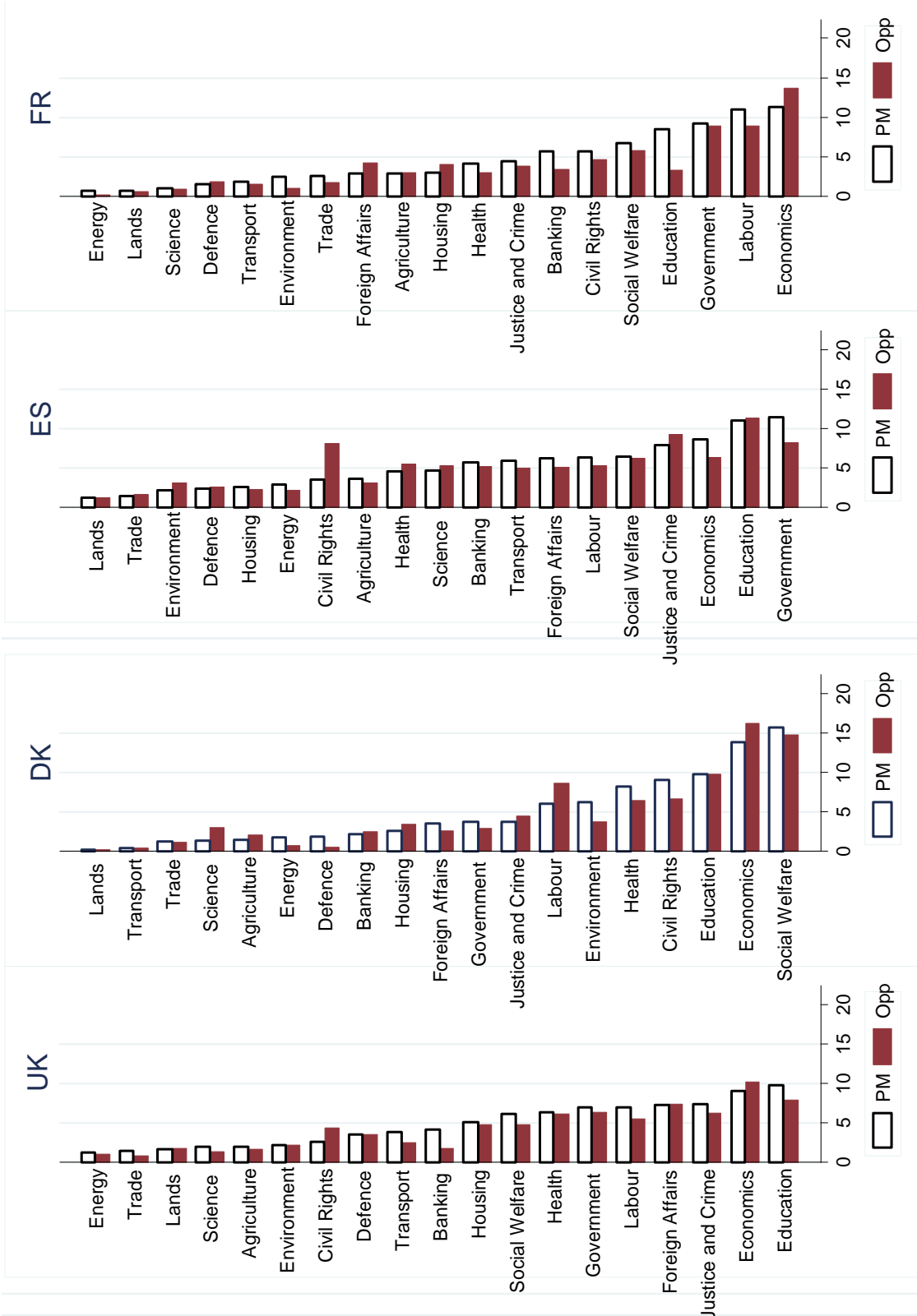
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

Similarly to the trends detected for the policy agenda, even the electoral priorities of the parties have an analogous composition – not only across countries but also in terms of issue attention across majority and opposition parties. Certain issues seem to capture partisan attention more than others in different contexts. In this sense, policy areas such as Economics and Education are particularly salient, both for governing and opposition parties. Whereas, issues such as Lands, Trade, and Energy have little salience in the four countries, both in the majority and in the opposition agendas. Differences in issue emphasis between the majority and opposition are minor and limited to a small number of issues across countries. A quick look at the standard deviations (not represented in the graph) suggests that partisan agendas are highly volatile for all policy areas, revealing that party preferences are particularly flexible from one election to the other in all countries. This preliminary description reveals that the content of both majority and opposition agendas are quite similar across the four countries and hence that majority and opposition parties campaign by emphasising similar issues rather than "switching" the focus of their attention.

Independent variable: EU directives to capture policy commitments

The agenda of the European Union (EU) has important consequences for Member States (MSs) that are expected to adapt existing policies to EU legislation. In this sense, EU directives are an important legal tool through which the EU drives policy adaptation and policy congruence among MSs. Even if directives approximate only a limited portion of the overall EU agenda (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 6) they have been selected since directives represent better than other sources of Communitarian law a list of "compulsory issues" that must be addressed in the policy agendas by MSs. In this study I use the dataset on the EU directives by the CAP (www.policyagendas.eu) to approximate commitments originating from the EU agenda. Following the general CAP scheme, coders assigned to each directive a single code capturing its issue attention. The unit of analysis is the proportion of directives adopted by the EU in a particular sector aggregated on a yearly basis.

As will be further detailed in Chapter 6, the binding nature of the directives for the Member States posits that their implementation must occur in "due time" and "correctly". In this understanding, non-compliance is costly both for the Member States (it implies damage to their reputation and credibility) and for the Union (since it implies that policies are not

delivered in the most effective way to everyone), (Konig and Luetgert 2008). Hence, one may argue that, differently to other legal instruments of the EU law, the directives are legally *binding* for the MSs and they must be *formally* transposed since when the EU adopts a new directive this directive needs to be formally transposed into national law before it can be implemented (Steunenberg 2006). Given these important characteristics, I consider that for MSs, transposing EU directives represents a compulsory and time-consuming policy activity that may influence the problem-solving capacity of MSs.

Unfortunately the CAP dataset on EU directives includes only a list of directives addressed to all Member States, without distinguishing among countries and without accounting for their transposal. To cope with this important limitation, the descriptive section of Chapter 6 relies also on a new indicator of acquiescence to EU directives for each MS, in different policy areas. Acquiescence with EU directives may result not only from the *transposition deficit* (the gap between the number of directives adopted at EU level and those transposed by Member States) but also from the *compliance deficit* (the number of incorrectly transposed directives). Hence, I built an indicator of acquiescence to EU directives calculated as the ratio between the number of directives correctly and incorrectly transposed in a particular policy area and the total number of directives addressed to each MS. Even if this indicator does not capture exclusively the directives that are correctly implemented and therefore may be considered an imprecise indicator of the congruence between national and EU policy agendas, for this study it seems particularly appropriate since it accounts for the fact that for governments both the correct and incorrect transposition of EU directives is time-consuming. Time will be consumed in case of late and/or incorrect transposition of a directive since the EU Commission may take legal action before the Court of Justice against Member States (Article 226 of the EC Treaty), hence pushing lawmakers to pay attention to the issues addressed in the directive again after the first transposition.

I used data from the website of the EU Commission (Pre-Lex) to build up the list of the directives applicable to each country. Then I looked at the annual reports of the European Commission (existing only since 1984) on the "Application of Communitarian Law" to identify the directives that have been correctly and incorrectly transposed by the four countries.[15] If an important number of directives has been correctly or incorrectly transposed,

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[15] See: online reports are available at
http://ec.europa.eu/eu_law/infringements/infringements_annual_report_fr.htm, consulted 12/02/2013. I wish to thank Danièle Réchard-Spence (Head of the European Parliament Policy Department on Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs , and EU fellow at the University of Colorado at Boulder) and James Spence Rechard (Lecturer at Sciences Po Paris and Honorary Director of the European Commission) who helped me in obtaining

levels of EU acquiescence are higher (hence the indicator should have higher values). Conversely, if most of the directives have not been correctly or incorrectly transposed, levels of EU acquiescence are lower (the indicator should have lower values).[16] As always, the data is aggregated by year. For the analyses in Chapter 6, I also include a control variable accounting for the length of the membership in the EU for each MS (*membership*) calculated in number of years, to verify whether the length of the EU membership plays a role in "constraining" national policy agendas. For this dissertation the CAP dataset on EU directives includes 13,529 directives from 1980 to 2008 distributed across policy areas as represented in Figure 3.4 below.[17]

Fig. 3.4: Issue attention in the EU directives (1980-2008%)
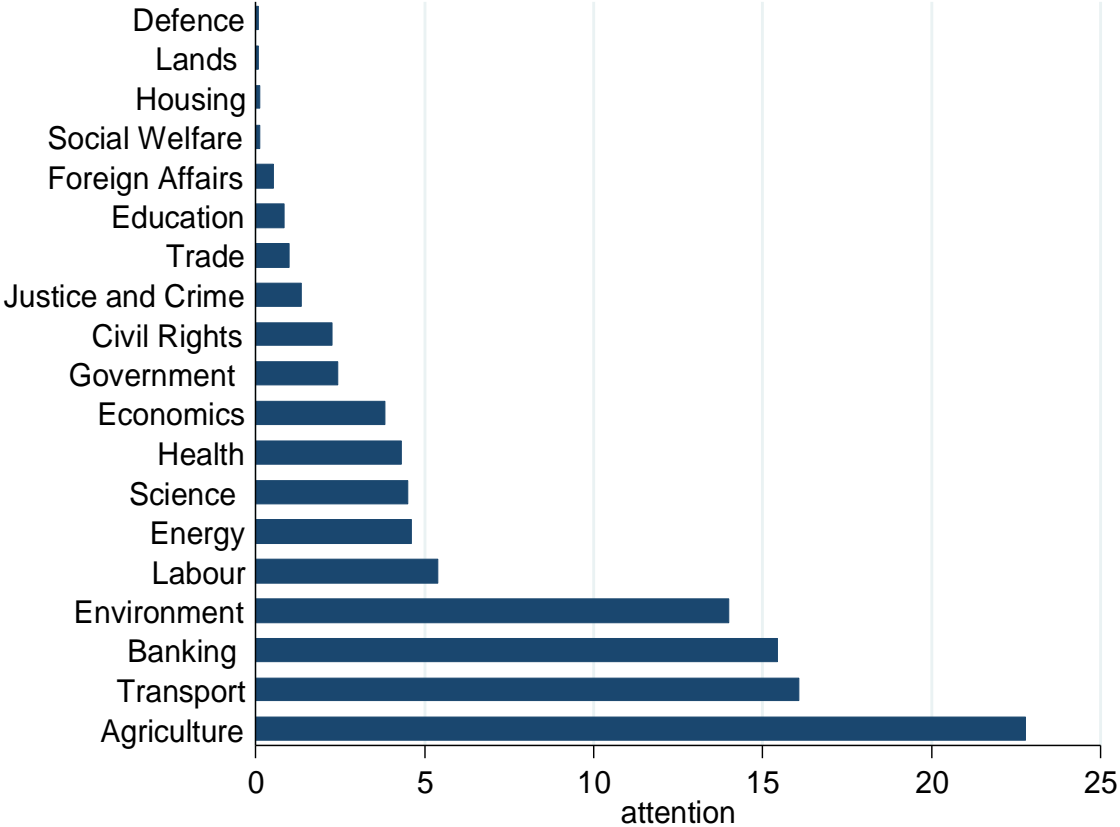
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

It can be noticed that between 1980 and 2008 there are certain issues that clearly capture the European Union's attention. These are: Agriculture, Transport, Banking, and

Environment. In other sectors attention is moderate (Labour, Energy, Science, Health and Economics), low (Governments, Civil Rights, Justice, Trade, and Education) or very low (Social Welfare, Housing, Lands and Defence). This may partially be understood in relation to the scope of competences of the EU in a given sector, and the nature of the sector considered. For example, Defence and Housing are not competences of the EU; Foreign Affairs is a specific policy domain that is rarely treated via directives. However, the results also suggest that, for some sectors over which the EU has a competence where the adoption of directives would be appropriate, the reason for a low figure may well be the absence of political consensus (Social Welfare for example).

Controlling for the societal agenda: what is in the news?

I use media stories to control for the wider societal agenda (in the continuous flow of information about new problems facing lawmakers) from 1980 to 2008, coded also according to the CAP scheme summarised in Table 3.1. This is generated by coding the headlines of all front-page news stories of quality newspapers in France (*Le Monde*, available between 1980 and 2008), Spain (*El Pais,* 1996-2008) and United Kingdom (The Times, 1980-2008). Front pages provide not only a trustworthy measure of ongoing events and the content of the newspaper, but the structure of the front page also appears to capture better the print media attention to issues (Boydstun 2013: 30-32).[18] The same sources have been used also for other studies on public attention within (Binderkrantz et al. 2009) and outside (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2008) the CAP. For the case of Denmark, similar data was unfortunately not available. Hence, I relied on a dataset from the Comparative Agendas Project including all radio news (features) at 12 am and 6:30 pm from 1984 to 2003 – this has been proved to be pertinent to account for the attention of the public in Denmark (Green-Pedersen, Stubager 2007)[19]. Taken together, these print and audio media venues are considered as the most important references for French, British, Spanish, and Danish politics.

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[18] The headlines of these stories have been blind-coded by coders according to the major topic codes. Team leaders found 80 per cent inter-coder reliability and disagreements have been solved by the project leaders.
[19] The pertinence of this dataset to capture media attention in Denmark is discussed by the authors at: http://www.agendasetting.dk/files/uploaded/421201380422PM3.pdf, consulted 18/10/2013. In all cases, data have been collected following the CAP coding protocol and using a combination of automatic and manual coding.

When discussing the results of the analyses it should be acknowledged that different media may bring different information and may produce different effects on the policy process (see literature review of this chapter and, in particular, Walgrave and Manssens 2000). Yet, to be sure about the comparability of the available data, Figure 3.5 illustrates the patterns of media coverage of different issues in the four countries.

Figure 3.5: Issue attention in the media (1980-2008,%)
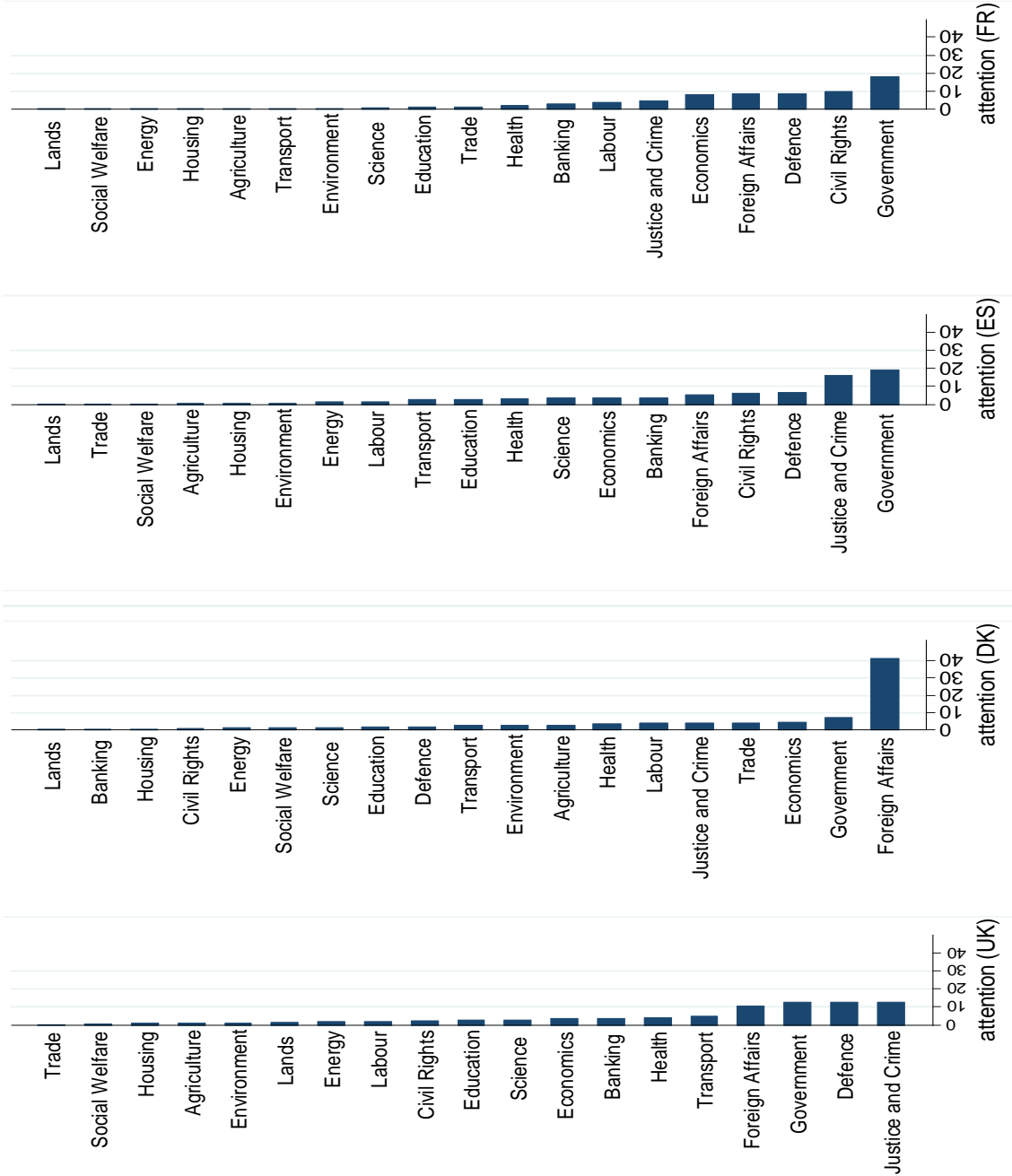
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

It can be noticed that general patterns are very similar not only across countries but also across media, even if Danish radio news tend to overemphasise Foreign affairs issues. Even if different issues in the four countries may be subject to public concern or interest, only few reach the threshold of newsworthiness. Figure 3.5 shows that the Spanish, French, and British publics (but also Danish radio news to a certain extent) concentrate their attention on a limited number of issues – in particular Government and Foreign Affairs – with the rest of the issues receiving very little or no attention. Hence, similar patterns of media attention exist across countries suggesting that even the media agenda is quite stable and focused on a limited number of issues.

For the purposes of my research, this indicator of the media agenda is particularly important because it simultaneously captures the media agenda as well as shifts in attention due to events in the wider societal agenda to which lawmakers are incentivised to react. In the chapter dealing with the public agenda, I also created a dummy variable taking the value of 1 for the years of national elections, and 0 otherwise to test whether the policy agenda is more responsive to the societal agendas in non-electoral times (see Chapter 2). As in the other models, the unit of analysis is the proportion of headlines in a particular sector aggregated on a yearly basis.[20]

Models estimation

The proportion of passed legislation on a specific policy area[21] aggregated by year is the dependent variable in all my analyses, which use tests for unit root and time-series cross-sectional models. On the basis of the summary statistics highlighting a common structure in the policy agendas of the four countries, I model the differences between countries with fixed effects in a time-series cross-sectional format. This is able to measure differences in the average level of issue attention between countries.

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[20] Assessing the extent to which media coverage reflects or leads the formation of public opinion is beyond the scope of my research. In the impossibility to find comparable public opinion indicators for the four countries, my work relies on the assumption (to be sure strong but debatable) that the media discourse is an important context to understanding the formation of public opinion and its general interest in an issue (as highlighted among others in a seminal piece by Gamson and Modigliani 1989.

[21] Among CAP scholars there is a debate on whether it is more appropriate to run analyses considering percentages or count measures (for an overview, see Brouard 2009). Even if count measures provide a more fine approximation of issue attention, most existing CAP publications rely on percentage measures.

The rationale for the structure of this research is straightforward. Each model adds an agenda venue originating policy problems for lawmakers (partisan-related, EU-related, public-related) to explain how pending commitments and the public agenda shape the transmission of partisan promises in policies. When necessary (as specified in each chapter) I add some controlling variables and interaction terms. For the theory to be tested, I need to look at parts of the policy agenda in each of the countries equally. Hence, the cross-sectional panels are organised in the form *country (a) x issue (i)* with the general models represented as follows:

1. *Transmission of electoral promises (Parties-related):*

$$\text{Laws}_{it} = \alpha^{*}_{0} + \beta^{*}_{1}\text{Laws}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{2}\text{Manifesto(Gov)}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{3}\text{Manifesto(Opp)}_{it\text{-}y}$$

2. *Accomplishment of pending commitments (EU-related)*

$$\text{Laws}_{it} = \alpha^{*}_{0} + \beta^{*}_{1}\text{Laws}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{2}\text{Manifesto(Gov)}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{3}\text{Manifesto(Opp)}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{4}\text{Directives}_{it\text{-}y}$$

3. *Controlling for the societal agenda (Media-related)*

$$\text{Laws}_{it} = \alpha^{*}_{0} + \beta^{*}_{1}\text{Laws}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{2}\text{Manifesto(Gov)}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{3}\text{Manifesto(Opp)}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{4}\text{Directives}_{it\text{-}y} + \beta^{*}_{5}\text{Media}_{it\text{-}1}$$

Overall, the models test the degree to which parliaments deliver on partisan agendas (Chapter 5), EU commitments (Chapter 6), and public agenda (Chapter 7) over the next year of their time in office. In the models, *Laws$_{it}$* refers to the proportion of laws for issue *i* during the current year, *Laws$_{it\text{-}y}$* refers to the proportion of Acts for topic *i* during the previous year, *Manifesto(Gov)$_{it\text{-}y}$* refers to the proportion of mentions of issue *i* in the party platform of the winner at the previous election, and *Manifesto(Opp)$_{it\text{-}y}$* refers to the proportion of mentions in the platform of the losing party. In addition, β^{*}_{4}*Directives$_{it\text{-}y}$* refers to the proportion of mentions of topic *i* in the EU directives during the previous year and β^{*}_{5}*Media$_{it\text{-}1}$* refers to the proportion of mentions of topic *i* in the media coverage during the previous year. These model specifications enable me to ascertain the strength of the transmission from the party platforms

to the policy agenda, controlling for the content of the EU directives and the media coverage over one year of a parliament, while simultaneously controlling for persistence of the policy agenda at an aggregated level. Each panel is issue within country for a total of 76 panels. When needed, models control also for interactions between different independent variables, as will be specified in each chapter.

Theoretical expectations from the agenda literature highlight that in all countries the structure of policy attention is similar given the finite nature of governments' attention and the systematic importance of some issues over others. These underlying dynamics of policy attention are the same in each of the countries, which is the baseline of my comparative enquiry and is consistent with the decision to pool the cross-national data. It is because of this common structure of policy agendas discussed in the theory that differences between countries are modelled with fixed effects in a time-series cross-sectional format aiming at detecting differences in the average level of issue attention between countries. In addition, a small-N comparison may hardly capture meaningful information about the influence of institutional configuration on agenda dynamics. These limits in the research design pushed me to privilege a focus on issues instead of on the countries; this is coherent with the CAP approach.

Rationale and implications of the case selection

After having introduced the CAP, outlining its approach to the study of politics and the operationalisation of this study, I now move on to discuss the rationale for the case selection and its implications. This contribution focuses on the way in which policy commitments and public' agenda mediate the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agendas of the four countries. As illustrated in Chapter 1, the extent to which partisan preferences are transmitted in policy agendas has been studied in several case and comparative studies that have stressed the importance of the institutional configuration in which parties act in shaping this relationship. However the way in which policy commitments derived from the EU agenda mediate this link is still a relatively unexplored field in comparative politics.

Hence, my case selection has been driven by the decision to include countries that exhibit a certain level of institutional variation as well as countries that exhibit different levels of 'involvement' with the Union. In addition, data availability for comparative investigation

further reduced the number of cases leading to a small-N sample. Even if this research is comparative, it faces all the limitations of a small-N whose results do not have strong statistical power. Yet, without dismissing this important criticism, the countries retained allow us to account for fair levels of variability, both at the institutional level and with respect to the relationship with the EU. In broader terms, the sample was built in order to provide both the opportunity for future generalisations, as well as to assure more leverage to the statistical analyses. In particular three criteria have driven my decisions:

1. First, assure that the countries retained are able to capture (at least intuitively) satisfactory levels of *institutional variation* to cope with the weak statistical power of small-N samples

2. Second, be sure that in the sample the four countries differ with respect of their *'involvement' with the EU* from which policy commitments originate.

3. Third, ensure the *availability and reliability of comparable data* on party platforms, passed legislation, and policy commitments.

Concerning the institutional criterion, the small-N does not fully account for the influence of institutional variation, which is not, *per se*, contradictory with existing agendas studies less concerned with institutional variation than with variation in issue attention across policy sectors and agenda venues (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014: 9-11). Yet, and without underplaying the important institutional element, the case selection was built in order to retain (few) countries exhibiting fair levels of institutional variation, paving the way for future broader investigations. In this respect, three of the countries selected are parliamentary democracies (Spain, Denmark and the UK), and one is a semi-presidential system (France).

Among these, the United Kingdom is predominantly a two-party system whereas Denmark, France and Spain are multiparty systems. In Denmark coalition governments (often with minority status) are the norm, leading to a stronger cooperation between majority and opposition in everyday policy making, and possibly to a higher productivity of the Danish parliament (see figure 3.1) resulting from the necessity to satisfy all members of the coalitions. More precisely, the United Kingdom is the archetypical majoritarian democracy, characterised (for the period considered) by single-party governments, where high clarity of

responsibility should enhance partisan influence on policy and hence the impact of discretionary priorities on policy agendas (Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999) France's two-round majoritarian electoral system is strongly disproportional, but does not yield such clear majorities. Spain and Denmark both have parliamentary governments with proportional electoral systems. However they differ in terms of government type. In Spain, even if minority governments have been frequent, the strongly varying magnitude of constituencies makes it a more majoritarian case than Denmark – where there is a long tradition of minority governments that are often coalitions, diminishing the clarity of lawmakers' responsibility In this sense, the sample will enable me to establish if stronger transmission of mandates takes place in more majoritarian systems.

Concerning the second criterion that oriented the case selection – the involvement with the EU – here as well the countries selected approximate important variations. In this sense, the levels of involvement in EU politics are likely to be affected by membership duration (e.g. how long a country has been part of the Union) and consequently the extent to which EU commitments shape the transmission of electoral promises in the policy agenda. In this respect, one of the countries (France) is a founding member of the European Union. Together with Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, France was among the founding countries of the Union that started European economic cooperation back in 1951. Conversely, Denmark and the UK joined the EU in 1973, and Spain even more recently, 10 years after the end of the dictatorship (only in 1986).

Even if the empirical analysis is unable to account for this, it shall be acknowledged that the type of agreements existing between the four countries and the EU also vary. France and Spain are both part of the Schengen Area (a territory where the free movement of persons is guaranteed) and the Eurozone. Denmark is part of the Schengen Area but has retained its national currency. Differently, the UK is less 'involved' than all the other countries in the sample since it is not part of the Schengen Area, nor of the Eurozone. In this sense, the countries selected allow us to account for whether EU commitments have a stronger impact on the transmission of partisan preferences in policy agendas in countries where the EU involvement is greater. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the four countries are also characterised by slightly different attitudes toward the EU. According to the 2013

Eurobarometer[22] in Spain and the UK the majority of citizens do not trust the EU institutions, whereas opinions are more balanced in France, and are very positive in Denmark.

Last but not least, another criterion that had driven the case selection is the availability and reliability of comparable data. With this respect, the sample includes countries for which CAP data on policy agendas, party manifestos, EU directives, and public agenda were available (Denmark and France) and countries for which data was partially available (Spain and the United Kingdom). The latter completely lacked the manifestos data series. After the first year of my scholarship – which was dedicated to the definition of the theoretical framework of this research and its general research design – I tried to use data from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP), but problems emerged when I noticed that even after extensive recoding and tests, the issue categories of the CAP and of the CMP were hardly comparable and that this would present a major limitation for an issue-based theoretical model. Hence, I decided to look for research funding in order to collect comparable party manifestos data for the United Kingdom and Spain. This was obtained and the data collection was undertaken during the second and third years of scholarship. Notwithstanding the statistical limits of studying small-N samples, comparing issue attention across different countries and agenda venues makes more sense if the comparison is made on the basis of data approximating the same phenomena.

Overall, the period covered includes several general elections ranging from (in descending order) 10 in Denmark, 8 in Spain, and 7 in France and in the United Kingdom. In all the countries, politics has been characterised both by partisan alternations and by demands deriving from the EU directives.[23] These specific configurations should provide a fairly good ground to test the theory, even if the generalisability of the results may be affected by the small number of countries considered.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how the theory presented in Chapter 2 will be empirically addressed. After briefly introducing the Comparative Agendas Project and its approach to the study of politics, I detailed the coding system used to build indicators about the content of

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[22] See http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79_publ_en.pdf , in particular pp. 92-94. Consulted 16.09.2014.

[23] In this research, alternation is defined as a change of government partisanship (Mair, 2008).

policy agendas, discretionary issues and policy commitments, controlling for the content of the public agenda. Finally I addressed the rationale for the case selection.

I discussed the content of the codebook as well as the differences across the data gathered for different venues (passed legislation, party manifestos, EU directives and the media). In addition, I provided preliminary summary statistics for each data series, before presenting the models, units of analysis, and the estimation techniques used in this research. To guide the reader, I summarised the characteristics of each dataset in Table 3.2 and the issues considered in Table 3.1. Any changes to the format of the data and extra control variables (or interaction terms) are highlighted and discussed in each chapter, when relevant. The last section of the chapter tackled the rationale, limits, and implications for the case selection of the study. In particular, I discussed the three criteria that have driven my choice (institutional, EU involvement and data availability) and how these are able to cope with the shortcomings of small-N quantitative analyses in capturing (at least intuitively) satisfactory variation across the few countries retained, paving the way for future Large-N analyses. In order to further cope with shortcoming of statistical analysis with small-N samples, in each chapter I integrate quantitative analyses with qualitative assessments based on the content analysis of the data.[24]

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[24] Mainly inspired by public policy theories dealing with the understanding of policy changes beyond 'partisan explanations' in the initial phase the main challenge addressed by CAP scholars was to apply the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory to European polities (for reviews see Baumgartner et al. 2011). More recently, CAP scholars started exploring the extent to which policy change is shaped also by parties' electoral promises and more broadly, by logics of party government and electoral accountability. This new challenge demanded big effort in collecting new party manifestos data which explains why comparative contributions in this specific field are still few. Given these constraints, most of existing CAP publications on party government and agenda-setting are either case studies (see on France Froio 2013 ; on the United Kingdom John et al. 2014 ; on Denmark Green Pedersen and Mortensen 2010) or they are concerned with assessing the explanatory power of public policy and partisan theories of lawmaking in different countries without directly including party manifestos data (see for a discussion on this Persico et al. 2012). For this dissertation I made the (debatable) choice to perform a fully comparative research, mainly grounded on partisan and passed legislation data. Despite this important comparative achievement, the other side of the coin is a small N sample, which however provides some interesting institutional variation across cases as discussed on pp. 64-67. Overall, despite being statistically limited in terms of generalizability, the overall findings of my work point in the direction of limited importance of institutional context on issue-by-issue agenda-setting dynamics. This confirms, on the one hand, that institutional features matter for reshaping lawmakers' attention, even if their impact is moderate. On the other, that the sample decently approximates institutional variation.

CHAPTER 4

The king is dead, long live the king? The content of the policy agenda between stability and change

In several countries the accession of a new monarch is saluted by the proclamation "the king is dead, long live the king!" symbolising that the transfer of sovereignty from the predecessor to the heir occurs immediately upon the death of the ruler. To a certain extent, the same happens in contemporary democracies where elections transfer the power to take decisions from the old government to the new one. Yet, differently from absolute monarchies, in contemporary democracies lawmakers' priorities may change because parties compete for office during the electoral campaigns. In each campaign preceding the elections, candidates present a list of policy goals that they intend to achieve in case of victory. Achieving the campaigns' objectives implies translating electoral promises into concrete policy measures once in office. Hence, the issues that have been prioritised by parties in electoral campaigns should also be prioritised by the government of the winning party (or parties) in its policy agenda. This might demand that pre-existing priorities are "destabilised" (or changed).

We can use as an illustrative example the Presidential elections in France, 2007. The campaign of presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy focused strongly on the issue of immigration, and he promised to his voters that in case of victory he would create a "Ministry of Immigration, Integration and National Identity".[25] Sarkozy's party won the election and the ministry was established immediately after the elections, within the government of Prime Minister François Fillon. The electoral announcements were thus followed by a "symbolic" measure, and accompanied by more radical immigration policies adopted during the mandate and culminating with the 'Grenoble Speech', in which Sarkozy announced his will to dismantle half of the illegal Roma camps in France within three months, and enforce massive expulsions of Roma people from the French territory.

In this case, the French right wing had important incentives to keep its mandate on immigration affairs. Yet, the history of electoral campaigning in democratic settings is filled with stories of broken promises; meaning that voters are often sceptical about party pledges in electoral campaigns. Hence, beyond sporadic and spectacular cases such as the one outlined above, is there any evidence that alternation in government leads to changes in the

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[25] See: http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/10/26/l-identite-nationale-theme-recurrent-de-nicolas-sarkozy_1259095_823448.html, consulted 04/12/2013.

composition of policy agendas? Is there any evidence that policy agendas change after the elections? Is there any evidence that this is so because of diverging party promises? If the answer to all these questions is a resounding "NO", then we can really conclude – as in the ancient regime – "the king is dead, long live the king!"? Instead, in modern democracies, understanding whether the content of policy agendas changes after elections is a field that deserves political scientists' attention since it has implications for the study of how electoral politics and electoral outcomes relate to change and stability of public policies, and in a broader sense also for understanding political representation. During the campaign, parties belonging to different political families compete for diverse issues to be prioritised in the policy agenda. Hence, when governments' partisanship changes after elections, the mandate obtained at the ballot should represent a major source of change in the agenda of lawmakers. This is why in contemporary democracies the motto "the king is dead, long live the king!" can not be applied so easily. More broadly, the importance of mapping agenda stability is also related to the fact that the level of agenda stability is related to the possibility of various agenda-setters to influence policy (Tsebelis 2002), where higher policy stability decreases the importance of agenda-setters (parties or otherwise).

The main goal of this first empirical chapter is to begin investigating the content of policy agendas by focusing on the effects of partisanship and elections on the stability of governments' priorities. In existing contributions the most widespread approach to tackle this issue is to consider the partisanship of government, and this is the base of the "politics matter" school of thought (Schmidt 1996; Imbeau et al. 2006) discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter compares the content of the policy agenda of different legislatures in Denmark, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom over the past 30 years to understand what determines its composition. In so doing, my main objective is to highlight whether and to what extent elections and partisan alternation are associated with a change of government priorities. This is a fundamental preliminary step for this study, since it allows me to capture empirically the portions of the policy agenda that are more "flexible"(i.e. more likely to experience changes in attention) and those portions that are more "rigid" (i.e. less likely to experience changes in attention), as will be further explored in the next sections of the dissertation.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I cast different expectations on stability and change of the policy agenda drawing on the literature on the "partisan hypothesis" presented in Chapter 1. Second, I present a measure to account for stability and change in the composition of policy agendas across cases and election campaigns. On this basis, I shall discuss the empirical evidence on partisan and policy agendas at the aggregate level and for

the different issues that are politicised. Subsequently, I shall suggest alternative interpretations of the dynamics of agenda change, developed from agenda-setting approaches. As will be illustrated, these suggest that – rather than partisanship and electoral alternation – one should also account for other sources of policy change such as problems definition and external events, as theorised in the Punctuated Equilibrium theory of policy Change (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). The final analyses investigate issue attention over time for a subsample of the issues constituting the policy agenda, paving the way for the in-depth analyses of the determinants of policy agendas that will be developed in the next chapters. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications of these findings.

The influence of elections and partisanship on policy stability and change: expectations

As detailed in Chapter 1, party government and electoral alternations (defined as the change in the partisanship of the Prime Minister) can be considered important sources of change for the content of policy agendas. Previous research pointed out that different party families compete by emphasising different policy priorities (Klingemann et al. 1994), so that policy priorities are likely to change when actors belonging to different party families are in office. This idea is echoed in the literature on issue competition (Budge and Farlie 1983) where parties compete in elections by proposing to the voters different policy options. In this understanding, parties compete by emphasising (i.e. making salient) the issues where they have a reputation for greater competence or that they "own" (Petrocik 1996). Thus, during a campaign issues that are electorally profitable for right-wing parties are probably not the same that will be beneficial for left-wing competitors since these parties conventionally "own" diverse issues (Petrocik 1996). Following classic approaches to the "partisan hypothesis" it can be expected that:

H1: Elections and the policy agenda: *Alternation in government results in a change in the content of the policy agenda.*

Within the "parties matter" research tradition, the "party mandate theory" (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994) of party government stresses that elections are the general driver of changes in the content of the policy agenda. In this view, elections provide information to parties in power about voters' expectations (see for example the literature on mandate perceptions in the American Congress: Grossback, Peterson and Stimson 2005) but also elections may orientate party government behaviour. Beyond this general election-related expectation however, scholars exploring the influence of the timing of the candidate have shown that logics of "electoral business cycles" originating from electoral proximity (Blais and Nadeau 1992; Schultz 1995) may lead governing parties to manipulate the content of the policy agenda to favour their chances of re-election, more precisely at the beginning and at the end of their mandates. In this perspective, following an alternation, change in the content of policy agendas will be more visible in the years immediately after the election than in subsequent years of government. Following this reasoning, I expect that:

H2: Electoral proximity and the policy agenda: *the effects of partisan alternation on the content of the policy agenda are stronger in the early years after an election than in subsequent years of government.*

To conclude, a comparative hypothesis may be formulated to account for the way in which political institutions mitigate partisan and elections' effects on the content of the policy agenda. In his contribution, Schmidt (1996) writes that institutions should be taken into account when analysing whether partisan preferences influence public policy, because institutions set the constraints on governments' margin of manoeuvrability (see Chapter 2). Following Schmidt, the most likely countries in which to find such partisan effects are majoritarian political systems (the United Kingdom and France). A similar logic has been borrowed by scholars of electoral mandates (Klingemann et al. 1994: 17-19) who have argued that the effects of partisan alternation are stronger in majority party systems than in multiparty coalition systems where the governing parties need to continuously negotiate their policy priorities with coalition partners. Coherently, I expect that:

H3*: Institutions and the Policy Agenda: *the effects of partisan alternation on the content of the policy agenda are stronger in countries characterised by majoritarian systems with a single government party.*

Measuring change and stability in the policy agenda

While an exhaustive description of the methodology of this research has been provided in Chapter 3, it is important to discuss here how it is possible to measure change and stability in policy agendas. In other words, a measure of "agenda stability" is necessary in order to appropriately assess whether partisan alternation, elections proximity, and the institutional configuration matter in determining the composition of policy agendas. My measurement is based upon the one proposed by Mortensen et al (2011) in a recent contribution, which in turn is inspired by Sigelman and Buell's measure of issue overlap (2004) and that has been widely used in agenda-setting studies (see Walgrave et al. 2014 for different uses of this index). The score lies between 0 and 100, where the maximum indicates that two legislatures have a 100% identical distribution of attention, and the minimum suggests complete absence of stability. It is calculated by summing the absolute differences in the percentage of attention dedicated to each policy area across all policy areas. Dividing the sum by 2 standardises the measure to range between 0 and 100, and subtracting the result from 100 converts it as a measure of stability instead of instability. To give an illustrative overview of the meaning of this measure, the reader may consider a case with two successive legislatures and three potential issues to address where attention to the three issues is distributed, as portrayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: The index of agenda stability: an illustrative example.

	Issue 1 (%)	Issue 2 (%)	Issue 3 (%)	Tot (%)
Legislature *Laws time 1*	40	50	10	100
Legislature *Laws time 2*	50	20	30	100

In this case, the difference between the passed legislation at time 1 and at time 2 during the same legislature would be 30 (|40-50/2| + |50-20/2| +|10-30/2|). The result is then standardised (by dividing the sum by 2) and subtracted from 100. As a result, the index of agenda stability (AS) suggested by Mortensen et al. (2011) and adapted to this study is:

$$AS_t = 100 - (\sum_{i=1}^{n} \quad |GS_t - GS_{t-1}/2|)$$

Where GS_t and GS_{t-1} is the proportion of the policy agenda devoted to a particular issue at time t and at time t-1, and the absolute differences between them are summed over all n of the potential issues on the agenda, l indicates the number of legislatures. To interpret the index the reader should remember that if AS_t equals 100, the issue composition of the policy agenda in year t is identical to the issue composition of the policy agenda in year t-1, suggesting agenda stability. On the other hand, if AS_t equals 0 the two successive policy agendas have been focused on very different issues, suggesting agenda change. In general, a score ranging from 0 to 30% would indicate none or very little issue overlap; a score ranging from 31% to 60% indicates moderate overlap, whereas a score ranging from 61% to 100% indicates high or total issue overlap. In this sense, for example, a score of 60 for a given year suggests 60% overlap between that year's government policy agendas and the previous year's agenda. As has been demonstrated by Mortensen et al. (2011) this measure is not affected by the addition of zero-attention issues that may bias the estimations.

Mapping general patterns of stability and change in the policy agenda

Does the content of the policy agenda change through different elections? I begin this investigation by comparing the priorities of different legislatures in each country between 1980 and 2008. For ease of understanding, I begin the empirical analyses by reporting only the three most important issues in each legislature. For the period covered by this study, the number of available legislatures represented in the table depends on the number of parliamentary elections held in each country. These vary from a minimum of 6 in the case of the United Kingdom, to a maximum of 10 in the case of Denmark, with 7 in France and 8 elections held in Spain. Table 4.2 below illustrates the results for each country, providing the relative attention that each policy sector receives in the policy agenda.

Table 4.2: Priorities in the policy agenda of different legislatures (1980-2008)

Legislatures	Priorities (% of attention)			
	Denmark	France	Spain	United Kingdom
1	Economics (15.3)	Government (14)	Government (18.6)	Justice and Crime (16.7)
	Housing (9)	Justice and Crime (10.6)	Economics (17.9)	Economics (12.1)
	Banking and Finance (8.2)	Foreign Affairs (10.4)	Justice and Crime (9)	Transport (9.1)
2	Economics (17.9)	Government (15.4)	Transport (13.5)	Justice and Crime (14.6)
	Housing (8.9)	Justice and Crime (13.5)	Economics (12.2)	Economics (11.6)
	Banking and Finance (8.7)	Foreign Affairs (10.5)	Justice and Crime (11.5)	Transport (11.2)
3	Economics (14.9)	Foreign Affairs (17)	Economics (20.3)	Economics (12.8)
	Banking and Finance (14.7)	Government (14.1)	Government (12)	Justice and Crime (12.4)
	Labour (11.7)	Justice and Crime (11.4)	Banking and Finance (11.9)	Government (8.4)
4	Economics (12.9)	Foreign Affairs (21)	Government (17.2)	Justice and Crime (22.1)
	Housing (11.4)	Government (13.5)	Economics (13.6)	Government (13.1)
	Banking and Finance (10.7)	Justice and Crime (9.5)	Justice and Crime (10.6)	Economics (11)
5	Banking and Finance (11.9)	Foreign Affairs (27.5)	Economics (16.3)	Economics (16.4)
	Economics (10.8)	Justice and Crime (11.3)	Government (12.2)	Justice and Crime (15.3)
	Labour (8.5)	Government (11.1)	Banking and Finance (11.7)	Government (11.8)
6	Economics (13.2)	Foreign Affairs (23.7)	Economics (18.4)	Economics (17.4)
	Labour (9.4)	Justice and Crime (13.5)	Banking and Finance (14.4)	Justice and Crime (13.9)
	Banking and Finance (8.8)	Government (8.3)	Justice and Crime (14)	Government (12.5)
7	Economics (16.2)	Foreign Affairs (15.8)	Banking and Finance (17.5)	-
	Banking and Finance (10.5)	Justice and Crime (12.9)	Government (14.9)	
	Labour (10.4)	Transport (11)	Economics (11.8)	
8	Economics (10.9)	-	Economics (25)	-
	Labour (8.9)		Banking and Finance (18.8)	
	Education (8.2)		Justice and Crime (12.5)	
9	Education (10.3)	-	-	-
	Economics (8.4)			
	Transport (7.8)			
10	Justice and Crime (12.1)	-	-	-
	Education (12)			
	Labour (9.4)			

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: The cells show the three most salient issues in the policy agenda of each legislature and the levels of attention in the policy agenda expressed as a percentage of the total attention.

Overall, these results suggest that issue priorities in policy agendas do not change substantially across legislatures in the same country. With minor exceptions, as I will discuss, the policy areas that capture lawmakers' attention are the same across the different legislatures, independent of the number and frequency of national (parliamentary) elections. In France, Foreign Affairs, Government Operations, Justice and Crime are systematically prioritised in policy agendas across the 7 legislatures. Stability is also the rule in the case of Spain, where Economics, Banking and Finance and Justice and Crime are stable priorities of lawmakers across the whole period. In the case of the United Kingdom, I found long periods of stability with few exceptions. In this case, from the first Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher until the more recent New Labour governments of Tony Blair the policy agenda is primarily focused on Justice and Crime and Economic issues. Yet, despite this trend for stability in the British policy agenda, the data shows that Transport is a policy area that stopped being a priority for British governments after the 1980s.

This can be understood if one considers that Transport reform was one of the major ideological features of the Conservative governments led by Thatcher. At that time, the British Parliament passed the Transport Act (1980) that privatised the public transport system and the later Transport Act of 1985 also privatised local transport. In the meantime the Conservative government introduced major reforms of civil aviation and the privatisation of British Aerospace (John et al. 2013). In the case of Denmark, Economics, Banking and Finance were the major concerns of each government until the early 1990s (from 1981 to 1994, in the table named Legislature 1 to Legislature 4), whereas Labour and Education emerge as stable policy priorities starting from Legislature 5 (beginning in 1990) led by the Conservative Prime Minister Poul Schlüter and persisting until the most recent Liberal-Conservative governments of Anders Fogh Rassmussen (between 2001 and 2009, e.g. Legislatures 8, 9, and 10). The emergence (and subsequent stability) of Labour and Education issues in the Danish policy agenda may be understood by considering that in the late 1980s Denmark initiated major reforms to the Labour market to decrease unemployment, and which have been coupled with a list of government programmes (Active Labour Market Policies) promoting professional training and skills enhancement (Larsen 2005). In this framework, activation for unemployed passed through job training and in particular through education. The most important measures that have been adopted to reduce unemployment include the enrolment of the unemployed in education in exchange for unemployment benefits for a period of up to five years. In addition, another important programme to provide benefits for

education to the unemployed was the education financial aid to improve their professional skills.

These preliminary descriptive results highlight that in general no major changes in the priorities of the policy agenda seem to occur after the elections. More than exceptions to policy stability related to elections, the results for the United Kingdom and Denmark suggest the importance of "critical junctures" in policy attention that produce path dependency. In this understanding, critical junctures that bring new issues to the policy agenda produce a specific (stable) trajectory of lawmakers' attention for the years to come that appears to be difficult to reverse. Overall, the issues that are prioritised by different legislatures remain the same, suggesting that policy agenda stability is the rule rather than the exception. The prevalence of stability seems to suggest that the composition of policy agendas is not subject to the partisanship of the Prime Minister, which would imply that lawmakers' priorities do not (necessarily) coincide with the issues that are owned by the different parties in office. In order to account for this, one has to look more carefully at the effects of partisan alternation on agenda stability given that Table 4.2 considers only lawmakers' top three priorities. Instead, it is possible that changes happen in policy areas that are less salient or that are part of the "quiet business" of politics (Culpepper 2011). For these reasons the next section broadens the analysis by including all the policy areas, and by accounting for partisan differences in terms of issue priorities.

The more things change the more they remain the same? Elections, partisanship and the content of the policy agenda

To what extent do different legislatures focus on the same issues? To tackle this question, I begin by calculating the index of agenda stability for each country. The results are provided in Table 4.3a below, reporting stability scores for each country, differentiated depending on whether agendas pertain to legislatures that have been confirmed in office (continuing government), or that were elected in alternation (new-government). As can be noticed, the third column of the table reports the difference between stability in Continuing Governments (A) and New Governments (B). The last column shows the results of the significance tests associated with the comparison of the differences in the means between "New Government" and "Continuing government". Following the literature on party mandate,

it should be expected that the policy agenda of "continuing governments" is more stable than the policy agenda of the "new-governments" where partisan alternation should bring change (i.e. the results of the difference should be significant and have a positive sign) as highlighted in hypothesis 1.

Table 4.3a: Agenda stability and left-right change in government partisanship

	Agenda Stability Measures			
	Continuing government	**New-government Left-Right change**	**Difference**	**t-value**
	(A)	**(B)**	**(A-B)**	
Overall	81.6	80.6	1	1.07*
Denmark	79.5	77.4	2.10	0.49
France	80.3	80.4	-0.1	-0.30
Spain	87	84.4	2.6	-1.60*
United Kingdom	79.9	80.3	- 0.4	1.50*

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
p<.05 *. Two tailed difference of proportion tests

In the four countries the overall score of the index of agenda stability is around 80 (on the 0-100 scale of agenda stability). This suggests that, on average, three quarters of the legislature's priorities in year t perfectly match with the issues priorities of the legislature in the year t-1. In general, the scores of agenda stability are very high suggesting that policy agendas are stable both under continuing legislatures and under new governments. For example, the policy agenda after partisan alternation -from a right-dominated (to left-dominated) government or from a left-dominated (to right-dominated) government shows on average 80.6 overlap with the policy agenda of the previous government, which is only slightly less agenda stability than the average score of 81.6 found within the group of continuing governments (i.e. without PM alternation). In addition, the differences between the two do not follow a clear pattern, in the sense that they are not positive (as expected) and they have little (and not systematic) statistical significance ($p < .05$) confirming that alternation is not a major source of policy change.

Even if this data does not capture whether in one specific year there are bigger (or smaller) levels of agenda stability, what is clear is that at the aggregate level only around 20% of the policy agenda is "flexible", both under continuing and new governments. The results in Table 4.3a confirm the descriptive results provided in Table 4.2, emphasising that elections and shifts in the partisanship of the governments do not change substantively the allocation of attention in the policy agenda. As discussed, in the theory on party mandate, electoral proximity should be a major source of policy change, since governing parties would be more willing to deliver on their electoral mandates when elections approach. Hence, I now turn to explore whether higher fluctuations in levels of agenda-stability are linked to post-election years or to years with new partisan governments.

The results are presented in Table 4.3b below. The structure of this table is similar to the previous one, but this time I report levels of agenda stability differentiating on whether agendas pertain to the first two years after the election (Two years after elections)[26] or in the remaining years of the mandate "far" from elections (Non-election). As before, differences and the results of the significance tests are also reported. This time the expectation drawn from party mandate literature and summarised in hypothesis 2 suggests that agenda stability should be lower in the two years that follow the election (i.e. this time the results of the difference should be significant and have a negative sign).

Table 4.3b: Agenda stability and election proximity

	Agenda Stability Measures			
	Two years after the election	Non-election	Difference	t-value
	(A)	(B)	(A-B)	
Overall	78.5	79.3	-0.8	1.02*
Denmark	70.8	73.6	2.8	0.29
France	81.5	83.4	-1.9	-0.19*
Spain	79.7	79.9	-0.2	-2.42*
United Kingdom	82	80.3	1.7	0.10*

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
p<.05 *. Two tailed difference of proportion tests

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[26] Other tests accounting for one year after the elections have been performed and the results are similar to those represented. I also checked the effect of a change in the Prime Minister (regardless of whether an election had occurred or not) and in the case of France for the change in the President to account for possible effects of the cohabitation but my additional findings point in the same direction of the results illustrated in Table 4.3b: non-effect and that agenda stability prevails over electoral proximity.

Table 4.3b shows that when comparing the levels of policy stability in the post-electoral agenda and in the agenda in non-electoral times, the results are very similar. For example, the policy agenda during the first two years after the elections shows on average 78.5% of overlap with the policy agenda of the previous government, which is only slightly less agenda stability than the average score of 79.3 found within the group of Non-elections. In addition, the differences between the two columns do not follow a clear pattern, they are not negative and they have little (and not systematic) statistical significance ($p < .05$) rejecting the hypothesis that electoral proximity is a major source of policy change. The only exception being Denmark for which, however, the result of the t-test is not significant.

Taken together the results of Tables 4.3a and 4.3b provide some preliminary insights into the dynamics of policy attention across different countries and institutional settings in Europe, suggesting that policy stability prevails over partisanship and electoral proximity. If policy stability prevails it means that the way in which lawmakers distribute policy attention across the four countries is remarkably similar (Mortensen 2011). This suggests that differences in the institutional configuration of political systems (different party systems, electoral systems, number of parties in the parliament, government type) are not systematically associated with different levels of stability (or changes) of the composition of the policy agenda. To put it differently, policy agendas seem to be characterised by very similar (and stable) patterns despite important institutional differences across country settings.

Putting the results of Table 4.3a and Table 4.3b into perspective, it appears that the classic explanations proposed by the "partisan hypothesis" do not hold for this sample: neither partisan alternation, electoral proximity, or institutional configuration are associated (at least straightforwardly) with changing lawmakers' priorities. These results, in fact, pave the way for the detailed analyses that shall be presented in the next chapters. Yet, before drawing broad conclusions from these findings and moving to the next chapters, I need to address the issue-by-issue dynamics of agenda stability. Although I find evidence suggesting that agendas are "stable" in terms of aggregate issue composition, this may not necessarily be the case for single issues. Indeed, the macro-level analysis provided above does not allow for capturing issues' specificities when it comes to stability and change of specific policy priorities. In order to gain a more accurate understanding of stability and change in the policy agenda I shall now look at the patterns of stability and change that characterise each issue in the policy agenda. For this reason, I disaggregated the results at the issue level to detect whether

different issues follow different patterns of stability and change across countries. In this case, always following Mortensen et al. (2011), I use a measure that is the numerical average of the change in issue attention from one year to the next.[27] In this way, I am able to capture the evolution of each issue's share in the policy agenda across the entire period,.[28] The results are described in Tables 4.4a and 4.4b below.

Table 4.4a: Change and stability in the content of the policy agenda: the effects of partisanship

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	Continuing government (A)	New-government Left-Right change (B)	Difference (A-B)	t-value
Overall	2.30	2.51	0.21	1.54
Issues				
Environment	6.73	2.05	4.67	-1.37
Labour	5.93	1.30	4.63	1.65
Transportation	5.80	2.70	3.10	-0.86
Justice and Crime	5.73	1.08	4.65	0.63
Agriculture	4.94	2.26	2.68	- 2.39 *
Defence	4.35	1.35	3.00	0.37
Education	4.20	1.43	2.77	-0.35*
Energy	4.14	1.70	2.44	-1.34
Economics	3.80	4.91	-1.11	-1.24 *
Urban planning	1.76	3.44	-1.69	-2.32
Government Operations	3.33	1.60	1.73	3.94
Civil Rights	3.16	1.32	1.84	2.19*
Science and technology	2.79	1.63	1.17	0.41
Banking	2.68	1.23	1.45	-2.78
Social Welfare	2.50	1.01	1.49	-2.32
Health	2.38	1.25	1.13	-1.29
International Affairs	2.19	0.75	1.43	1.63*
Foreign Trade	1.92	0.61	1.31	1.97

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
p<.05 *. Two tailed difference of proportion tests

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[27] Percentage measure.
[28] As explained by Mortensen et al. (2011), numerical changes are used to avoid positive and negative changes cancelling each other out.

According to Table 4.4a, across countries average changes in the policy agenda are slightly higher in the years followed by partisan alternation than when a new legislature succeeded one of the same political colour, but this effect does not achieve statistical significance. Issue-by-issue results bring instead mixed evidence. For example, I find that in 16 out of 19 issues changes are higher in the years under "continuing governments" than when the partisanship of the legislature changes, but only in the case of Agriculture and Civil Rights the difference reaches a very weak statistical significance (* $p<0.05$). Only in 2 out of 19 issues (Economics and Urban Planning) is partisan alternation associated with higher agenda change, but the relationship is weakly significant only in one case. Furthermore, even if I calculate the results by country, I find similar patterns. Only in 2 out of 18 issues (for Spain and the UK) and only in 1 out of 18 (Denmark and France) are changes in issue attention higher in years with left-right change of legislature and the difference is statistically significant.[29] Table 4.4b below looks instead at the effects of electoral proximity on agenda change for different issues.

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[29] These results are not shown but are available from the author upon request.

Table 4.4b Change and stability in the content of the policy agenda: the effects of electoral proximity

	Two years after election (C)	Non-election government (D)	Difference (C-D)	t-value
Overall	2.34	2.42	-0.08	-0.23
Issues				
Transportation	4.80	1.50	3.30	0.84
Government Operations	4.21	1.03	3.19	- 2.13*
Environment	2.39	2.18	0.21	-0.17
Health	2.28	1.46	0.82	0.14
Banking	2.16	0.99	1.16	1.54
Labour	1.97	1.82	0.15	2.01*
Economics	1.90	1.13	0.77	2.31*
Justice and Crime	1.81	1.18	0.63	-2.96*
Civil Rights	1.65	1.81	-0.16	1.49
Energy	1.41	1.49	-0.07	0.20
Social Welfare	1.31	1.04	0.27	-1.23
Defence	1.15	1.12	0.03	-0.69
Science and technology	1.10	1.11	-0.01	0.98
Agriculture	1.07	3.02	-1.94	-0.38
Education	1.00	2.45	-1.45	1.92
Urban Planning	0.91	1.25	-0.33	0.86
International Affairs	0.77	0.66	0.10	-2.49*
Foreign Trade	0.47	0.51	-0-04	-1.21

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
p<.05 *. Two tailed difference of proportion tests

When looking at the effects of an election's proximity on agenda change, Table 4.5a indicates that these effects are even weaker than the partisan ones. Across countries, average changes in the policy agenda are slightly higher during the years that do not follow an election, but the result is once again insignificant. By looking at the results at the issue level I find mixed evidence. In 11 out of 19 issues changes are higher in the 2 years that follow an election, but the results reach (weak) statistical significance for only two issues: Labour and Economics. At the same time, I find changes in the agenda's composition in 8 out of 19 issues, but again the relationship is (weakly) significant only for a narrower set of issues (3

out of 8). The findings suggest that the effects of electoral proximity on agendas' change are limited and the pattern is far from consistent. Taken together the results from Table 4.4a and Table 4.4b provide no evidence that partisan alternation in office or electoral proximity systematically affect levels of change and stability in the policy agenda as suggested by the "partisan hypothesis", and this is coherent with the results of previous studies on agenda stability and change in France (Baumgartner, Grossman, Brouard 2009), the United States (Jones and Baumgartner 2005: 84-85), the United Kingdom (John and Jennings 2010), Netherlands and Denmark (Mortensen et al. 2011).

There is further evidence that appears from this investigation of the hypotheses drawn from the "partisan hypothesis" literature and that deserves to be discussed. Overall, by looking at the values of agenda change associated with continuing governments in Table 4.4a and Table 4.4b, it can be noticed that the former are always higher than the latter. Yet, Table 4.3a and Table 4.3b suggest that agenda stability does not systematically characterise continuing legislatures. These (apparently) contradictory results are likely to depend on the focus of the two investigations and have interesting implications. The first one (Table 4.3a and Table 4.3b) focused on the differences across countries, whereas the latter (Table 4.4a and Table 4.4b) focused on the differences across issues. In this sense, it appears that the differences across issues prevail over the differences across countries, which would also explain why I could not find intuitive evidence about the role of institutions in shaping agenda change and stability.

Taken together, these results question the main research hypotheses drawn from classic party mandate theories, which assumed that alternation in party government results in change in the content of the policy agenda (H1); that higher levels of change appear in the years that are closer to elections than in the years between the elections (H2); and finally that the effects of partisan alternation on the content of the policy agenda are stronger in countries characterised by majoritarian systems with single government party (H3). Conversely, I have empirically illustrated a cluster of almost 80% of agenda stability across countries. This suggests that to a large extent, new governments inherit and keep the problems and priorities of old governments, and this path-dependency creates obligations that are present in the governments' agendas independently from their partisanship, electoral proximity, or institutional configuration.

The explanations for policy change provided by the "partisan hypothesis" do not seem to explain the reasons for the variation in the preferences of the majority in office, since neither alternation or election proximity are associated with systematic change in allocation of

parliaments' attention. Hence, the next section shall investigate alternative explanations of policy change based on agenda-setting literature. This interpretation suggests that even if governing parties would like to stick to their electoral promises, a number of factors intervene in the policy process to mediate this relationship. In particular, incoming information from inside/outside the political system reshapes actors' preferences (Jones and Baumgartner 2005) and may weaken the party-policy link.

The consequence of this would be that changes in the policy agenda occur abruptly, and not systematically, e.g. without necessarily resulting from government's alternation or electoral proximity. I now turn to explore this mechanism that has been studied by agenda-scholars. Considering that the results indicate the importance of an issue-by-issue approach, I now limit my analysis to specific policy areas, by looking at the way in which issue attention changes over time for the entire period covered by this study, and whether these changes coincide with partisan alternation or electoral proximity or instead follow different logics as suggested by agenda scholars (Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

Alternative sources of policy attention: the agenda-setting approach to change and stability in the policy agenda through the cases of Health, and Justice and Crime

Different from the "parties matter" tradition, agenda-setting scholars suggested alternative explanations to understand changes in policy agendas (Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones 2006). In this view, the partisanship of the government is not a driving factor for change. One should instead account for *policy responsibility* since voters tend to sanction representatives even when they are not directly involved in specific developments (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010) but also other *policy problems* (other than electoral promises) that exist in the system and over which lawmakers feel responsible to act (see Chapter 2). In this understanding, policy attention has to do with the fact that law makers in office are aware that voters tend to see them as responsible for every policy development. For example, scholars have highlighted that voters evaluate (and tend to sanction) governments for bad economic performances (Van der Brug et al. 2007), but also for the way in which they deal with shocking and unexpected events (Birkland 1994).

In these situations, when the economy is at risk, or when health and humanitarian assistance is needed after a natural disaster or a terroristic attack, governments have to deliver

policy solutions, independently from their political colour. In this understanding, for example, if one wants to understand Spanish PM Zapatero's policy priorities, knowing his party colour is important, but it is not enough. One should also consider what policy problems he faced during its mandates: the beginning of the euro crisis, the Iraq war, the negotiations with the ETA. According to policy agenda-setting scholars, these events are likely to be more important than partisanship in explaining the composition of the policy agendas during Zapatero's governments, and the way in which the Socialist PM reordered the priorities of his majority. In this sense, the everyday 'business of policy' requires not only to respond to inherited problems or commitments, but also to provide solutions to new problems (Jones and Baumgartner 2005) that do not necessarily coincide with the electoral promises and that add complexity to the capacity of lawmakers to treat information and to deliver on their electoral mandates. In other words, in this perspective, inherited problems and new emerging (unexpected) problems have little to do with the partisanship of the government. Changes in policy would instead follow the model of the "punctuated equilibrium" theory (PET) (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; 2005) where periods of equilibrium (stability) are interrupted by 'sudden jumps' in attention (punctuations), with the result that most policies remain the same for long periods while a small number change quickly (see Chapter 1). According to agenda scholars, this 'iron law" of the punctuated equilibrium model should push lawmakers to distribute attention in a similar way even in different political systems, independently from governments' partisanship.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that different policy problems coexist in everyday policymaking and hence that policy change originates not only from partisan alternation, but also from lawmakers' responses to other policy problems than their electoral mandates. In order to provide a broader picture of the patterns of stability and change in the policy agenda, it is also important to include in this chapter evidence based on the PET approach that recognises the pressure of different policy problems on lawmakers' attention and that is privileged by the policy-agenda-setting approach to detect changes in policy agendas' priorities. For this, it is necessary to look at the long-term developments of selected policy areas on the policy agenda across the four countries. Without pretending to provide an exhaustive historical account of the evolution of the importance of each issue on the policy agenda, this method is useful since it provides alternative evidence about the way in which policy problems rise and fall on the policy agenda, beyond parties and elections. To achieve this goal, I decided to focus on a limited number of issues to qualify my analysis with a closer

look at some trends of issue attention. To ease the comparison I selected two policy areas that are salient on the policy agendas of the four countries for the whole period, and that are particularly useful to identify the role of policy problems since they are always present in the policy agenda; they have also been used for other agenda-setting studies on a different sample of countries (Mortensen et. al. 2011: 988): Health, and Justice and Crime.

Figure 4.1 reports the frequencies of issue attention by country and it allows me to observe the attention paid to Health issues on the policy agenda and when it changes. Following the classic partisan hypothesis expectations, sudden changes should be associated with partisan alternation in power and the early years after an election, whereas more stability should characterise the years 'within' the mandate. Following an agenda-setting approach, changes in attention should not follow clear partisan or electoral determinants and attention should instead be characterised by sudden "jumps" with frequent year-to-year fluctuations.

Figure 4.1: Policy Attention to Health issues
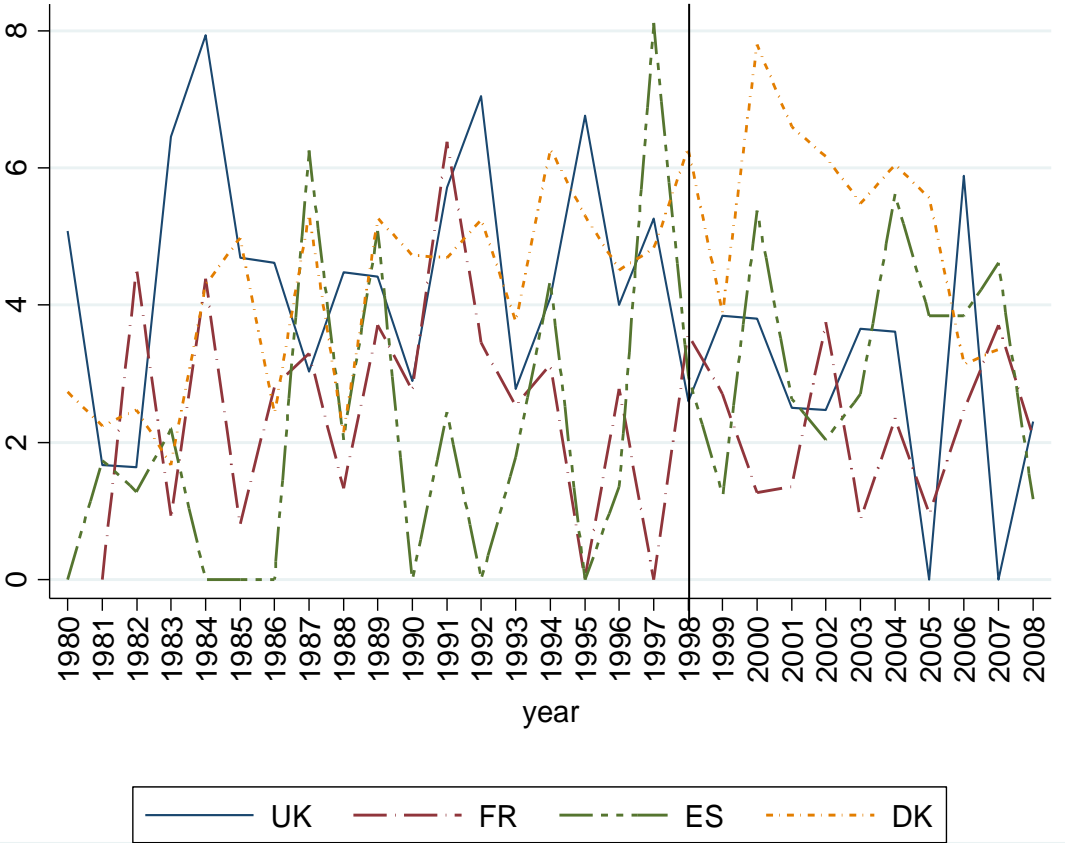
Source. Comparative Agendas Project

The case where these patterns can be more easily assessed is the United Kingdom (solid line), that between 1980 and 2008 experienced only one right-left alternation at the general elections of 1997 when the Conservative party led by John Major was defeated by the Labour Party of Tony Blair. By looking at Figure 4.1, I find that after this alternation attention to health policy changes (it falls) but then the years of the Labour party mandate are characterised by slight downturns and continuous redressements, a pattern that is different from what it can be expected following the partisan hypothesis where changes should be limited to electoral times. The same happens in the case of Spain (broken line with two dots), where the PSOE and the UCD-PP alternate in 1982, 1996, and 2004. Electoral years are followed by sudden changes in attention, but overall attention for Health policy is never steady during the years of the mandate, rather it fluctuates on a yearly base. The results for France and Denmark point in the same direction: partisan hypothesis explanations for agenda change do not provide convincing explanations for policy change. Instead, sudden and year-to-year changes characterise the attention to health policy as expected by the PET. This may be understood if one considers that health is often about life or death, it is important for the entire population and not only for specific groups of voters which may bring this issue to the top of both left- and right-wing governments' priorities. To counter-check these findings I now focus on policy attention for another issue that is more likely to exhibit clearer patterns of "partisanship": Justice and Crime, which has been traditionally qualified as an issue owned by right-wing parties. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Policy Attention to Justice and Crime issues
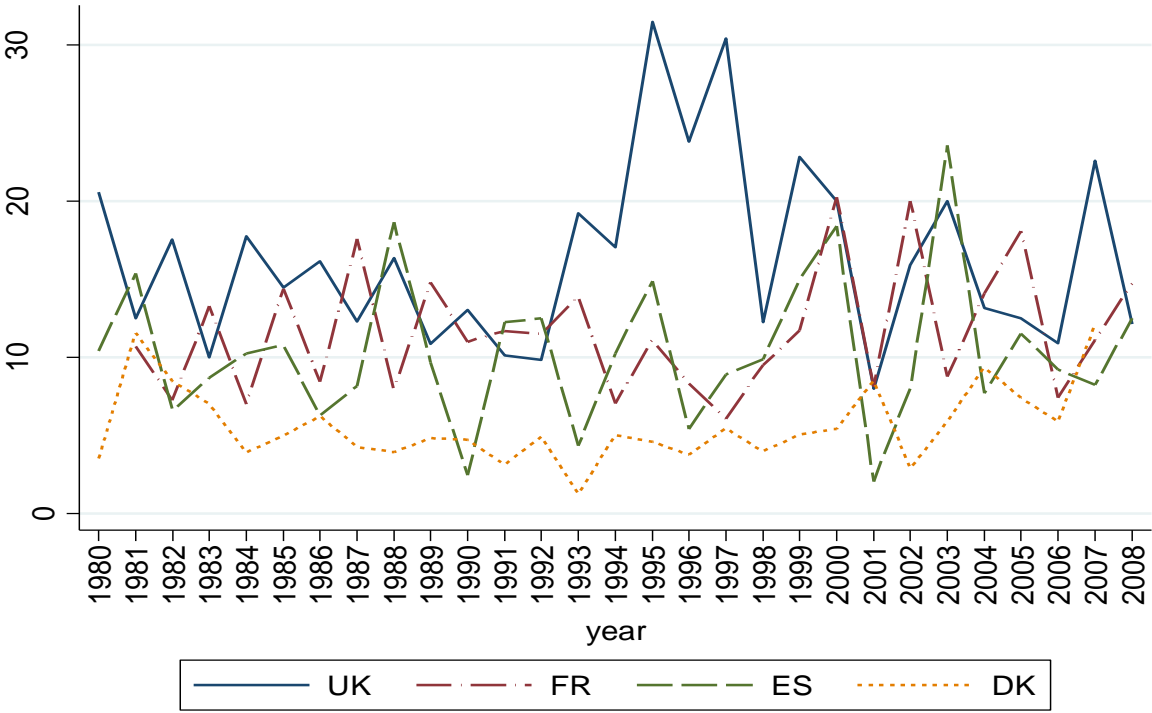
Source. Comparative Agendas Project

As illustrated in Figure 4.2, over time, Justice and Crime issues have also been characterised by substantial variation on a year to year basis. The pattern outlined in Figure 4.2 clearly challenges the idea that the partisan composition of government matters for determining the amount of policy attention devoted to crime issues. As can be observed, attention varies on a year-to-year basis, with minor – if any – continued pattern that might indicate the presence of a form of mandate. The (most noticeable) exception is the UK, from 1995 to 1997, but the peak is preceded and followed by average levels of attention. Although fluctuations may be related to events that occur at an unpredictable rate, previous research has shown that policy initiatives in this domain are less related to increasing crime trends (Estrada 2004) than to the fact that governments, at times, want to show they are being "tough on crime" (Mortensen et al. 2011, 991), because this is an issue that has become particularly important for the public agenda, and for the media (Balvig 2005), and one that increasingly transcends the conventional left/right divide in party competition (Meguid 2005). As emphasised by agenda-setting scholars, when the agendas of the public and of lawmakers come into phase all at once, creating a "window of opportunity" (Kingdon 1995), then policy

attention punctuates, independently from the partisanship of the Prime Minister. By looking at figure 4.2 there is another finding that seems to contradict partisan-hypothesis expectations.

As a matter of fact, even if Justice and Crime issues are conventionally owned by right-wing parties, a look at the evolution of the policy agenda seems to suggest something else. In the four countries, major peaks in policy attention for Justice and Crime issues are visible both under "left" and "right" wing majorities suggesting that the salience of Justice and Crime issues in policy agendas goes beyond the traditional partisan divides. For example, this is particularly evident in the case of Spain where attention for Justice and Crime peaks under the PSOE majority in 1988 but also under the PP majority in 2000, confirming that pure partisan hypothesis explanations do not offer an exhaustive account of the way in which lawmakers set their priorities, whereas an agenda-approach seems to better approximate the dynamics at stake.

Conclusion

Is there any evidence that policy agendas change after the elections? Does partisanship matter for redefining lawmakers' priorities? In this chapter I described the content of the policy agenda in four Western European Democracies, aiming at exploring the extent to which lawmakers' priorities change or remain stable. Structured in three parts, the first part of the chapter provided and discussed a set of research hypotheses inspired by the classic "partisan hypothesis" literature suggesting that alternation of parties in office, electoral proximity and institutional configuration should be related to change in the content of the policy agenda. Subsequently, I tested the validity of the classic party mandate assumptions and I found little support for those. In particular, I illustrated that legislatures' issue priorities are characterised by a remarkable stability, over time, across countries and across issues. Partisan alternation and elections proximity do not seem to produce substantial changes in the content of policy agendas, despite the different institutional features characterising the four countries under study, which further suggests that institutional design does not play a major role in determining policy change. Finally, I introduced the agenda-setting perspective to the study of policy change that helped to highlight the importance of problem-definition to understand governments' priorities and this has been illustrated empirically by focusing on long-term developments of issue attention. Here, I found that issue attention is punctuated

with periods of stability alternated with periods of abrupt changes that do not necessarily coincide with whether the partisanship of the majority changed or whether elections are closer. This latter investigation confirmed that the "partisan hypothesis" alone cannot approximate the complexity of the way in which lawmakers change their priorities.

This investigation suggests that important portions of the policy agenda operate beyond the traditional logics of party government, or at least in a more dynamic and complex way than a simple 'conveyor' belt from majority parties to policy as is traditionally argued. This does not imply that political parties do not try to draw attention to the issues that they promise to their voters once in office, but it is likely that the mechanism is more complex and partisan preferences interact with other policy problems that are brought to the system by different actors. Building on these results, the chapters that follow consider different "sources" of *policy problems* that hit the system and demand lawmakers' attention, to verify the extent to which policy agendas result from balancing attention across different types of policy problems.

The next chapter focuses directly on the influence of parties' electoral promises on the policy agenda. In order to do so, I analyse the extent to which party platforms approximate lawmakers' priorities.

CHAPTER 5

The discretionary problems: policy agendas and partisan preferences

Chapter 4 explored the influence of partisanship, electoral alternation and electoral proximity on the composition of the policy agenda. Taken together, the results suggested a high degree of stability and path dependency in the composition of the policy agenda independent from electoral alternation and elections proximity. In this sense, the exploratory results of Chapter 4 pave the way to further explore different determinants of the content of the policy agenda. To begin the investigation, Chapter 5 analyses the extent to which parties' electoral promises are transmitted to the policy agenda, by looking at the correspondence between party platforms and passed legislation.

The leading question of this chapter is *to what extent are electoral promises of the governing parties accommodated in the policy agenda*? In other words, do party platforms originate the policy problems that receive attention in the policy agenda? Hence, this chapter explores the partisan hypothesis in a redefined way to the classic literature, on the one hand by exploring the "conditionality" of the mandate, on the other, by relying on an alternative measure of policy outputs. I do not expect the influence of partisan preferences to be ubiquitous or straightforward; rather, I suggest that one should look at the "contingent nature" of partisan influence on the content of the policy agendas. For this, I consider the electoral programmes (or party platforms) as (one of the) sources of policy problems that lawmakers may decide to address or dismiss. In addition, I focus on legislative production as a measure of policy outputs, rather than budget expenditures like in classic studies (see Chapter 1).

If Chapter 4 explored simply whether partisan alternation matters for policy agendas by looking exclusively at the content of passed legislation, Chapter 5 deals more directly with the *transmission* of parties' electoral promises in the policy agendas. To achieve this goal, the analyses considers not only the electoral promises of the party of the Prime Minister but also those of the main opposition party, issue-level dynamics, and institutional and elections

proximity determinants.[30] A central issue in the study of the policy agenda is the degree to which party platforms presented to citizens *at election time* (i.e. party agendas) are a function of the long-term priorities of government (i.e. the policy agenda). Classic theories of party mandate (see Chapter 1) have highlighted that this enquiry concerns the very basis of liberal democracy, in which parties are supposed to represent voters' preferences, and partisan alternation in power should lead to policy change (Robertson 1976). In this sense, elections are the means by which citizens can make government officials accountable, while at the same time they can concretely influence policy choices. In a system of party government where parties are not able to propose to their voters policy alternatives, voters' choice is limited and as a consequence voters' ability to choose and control policy outputs is also restricted (Sullivan and O'Connor 1972). To put it in Francis Castles' words: "What price democracy if it doesn't matter who you vote for or what party is in office?" (Castles 1982: 5).

Those important tasks that parties have within democratic polities derive from two essential functions of political parties: the expressive and the instrumental function (Rose and McAllister 1992; Mair 2009). The expressive function consists of representing the preferences of their voters in their programmes. The instrumental function involves transforming parties' preferences into policy outputs. As a consequence, according to party mandate theory, a governing party is expected to produce policy outputs that are coherent with its electoral promises and elections are the instrument that allows voters' to evaluate parties' conduct. For these reasons the leading research questions of this chapter will be: When do parties matter for the content of the policy agenda? Is there a difference between party families in terms of the influence they exert on the policy agenda? Do institutional configuration and election proximity play a role?

Drawing on the classic literature on party mandate (see Chapter 1), here I test several conditioning factors of the transmission of partisan preferences in policy agendas, with the aim of understanding not only to what extent partisan electoral promises create policy problems that lawmakers address in the policy agenda, but also under which conditions. For this, I investigate the dynamic relationship between the issue priorities of the policy agenda

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[30] The analysis in this chapter privileges a narrow (but certainly not exhaustive) set of determinants of the link between electoral promises and policy agendas related to 'internal' party system dynamics. In this sense, for example, these analyses do not account for changes in the economic context and their impact on party mandate that are also likely to influence the transmission, an issue that is beyond the focus of this study and that I have tackled in another paper: see Froio C. and Grossman E. (2014). The last empirical chapter of this study partially copes with this limitation. It controls the extent to which the transmission of electoral promises in policy agendas is mediated by the content of the society agenda, under the assumption that if for example, the economy is bad or unemployment is high, both shall emerge as important topics in the agenda of the public.

and the issue priorities of both the government and the main opposition party, and of different party families in the four countries. The data captures policy priorities of parliaments and of the parties that are coded according to a common policy content coding system (see Chapter 3). This enables consistent analyses of the importance of issues across institutional venues and over time. I also use data from the "parlgov" dataset (www.parlgov.org) to account for institutional characteristics of each system related to the type of government and the number of legislative parties, and I control for elections proximity. The objective of the chapter is threefold:

a) First, I show the appropriateness of using party-system agenda data, party-family and institutional determinants to test contingent theories of party mandate. For this I rely on the theoretical background provided by the classic theories of party mandate to which I add insights from the agenda-setting literature (see Chapter 1).

b) Second, I empirically explore the conditional dynamics of partisan influence on the policy agenda in four countries providing general trends and issue-level evidence of this relationship. In this way, I shall illustrate country profiles and party-family profiles in terms of policy preferences.

c) Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings and highlight the importance of adding other conditioning factors to study partisan influence on policy agendas which have received limited consideration in the existing party mandate literature and that will be explored in the next chapters.

The findings, therefore, concern not only whether electoral mandates shape the policy agenda of parties in government seeking to deliver on their platforms, in line with classic studies, but also whether the mandate is conditional. In particular whether the mandate is at work not only for the governing party but also for the main opposition party (H1), if different party families keep their mandates on different issues (H2), if the institutional configuration of the political system plays a role in mediating party mandate (H3) and if election proximity matters (H3a).

From *do* parties matter to *when* parties matter: expectations on the contingent influence of partisan electoral promises on the policy agenda

Do parties matter? This classic question in political science may be associated with the traditional understanding of party government in party democracies (Klingemann et al. 1994), "where parties acquire a *mandate* through elections and go on to implement the chosen policies while in government" (Mair 2009: 11). In this sense, studying party mandate implies examining the relationship between voters' preferences and the policies that parties enact once they get in power, under the assumption that a functioning party democracy suggests a relatively simple and planned policy process, where party preferences lead to policy priorities. Combining insights from the classic party mandate literature and agenda-setting approaches to partisan agendas and policies, the hypotheses explore the contingent relationship between partisan agendas and policy agendas. The goal is to assess the extent to which policy agendas reflect the discretionary issues originating from the function of lawmakers to represent voters' concerns (see Chapter 2).

In particular, I focus on three sets of determinants to explain the conditional influence of policy problems originating from electoral mandates on the policy agenda. The first deals with the classic "do parties matter?" question, investigating whether changes in the content of the policy agenda are related to logics of partisanship and/or to electoral convenience. The logic should be straightforward: in a representative democracy, the electoral promises of the parties should influence the legislation that is passed. As a consequence, a first classic "party mandate" hypothesis follows:

H1: *The higher the issue attention to an issue in the party platform of the Prime Minister, the higher the issue attention to the same issue in the policy agenda after the elections.*

Recent agenda-setting studies on the influence of partisan agendas on policy agendas (cf. Green-Pedersen 2014) have offered a preliminary reassessment of the classic "party mandate" theory. In this sense, scholars have highlighted that lawmakers' attention is likely to be influenced not only by the electoral promises of the governing party but also by those of the opposition that interact in everyday politics representing a "party system agenda" (Green-

Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Green-Pedersen 2014: 70). Delivering on electoral promises by the opposition is a strategy that lawmakers may follow to capture support from across the political spectrum, but also to avoid problematic issues (Sides 2007; Green-Pedersen 2014: 73). More precisely, through emphasising issues associated with their opponents, governing parties can also help undermine traditional party reputations for the ownership of certain issues and 'trespass' on issues belonging to their competitors. In line with this approach, therefore, I propose to complement H1 by suggesting a "party system agenda" hypothesis, which is formulated as follows:

H1(a): *The higher the issue attention in the party system agenda, the higher the issue attention in the policy agenda*

H1(b): *The higher the issue attention in the platform of the main opposition party, the higher the issue attention in the policy agenda*

However, not all policy sectors are likely to be equally important for all the parties. As explained by Walgrave et al. (2000), the policy preferences of a party are likely to be multifaceted, depending mainly on ideological and reward motives. On the one hand, the *ideological* preference has been the key concept in the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) research. Even acknowledging that "ideology is not the whole story", scholars assume that the identity of the party and its political family are important to explain parties' policy preferences (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001). On the other hand, however, despite ideological differences the *reward* motive may push parties to emphasise different issues to reinforce their position in the political game, even if in principle they do not care for the issue as such. In this understanding parties benefit from selective issue emphasis or issue ownership (Budge and Farlie 1983; Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1988; Petrocik 1996). For example, a party may prioritise issues because they meet the interests of a specific group that the party considers particularly important in electoral terms (Lorwin 1971).

Similarly, specific issues may be taken up because they provide potential benefits for a larger population than a party's constituency. Partisan competition strategies may lead an issue to be politicised simply because it is damaging for an opponent, such as in the case of a

political scandal (Walgrave et al. 2000). Given the nature of the data, I will not be able to account for all meaningful dimensions of conflict between parties, since this would require accounting for issue positions. Yet, what I may assess is whether parties belonging to different political families emphasise specific policy areas over time, assuming that those should be the "core" issues that they "own" during the electoral campaigns to win elections. For example, classic studies assume that left-wing parties shall focus more on welfare issues, whereas right-wing parties focus on Defence and Crime (see Chapter 1). In this sense, I analyse if the transmission of electoral promises in the policy agenda is conditional on the party family (left-right) of the party in power. Therefore I test the following "party family" hypotheses of party mandate:

H2: *If partisanship matters, then left and right wing parties shall exhibit different patterns of issue attention both in their electoral promises and in the policy agenda once in office.*

H2a: *For left and right wing parties, the influence of their electoral promises on the policy agenda is conditional upon the policy sector considered.*

In addition, from classic theories of party mandate a comparative hypothesis may be introduced accounting for the institutional differences across the countries considered. Partisan influence on public policy is mediated through institutions with certain political systems (majoritarian ones) promoting a clearer mandate (Schmidt 1996, 2002). This literature has initiated the debate on the "clarity of responsibility" (Powell and Whitten 2003; Soroka and Wlezien 2010). Among several important determinants, the type of government (single party/coalition government), and the number of parties that obtained seats in the parliament (effective number of legislative parties), are important factors affecting parties' agenda-setting power. Large partisan effects have been found in majoritarian democracies with a limited number of parties represented in the parliament and single-party governments, i.e. systems in which government manoeuvrability is relatively less subject to coalition constraints (or veto players)[31]. Conversely, partisan influence is more difficult to find in consensual democracies, with a larger number of parties in the parliament and where

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[31] On the role of coalition governments as veto players see G. Tsebelis (2002), *Veto Players. How Political Institutions Wor*k, NY: Princeton University Press.

governments are ruled by coalitions (Schmidt 1996) in which negotiations among allies are the rule. A similar argument has been developed with respect to the electoral mandates (Klingemann et al. 1994; pp. 17-19). This research tradition suggests that the institutional context affects the transmission of electoral promises in policy agendas with majoritarian systems favouring the impact of parties on lawmaking. This suggests the following conditional hypotheses:

H3: *Electoral mandates are stronger in majoritarian political systems that concentrate power in a single-party government.*

H3a: *The higher the number of parties represented in the parliament, the lower the influence of the partisan agenda on the policy agenda*

Finally, as discussed in Chapter 4 elections proximity shall also play a role with "electoral business cycles" that shall lead to stronger correspondence between electoral promises and policy agendas in electoral times (Blais and Nadeau 1992; Schultz 1995). Coherently, it can be expected that:

H3b: *The transmission of the electoral promises of the parties in the policy agenda is stronger in electoral than non-electoral times.*

Taken together, these three sets of hypotheses suggest a conditional model of partisan influence on the policy agenda attuned to party-system agenda, issue-level and institutional determinants. The remaining sections of the chapter explore empirically whether partisan electoral promises are transmitted in the policy agenda and explore the conditions that favour or limit such behaviour in the light of these expectations.

Policy agendas and discretionary problems: the impact of the electoral promises of the Prime Minister and of the Opposition

To begin this investigation, I first shed light on the parallel development of partisan and policy agendas, trying to capture the interrelations between the two. Let us recall that the first main hypothesis of this chapter expects that the two agendas are correlated, as the distribution of lawmakers' attention depends on the promises made by governing parties during election campaigns. However, in everyday lawmaking, majority and opposition parties interact to shape the content of the policy agenda. Hence, I begin by controlling for the correlation between a government's policy agenda, the partisan agenda of the Prime Minister (PM) and that of the main opposition party (H1a and H1b). For this I correlate issue attention in party platforms at the most recent elections, with issue attention in the passed legislation following the election. Table 5.1 represents correlation scores between issue attention in party platforms and in the policy agenda.

Table 5.1: Correlations between partisan and policy agendas in the four countries, 1980-2008

	Policy agenda
Policy agenda	1
Partisan agenda (PM)	-0.63**
Partisan agenda (Opp.)	-0.40*
Overall (PM + Opp.)	-0.53***

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
*p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01
Note: Cells show correlations coefficients between the proportion of actions (laws and quasi-sentences) in each of the 19 issue areas for each country/year.

The overall level of correlation between partisan and policy agendas is strongly significant (p <0.01) with the highest correlation (observed for the partisan agenda of the PM) reaching a level of 0.63 (p <0.05). What may be striking is the systematic negative directionality of the correlation between the three agenda venues, suggesting that they move in opposite directions: if attention to certain policy areas in the policy agenda increases, the

attention to the same policy areas in the partisan agenda decreases and vice versa. This holds true both for the governing and the main opposition party. The most likely explanation for this result has to do with the role of party manifestos, which tend to be "electoral wish lists" and therefore potentially "catch-all" in terms of distribution of attention towards different issues.

In contrast, policy agendas are limited (Cox 2006), and therefore parties are somehow obliged to limit the number of policy areas they may focus on for policy activity. In broader terms, these results suggest that majority and opposition parties deliver on their electoral mandates only on a limited number of issues "dismissing" important portions of the electoral promises. This is particularly true for the agenda of the party of the Prime Minister, which has a stronger and negative correlation with the policy agenda (-0.63**). In this sense, these findings suggest that parties often declare policy goals to achieve desirable electoral outcomes without actually considering how and whether their promises could be enacted and funded once in office (Page and Jenkins, 2005). This distinction between partisan and policy agendas may also be explained by factors that are not only related to the content of the party platforms and that may affect the distribution of attention in the policy agenda. Above all, policy agendas shall also respond to pending commitments and problems emerging in the society that could not be debated or forecasted during the campaigns. Concerning the classic question posed by the party mandate literature – do parties matter for policy? – this data provides mixed evidence. The overall level of correlation between the agenda of the party of the PM and the policy agenda is significant but negative. In addition, the data confirms that the electoral promises of both the party of the PM and of the main opposition party shall be taken into account to fully account for parliaments' priorities.

While I have shed some light on the intensity of the relationship between partisan and policy agendas at the aggregate level, these results do not provide information about whether different dynamics are at work for various issues. In other words, we still ignore if the intensity of the relationship between partisan and policy agendas changes according to the policy area considered. Table 5.2 below shows the relative attention to different policy areas in the partisan agendas and in the policy agendas of the four countries.

Table 5.2: Issue attention in partisan and policy agendas, 1980-2008.

Policy Areas	Policy Agenda	Partisan Agenda PRIME MINISTER	Partisan Agenda OPPOSITION
Economics	12.58	10.32	10.05
Government operations	10.24	8.71	8.9
Justice and Crime	11.03	7.34	8.7
Banking, finance	8.97	5.07	3.81
International Affairs	7.35	6.4	5.5
Transportation	5.99	4.4	3.64
Labour	5.89	8.01	6.1
Education	4.22	10.2	10.01
Civil Rights	4.07	4.1	6.23
Urban planning	3.83	4.01	3.8
Agriculture	3.74	3.5	3.4
Health	3.73	6.01	5.7
Environment	3.22	3.2	2.78
Social Welfare	3.08	7.3	7.4
Territorial issues	2.85	1.48	2.3
Defence	2.63	2.71	3.7
Energy	2.15	1.95	2.4
Science and technology	2.14	2.98	3.84
Foreign trade	1.63	2.4	1.9
Total	100	100	100
N	13416	29000	31684

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: Cells show proportion of attention per country/year.

Table 5.2 reveals three interesting patterns of issue attention amongst the three agenda venues. First, there are issues that are prioritised in both partisan agendas (of the PM and of the Opposition) and in the policy agenda. This is the case of Economics issues (covering matters such as inflation, taxation policy and industrial policy) that occupy 12.5 % of the total policy agenda and around 10% of the partisan agenda of the PM and of the main opposition party. Similarly, government operations (covering matters such as agency reorganisation, appointments and duties of the bureaucratic personnel) occupy 10 % of the policy agenda and around 9% of the partisan agenda. Second, other policy areas are characterised by low levels of attention in the three agendas. In this sense, Foreign Trade, Energy, and Territorial issues occupy less than 3% of the policy and partisan agendas. These are issues that gain centrality in electoral debates only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. Energy issues may become

prominent as a result of nuclear disasters) and seem to be addressed by governments relatively less often than other more far-reaching policy areas (e.g. Territorial issues may be tackled at once for major institutional and administrative reforms). Finally, there are certain issues that occupy important portions of the partisan agenda (such as Education, Social Welfare and Labour), yet are not prominent in the policy agenda. Indeed, partisan and policy agendas seem to follow similar patterns of attention only on a limited number of issue areas. These results suggest that only specific issues that are highly important in the electoral pledges of the parties are also highly important in the policy agendas. This may further be understood if one considers that the two agenda venues respond to different functions of lawmakers and different strategic incentives: electoral appeal through interests' representation for partisan agendas, and re-election but also administrative responsibilities through accomplishing existing commitments for the policy agenda. In other words, once in office parties need to emphasise the issues that are important for their activists and voters, but at the same time parties have to deal with other issues that are important for the country and that will give them a reputation for good government.

Understanding the salience of different issues in the partisan agendas and policy agenda is only half of the story, because it only reveals the degree of similarity in terms of distribution of issue attention across policy areas. Rather, we shall also explore the intensity of the relationship between partisan and policy agendas for each different policy area. Table 5.3 displays correlation scores between partisan and policy agendas for different issues always distinguishing between the partisan agenda of the party of the PM, of the main opposition party, and of both (overall).

Tab. 5.3: Correlations between partisan and policy agendas in four countries by policy area 1980-2008.

Policy area	Policy Agenda/ Partisan agenda PM	Policy Agenda/ Partisan agenda OPP	Policy Agenda/ Partisan agenda (Overall)
Justice and Crime	**0.61****	**0.79*****	**0.76*****
Education	**0.54***	**0.69***	**0.71***
Agriculture	**0.41***	**0.24 ***	**0.50***
Economics	0.12	0.10	0.11
Civil Rights	-0.06	0.04	-0.01
Health	-0.20	0.41	0.10
Labour	0.003	0.01	0.06
Environment	-0.31	-0.52	-0.49
Energy	0.04	0.03	0.16
Transportation	-0.03	-0.23	-0.15
Social Welfare	0.03	-0.01	0.02
Urban planning	-0.31	-0.51	-0.50
Banking, finance	0.39	0.28	0.38
Defence	-0.53	-0.14	-0.32
Science	-0.02	0.19	0.13
Foreign trade	-0.35	-0.36	-0.36
International Affairs	-0.28	0.14	0.31
Government operations	0.24	-0.05	0.08
Territorial issues	0.12	-0.05	0.04

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
*p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01
Note: Cells show correlations coefficients between the proportion of actions (laws and quasi-sentences) in each of the 19 issue areas for each country/year.

The level of correlations between partisan and policy agendas is high and significant only for a limited number of issues: 3 out of 19. The highest correlation is observed for Justice and Crime issues, whereas others are characterised by lower levels of significance ($p<0.10$) suggesting a weaker relationship between the two agenda venues. I ran correlations with different categories of partisan agendas – party of the Prime Minister, the main opposition party, separately and together – and found that correlations are higher with aggregated partisan agendas, suggesting that once in power, parties tend to carry on their own promises but also those of the opposition party. In some cases (Justice and Crime, Education) the correlation between the policy agenda and the partisan agenda of the opposition is higher than the correlation with the partisan agenda of the PM. This evidence suggests that lawmakers' attention results from the interaction of the electoral promises of the majority and

opposition parties, confirming the results found by Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) on a case study on Denmark.

The mechanism unveiled by my analysis should be as follows: the party of the Prime Minister may generate a debate around an issue that becomes part of the policy agenda. At the same time, however, this party also has strong incentives to pay attention to the issues that enter the policy agenda even when they are brought by the opposition. According to the data, this seems to be particularly the case of Justice and Crime issues, where the correlation between the agenda of the opposition party and the policy agenda (0.79***) is stronger than the correlation between the party of the Prime Minister and the policy agenda (0.61**). Overall, these results suggest that when both the party of the PM and the main opposition party give substantial emphasis to Justice and Crime, Education, and Agriculture issues, it is likely that lawmakers will pass legislation dealing with these issues in the following years. It is only when both the government and opposition party provide substantial electoral attention to these issues that party manifestos seem to be correlated to the policy agenda. Hence, the issue-by-issue analyses of correlations provide partial support for classic party mandate theories. The results suggest that a mandate exists but that it is not as strong as classic theories may expect since it is a) conditional upon the issue considered, and b) dependent on more than just the main party in government. Correlation scores are significant but the "congruence between promise and performance" is not as "remarkable" (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994: 2) since it is limited to a small number of issues that constitute the policy agenda.

Moreover, correlation scores are significant both for the partisan agenda of the PM and for the main opposition party suggesting that party mandate is not exclusively transmitted by the government's manifesto, but more broadly by the party system agenda (H1a and H1b).
So far, I have focused on issue-level dynamics starting from the role of parties in national parliaments, i.e. whether it is the party of the PM or the main opposition party. Yet, an exhaustive account of the relationship between partisan and policy agendas needs to consider also whether partisanship shapes patterns of issue-attention in the two agenda venues. To uncover issue-level dynamics originating from partisanship – in the light of the mandate literature arguing that not all policy sectors are equally important for different party families (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001) – the following sections control the correlations for the policy content of the policy agenda in "left" and "right" wing legislatures (H2 and H2a). Accordingly, the next section tests more consistently the

relationship between partisan and policy agendas of different party families.[32] For this I follow two steps: first I map and compare issue attention in left- and right-wing party platforms to detect differences in terms of electoral promises among party families. Second, I look at the transmission of left- and right-wing electoral promises in passed legislation to detect differences in the policy agenda among party families.

Policy agendas and discretionary problems: party family determinants of a conditional mandate

Even if the significance of the terms "Left" and "Right" is becoming progressively less clear especially when applied to mainstream parties with stronger tendencies to cartelisation of interests and policies (Katz and Mair 1995), in the field of research dealing with locating parties on the left-right continuum, the 'Ideological Score' of a party based on the surveys of country's experts (Castles and Mair 1984) is conventionally considered as a good indicator to approximate the actor's political family and related policy preferences. Therefore, for this investigation, I classify parties according to the ideological score proposed by Castles and Mair ranging from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right).[33] For the four countries, I achieve the following classification that is similar to what I obtain using other (more recent) ideological indicators existing in the literature, in particular those based on party manifestos data (e.g., Laver and Budge 1993, Kim and Fording 1998, Gabel and Huber 2000, Laver and Garry 2000, and McDonald, Mendes, and Budge 2004):[34]

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[32]   The reader should be aware that the data does not enable us to tackle whether governing and opposition parties take different positions over policy issues and this is certainly a limit of this contribution and of all agenda-setting studies privileging an attention-approach (see Chapter 3). Differently, what I will be able to assess is whether left- and right-wing governing parties build their policy agendas in the same and/or different ways. The literature on party mandate stresses that different party families have ideological and or reward preferences regarding the way specific policies have to be carried on (see Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987). In this sense, to obtain electoral advantages parties need to emphasise the issues that respond to the concerns of their activists and voters. In the same way, according to the agenda-setting perspective more attention to an issue implies also a stronger (ideological and/or electoral) preference towards it (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2013) and consequently issue emphasis should vary across party families. Even without been able to account for party positioning on different issues I will be able to assess whether left- and right-wing governing parties focus on different issues when they get in government, or whether the "politics of attention" in the policy agenda does not follow partisan patterns.

[33] Details are provided in the Appendix.

[34] For an overview of all existing measures to identify party ideologies and their correlation, see http://mailer.fsu.edu/~hkim/Ideology_Measures_Paper-Final.pdf,. Consulted 17/01/2014.

a) *Centre-Left parties:* Social Democrats (Denmark), Socialist party (France and Spain), and Labour Party (United Kingdom)

b) *Centre-Right parties:* Conservative and Venstre (Denmark), RPR-UMP (France), UCD-PP (Spain) and Conservative Party (United Kingdom).

Starting from this categorisation, from now on I will refer to these parties simply as left- and right-wing actors.

I begin this investigation by comparing the priorities of different party families in each country between 1980 and 2008. As in Chapter 4, I consider the three most important policy areas, i.e. those that occupy bigger shares of the partisan agenda during each electoral campaign. Table 5.4 below illustrates the results for each country, providing the relative attention that each policy sector receives in the party manifestos.

Table 5.4: Priorities in the partisan agenda of different party families 1980-2008 (%)

	Denmark	France	Spain	United Kingdom
Left	**Social Welfare** (15.2)	**Economics** (9.4)	**Education** (10.4)	**Economics** (10.3)
	Economics (14.6) Education (10.8)	**Government** (9.1) Education (6)	**Government** (9.3) Economics (8.4)	**Education** (6.9) Foreign Affairs (6.8)
Right	**Economics** (20.1)	**Economics** (16.8)	**Education** (12.8)	**Education** (11.5)
	Social Welfare (13.4) Labour (9.7)	Labour (7.8) **Government** (6.5)	Justice and Crime (10.9) **Government** (9.9)	**Economics** (9.0) Justice and Crime (8.6)

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: Cells show the three most salient issues in the policy agenda of each party family and the corresponding levels of attention. Measures are proportions. Common issues to both left and right are in bold.

As can be noticed, the two political families exhibit very similar profiles in terms of issue attention in each country, at least for the three main priorities of the PM and opposition parties. In Denmark, left- and right-wing parties have among their priorities Economics and Social Welfare, in France the PS and the RPR-UMP emphasise Economics and Government Operations. The same is true for Spain where the UCD-PP and the PSOE pay high attention to Education and Government Operations, and in the United Kingdom where Economics and Education are emphasised both by the Tories and by the Labour party. From Table 5.4 it is also possible to notice that minor yet striking exceptions to this trend exist. This is the case of Labour issues in Denmark and France that occupy 9.7% and 7.8% respectively of the total partisan agenda of the Right-wing and do not appear among the priorities of the left-wing parties. Similarly, Justice and Crime in Spain and in the United Kingdom occupy 10.9% and 8.6% respectively of the Right-wing partisan agenda, but do not appear among the priorities of left-wing parties.

While one might have expected higher attention for Justice and Crime issues from Right-wing parties, the relatively higher attention paid by the Right-wing parties to Labour issues was unexpected. In order to test this party-family hypothesis even further, and on the entire sample, I ran a two-group mean comparison t-test on the proportion of attention dedicated to each issue by each party family between 1980 and 2008. The results are provided in Table 5.5 below. The last column of Table 5.5 indicates the results of the significance tests associated with the comparison of the differences in the means from left- and right-wing policy agendas (*1 and 3*) and the same indicator from left- and Right-wing partisan agendas (*2 and 4*). This is an intuitive way to capture both whether left- and right-wing electoral promises differ; and whether the content of the policy agenda varies depending on the party family. In this case, stronger partisanship emerges when, for a given issue, both coefficients for the partisan and the policy agenda are significant.

Table 5.5: Mean comparison of issue attention between Left- and Right-partisan and policy agendas 1980-2008

Policy areas	RIGHT		LEFT		Significance tests	
	Policy 1	Partisan 2	Policy 3	Partisan 4	1 and 3	2 and 4
Economics	11.29	10.86	14.44	9.47	.12	.70**
Civil Rights	4.97	6.62	4.92	5.32	**.11****	**.56****
Health	4.26	5.82	3.95	5.73	.09	.45
Agriculture	4.32	2.79	4.51	3.56	.02	.16
Labour	6.98	7.93	7.65	7.00	.08	.44
Education	5.93	9.65	1.02	11.20	-.11**	.55
Environment	3.92	3.28	1.02	2.49	**-.06****	**.12****
Energy	2.24	2.32	2.98	1.63	-.25***	.24
Transportation	6.51	4.01	5.96	4.23	.00	.20
Justice and Crime	8.42	6.22	9.43	9.14	-.30***	.22
Social Welfare	4.67	7.66	4.10	7.22	.00	.63
Urban planning	5.75	4.77	4.76	2.98	.02	.34
Banking, finance	9.14	3.72	9.57	5.71	.11**	.12
Defence	1.84	3.41	2.16	2.44	**-.07****	**.18****
Science and technology	2.42	2.83	2.64	4.21	-.39	.23
Foreign trade	1.19	1.79	1.56	1.69	-.44**	.12
International Affairs	4.77	6.42	6.36	5.88	-.76	.20
Government operations	8.40	8.19	10.20	9.01	-.70	.19
Territorial issues	2.98	1.70	2.75	1.07	-.00	.07
Total	100	100	100	100		
N of actions (laws; quasi-sentences)	7449	23129	5567	33762		

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Paired- t- test; *p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01. Significance tests are done on the basis of the proportion of laws and quasi-sentences in each of the 19 policy areas for each country/year. Areas for which differences are significant both for electoral promises and for the content of the policy agenda are in bold.

By looking at the differences in the electoral promises (last column), it appears that mean differences between partisan agendas for left-wing and right-wing parties are significant only for a limited number of issues (Economics, Civil Rights, Environment, and Defence), suggesting that during electoral campaigns parties compete more by emphasising (and eventually taking positions on) similar issues, rather than by differentiating the issues that become salient in the campaign. By looking at the differences in the content of the policy agenda (fifth column), it also appears that mean differences for diverse party families are

significant only for a limited number of issues (Civil Rights, Education, Environment, Energy, Justice and Crime, Banking and Finance, Defence, and Foreign Trade), suggesting that even in office parties govern not by redirecting issue attention, but by intervening on similar issues (in line with the patterns depicted in Chapter 4). Finally, by looking at the transmission, e.g. whether different electoral promises correspond to differences in the content of the policy agenda (issues in bold), I find 3 consistent left-right differences concerning Civil Rights, Environment and Defence issues, whereas in the case of Economics the difference is significant only when comparing the electoral promises of the parties. Thus there is little evidence that party families systematically affect the content of the policy agenda. Yet, whereas differences are significant for Defence, the relation is not as expected (it is somewhat counter-intuitive). While one might have expected significantly higher attention for Defence issues from right-wing policy agendas the results show that this is an issue that is slightly more emphasised in the policy agenda of the left-wing parties.

A case study of defence policy goes beyond the aim of this chapter but it is important to interpret these counter-intuitive results. Defence policy is an interesting case study for future research on the influence of partisan agendas on policy agendas since some of its aspects largely depend on the country's place in the world (geopolitically) rather than on the partisanship of the government in power. In this policy area, important policy continuities (i.e. independent from partisan alternation) are likely to exist (Bow 2008). However, historically some important changes in defence policy have also been associated with the change of the government. For example, one can recall the case of the Spanish Socialist Prime Minister Zapatero who decided in 2004 to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq, drastically changing the decision of the former conservative Spanish Prime Minister Aznar. In a recent study Bow (2008) shows that these "redirections" in Defence policy tend to be smaller than we think and in general they are better explained by altered political circumstances in the international context than by partisan alternation. Following this reasoning, a plausible qualitative interpretation to make sense of these findings may point out the different historical periods during which left- and right-wing parties have been in power in the four countries, and in particular the fact that most left-wing Prime Ministers arrived to power between the 1980s and 1990s, i.e. towards the end of the Cold War when arms control and disarmament became a major defence concern of all western governments.

During this period, with the only exception of Prime Minister Chirac during the first cohabitation[35] between 1981 and 1993, France has been governed by 5 socialist Prime Ministers under the Presidency of the socialist Mitterrand. In Spain, Felipe Gonzàles (PSOE) was Prime Minister for 14 years between 1982 and 1996. In Denmark, Social-Democratic Prime Ministers governed between 1978 and 1982 (Jørgensen) and between 1993-2001 (Nyrup Rasmussen). For the United Kingdom the pattern is less clear since the Conservative party ruled uninterruptedly between 1979 and 1997 (Thatcher and Major) and the Labour party led by Tony Blair won the elections only in May 1997. However, also in this case, Bow's hypothesis – on the importance of supranational commitments rather than partisanship in defence policy – seems plausible.

Indeed starting from 1997 the Labour Party changed the Defence agenda of the country and engaged British troops in battles on several occasions. Most of these actions were largely motivated by supranational commitments mainly deriving from the close military alliance between the United Kingdom and the United States: the 'Operation Desert Fox' in Iraq in December 1998; the most recent 'War on Terror' against Iraq, joined by the United Kingdom in 2003; the Kosovo war (1999); and the war in Afghanistan (2001-ongoing). At the same time however, Blair's government also faced some internal defence concerns, such as a long negotiation process with the Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA or New IRA) after the Omagh bombing in August 1998 as well as the military intervention in the Sierra Leone Civil war (2000) – a former colony and Commonwealth member. In the light of this short discussion it seems difficult to argue that partisanship systematically determines the attention that governments pay to Defence policy since these issues are very likely to depend on the international context, even if sometimes governments' choices may make the difference. Admittedly, significant correlations for left-wing parties on Defence may also hide the fact that I am not considering the different positions of the parties on the same issue. It is possible that in their manifestos and in their policy activities left-wing actors are more concerned with limiting defence engagements than expanding them but the data is unable to account for this.

Taken together, these descriptive findings seem to challenge the hypothesis that party families matter for the content of the policy agenda (H2 and H2a), showing that similarities in issue attention exist among different party families, within and across countries not only in the electoral platforms, but also in government. I still need to address two other important dimensions that have been discussed in the "do parties matter" literature, i.e. the impact of

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[35] The Cohabitation between President Mitterrand (PS)- and the Prime Minister Chirac (RPR) took place between 1986-1988.

institutions and of elections proximity. The last section deals specifically with these concerns summarised in the set of H3.

Policy agendas and discretionary problems: institutional determinants of a conditional mandate

Institutions set the context within which parties act, compete, cooperate, and rule. In this sense, the institutional framework where parties govern influences also the way in which parties pursue their policy agendas and subsequently the way in which actors' attention is distributed across issues. Institutional configuration is likely to create both opportunities and constraints for actors to pursue policy priorities. This is far from being a recent discovery, since classic studies of the partisan hypothesis have already highlighted that party mandate may be conditioned by the institutional framework in which parties govern (Schmidt 1996; see Chapter 1) and hence a credible test of the partisan hypothesis needs to account also for this important conditioning factor. In this framework, for Klingemann et al. (1994: 17-19) the effects of partisanship on public policy should be stronger in majority systems with single-party cabinets, than in multiparty coalition systems where governing parties are obliged to negotiate and balance their preferences with coalition partners. The same reasoning may be applied to policy and partisan agendas assuming that majoritarian contexts should favour the influence of partisan agendas on the policy agenda. Institutions such as the type of government and the number of legislative parties should be particularly important for the content of the policy agenda by creating incentives that can enhance the ability of political actors to translate their preferences into the policy agenda (Walgrave et al. 2006). In this sense, single-party governments should favour the influence of the partisan agendas on the policy agenda (H3) and a lower number of legislative parties should improve this transmission (H3a)

To test the effects of the institutional configuration on the relationship between partisan and policy agendas, this section is divided in two parts:

1. First, to capture broad patterns of conditional party mandate, I estimate pooled time-series cross-sectional regressions for the period 1980 to 2008 with panel corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995) where each of the 19 policy areas per country constitutes a panel. Estimations rely on 76 issue-country panels, each with around 26 yearly observations[36] from 1980 to 2008 (N=1976). The resulting coefficients tell the reader the average effect of the content of the partisan agendas at the last elections on the content of the policy agenda. Country dummies are not included in the analyses since the variables accounting for institutional characteristics of the type of government and of the number of legislative parties should capture these differences.

2. While the use of a pooled time-series cross-sectional framework enables comparison of the structure of representation across policy agendas and across countries, it is possible that the absence of party mandate on certain policy areas might cancel out party mandate on others obscuring important features of the underlying categories (Bevan and Jennings 2012: 16). In other words, the policy agenda might be responsive to the partisan agenda for a number of most salient policy areas (as previously observed in the case of economy or government operations) but this would not necessarily be reflected in the pooled analysis. Indeed variation in rates of party mandate between policy agendas and partisan agendas for individual issues is to be expected due to differences in the intrinsic importance of certain issues to parties (Klingemann. Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001). Therefore, an issue-level analysis is needed to fully test the inter-relationship between partisan agendas and policy agendas. Hence, in a second part to detect issue-specific dynamics of conditional party mandate I estimate separate time-series cross-sectional regressions for each of the nineteen policy areas for the period from 1980 to 2008.

Time-series cross-sectional analyses makes it possible to analyse the impact of partisan agendas on the content of the policy agenda while controlling for other factors. The policy agenda is the dependent variable and the models predict the relative policy attention devoted to a particular issue in a given period. For all models the time unit of analysis is 12 months. In all time-series models, the lagged value of the dependent variable controls for the

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[36] Given the composition of the data (see Chapter 3) the number of yearly observations per country varies between a minimum of 23 to a maximum of 27. The average number of yearly observations is 25,7.

autoregressive nature of the policy agenda over time and for autocorrelation (see Chapter 3 on methods for further details).[37] Model 1 tests for the effect of the party system agenda and the policy agenda by considering the partisan agenda of the Prime Minister (*PM party agenda*) and of the main opposition party (*Opp. party agenda*) (set of H1); Model 2 controls also for the effects of party families with a variable that is coded 1 when there is a left-wing Prime Minister and 0 when there is a right-wing government (*Left*) (set of H2). In addition, Model 3 controls for the effects of the institutional configuration and electoral proximity (set of H3). The former is done by including a variable accounting for the type of government coded 1 if it is a single-party government and 0 otherwise (*government type*) and for the number of legislative parties (*nr. of parties*). To measure the number of legislative parties I use the 'enp_seats' variable provided by the parlgov dataset that takes higher values for higher number of parties and lower otherwise. Parlgov (www.parlgov.com) is a dataset that provides comparative indicators about government composition, elections, and party positions (for more information see Döring and Manow 2011). Finally, to test the impact of elections proximity I use a dummy variable (*electoral*) taking the value of 1 for the 12 months prior to a national election, and 0 otherwise.

I begin the investigation by focusing on macro-dynamics of issue attention, without distinguishing by policy areas. Table 5.6 below displays the results of the pooled time-series cross-sectional analyses for all of the four countries, proposing a first test of the conditionality of party mandate.

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[37] The responsiveness of policy agendas to issue priorities of the parties can be understood in both contemporaneous and dynamic (Walgrave et al. 2006) forms. For this reason I run the models including a lagged dependent variable that is able to capture changes in policy attention related to long and short term partisan influence.

Table 5.6: Time-series cross-sectional analyses of partisan agendas and policy agendas (1980– 2008)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	1.393	1.388	1.375
	(.247)***	(.246)***	(.234)***
L1. policy agenda	.649	.649	.649
	(.052)***	(.052)***	(.052)***
PM party agenda	.082	.082	.082
	(.015)***	(.015)***	(.015)***
Opp. party agenda	.004	.004	.004
	(.002)*	(.002)*	(.002)*
Left		.009	.009
		(.032)	(.032)
Number of parties			.001
			(.009)
Type of government			.015
			(.001)
Electoral			.012
			(.058)
R-squared	0.46	0.46	0.46
N	1957	1957	1957

Source: Comparative Agendas Project. DV. Policy agenda
Panel corrected standard errors are presented in parentheses.
*p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01.

Table 5.6 shows that the coefficient of the lagged dependent variable is particularly high. This suggests strong autocorrelation, meaning that the policy agenda of a given year is strongly similar to that of the previous year. In other words, these results confirm some of the trends detected in Chapter 4, i.e. that policy stability is high in the policy agenda and path dependency appears as the strongest explanatory factor of the content of the policy agenda. Every year governing parties have to face this legacy, which seems to be the major driver of policy attention. At the same time, my results show that there is an important effect of the partisan agenda of the Prime Minister on the policy agenda and a significant but weaker effect (*p<0.10) of the partisan agenda of the main opposition party as expected in the set of H1 (Model 1). These results confirm the general tendencies depicted in the previous sections of the chapter and they bring further support for the set of H1 arguing that the party system agenda matters for the content of the policy agenda, and policy priorities are set not only by the governing party but also by the opposition. In Model 2 the coefficient associated with the

party family of the Prime Minister does not appear to influence the composition of the policy agenda, suggesting that the attention profiles of governments do not vary substantially depending on the partisanship of the party in office, which is not in line with the set of hypotheses H2. Finally, the results of Model 3 account for institutional determinants and elections proximity providing an empirical test of the set of H3. In my sample, neither the number of legislative parties nor the type of government and electoral proximity seem to matter for party mandate (the coefficients are not significant), contradicting conventional wisdom (Blais and Nadeau, 1992; Schmidt 1996). However the results of Model 3 should be interpreted very carefully and by considering that their validity is affected by the small number of countries included in this study. Future investigations on broader samples exhibiting bigger institutional variation may further clarify these patterns.

The results illustrated in Table 5.6 are useful to inform about general tendencies of the relationship between partisan and policy agendas and its conditional character. Yet, to achieve a more exhaustive picture, they need to be further specified by accounting for the differences across policy areas. To achieve this goal, I have tested issue-dynamics of conditional party mandate (as in Model 3) for each policy area separately, capturing differences in institutional configuration across countries by the variables accounting for the type of government and the number of legislative parties. The results are presented in Table 5.7 and summarised in Table 5.8 below. Table 5.7 presents the findings on the effects of issue attention in partisan agendas on the policy agenda by presenting the coefficient estimates for each policy area. To ease the reading Table 5.7 reports only significant coefficients. In addition, Table 5.8 proposes a summary of this information and it is structured as follows. In each column I list the policy areas for which the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda takes place via the agenda of the party of the PM (as suggested by classic theories of party mandate), via the agenda of the opposition (as posited by the party system agenda theory developed by agenda scholars), the policy areas for which the transmission is shaped by the institutional configuration, and finally by elections proximity. These results are presented across the columns, enabling comparison across policy areas and mechanisms of transmission.

Table 5.7: Effects of partisan agendas on policy agendas, by policy area (1980-2008)

	Economics	Civil Rights	Health	Agriculture	Labour	Education	Environment	Energy	Transport	Justice and Crime	Welfare	Housing	Banking	Defence	Science	Trade	Foreign affairs	Government	Lands
Constant	-3.66 (3.52)*	5.46 (2.01)***	NS	.70 (1.17)*	NS	4.21 (1.47)*	4.17 (1.47)*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.22 (.12)**	5.69 (1.94)***	7.26 (3.87)**	10.16 (3.27)**	-.055 (1.47)*
L1. policy agenda	.022 (.134)*	.32 (113)***	-.012 (.11)*	.284 (.101)***	.15 (.10)*	.31 (.12)**	.022 (.012)*	.193 (.10)*	.159 (.102)*	NS	.38 (.10)***	.40 (.089)***	.097 (.001)*	NS	.22 (.12)**	.467 (.138)***	.645 (.103)***	NS	.146 (.127)*
PM party agenda	-.11 (.069)*	.084 (.048)*	.15 (.050)***	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.408 (.141)**	NS	NS	NS	.267 (.097)***	NS	-.185 (.09)**	NS	NS	.244 (.127)*	NS
Opp. party agenda	NS	NS	.012 (.006)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.011 (.005)**	NS	.163 (.060)***	NS	.154 (.067)**	NS	NS	NS	NS
Left	NS	NS	-.84 (.49)*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-1.98 (.55)***	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	2.30 (1.02)*	NS
Number of parties	1.77 (.28)***	-.33 (.15)**	.24 (.12)*	.263 (.11)**	.618 (161)***	NS	NS	.229 (.080)**	.660 (.171)***	NS	NS	.779 (.199)***	NS	NS	.270 (.089)**	-.406 (.167)**	NS	-.537 (.271)**	NS
Type of government	NS	NS	.033 (.014)**	NS	-.096 (.021)***	NS	NS	NS	.036 (.016)**	.18 (.043)*	NS	NS	-.057 (.025)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Electoral	2.81 (1.23)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.546 (.32)*	NS	2.30 (1.14)**	NS	NS
R-squared	0.36	0.31	0.19	0.20	0.40	0.15	0.05	0.14	0.26	0.07	0.20	0.17	0.36	0.02	0.21	0.46	0.40	0.21	0.06

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
*p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01
Panel Corrected standard errors (not shown)

Table 5.8: Summary of the effects of partisan agendas on policy agendas, by policy area (1980-2008)

Transmission of partisan electoral promises in the policy agenda				
Classic mechanism (via the PM party agenda)	Party system mechanism (via the OPP party agenda)	Mandate mediated by party family	Mandate mediated by institutions	Mandate mediated by elections proximity
Economics			Economics	Economics (+)
Civil Rights			Civil Rights	
Health	Health	Health (-)	Health	
Transport	Welfare	Transport (-)	Transport	
Banking	Banking	Government (+)	Banking	
Science	Trade		Science	Science (-)
Government			Trade	
			Government	

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

Overall, I find some evidence that parties' electoral promises are transmitted in the policy agenda not only via the platform of the Prime Minister (confirming H1) but also via the platforms of the opposition (confirming H1a). Issue-by-issue analyses highlight that out of 19 policy areas, classic theories of party mandate can explain the transmission of electoral promises in policy agendas for 7 policy areas. Party-system agenda theory brings further evidence adding 2 extra issues (Welfare and Trade) that enter the policy agenda via the electoral promises of the opposition. These results confirm that policy agendas are set not only by the electoral promises of the governing parties (even if this appears to be more prominent), but also by the opposition. In total, if one considers both classic and agenda-theories of party mandate, it is found that the electoral promises of the parties influence the content of the policy agenda on 9 out of 19 issues. Concerning the influence of party families, the results show that partisanship matters only for 3 out of 9 issues for which party mandate is at work, providing only weak support for the set of H2.

The direction of the effects indicates that left-wing parties attend more to Government issues, while right-wing parties tend to emphasise policy areas such as Health and Transport,

which are not straightforwardly identifiable as classic "left or right" issues (such as Crime for the Right, and Welfare for the Left).

Interestingly enough, institutions appear to mediate systematically the transmission of electoral promises in the policy agenda, confirming H3 and the results achieved by classic studies of party mandate (Schmidt 1996). However, issue-by-issue analyses reveal that the role of institutions is more complex than traditionally assumed. On the one hand I find that over certain issues a more majoritarian institutional configuration (with single party government and a smaller number of parties) allows higher levels of transmission of electoral promises in policy agenda (for Civil Rights, Trade and Government) but this is far from being systematic across issues over which institutional influence does not follow clear patterns as assumed by classic studies. Finally, the results indicate that elections proximity matters only in very few cases (2 out of the 9 issues where party mandate is at work), bringing weak support to H3a. In addition, the directions of the effects point out that the impact is not as expected. If Economic issues appear to follow the "classic" electoral business cycle (being emphasised in the policy agenda during the 12 months closest to the elections), differently Science and Technology appear to be issues that enter the policy agenda mostly in non-electoral times. This is likely to depend on the electoral pay-off of the two issues with the Economy representing one very important topic that has been proven to shape voter behaviour (van der Brug et al. 2007) over which lawmakers are more ready to manipulate the policy agenda to assure re-election.

Taken together, these results provide at least three major indications about the influence of partisan agendas on policy agendas. First, as expected (set of H1) when party mandate is at work, it may be assured both by the party of the PM and/or by the opposition and therefore often the government responds to the issues raised by the opposition. Hence, parties seek to influence the policy agenda not only when they govern but also when they are in opposition, confirming the importance of the party system agendas for public policy. These results are coherent with previous findings showing that at least some degree of representation falls to the party system agenda (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010) and not merely to individual partisan agendas. Second, unlike what is expected (H2), the relationship between partisan and policy agendas does not appear to be systematically influenced by the classic left-right cleavage. I do not find consistently significant left-right cleavages across issues that would give credit to the influence of the party family on the issues that parties emphasise when they are in office. This is coherent with the results achieved by other agenda scholars suggesting

that more than the "party family" there should be country- and party-specific interest patterns that explain these variations and that deserve to be further explored. In addition, this may also result from the competences of each policy agenda in the different countries (Bevan and Jennings 2012) but also from the priorities of the parties in government at different times in different contexts. Thirdly, consistent with classical expectations (H3), issue-by-issue analyses confirm that policy agendas are more responsive in majoritarian systems with single-party governments and a smaller number of parties (such as the UK and France). These results confirm those of other agenda studies of party mandate (Persico et al. 2012; Froio et al. 2014; Bevan and Greene 2015), but they should be interpreted very carefully given the small number of countries included in the sample of this study. In addition, the "electoral business cycle" appears to be at work only on a very limited number of issues (H3a) and not only as expected by classic research. In this sense, the results reveal that over issues with bigger potential payoff (such as the Economy), the transmission of electoral promises in the policy agenda is stronger during electoral times. This is, however, not the case of issues with lower payoff (such as Science and Technology).

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an analysis of the relationship between partisan electoral promises and policy agendas, under the theoretical assumption that the influence of parties on lawmaking is not as ubiquitous as previous literature on party mandate suggests, instead it is conditional. Unlike previous studies, therefore, I do not analyse exclusively the impact of the partisan agenda on the policy agenda depending on the institutional framework, but I also explore the influence of the content of the party system agenda on policy agendas, and I carefully distinguish issue-by-issue dynamics in order to capture the circumstances and issue areas that make parties matter. The results show that half of the policy areas included in the agenda of the parliaments are significantly influenced by the content of the party system agenda, i.e. the policy demands of both the party of the Prime Minister and of the main opposition party. In addition, only a limited number of issues are mobilised differently depending on the partisanship of the government. This suggests that political families have preferences that are more homogeneous than expected by the issue ownership literature. At

the same time, my results seem to confirm the idea that single-party cabinets and a limited number of legislative parties enhance partisan influence even if election proximity does not seem to matter. In other words, partisan influence on policy is conditional since it is achieved not only by the governing parties, but also by the opposition.

The findings of this chapter detect the share of the policy agenda that is shaped by the discretionary preferences of the parties, showing that, although parties still influence a certain share of passed legislation, parties' electoral promises originate policy problems that are not systematically translated into policies. Other policy problems are likely to influence policy attention of lawmakers and hence reshape partisan influence on the policy agenda. These may be related to what is under discussion in the public debate, but also to pending commitments that need to be addressed by representatives in order for them to keep their reputation of good government. These may affect lawmakers' decisions to prioritise certain issues instead of others and hence further condition the relationship between partisan preferences and policy agendas. These dynamics are explored in more detail in the next chapters. In particular, Chapter 6 focuses on the way in which the transmission of electoral promises in policy agendas is mediated by pending policy commitments originating from the EU directives.

APPENDIX CHAPTER 5

THE DISCRETIONARY PRIORITIES:

POLICY AGENDAS AND PARTISAN PREFERENCES

Table A: Descriptors of the parties considered in this study

Country	Time	Majority (First) Party	Votes (%)	Seats	Largest opposition party	Votes (%)	Seats
	1981-1984	Social Democratic Party	32,9	59	Conservative People's Party	14,5	26
	1984-1987	Social Democratic Party	31,6	56	Conservative People's Party	23,4	42
	1987-1988	Social Democratic Party	29,3	54	Conservative People's Party	20,8	38
	1988-1990	Social Democratic Party	29,8	55	Conservative People's Party	19,3	35
Denmark	1990-1994	Social Democratic Party	37,4	69	Conservative People's Party	16	30
	1994-1998	Social Democratic Party	34,6	62	Venstre (Liberal)	23,3	42
	1998-2001	Social Democratic Party	35,9	63	Venstre (Liberal)	24	42
	2001-2005	Venstre (Liberal)	31,2	56	Social Democratic Party	29,1	52
	2005-2007	Venstre (Liberal)	29	52	Social Democratic Party	25,8	47
	1981-1986	Socialist Party	37,5	269	Rally for the Republic	20,8	85
	1986-1988	Socialist Party	31	206	Rally for the Republic +	11,2 +	149+
					Union for french democracy (Common lists)	8,3	127
France	1988-1993	Socialist Party	34,7	260	Rally for the Republic	19,2	149
	1993-1997	Rally for the Republic	20	242	Union for french democracy	18,7	207
	1997-2002	Socialist Party	23,4	255	Rally for the Republic	15,7	139
	2002-2007	Union for a popular Mouvement	33,3	399	Socialist Party	24,1	255
	1982-1986	Socialist Party	48,1	202	People's Alliance/People's Party	26,4	107
	1986-1989	Socialist Party	44,1	184	People's Alliance/People's Party	26	105
	1989-1993	Socialist Party	39,6	175	People's Party	25,8	101
Spain	1993-1996	Socialist Party	38,8	159	People's Party	34,8	141
	1996-2000	People's Party	38,8	156	Socialist Party	37,6	141
	2000-2004	People's Party	44,5	183	Socialist Party	34,1	125
	2004-2008	Socialist Party	42,6	164	People's Party	37,7	148
	1983-1987	Conservative	42,4	397	Labour	27,6	209
	1987-1992	Conservative	42,2	376	Labour	30,8	229
United Kingdom	1992-1997	Conservative	41,9	336	Labour	34,4	271
	1997-2001	Labour	43,2	418	Conservative	30,7	165
	2001-2005	Labour	40,7	413	Conservative	31,7	166
	2005-2010	Labour	35,2	355	Conservative	32,4	198

Note: For France: the table reports the scores of the parties in the 1st round of legislative elections. For Spain: the table reports the scores of the parties for the lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados).* All the data has been collected from the website: http://parlgov.org/stable/data/dnk.html.

Table B: Party abbreviations, ideological scores and party families

Country	Party Original Name	Abbreviation	Political Family (Castles & Mair 1984)*
Denmark	Konservative Folkeparti	Cons	Right (7.2)
	Socialdemokraterne	SD	Left (3.8)
	Venstre	V	Right (7.3)
France	Parti socialiste	PS	Left (3.2)
	Rassemblement pour la République	RPR	Right (7.5)
	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire	UMP	Right (7.5)
Spain	Alianza Popular	PP	Right (7.6)
	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	PSOE	Left (3.7)
	Unión de Centro Democrático	UCD	Right (7.1)
United Kingdom	Conservative and Unionist Party	C	Right (7.4)
	Labour Party	L	Left (4.4)

*Castles and Mair ideological scores. This score ranges from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right).

Graph A: Issue salience in party manifestos (1980-2008). %
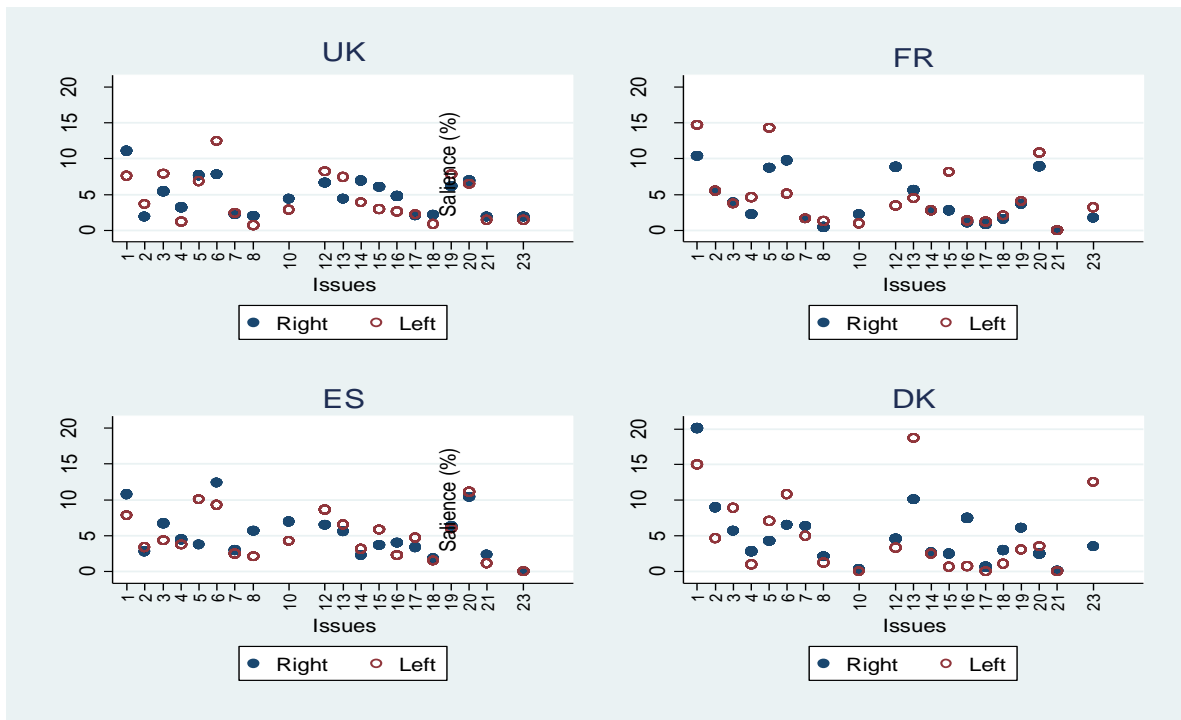
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

Note: *The codes refer to the following policy domains: 1=Economics. 2=Civil rights. 3=Health. 4=Agriculture. 5=Labour. 6=Education. 7=Environment. 10=Transportation. 12=Law, crime 13=Social Welfare. 14=Housing policy. 15=Banking, finance. 16=Defence. 18=Foreign trade. 19=Foreign policy. 20=Government operations. 21= Land and water management. 23=Culture.*

Graph B: Issue salience in passed legislation (1980-2008). %
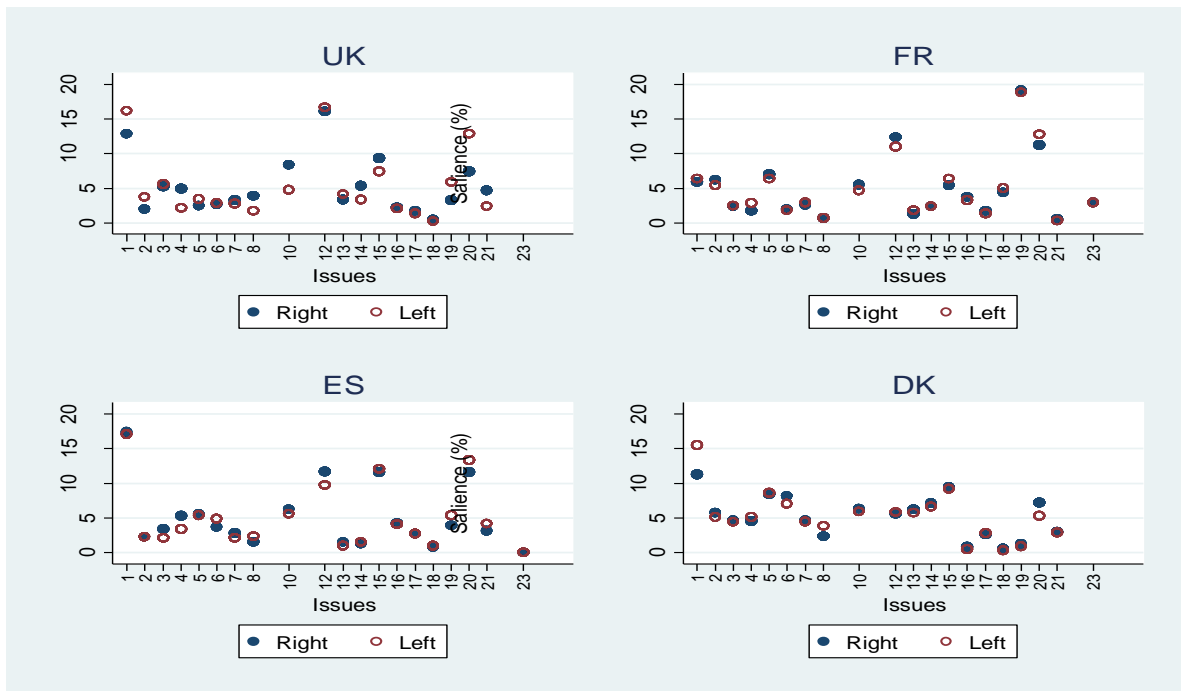
Source: Comparative Agendas Project

Note: *The codes refer to the following policy domains: 1=Economics. 2=Civil rights. 3=Health. 4=Agriculture. 5=Labour. 6=Education. 7=Environment. 10=Transportation. 12=Law, crime 13=Social Welfare. 14=Housing policy. 15=Banking, finance. 16=Defence. 18=Foreign trade. 19=Foreign policy. 20=Government operations. 21= Land and water management. 23=Culture.*

CHAPTER 6

The impact of pending commitments: policy agendas and the content of EU directives

Chapter 5 explored the conditions for the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda. The results illustrated that both the electoral promises of the majority and of the main opposition party contribute to set the policy agenda, that partisanship matters exclusively for a narrow set of policy areas, and that institutional configuration and elections proximity shape the transmission of electoral promises in a less homogeneous way than expected by classic theories, and only for a narrow set of policy areas. Accounting both for classic and agenda-setting explanations for the transmission of parties' preferences in policies leaves us with important portions of lawmakers' attention that still need to be explained and for which the influence of parties does not appear to play a prominent role. Broadly speaking, the results suggest that policy agendas do not seem to follow exclusively partisan logics, suggesting that parties are not the key-actors of the game, or in other terms, that not all the issues that enter the policy agenda are brought and/or driven by partisan imperatives.

Expanding on these first findings, I shall now explore the other venue of policy problems identified in the theoretical model of this work that shall influence the construction of the policy agenda. In Chapter 2 I referred to this as "policy commitments" originating from the open-ended decisions inherited by governments from their predecessors. In this understanding, in the four countries selected the policy agenda is shaped by non-electoral commitments addressed in the EU directives – binding legal acts to which Member States (MSs) must comply to achieve policy convergence in the Union. Accounting for this source of policy problems allows us to study how policy responsibility impacts the composition of policy agendas and if attention to commitments redefines electoral mandates. In this framework, Chapter 6 explores the following questions: do policy commitments influence lawmakers' attention? To what extent do policy commitments shape the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda?

In a classic contribution on the role of inheritance in public policy, Richard Rose writes that: "Policy makers are heirs before they are choosers" (Rose 1990: 263). In this

sense, when a new parliament enters office it cannot insert in its agenda only the priorities resulting from its electoral mandate, but lawmakers have to cope with "policy inheritance" – i.e. all issues that *must* be tackled because they represent commitments inherited by governments.

These compulsory problems result from all the decisions of previous representatives (and their consequences). In this respect, studies of public policy have highlighted the importance of inherited commitments related for example to building infrastructures, assuring military defence, paying social security benefits (Rose 1994), but also – in the case of the United States – the renewal of expiring legislation (Adler and Wilkerson 2013). In all these cases decisions adopted will take longer than a legislature to be realised and hence become pending commitments for future legislators. In my theoretical model, pending commitments contribute to shape lawmakers' attention and they mediate the transmission of electoral promises in the policy agenda. A striking case of policy commitments creating compulsory policy activities for European polities is that of the EU directives, since decisions on EU affairs and delegation of power taken from previous governments are hard – if not impossible – to reverse by their successors. For example, the determination of a new Prime Minister or parliamentary majority cannot alter the effects of the EU Membership on the national economy of a country that has previously adopted the Euro currency.

For these reasons, a comprehensive understanding of the composition of the policy agenda must account for this important portion of lawmakers' activities, through which they accomplish their function as responsible administrators and avoid reckless decision-making. Focusing only on whether the discretionary preferences of the governing parties enter the policy agenda means neglecting the second function of lawmakers in contemporary democracies, e.g. administrating the state. In addition, studying policy agendas only by considering partisan influence would neglect the fact that governing parties are not as free as an "individual in a shopping mall", but that existing commitments may re-shape party mandate dynamics, and hence the agenda-setting power of governing parties. Several studies of the composition of policy agendas discuss the importance of considering this specific branch of parliaments' activity originating from non-electoral mandates and that is independent both from the parties in power and from the societal agenda (see Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014 for a discussion).

Yet, empirical studies on the compulsory share of policy agendas are – to the best of my knowledge – still very rare. In addition, most existing contributions focus exclusively on budgetary commitments on governments' choices, neglecting the role of other important

sources of policy commitments (often with lower electoral payoff than budgets) originating from the European Union (EU). Under the founding Treaties of the EU – and in particular under the recent dispositions of the Lisbon Treaty – Member States (MSs) share and confer competences with and to the Union.[38] An exhaustive study of the composition of domestic policy agendas of EU Member States shall consider the influence of the EU commitments on national policy activities. The goal of this chapter will be precisely to explore empirically the impact of policy commitments on the composition of the policy agenda, by looking at the way in which commitments may mediate the transmission of electoral mandates. More precisely, I focus on the consequences of the content of the EU directives on the passed legislation of national representatives and hence for their problem-solving capacity. The structure of the chapter is threefold:

a) First, I discuss how the EU membership produces a set of pending commitments for national legislatures. I propose to explore how compulsory policy problems influence the content of the policy agenda and how they interact with the discretionary electoral priorities of governing parties

b) Second, I map out the commitments deriving from the EU directives for 19 policy areas between 1982 and 2010, with the goal of detecting variation over time and across countries.

c) Third, I explore the way in which policy commitments mediate the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda to understand whether over certain policy areas commitments are stronger than in others, and if these shape the agenda-setting power of governing parties.

In this sense, the research hypotheses of this chapter investigate whether national policy agendas respond to policy commitments originating from the EU directives (H1), if these commitments have changed over time (H1a), the magnitude of this influence (H2 and H2a), and finally if existing policy commitments shape the transmission of parties' electoral

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[38]As will be further discussed, Articles 3, 4, and 6 of the TFEU (2007) distinguish between three types of competences: exclusive, shared and supporting competences of the Union. The Treaty entered into force on December 1 2009.

promises in the policy agenda, or in other words if pending commitments impact the agenda-setting power of governing parties in electoral and non-electoral times (H3 and H3a).

The Delors' prophecy: EU commitments and national policy agendas

In 1988, the then President of the European Commission Jacques Delors (1985-1994) declared in front of the European Parliament that within 10 years "80 per cent of the legislation related to economics, maybe also to taxes and social affairs, will be of Community origin" (Bulletin No-2-367/157, 6 July 1988). Scholars do not agree on whether this figure is accurate, and different opinions exist (for an overview of this debate see Brouard et. al. 2012). Yet, regardless of the accuracy of the "Delors' Prophecy", the effects of the creation of the European Union and its consequences for the Member States have been largely debated in the literature dealing with "Europeanisation".

More precisely, the formal adjustments of the EU treaties that have characterised the last 20 years of the Union have led scholars to explore the impact of the European integration on national politics and policies (Radaelli 1997; Kassim et al. 2000; Hix and Goetz 2000; Cowles et al. 2001; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Bulmer and Radaelli 2005; Holzhacker 2007; Konig 2007). Most of these studies provide normative interpretations of the institutional mechanisms and sets of power relations between the EU and its Member States. Europeanisation is a very fashionable but extremely polysemous concept that is hard to clarify given the high number of definitions that have been provided by existing research. In this sense, the concept is used to refer to a variety of phenomena ranging from the formal agreement of member states with the EU legal rules (Müller et al. 2010) to "the standardization and convergence of cultural practices and lifestyles" (Mair 2004: 341). There is not one single definition that is shared by scholars of this field, whereas definitions are often developed *ad hoc*, i.e. produced in order to explain specific case studies (Olsen 2002; for an overview see: Börzel 1999: 547; Checkel 2001: 180).

At the same time, these definitions tend to complement, rather than exclude, each other. Consequently, in my view, it is premature to fully abandon the term even if its definition is complicated. Thus, my study does not have the ambition of proposing the ultimate, most exhaustive definition of the term "Europeanisation". Instead, I shall look at the existing literature on Europeanisation and extrapolate the definition of the mechanism that best fits my research endeavour, i.e. a conceptualisation that accounts for the impact of EU

decisions on domestic policy agendas (hereinafter EU commitments) by producing compulsory policy activities. According to Olsen (2002) the concept of "Europeanisation" has been associated with different phenomena pertaining to *what* is Europeanised (e.g. influenced by the process of European integration), *how* and *why*. In particular, scholars have explored 5 main research questions. First of all, they have studied changes in the territorial external boundaries of the EU, exploring the rationale for the dynamics of expansion for MSs and for the forerunners (for an overview see: Schimmelfennig 2001 and Sedelmeier 2001; Sjursen 2001a and 2001b). In this understanding, Europeanisation is at work "territorially", through EU enlargement.

Second, scholars have focused on the development of institutions at the European level, dealing with the formal set of legal institutions of governance aiming at facilitating the application of binding decisions and at the same time at sanctioning non-compliance. Here, Europeanisation refers to the institutionalisation of a specific system of governance at the EU level (Risse et al. 2001: 3). In this understanding Europeanisation includes not only the strengthening of the organisational capacity of the EU, but also the development of common ideas, norms and understandings of EU citizenship and membership (Checkel 2001: 180; also on education policy of the EU see Beukel 2001).

Third, EU studies have been concerned with exporting forms of political organisation. In this case research deals with the relations between EU institutions and non-EU institutions beyond the EU territory and the functioning of the diffusion processes. In this understanding, Europeanisation is broadly conceived as the influence of the EU on the international level. Scholars have questioned the attractiveness of EU prescriptions for inspiration outside the EU (Garton Ash 2001; Meyer 2001). Fourth, research on the EU as a political unification project explores the extent to which the EU is becoming a more united polity with a stronger identity shared among its citizens. Here Europeanisation refers to the political and cultural process through which the EU is becoming an identity. According to existing research, these processes may result from reform programmes (Habermas 1998; Notre Europe 2001); from the creation of a multi-level system of governance (Kohler-Koch 1999; Hooghe and Marks 2001), but also from a series of past failed attempts to unify the EU (Heater 1992).

Finally, studies have focused on the EU penetration of national systems of governance. Here, the focus is on changing domestic institutions and governance resulting from the development at the EU level of institutions, and policies. Hence, in this understanding Europeanisation refers to the adaptation of national and sub-national systems of governance and of national and sub-national policies to European norms. According to Olsen (2002), this

is the most common use of the term Europeanisation today. These traditions explore the impact of European decisions on national policies in different sectors (for a general overview see Radaelli 2003; on the Europeanisation of environmental policy see Knill and Lenschow 2000 and Haverland 2000, on transportation see Héritié et al. 2001), but also the scope of domestic changes and practices under the influence of the EU (Mény et al. 1996; Bulmer and Lequesne 2001; Goetz and Hix 2001; Ladrech 2010). Within this tradition, however, scholars tend to disagree on the extent to which Europeanisation is at work in reshaping domestic policies (Wallace 1999; Bulmer and Radaelli 2004), even though most agree that European-level decisions have negatively affected the problem-solving capacity of MSs (Scharpf 1999) and consequently challenged the classic role of national politics (Mair 2008). For the purpose of my study, I adopt the definition and approach of the latter tradition of research in the field of Europeanisation, since this makes it possible to fully grasp the influence of EU-level decisions on national agendas.

In this sense, Conzelmann (1998: 1) has reported that: "one should assume that if governance and institutional structures of the Member State level (*i.e. politics and polity*) are being transformed, the impact of European integration on domestic *policy* should be even more profound". Hence, in a certain sense the policy-approach may be considered as a privileged viewpoint to explore the EU commitments for domestic policy agendas. Indeed, research in this field has illustrated that EU membership produces important policy consequences for MSs, and that the content of the EU agenda is an important source of policy commitments for national representatives. [39]

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[39] In this sense, this study privileges a "top down" approach to Europeanisation leaving aside feedback effects of national on EU policies. Adopting a more demanding and encompassing definition of Europeanisation to approximate policy legacy would be of great interest. Yet, it would be very problematic for a comparative study both in terms of data availability and in terms of generalisability of the findings. Indeed, despite the proliferation of normative definitions, this field of research lacks of empirical comparative and longitudinal studies of the extent to which national policies are Europeanised, implying that we still do not know how much and in what ways the EU is influencing different national policy sectors in a cross-countries and cross-policies perspective (Raunio and Wiberg 2009 for an exception see Brouard et al. 2012). This lack of large-N comparative research is partially due to the absence of a generalisable operationalisation of Europeanisation (Olson 2002) that may easily be transported from one case study to others.

Expectations of the interrelations between compulsory and discretionary policy problems: policy commitments and electoral promises in policy agendas

Combining insights from the Europeanisation literature and from public policy approaches to policy commitments and policy agendas (see Chapter 2), the hypotheses set out to analyse the relation between pending commitments, partisan electoral promises and policy agendas, in order to analyse the extent to which existing commitments impact lawmakers' attention and reshape party mandate. The first set of hypotheses focuses specifically on the share of the policy agenda resulting from EU commitments. As previously discussed, I consider the EU directives as an important and binding source of policy commitments for national governments. The first question I aim to answer is therefore a basic (almost rhetorical) one, which, however, is needed to build my reasoning: do policy agendas accommodate commitments originating from the EU directives? The logic should be straightforward: for MSs, EU directives are binding legal acts and hence they set the obligation to comply with EU standards of policies. As a consequence, a first intuitive hypothesis follows:

H1: *The issue priorities of the EU directives are represented in the policy agenda.*

In a recent contribution discussing the functioning of the political system of the EU, Hix and Høyland (2011: 6-12) analysed how the approval of the major EU treaties influences the degree of policy integration between the EU and the MSs. The results of their enquiry are summarised in Figure 6.1. below. In the figure, the "degree of policy integration" is an approximate measure of the number and significance of the policy competences that are covered by the EU. The "extent of supranational decision-making" is an approximate measure of the proportion of EU policy competences that are governed by supra-national decision-making procedures, where the Commission is the agenda-setter, the Council decides by QMV, the Council shares legislative authority with the European Parliament, and the ECJ has jurisdiction. Within the legal framework of the EU, policy areas treated via supranational procedures are those over which MSs have 'lost' much of their autonomy (Marks et al. 1996; Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999; Stone Sweet et al. 2001).

Figure 6.1: The degree of policy integration
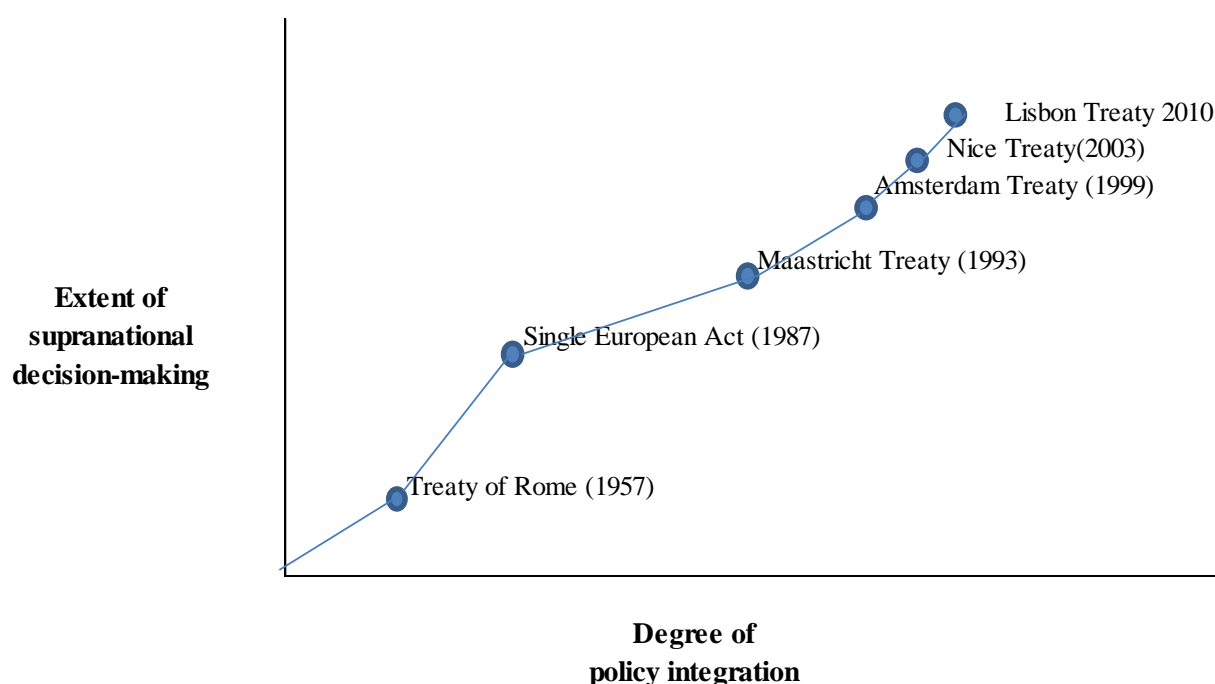
Note: the "degree of policy integration" is an approximate measure of the number and significance of the policy competences that are covered by the EU. The "extent of supranational decision-making" is an approximate measure of the proportion of EU policy competences that are governed by supra-national decision-making procedures, where the Commission is the agenda-setter, the Council decides by QMV, the Council shares legislative authority with the European Parliament, and the ECJ has jurisdiction.

The graph illustrates that as new treaties have been introduced, the degree of policy-integration between the EU and its MSs has increased. In this framework, the more the EU-integration process has advanced, the more Europeanised domestic policy agendas should be, and therefore the more commitments related to the EU decisions should enter the domestic policy agenda. Yet, Hix and Høyland also illustrate that this "upward" trend has been changing, especially during most recent times, when "every new EU Treaty has ended up being less ambitious than the previous one" (Hix and Høyland,: 11), since the EU got closer to an equilibrium in terms of "policy architecture" and competence sharing with the MSs. In this sense, in the period included in the analysis the influence of the EU should have increased even if this is less likely to be the case for more recent years for which data is not available. As a consequence, given the timespan covered by this study, I formulate the following hypothesis concerning the change of EU commitments over time:

H1a: In the domestic policy agenda, policy commitments originating from EU directives increase over time.

Related to this broad hypothesis on increasing EU commitments in domestic agendas over time, I argue that the influence of EU commitments on domestic agendas is likely to depend also on membership duration, under the assumption that never Member States with higher levels of EU involvement deriving from the need to transpose the *acquis communautaire* shall face higher commitments than old MSs that joined the Union before (Knill and Tosun 2009). Therefore, I expect that:

H1b. The more recent the membership to the EU, the higher the levels of EU commitments in the policy agenda due to the pressure to catch-up with the acquis communautaire.

Yet, EU commitments may differ over time and according to the policy area considered given the different categories of the EU competences. In particular, according to the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU art. 2-6), the competences are now divided into three categories: 1. *exclusive competence* where only the EU can act (art. 3 TFEU) in the case of customs union, monetary policy, fishery policy, and commercial policy. 2 *Shared competences* with Member States where both the EU and its MSs may adopt legally binding acts (although, the MSs can do so *only* if the EU has decided not to (art. 4 TFEU) in fields such as Environment, Agriculture, and Transport).

Finally, 3. *competence to support and coordinate* the actions of the MSs, where the EU may not adopt legally binding acts that require the MSs to harmonise their regulations (art. 6 TFEU) such as in the fields of health, culture, and tourism. In this framework, studies on Europeanisation of domestic policies have shown that different policy areas are characterised by different levels of Europeanisation (see for an overview Brouard et al. 2012). The basic idea is that in the sectors over which the EU has developed exclusive and shared competences (such as in the case of Fishery, Agriculture and Environmental policy), national policies are more extensively influenced by the EU decisions (see Schmitter 1996; Schmidt 2002; Börzel 2006). In line with the results of these studies, I expect that national policies are

mostly affected in the fields over which the EU has developed exclusive or shared competences vis a vis the MSs that are associated with increasing policy actions (Andersen and Eliassen 1993; Pollack 1994). In general, this should translate into different commitments related to the EU directives in different policy areas. As a consequence, a simple set of "differential commitments hypotheses" follow:

H2: *In the policy agenda, different levels of policy commitments are associated to different policy areas depending on the type of competences of the EU*

More precisely, given the division of competences between the EU and its Member States, I expect that stronger commitments exist in the areas where the EU has exclusive and shared competence with MSs. Hence, Hypothesis 2 may be specified as follows:

H2a: Higher levels of policy commitments exist in the fields of exclusive and shared competences between MSs and the EU, such as Agriculture and Environmental policies.

Lawmakers are generally considered to be responsible for the transposition of EU directives in national systems. Yet, this takes place in the framework of a limited problem-solving capacity for national legislatures that also have to cope with other policy problems (such as external events and new policy problems), as well as with the electoral promises they have made in order to be elected (See Chapter 2). Their capacity to respond to EU demands, therefore, is also related to the need of parliaments to distribute their "scarce" attention across different policy problems. In other words, there is a zero-sum game for parliament attention between compulsory policy activities and the discretionary issues resulting from electoral promises (see Chapter 2). As highlighted by Nugent (2010) and Richard Rose (2013): "the doctrine of the *acquis communitaire* stipulates that once an EU policy is enacted, the governing party/coalition of each Member State must accept it, even if approval was given by a predecessor government of a different party or a policy was adopted long before it joined.

The cumulative growth in EU treaties and legislation makes the *acquis* a significant constraint on a newly- elected national government. It is not only faced with the legacy of its domestic predecessors but also with a legacy of past EU decisions that it cannot reverse".

Recent normative studies on party government (Rose 2014) have discussed how EU competences and related domestic-commitments should be connected to the loss of autonomy of governing parties in setting domestic policy agendas. In this understanding, in the policy areas that are more "Europeanised" the agenda-setting power of government parties should diminish since the policy competences are moved from the national to the supranational level.

Hence, under the influence of the EU directives, the agenda-setting power of governing parties should vary across the policy areas included in the domestic policy agenda. For example, governing parties may act freely and without having to consider EU legislation in fields where the EU commitments are few since the EU has only the residual competence to support the MSs such as in the cases of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Health. Yet, within the policy agenda there are also issues over which the EU legislation is particularly important since it constitutes an exclusive or a shared competence of the EU and its MSs.

In these fields, the EU competence over specific issues poses a limit to national parties' agenda-setting power (Rose 2014) since decisions are taken at the supranational level or coordinated between the supranational and national arenas, but in any case parties in the MSs lose their autonomous agenda-setting power (such as in the case of Environmental and Agricultural policies). To summarise, within the policy agenda national parties have limited agenda-setting power over the issues that receive more attention in the EU agenda as a result of the competences of the Union. Differently, they keep their role of important agenda-setters over the issues that receive scarce attention in the EU agenda. Hence, another hypothesis concerning the effect of EU commitments on the agenda-setting power of parties may be proposed:

H3: *In the policy agenda, EU commitments reduce the agenda-setting capacity of the governing parties only in the sectors where the EU has exclusive or shared competences*

In addition, it can be expected that election proximity plays a role. Coherent with the "electoral business cycle" theory discussed in Chapter 5, re-election oriented lawmakers may decide to put in "stand by" commitments when elections are closer to emphasise their electoral promises in the policy agenda. Hence, I expect that:

H3a: The mediating effect of commitments on the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda is stronger in non-electoral than in electoral times.

Taken together the three sets of hypotheses suggest a model of the composition of the policy agenda attuned to compulsory and discretionary policy problems.

Changing pressure originating from EU commitments: how EU directives are transposed

MSs use different instruments for transposing EU directives. By instruments I refer to the set of legal instruments that allow the provision of a directive to be transposed. It should be highlighted however that the variation in the different legal instruments often depends on the country's constitutional system, making it very complicated for a researcher to collect information and compare these tools, and datasets capturing this information do not exist. In addition, this search is difficult due to the great difference in the content of the directives and the distribution of the competences over them at the national level, which changes from country to country. Hence this description will be limited to the discussion of the legal instruments used in Denmark, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom to transpose EU directives. It is based on one of the few existing comparative studies on the topic – a research report by the University of Leiden authored by Steunenberg and Voermans and published in 2006 based on expert surveys.[40] First of all, none of the countries in the sample has separate faster implementation procedures for transposing directives which makes the cases comparable. None of the constitutions of these 4 countries includes special dispositions for speeding up the transposition of the directives.

Yet France and the United Kingdom have special statutory regulations allowing the use of special instruments (such as delegated legislation) to transpose the directives. These have been proven to shorten the transposition time (Steunenberg and Voermans 2006) even if they are not *ad hoc* procedures in the literal sense. In particular, under the European Communities Act (1972) in the case of the United Kingdom the government has wide powers to transpose the directives via "statutory instruments". One of the transposition instruments that has been used in Spain is the so-called "package law". A package law is an act that transposes a number of directives for which the implementation deadline has passed. This type of law is often used as an "emergency measure" with the main goal of reducing

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[40] Steunenberg, Bernard, and Wim Voermans. "The Transposition of EC Directives: A Comparative Study of Instruments, Techniques and Processes in Six EU Member States." *Leiden University, Leiden/Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice Paper* (2006).

transposition deficit. In the case of Spain, it has been used only once when the country joined the EU in 1986. In that case it was based on a Delegation of Powers Act that granted to the government the power to transpose a massive number of directives through a decree-law (*real-decreto legislativo*[41]). In France, omnibus laws (another instrument used to transpose several directives into the national legal system simultaneously) are not used for emergency situations, rather, they are regular part of the transposition system. They are called DDAC laws (*Disposition D'adaptation au Droit Communautaire*) and in general they are limited to one policy area.

In general, legislative instruments for transposing EU directives in the national legal order are mainly subject to two major decision-making processes: either transposition laws are based on a standard legislative procedure, which is mainly based on a government's proposal adopted by the parliament, or the transposition process may also be delegated to the national government. In the case of Denmark, directives in the social field may also be transposed by collective agreements between social partners. Apart from the special tools of package and omnibus laws used mostly in the cases of France and Spain, the report by Steunenberg and Voermans illustrates that the four countries included in the sample frequently transpose EU directives through delegated legislation to avoid the often time consuming path of an Act of the Parliament (Steunenberg and Voermans 2006: 39). The scholars found that in Spain 84% of the directives are transposed through secondary legislation. In the UK the figure is around 90%, in Denmark 85% and in France almost 60% of the directives are transposed through subordinate legislation.

The use of delegate legislation in transposing EU directives saves parliamentary time and therefore should limit the pressure of EU-related commitments on the policy agenda. The figures for Spain and Denmark are very similar. In the sample the UK is the country where the transposition of the directives is massively achieved via secondary legislation. Differently, France appears to be an important exception. The exceptionality of the French case is likely to depend on the fact that the government is empowered directly by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic of implementing legislation under specific conditions. In France, the government has a separate Constitutional power to draft Decree-laws (*décret-lois*) in the policy areas that are not governed by the Acts or that do not fall within the legislative domain (*Domaine de la loi*, Art. 37 of the French Constitution).

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[41] Ley de Bases 47/1985 del 27 Diciembre, para la delegaciòn al Gobierno para la aplicaciòn del Derecho Comunitario.

In the framework of agenda scarcity discussed in the theoretical model of this research, it seems reasonable to expect that the transposal of EU directives adds complexity to the problem-solving capacity of MSs, even if it should be acknowledged that the extent is likely to depend on the type of legal instruments used for the transposal, for which my work is unable to account for directly. The comparative research design of this study should help in shedding light (at least intuitively) on these processes. In the light of these specificities, it should be recalled that the EU directives approximate (well) only a portion of a set of broader EU demands. Yet, the reader may consider that this limited approximation of policy commitments via the EU directives leads to a conservative test: if I find that the policy agenda is even weakly influenced by my approximate measure of policy commitments, this is important proof that compulsory policy activities really do matter in everyday policymaking. In addition, among the sources of the EU law, the directives seem to play an important role in shaping national policies – especially at the legislative level (König 2009; Lampinen, Uusikylä 1998; Steunenberg 2006; Falkner et al. 2004; Mastenbroek 2005, Kaeding 2005, König et al. 2005, Treutlein 2007), which make the directives particularly fitting in the research design of my investigation.

The content of the national agenda and of the EU directives

To capture the relationship between policy agendas and compulsory policy activity originating from the EU commitments, I begin by shedding light on the developments of the EU agenda and of the domestic policy agenda. By descriptively illustrating their parallel development, I shall capture a first picture of the interrelations between the two. Given that EU competences are not ubiquitous but pertain to specific issue areas (changing over time), I begin by running issue-by-issue correlations to see whether different levels of EU commitments exist (H1) for different policy areas (H2), and in the next sections I analyse variation over time (H1a). Table 6.1 displays correlation scores between the content of the EU directives (*EU agenda*) and the domestic policy agendas for different issues[42].

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[42] The salience of different policy areas in the agenda of the EU and in the domestic policy agenda is available in Table 6.a the Appendix of this chapter.

Tab. 6.1: Correlations among EU and domestic policy agendas in 4 countries, by policy areas
(1980-2008)[43]

Policy Areas	Correlation National Agenda/ EU Agenda
Civil Rights	0.50***
Agriculture	0.41**
Environment	0.39**
Banking, finance	0.25*
Science and technology	0.22
Urban planning	0.18
Labour	0.15
Economics	0.10
International Affairs	0.05
Defence	0.04
Government operations	-0.01
Foreign trade	-0.06
Social Welfare	-0.06
Transportation	-0.06
Health	-0.08
Territorial issues	-0.10
Justice and Crime	-0.11
Education	-0.12
Energy	-0.14
General correlation	0.26*

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
*p<0.10; ** p <0.05; *** p <0.01
Note: Cells show correlation coefficients between the proportion of actions (laws and directives) in each
of the 19 issue areas for each country/year.

Concerning the intensity of the relationship between domestic and European policy
agendas, the results show that this varies extensively depending on the policy sector. The
overall level of correlation between the EU and the domestic policy agendas is marginally
significant (p<0.10) suggesting that a relationship exists but that it is reasonably limited to
specific issues included in the policy agendas. Indeed, by looking at the issue-by-issue results,

[43] When interpreting these results, the reader shall consider that they may reflect the way in which the category
'Civil Rights' is built in the CAP coding scheme. More precisely, this category includes on the one hand, both
items that are among the recent (but increasing) concerns of the Union such as Gender and Sexual Orientation
Discrimination, Handicap or Disease Discrimination, Voting Rights, and Freedom of Religion (see for a
discussion Spencer 1995 and Verloo 2006). On the other, however it includes also immigration regulation and
measures of borders control, asylum etc. that are instead among the historical concerns of the Union (see for a
chronology, and for a discussion Givens et al. 2004).

it can be observed that some policy areas exhibit a greater degree of correlation than others. This is the case of Civil Rights where the correlation between the EU and the national agenda is 0.50 and highly significant (p<0.10), Agriculture (0.41**), Environment (0.39*), and Banking and Finance (0.25*). Differently, the relationship between EU and national agendas is very weak in areas including International Affairs and Defense, where the EU institutions produce few directives (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.4) and have very limited competences.

This hints at the separation of competences between the EU and its Member States (as it is defined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) but also at the importance that these policy areas have played in the history of the Union. In this sense, Foreign Affairs and Defence are policy areas over which the EU has little competence despite the existence of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (Howorth 2006). Differently, the Common Agricultural Policy has been one of the first concerns of the Union, originating back in 1962. The same applies to the EU Environmental policy that began in the early 1970s with the adoption of the first Environmental programme in 1973 and that today makes of the Union an international organisation with the most advanced legislation in the field of environmental policies (Lafferty and Hovden 2003). Civil Rights and minority issues (such as EU nationality and EU-citizenship rights, equal employment opportunity dispositions, anti-racist legislation and immigration regulation) have been part of the EU agenda at least since the Schengen Agreement in 1985 (which initiated the abolition of border controls between member states), and disposition on equal opportunities and non-discrimination occupy one the older chapters of the *acquis communautaire* – the founding law of the European Union. Banking and Finance policies (such as Consumer protection but also insurance and financial regulations) have been also part of the early EU agenda starting from the creation of the European Economic Community (in 1957) and have been reinforced with the Maastricht Treaty more recently (in 1993).

In sum, the results support the idea that a relationship between the domestic policy agenda and the EU directives does exist. However, correlation scores are significant only for a certain number of policy areas suggesting that EU agenda and national agendas are related in some specific areas rather than in others (H2). Hence, if commitments exist, they are also likely to be found in these sectors. Given that the EU competences have changed over time from the Maastricht Treaty to the Lisbon Treaty (see Chapter 2), an exhaustive account of the relationship between EU commitments and policy agendas needs to consider also whether the relationship has changed over time (H1a) as argued in the literature (Hix and Høyland 2011).

For this, I propose to consider that the influence of the EU commitments on the national policy agenda is likely to depend on:

a) The amount of legislative activities *originated* at the EU level. In this sense, the number of directives that must be transposed by each MS is an important preliminary indicator of the extent to which domestic legislation originates in Brussels (Konig et al. 2008, 22).

b) The extent to which EU directives are *absorbed* in the domestic policy agendas. In this sense, the number of directives transposed (correctly and incorrectly) by each MS is a good indicator of the extent to which EU legislation has originated policy commitments in domestic policy agendas.

Hence, I now turn to analyse whether the number of EU demands and the corresponding levels of EU commitments in the policy agenda have increased over time.

The evolution of EU commitments in different policy areas and over time

To explore variations in EU demands to national lawmakers, I shall first map the number of EU directives across years and legislatures, with the expectation that EU demands increase with further European integration. Subsequently, I shall verify if the share of EU demands accommodated in the policy agenda (the actual policy commitments) has changed over time, by using the EU acquiescence index described in Chapter 3. This indicator measures the number of directives that have been transposed by the Member States by the total number of directives applicable to each country (see Chapter 3). The maximum score (1) indicates that all directives have been transposed, hence levels of policy commitments are higher in the domestic agenda. The minimum score (0) means complete absence of directives transposal. Figure 6.1 below illustrates the number of EU directives produced by the Union between 1980 and 2008.

Figure 6.1: The number of directives adopted by the European Union (1980-2008)
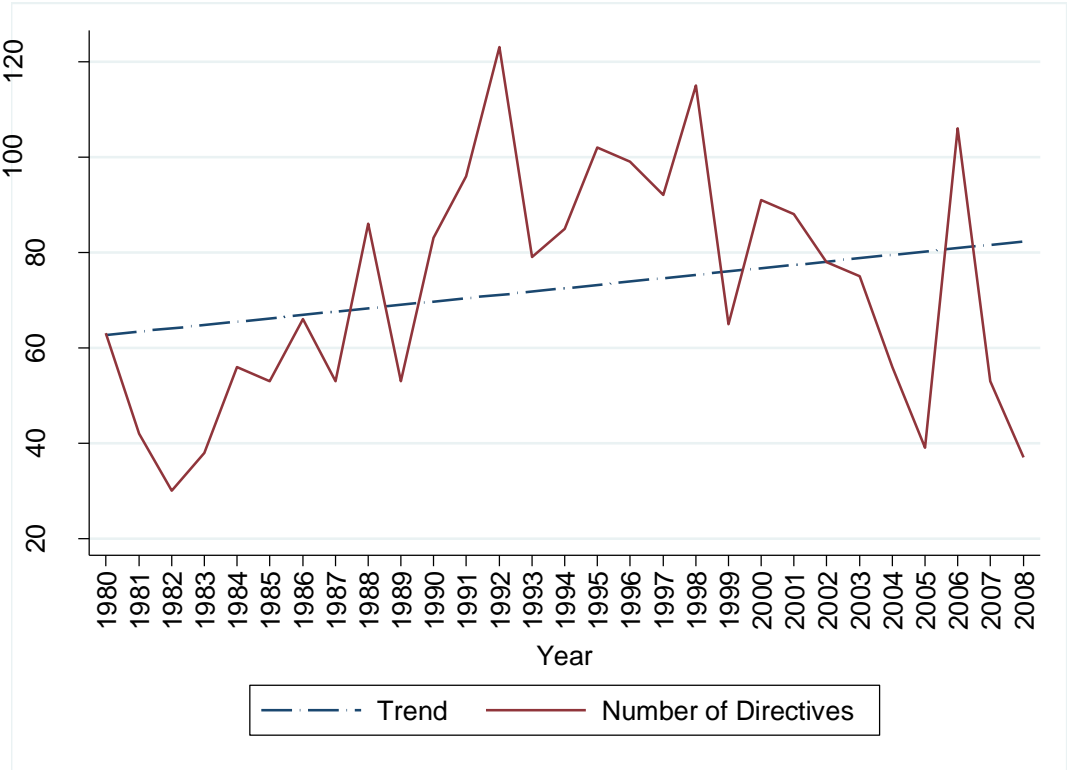
Source: Comparative Agendas Project / European Union Policy Agendas Project

Although there is major year-by-year variation (even in recent times), the figure shows a general upward trend in the number of EU directives addressed to MSs. A more careful look at the trends reveals however a curvilinear pattern, where most EU directives have been produced between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. Throughout the early 1980s, in fact, the level of EU activity is predictably lower than in the following decades. In line with our overarching expectation, this suggests that the EU has become more demanding towards MSs over time even if in the most recent period demands seem to diminish. There are three major peaks in the activity of the EU driving this broad upward trend: 1992, 1998, and most recently 2006. These coincide with the approval and the subsequent application of the Maastricht Treaty (signed in 1992 and entered into force in 1993); the Amsterdam Treaty (1997- 1999); and the final approval of the highly discussed Bolkestein Directive on services in the internal market drafted in 2000, amended substantially in 2004 and finally approved in the end of 2006 In these circumstances, not only has the EU legislated more via directives but it has also increased its competences over MSs.

According to my theoretical model, this process is likely to have influenced the corresponding legislative activity in the Member States; in other words, EU activity promotes national parliaments' activity in order to achieve policy congruence between national and

supra-national dispositions. At the same time, it is also possible that EU demands have not been met by national representatives. The EU may have asked a lot of its MSs, but EU directives leave a sensible margin to lawmakers, which may have responded only in part, or not responded at all, to communitarian policy solicitations. In order to check for this, I shall further specify my analysis to capture the share of the EU demands that has been accommodated in national legislation, i.e. the levels of EU acquiescence between the policy agenda of the EU and the policy agenda of the MSs. Figure 6.2, below, illustrates the levels of EU acquiescence between 1984 and 2008.

Figure 6.2: Levels of EU acquiescence (1984-2008)[44]

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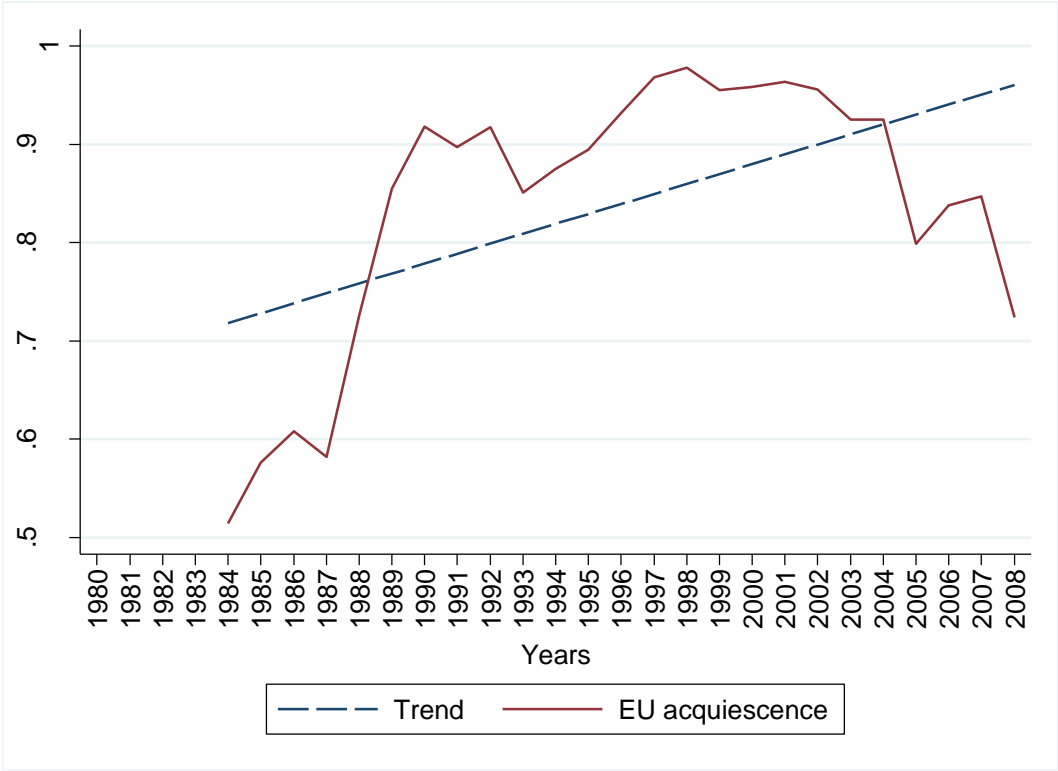
[44] In this dissertation I privilege the label 'acquiescence' instead than transposal or compliance to refer to the influence of EU commitments on domestic agendas. The reasons being that "acquiescence" in my opinion is a more encompassing concept than the other two. Indeed, acquiescence with EU directives may result not only from the *transposition deficit* (the gap between the number of directives adopted at EU level and those transposed by Member States) but also from the *compliance deficit* (the number of incorrectly transposed directives). Hence, the indicator of acquiescence to EU directives is calculated as the ratio between the number of directives correctly and incorrectly transposed in a particular policy area and the total number of directives addressed to each MS. Even if this indicator does not capture exclusively the directives that are correctly implemented and therefore may be considered an imprecise indicator of the congruence between national and EU policy agendas, for this study it seems particularly appropriate since it accounts for the fact that for governments both the correct and incorrect transposition of EU directives is time-consuming. In figure 6.2 the y-

Overall, by looking at the general trend of the evolution of EU acquiescence over time, it can be noticed that the value increases, suggesting that the levels of EU commitments in domestic policy agendas have also increased offering support for the hypothesis of increasing EU commitments over time (H1a). Yet, beyond the general trend, a closer look at Figure 6.2 reveals that the process is much more nuanced than is illustrated by the trend line. More precisely, higher acquiescence exists between the late 1980s (the years of the "permissive consensus" for the EU, according to Lindberg and Scheingold 1970) and early 2000s.

Whereas two lower peaks appear at the extreme of the curve: in 1986 and more recently in 2005. On the one hand, in 1987 low levels of EU acquiescence are likely to result from the previous approval of the Single European Act (in 1986) aiming at completing the Internal market Act that introduced a new package of directives for the MSs aiming at removing the many obstacles identified. On the other hand, in 2005 low levels of EU acquiescence coincide with the rejection in France and the Netherlands of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE), and its approval in Spain and Luxembourg that produced a sudden "halt" in the integration project that has not been overcome in the following years. In addition, if one compares the results in Figure 6.1 and those in Figure 6.2, it appears that the consequences of the 2005-2006 referenda are visible over time. Starting from that moment (excluding the 2007 peak that can be explained by the signature of the Treaty of Lisbon that was approved to strengthen the powers of the Union and cope with the negative outcomes of the referenda) the EU dramatically diminishes the number of directives produced. One interesting question for future investigations would be to understand if this drop in the number of directives results from the fact that EU lawmakers preferred to dismiss directives as a legislative instrument, to use other legislative instruments that leave less margin of approval to domestic governments (regulations, for example). Taken together the results suggest that most of the EU demands have been progressively "absorbed" in national policy agendas offering support for the hypothesis expecting an increase in EU commitments over time. However it should be acknowledged that the process is less homogeneous than

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axis varies between 0 and 1. If an important number of directives has been correctly and/or incorrectly transposed, levels of EU acquiescence are closer to 1. Conversely, if most of the directives have not been correctly and/or incorrectly transposed, levels of EU acquiescence are closer to 0. See chapter 3 for further methodological details.

what is expected with important low peaks appearing in the curve. More data (not available at the time of writing) is needed to assess if the 2005 downward trend is still ongoing, as can be reasonably expected given the increasing levels of euro scepticism nourished by the euro crisis (Dehousse 2013; Weiler 2012) – a dimension that should be investigated carefully by future contributions interested in extending the period under investigation.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of EU commitments in domestic policy agendas, it is also important to assess whether levels of EU acquiescence differ among policy areas. As discussed in the second section of the chapter, EU membership involves a division (and transfer) of competences between MSs and the EU level. In the areas where the EU has acquired broader competences, therefore, MSs are steadily losing their authority. If this is the case, the EU acquiescence indicator should score particularly high for the policy areas over which the EU has exclusive or shared competences (which are also the oldest ones) and that coherently are those over which important portions of the EU directives have been incorporated in the domestic agenda. Differently, in other sectors characterised by residual (or more recent) EU competence and hence lower levels of incorporation, the values should be lower (H2 and H2a). The results of the EU acquiescence index for each policy area are presented in Table 6.2 below.

Tab. 6.2: The EU acquiescence of national policy agendas, by policy areas (1984- 2008)

Policy Areas	EU acquiescence
Agriculture	**0.98**
Environment	**0.97**
Banking and finance	**0.94**
Transportation	0.89
Economics	0.87
Health	0.87
Energy	0.86
Labour	0.84
Science and technology	0.83
Foreign trade	0.82
Education	0.80
Civil Rights	0.79
Justice and Crime	0.64
Urban planning	0.64
Social Welfare	0.43
Defence	-
International Affairs	-
Government operations	-
Territorial issues	-

Source: Data on the transposal of the EU directives. Own elaboration from the European Commission data.
Note: Defence, International Affairs, Government Operations and Territorial Issues are not included in the construction of the index since the number of directives available was very limited given that these are not competences of the EU.

According to Table 6.2, the policy areas over which the EU legislates more are those over which national parliaments have also transposed more. These are the "old" fields of competences of the EU over which the Union today has shared competences: Agricultural policy, Environment, and Banking and Finance[45]. The scores of the index suggest that in these domains MSs have transposed most of the EU directives, and consequently these are the portions of the policy agenda that accommodate more policy commitments deriving from EU demands. As previously discussed, the Common Agricultural Policy, the creation and completion of a European free market, and the active role of the EU in promoting environmental policy at the European and international levels may help to explain these results. Yet, by looking at the type of issues, there is another reasonable interpretation that may be suggested. Agriculture, Environment, and Banking and Finance are policy areas

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[45] In the CAP codebook, fishery policy is included in the "Agriculture" category.

characterised by low levels of attention in domestic agendas (see Chapter 3, figure 3.2) suggesting that the EU legislates more on the issues that are not among the priorities of national legislatures. This would also explain why MSs lawmakers are not "hesitant" to transpose EU directives. Differently, there are policy areas over which the EU produced (less) directives (such as in the case of Social Welfare, Education and Urban Planning see figure 3.2) over which MSs are more "reluctant" to transpose. This may partially be understood in relation to the scope of competences of the EU in a given sector, and the nature of the sector considered. For example, Urban planning (or Housing) is not a competence of the EU.

However, the results suggest also that, for some sectors over which the EU has a competence and where the adoption of directives would be appropriate, the reason for a low figure may well be the absence of political consensus (Social Welfare). Taken together these results suggest that within the domestic policy agenda there are different levels of policy commitments related to the EU directives (H2) and that higher levels of commitments exist in the sectors over which the EU has broader (and older) competences (H2a). In addition, the data reveals that the policy areas over which higher EU commitments exist are also those that are not among the priorities of domestic legislatures.

'Committed' policy agendas and the agenda-setting power of governing parties

As previously mentioned, the impact of EU commitments on national policy activity influences the margin of manoeuvre of the parliaments, who are bound by EU treaties to comply with supranational decisions in important policy areas. According to my theoretical model, this triggers a broader limitation in the agenda-setting capacity of governing parties, since policy areas of competence of EU law are now – at least in part – beyond their discretionary choices. In this sense, policy commitments shall mediate the transmission of parties' electoral promises in policy agendas. In addition, policy commitments shall be stronger in the policy areas over which the Union legislates more. In the framework of a "busy" policy agenda (see Chapter 2) this should impact the room for transmitting partisan electoral priorities (H3). To test the effects of policy commitments on the composition of the domestic agenda, and on the transmission of electoral mandates, as in Chapter 5, this section is divided in two parts:

1. First, I shall detect general patterns of influence of EU commitments on domestic agendas controlling for the electoral promises of the parties by estimating pooled time-series cross-sectional regressions for the period from 1980 to 2008 with panel corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995) where each of the 19 policy areas per country constitutes a panel. Estimations rely on 76 issue-country panels, each with around 26 yearly observations[46] from 1980 to 2008 (N=1976). The resulting coefficients display the average effect of the content of the EU agenda on the content of the policy agenda, controlling for the 'explanatory power' of electoral promises of the governing parties. Country dummies are not included in the analyses since I control for the length of a country's EU membership, which should capture contextual differences more meaningfully. As before the model also includes a dummy variable (*electoral*) to control for the impact of elections' proximity (coded 1 for the 12 months prior to a national election and 0 otherwise).

2. In addition to that, according to my theoretical framework, parties are expected to lose their agenda-setting power over policy areas that are (exclusive or shared) competence of the EU. Therefore, an issue-level analysis is needed to fully test the relationship between EU commitments, policy agenda, and the agenda-setting power of governing parties. Hence, in a second part I estimate separate time-series cross-sectional regressions for each of the nineteen policy areas across countries for the period from 1980 to 2008.

Time-series cross-sectional analyses allow me to analyse the impact of policy commitments on the domestic policy agenda while controlling for partisan agendas. The domestic policy agenda is the dependent variable and the models predict the relative attention devoted to a particular issue in a given period controlling for the content of parties' electoral promises, and for EU commitments. The operationalisation is the same described in Chapter 5. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, I report here again the results of Model 1 from Chapter 5 – which tests for the effect of parties' electoral promises on the policy agenda by considering the partisan agenda of the Prime Minister (*PM party agenda*) and of the main opposition party (*Opp. party agenda*) – and I introduce Model 5. The latter controls for the effects of the content of the EU directives (*EU agenda*) and of the length of the EU

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[46] Given the composition of the data (see Chapter 3) the number of yearly observations per country varies between a minimum of 23 to a maximum of 27. The average number of yearly observations is 25,7.

membership with a variable (*EU Membership*) capturing the number of years a country has been part of the Union. The values vary between a maximum of 57 years for France and a minimum of 25 years for Spain (coded as follows: the higher the value, the older the membership). Since the descriptive results obtained by the EU-acquiescence index confirm that the issues that are more salient in the EU agenda (see Table 6.a in the Appendix) are also the issues over which policy commitments for MSs are higher – and the index of EU acquiescence is highly correlated with the content of the EU directives (0.89**) – I decided to include in the models only one of them and I opted for the broader policy agenda of all EU directives assuming that this data not only better approximates the distribution of EU attention towards different policy areas, but also because it covers a larger timespan than the EU-acquiescence index that I have built (see Chapter 3), making the statistical estimations more accurate. In addition, the dummy variable accounting for electoral proximity (*electoral*) allows me to capture the impact of policy commitments on the transmission of party mandates in electoral and non-electoral times. Table 6.3 below reports the results of the pooled time-series cross-sectional analyses at the aggregate level, proposing a test of the influence of the EU agenda on the domestic policy agenda, controlling for the electoral priorities of governing parties.

Table 6.3: Time-series cross-sectional analyses of EU agenda, partisan agendas, and policy agendas between 1980 and 2008

	Model 1	Model 5
Constant	1.393 (.247)***	1.710 (.298)***
L1. policy agenda	.649 (.052)***	.614 (.052)***
PM party agenda	.082 (.015)***	.099 (.016)***
Opp. party agenda	.004 (.002)*	.005 (.002)*
EU agenda		.003 (.001)**
Membership (years)		-.010 (.003)***
Electoral		.019 (.031)
R-squared	0.46	0.47
N	1957	1957

Source: Comparative Agendas Project.
Panel corrected standard errors are presented in parentheses.
*p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01.

Table 6.3 shows that the coefficient of the lagged dependent variable is particularly high if compared to the others. This suggests the presence of autocorrelation, meaning that the policy agenda of a given year is strongly similar to that of the previous year. In other words, these results confirm some of the trends detected in Chapter 4 and 5, i.e. that policy stability is high in the policy agenda and path dependency appears as the strongest explanatory factor of the content of the policy agenda, even when I control for partisan electoral priorities and for pending policy commitments originating from the EU directives. Every year, lawmakers have to face this path dependency, which seems to be the major driver of changes in policy attention.

In Model 5, the coefficients associated with the content of the EU agenda and with the length of the EU membership are both statistically significant, but they are very small, suggesting that the directives capture indeed only a small part of broader EU commitments. In addition, they work in opposite directions. On the one hand the distribution of attention in the policy agenda varies substantially depending on the content of the EU agenda supporting H1. On the other hand, however, the coefficient associated with the length of the EU membership is significant but negative, suggesting that the more recent the EU access of a country, the more likely it is that EU commitments influence the composition of the policy agenda. This makes sense if one considers that MSs receive higher pressure for policy reforms before joining the EU or during the early years of membership than once they have already harmonised with EU standards in several policy domains. In order to be eligible to join the Union, a candidate country must meet specific political and economic standards set by the Copenhagen criteria (including respect for human rights, institutions assuring democracy, respect and protection of the minorities), and by the *acquis communautaire*. In this sense, the integration between a candidate country and the EU takes place well before the formal admission or shortly after it. Concerning the role of the electoral promises of the parties, when controlling for the content of the EU directives and the length of the EU membership, neither of the partisan variables lose statistical significance, nor do they exhibit lower coefficients. Hence, the results suggest that at a general level partisan promises do not lose explanatory power when accounting for the policy commitments brought to the policy agenda by the EU directives.

The findings illustrated so far describe general tendencies of the relationship between EU commitments, partisan electoral promises, and policy agendas. Yet, given that the descriptive results highlighted that only a limited set of issues across countries should be affected by the EU commitments, I shall now go further in my analysis of policy commitments in policy agendas by accounting for the differences across policy areas. I now turn to issue-specific analyses. To achieve this goal, I have tested issue dynamics of the influence of policy commitments on policy agendas (as in Model 5) for each policy area separately, capturing differences in EU involvement across countries by the variables accounting for the length of the EU membership. [47] The results are presented in Table 6.4 and summarised in Table 6.5. Table 6.4 presents the findings on the effects of issue attention in

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[47] These are: Defence, Foreign Affairs, Government Operations and Lands and Lands and water management. The detailed results including the coefficients estimates are reported in Table 6.b in the Appendix of this Chapter.

the EU directives on the policy agenda, controlling for the electoral promises of the governing parties, by reporting the coefficient estimates for each policy area. To ease the reading, Table 6.4 reports only significant coefficients. In addition, Table 6.5 proposes a summary of the results, and it is structured as follows. The first column indicates the policy areas for which EU commitments impact the composition of the policy agenda (i.e. the coefficients associated with the EU agenda are significant and positive). The second column represents the policy areas for which (controlling for the EU commitments) the agenda-setting power of parties' electoral priorities diminishes (i.e. the coefficients associated with partisan agendas are significant but negative). The third column indicates the policy areas for which the impact of EU commitments is influenced by the length of the EU membership (and the directionality of the significant coefficients), and finally the last column lists the policy areas for which the impact of policy commitments on the policy agenda is mediated by elections proximity (and the directionality of the significant coefficients).

Table 6.4: The impact of policy commitments on the composition of the policy agenda (1980-2008)

	Economics	Civil Rights	Health	Agriculture	Labour	Education	Environment	Energy	Transport	Justice and Crime	Welfare	Housing	Banking	Defence	Science	Trade	Foreign Affairs	Government	Lands
Constant	26.57 (4.16)***	-.52 (.49)*	3.90 (1.02)***	4.08 (1.08)***	2.94 (1.01)**	5.79 (1.66)***	3.16 (.942)**	3.342 (.747)**	7.65 (1.49)***	1.25 (.25)***	2.55 (1.11)*	2.55 (1.10)*	13.84 (1.93)***	NS	3.31 (.78)***	NS	7.26 (3.87)**	10.16 (3.27)**	-.055 (1.47)*
L1.policy agenda	-.039 (.027)*	.280 (.111)**	NS	.304 (.103)***	.461 (.096)***	.388 (.115)***	NS	.196 (.103)***	.286 (.101)***	.648 (.052)***	.436 (.09)***	.436 (.090)***	.050 (.109)*	NS	.278 (.123)**	.416 (.151)***	.645 (.103)***	NS	.146 (.127)*
PM party agenda	-.020 (.018)*	.093 (.049)**	.163 (.050)***	-.184 (.110)*	.15 (.10)*	-.109 (.068)*	-.092 (.074)*	NS	-.238 (.13)**	.086 (.015)***	NS	NS	-.318 (.091)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	.244 (.127)*	NS
Opp. party agenda	-.005 (.003)*	.022 (.010)**	.009 (.005)*	NS	NS	.015 (.008)*	NS	NS	-.10 (.08)*	.004 (.002)*	NS	NS	-.154 (.059)*	NS	NS	.084 (.049)*	NS	NS	NS
EU agenda	.002 (.001)*	.004 (.002)*	NS	.005 (.001)**	NS	NS	.006 (.001)***	NS	.002 (.001)*	NS	NS	NS	.003 (.001)**	NS	.002 (.001)*	NS	NS	NS	NS
Membership	-.363 (.061)***	.071 (.025)***	NS	-.049 (.021)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.059 (.027)**	NS	NS	NS	-.191 (.032)**	NS	-.035 (.014)*	NS	NS	NS	NS
Electoral	-2.43 (1.18)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
R-squared	0.40	0.33	0.13	0.38	0.16	0.24	0.35	0.05	0.37	0.25	0.12	0.10	0.41	0.02	0.25	0.10	0.38	0.21	0.04

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
*<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01
Panel Corrected Standard Errors

Table 6.5: Summary of the effects of policy commitments on policy agendas and on the transmission of parties' electoral promises, by policy area (1980-2008)

The impact of policy commitments on policy agendas			
Areas influenced by pending EU commitments	EU commitments moderate parties' electoral promises	Impact of commitments mediated by lenght of EU membership	Impact of commitments mediated by elections proximity
Economics	Economics	Economics (-)	Economics (-)
Civil Rights	Agriculture	Agriculture (-)	
Agriculture	Environement	Transport (-)	
Environement	Transport	Banking (-)	
Transport	Banking		
Banking			
Science			

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

To begin with, the results show that only a small number of policy areas are effectively influenced by the EU commitments. More specifically, statistically significant effects of the EU demands are observed in the four countries in 7 policy areas (out of 16) over which the EU produced an important number of directives (see Tab. 6.a in the Appendix) being among the traditional competences of the Union.[48] These results suggest that similar patterns of EU commitments are at work in the policy agendas of the countries selected even if the influence of these commitments is limited to a narrow set of policy areas. These

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[48] Pooled models have also been run separately for each country (results are available upon request). For Denmark and Spain, 5 out of 16 policy areas show the effect of the EU agenda or of the length of the EU membership to be positive and statistically significant, for France 6 out of 16, and for the United Kingdom only 4 out of 16. One may make sense of these results by considering that in the sample the UK is the country where 95% of EU directives are implemented via secondary legislation – which my measure of the policy agenda does not include. Whereas only 5% of the directives are implemented via Primary legislation made by the Parliament. Conversely, in the case of France "only" 60% of the directives are transposed via secondary legislation leaving to the Parliament 40% of transposition activity. Intuitively it can be argued that this type of institutional differences indeed seem to produce different levels of EU commitments in domestic policy agendas, even if better data is needed to fully test the validity of this statement. Concerning the type of issues, it can be noticed that even if they vary across countries, there are important similarities that must be detected. In all countries, Environment and Agriculture are policy areas over which greater EU commitments exist for national lawmakers, and they are also classic domains of competence of the EU over which the EU produced an important number of directives (see Tab. 6.a).

findings are consistent with the expectations that the EU commitments affect the content of the policy agenda (H1) and that different levels of commitments exist in different policy areas depending on the type of competence of the EU, with the impact of commitments emerging more clearly on issues that are among the exclusive and shared competences of the Union (H2 and H2a).

By looking at the way in which policy commitments affect the agenda-setting power of the electoral promises of the parties, I find that in most of the policy areas where commitments matter, they reduce the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda. However this does not seem to happen in the case of Civil Rights and Science – these are probably policy areas over which EU commitments and parties' promises may converge more easily given that these policies often have more of a symbolic (than actual electoral) value. In this sense, the results support my hypothesis (H3) claiming that, most of the time, policy commitments limit the agenda-setting capacity of governing parties, even if this does not happen systematically for all issues over which important commitments exist. In addition, the effects of the length of the EU membership are systematically negative for the policy areas over which commitments shape the content of the policy agenda, confirming what emerged already in Model 5, e.g. that MSs receive higher pressure for policy reforms before joining the EU or during the early years of membership than once they have already harmonised with EU standards in several policy domains, rejecting H3a.

In this framework policy commitments are likely to be higher for new MSs than for older ones confirming H1b. Furthermore the results illustrate that the impact of commitments on the policy agenda is not stronger when elections approach, quite the contrary. The signs of the coefficients indicate that the impact of policy commitments is stronger the further away the elections are, confirming (at least intuitively) that lawmakers may postpone policy responsibilities to privilege electoral promises when elections are closer even if this is at work only in the case of one policy area: Economics.

Taken together, these results provide at least three major indications concerning the influence of policy commitments on the policy agenda, and how they mediate the transmission of parties' electoral promises in policies. First, as expected the policy agenda includes a set of policy activities originating from the commitments of the policies decided at the EU level (H1). These findings are coherent with previous ones in the field of public policy showing that at least some degree of policy activities of national lawmakers originate from EU decisions (Goetz and Hix 2001; Radaelli 2003) and not merely from the electoral priorities of national representatives. Secondly, coherently with the findings of previous

scholars exploring the influence of the EU decisions on the policy activities of the MSs, I found that EU influence is not ubiquitous. On the contrary, it is issue based, as EU commitments exist exclusively in specific policy areas depending on the competences of the Union (H2). In particular, sectors where the EU has exclusive or shared competence with the MSs (such as Agriculture and the Environment) emerge as the areas over which EU commitments are particularly visible in the policy agenda (H2a). Thirdly, coherently with normative expectations concerning the influence of EU commitments on the agenda-setting capacity of governing parties (Rose 2014; Mair 2008), (set of H3), the results point to mixed evidence. I find that, most of the time, where commitments exist, these limit the agenda-setting capacity of governing parties, even if this is not as systematic and is always limited to a very narrow set of policy areas.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analysed the way in which policy commitments originating from the EU directives shape the content of the domestic agenda, and mediate the agenda-setting power of governing parties. Different studies in the field of public policy pointed out that policy commitments are one of the major concerns for each legislature and that this type of "routine" activity occupies important portions of representatives' attention. To the best of my knowledge however, most of the existing contributions focus exclusively on the budgetary legacy, without paying sufficient attention to another important source of policy commitments that has instead been privileged in my investigation: the EU directives – binding legal acts creating commitments for the member states. The aim of the chapter was to improve our understanding of the way in which policy commitments shape the content of the policy agenda in three ways.

First, I provided descriptive evidence about the way in which EU demands included in the EU directives are related to domestic policy agendas, and how they have increased over time as a result of the advancement of the process of European integration, even if the 2005-2006 referenda that rejected the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in several countries marked an important turning point after which the production of EU directives drastically diminished. Second, by using an Index of EU acquiescence, it has been illustrated that within the domestic policy agenda there are different levels of policy commitments

related to EU directives that are, however, restricted to the policy areas over which the EU has broader competences – such as Environment and Agriculture. The results also highlighted that the sectors over which EU commitments are higher are policy areas that are not among the priorities of national lawmakers. Third, I tested if accommodating the policy commitments originating from EU demands reduces the agenda-setting power of governing parties. I found that this does not happen systematically, but only in the case of policy areas that are highly salient in the agenda of the Union. My results would need further investigation. In particular, future studies may propose other sources (i.e. other than the directives) to approximate EU demands, since directives are mainly transposed via secondary legislation, and they concern specific policy fields that are not addressed by other sources of communitarian law. In addition country case studies may enrich our understanding, in particular with respect to the way in which transposal via secondary legislation may limit the pressure on lawmakers' attention.

However, the fact that I managed to find some effects even with such a small sample and a limited measure reveals that the general instinct driving my argument is valid, even if it may benefit from broadening the number of countries considered, but also accounting for other factors that are likely to shape the impact of policy commitments on policy agendas, such as the levels of euro scepticism in different countries, but also the "economic dependence" of the Member States' on the Union that is likely to shape the agenda-setting power of governing parties, especially when it comes to economic concerns. These are all phenomena that the ongoing euro crisis has brought to the academic and public debate and that are not addressed in my work, yet my theory offers a starting point for future investigations of these dynamics. In the next chapter I explore whether another source of policy problems contributes to reshape the composition of the policy agenda by adding further complexity to the problem-solving capacity of national lawmakers and to the agenda-setting power of governing parties: the agenda of the public.

APPENDIX CHAPTER 6: POLICY COMMITMENTS

Table 6.a: Mean share of the EU and national policy agendas for different issues (1980-2008, Percentages)

Policy Areas	Policy Agendas	
	National Agenda	**EU Agenda**
Economics	**12.58**	3.85
Government operations	**10.24**	2.43
Justice and Crime	**11.03**	1.38
Banking, finance	**8.97**	**15.46**
International Affairs	7.35	0.52
Transportation	5.99	**16.08**
Labour	5.89	5.38
Education	4.22	0.86
Civil Rights	4.07	2.28
Urban planning	3.83	0.14
Agriculture	3.74	**22.79**
Health	3.73	4.33
Environment	3.22	**14.03**
Social Welfare	3.08	0.14
Territorial issues	2.85	0.1
Defence	2.63	0.1
Energy	2.15	4.61
Science and technology	2.14	4.52
Foreign trade	1.63	1
Tot.	100	100
N	13416	2102

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: EU Agenda = EU directives; National Agenda = passed legislation

CHAPTER 7

The impact of the public's priorities: policy agendas and media coverage

Chapter 6 explored the relationship between policy agendas and policy commitments originating from the EU directives, with the aim of understanding the extent to which policy agendas respond to policy commitments originating from non-electoral mandates, and if these weaken the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda. The results suggest that EU commitments are fairly good predictors of issue attention in domestic policy agendas for areas over which the EU has exclusive or shared competences with its Member States (such as Agriculture and Environment). The findings also highlighted that in the policy areas where commitments matter, the agenda-setting power of governing parties is weakened, even if this does not happen systematically (especially in the case of issues with moderate electoral payoff such as Science and Civil Rights).

Building on these findings, Chapter 7 controls for another source of policy problems that reshapes lawmakers' attention: the agenda of the public (as it is portrayed by media coverage of societal events). Reflecting on rational anticipation of future electoral costs and disruption from policy problems on a day-to-day basis, I expect that lawmakers respond to the agenda of the public, and that this shall reshape the composition of policy agendas. However, as I will discuss further, the impact of the media agenda on lawmakers' attention may be direct or mediated by the interaction with other policy problems that representatives address (parties' electoral promises, and policy commitments). In this understanding, the main questions that this chapter will tackle are: does the agenda of the public impact lawmakers' attention? How does the agenda of the public mediate the transmission of parties' electoral promises and the respect of policy commitments?

Nowadays, the idea that mass media influence lawmakers' attention is hardly controversial, and this idea has become common when citizens, politicians, and political scientists discuss the media and politics. According to existing research, the media is perhaps "the most important source of information and channel of communication between citizenry and political institutions" (Strömbäck 2008: 236) to the extent that "mediatization" is seen as

a "force in politics and its increased importance is seen as a potential problem for democracy" (Green-Pedersen, Stubager 2010:663).

Although the role of the media in influencing politics is widely accepted, the results of scholarly research on the reciprocal relationship between the media and policy are often inconclusive. While scholars acknowledge that the media can play a role influencing lawmakers' attention, it is also suggested that media impact is *conditional* on the issue that is considered, the type of media, and whether elections are approaching or not. In addition, while the influence of mass media on the preferences of the public (see Behr and Iyengar 1985; Page and Shapiro 1992; Mccombs 2004) and on the logics of party competition (see for an overview Green-Pedersen 2010) have been widely explored, research on the influence of mass media on policy outputs is more scarce. In particular, little scholarly attention has been dedicated to these aspects outside the US. Most of the existing contributions focus exclusively on the agenda-setting power of the media, neglecting the way in which policy problems originating from media coverage (and reflecting the agenda of the public) compete or interact with other policy problems to enter the policy agenda. In other words, previous studies have generally downplayed the question of how the issues that are brought to the agenda by the mass media interact with the other policy problems that lawmakers address in passed legislation.

This chapter sets out to analyse the relationship between issue priorities of the public as portrayed by the media (media agenda) and the content of the policy agenda. In other words, I investigate to what extent the media are able to influence policy agendas, and if there is a direct impact or whether media-effects are mediated by the electoral promises of the parties or by policy commitments. My main theoretical argument is straightforward: reflecting on external pressures and disruption from policy problems on a day-to-day basis, the policy agenda is responsive to the media agenda, i.e. the issue priorities of the public as described by the mass media.[49] Given that government attention is a scarce resource, the presence of this parallel agenda venue has consequences for the problem-solving capacity of lawmakers. I argue that Policy problems originating from media coverage enter the policy agenda either directly or by interacting with another set of discretionary problems: the electoral promises of the parties. Accordingly, in this chapter the media agenda accounts for the variation in the level of public attention given to issues that are more steadily discussed in a society that

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[49] Issues emphasised in the media agenda have been proved to reflect public opinion concerns (see for a review: Erbring et al. 1980; Roberts and Bachen 1981; MacKuen and Coombs 1982; Behr and Iyengar 1985; Entman 1989; Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 2010, Jacoby 2000; Soroka 2003; Jasperson et al. 1998; McCombs 2004; John et al. 2013).

lawmakers may decide to consider or not, illustrating the relative media salience of policy issues. Hence, in this contribution the media agenda approximates the supply of information about new policy problems on the societal agenda in general. The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows:

a) First, I provide an overview of the research dealing with media influence on policy. My focus is on the scholarly understanding of the *conditionality* of media influence, depending mainly on issue features, time period, as well as on the role of parties as moderators of media effects.

b) Subsequently, I provide descriptive patterns of media attention in the four countries and over time to detect whether similarity across issues and agenda venues exists across countries.

c) Finally, I explore the effects of the media agenda on the composition of the policy agenda. The analyses focus on whether media priorities' influence the content of the policy agenda, and whether the influence of the agenda of the public is mediated by the electoral promises of the governing parties and or by policy commitments that lawmakers have to respect.

The findings concern whether policy agendas accommodate issue priorities of the media agenda (H1), whether different levels of media influence are found for different policy areas (H2), if the link is stronger in non-electoral than in electoral times (H3), and if the agenda-setting power of the media is conditioned by the electoral priorities of governing parties (set of H4) and by policy commitments (H5).

News and policies: when media coverage matters for lawmakers' attention

The relationship between media and politics has been widely researched and the concept of mediatization has been used by different authors to refer to media influence in politics and society (Mazzoleni 2008). In a recent publication, Thesen (2011: 21) categorises studies based on two interpretive lines: a) research focusing on *whether* media matter; and b)

research focusing on *when* media matter for policy agendas. Concerning the first group of scholarly research, early studies stressed that the media cause little and negligible impact on policies because they merely respond to political inputs (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Pritchard and Berkowitz 1993; Wanta and Foote 1994). This interpretation suggested that "the media report what is going on in government, by and large, rather than having an independent effect on governmental agendas" (Walker 1977: 59). In contrast, recent studies increasingly identify a distinct media-effect on policies, although it is generally acknowledged that this takes place within a broader, circular mechanism of mutual influence between government action and news media reports.

According to this literature, the salience of the events in the media reflects the agenda of the public and it may influence policy decisions (Lambeth 1978; Jones and Baumgartner 2005a; Walgrave et al. 2006; Kriesi et al 2013). These findings have been confirmed by longitudinal quantitative studies (Gilbert et al. 1980; Cook and Skogan 1991; Bartels 1996; Wood and Peake 1998; Edwards and Wood 1999; Baumgartner et al. 1997), as well as by qualitative case studies on the U.S. (Linski 1986; Cook et al. 1983; Protess et al. 1991) and on western European politics (Walgrave 2008; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010a; Chaquès-Bonanfont and Baumgartner 2013). Much attention has been devoted by scholars to the question of "who leads who" in the media-policy relationship (Bartels 1996; Edwards and Wood 1999; Brandemburg 2002). Recent approaches developed in agenda-setting research suggest to overcome a purely causal understanding of the relationship between policy agenda and the media, and to conceive it as a dynamic process, where media priorities and the policy agenda equilibrate in response to one another over time (Jennings and John 2009).

Rather than focusing on *whether* media matter, other scholars have studied the *when* question, i.e. the conditionality of media influence on policy. According to this research, three important elements may condition media influence on policy agendas: the type of medium (TV, radio, newspapers, internet); the time in which policy decisions are (or are to be) taken (electoral or routine politics); and, the features of the issues that are discussed. Concerning the first stream of literature, research conventionally measured media agendas by using classic data such as TV news, newspapers and magazines (Protess and McCombs 1991; Dearing and Rogers 1996). Yet, there is increasing disagreement among the academic community with respect to the type of media sources that best predict policy outcomes (Bartels 1996). Not only does the debate compare print media to electronic media, but also national outlets to local ones, quality newspapers to tabloids and other popular media sources.

In general, several authors have highlighted diverging political agenda-setting dynamics for different types of media, emphasising that "real time" media such as TV and radio are more likely to play a prominent role in influencing policy agendas (Palmgreen et al. 1995; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2007). This is not only related to their widespread diffusion and the type of target audience that they address, but also because "real time" media report unexpected situations that are likely to speed the decision process (Sabato 1991; Walgrave and Manssens 2000). Cobb and Elder (1971) defined such events as "focusing events" and argued that the absence of focusing events could block the emergence of an issue in the policy agenda.

Similarly, existing contributions have explored the types of policy problems that are more likely to receive media coverage. Results underline that certain types of issues receive more attention in the media than others, due to their different appeal for the broad public (Hallin and Mancini 2004a). According to this interpretation, selection of news is not a random or necessarily proportional process that mirrors what happens in the world, but news selection is rather based on journalists' perception of newsworthiness.

In other words, journalists evaluate whether an issue is "mediagenic" or not. There is a consensus around the idea that *spectacular issues* – i.e. issues that are oriented towards entertainment, *emotional issues* – i.e. issues that may provoke an emotional reaction, *confrontational issues* – i.e. issues that may produce political conflict rather than agreement, and *infotainment issues* – i.e. issues for which the point of view of the "common citizen" can be emphasised, are all privileged by the media (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Mazzoleni 2008; Kriesi et al. 2013). Within this field of research, Altheide and Snow developed the concept of "media logics" (1979), to refer to the format, the style of presentation, the focus, the emphasis, and the "grammar" of the mediated communication (Altheide and Snow 1979:10). More broadly, according to Mazzoleni (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Mazzoleni 2008) this concept encompasses the imperatives that drive the production of news and that include professionalisation (in the sense that a journalist has a different sense of social purpose than lawmakers) and commercialization (the imperative for media "to sell").

In addition to that, other contributions focus on the time period in which the relationship between media and policy agenda is more likely to be important. Here as well, evidence is mixed. On the one hand, scholars underlined that politicians incorporate media insights at any point in time, including non-electoral times (Nimmo 1999). On the other, a number of studies have suggested that the influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda (and *vice versa*) follows different patterns in routine times and during electoral campaigning

(Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). More precisely, it has been pointed out that the media impact on lawmakers' agendas is very weak in electoral times (Norris et al. 1999), since during campaigns the media are forced to report the positions and proposals of the candidates.

Finally, another branch of the literature focused more directly on the influence of media coverage on policy agendas, and confirmed the importance of issue characteristics (Edwards and Wood 1999; Soroka 2002; Walgrave et al.2008; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010a; Baumgartner and Bonanfont 2013). In this understanding, not all issues that are emphasised by the media are necessarily as important for lawmakers. In particular, in his study on Canada, Soroka (2002) identifies three types of issues exhibiting different levels of "appeal" for lawmakers: Prominent issues, sensational issues, and governmental issues, underlining that these are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive (Soroka 2002:20). *Prominent issues* are obtrusive (people have high levels of direct experience) and concrete (they are related to everyday life and therefore they are not difficult to understand).

According to Soroka, the more direct experience people have with a given issue area, the more they will feel it is concrete, and thus the less they will rely on media stories for information and interpretation. Thus media agenda should matter more for unobtrusive issues (over which people have less direct experience). Examples of obtrusive issues in Soroka's typology are inflation and unemployment. *Sensational issues* are also concrete but unlike prominent issues they have "little observable impact on the vast majority of individuals (ibid. 20-21). Yet they have a dramatic character, which makes them "newsworthy", enhancing their commercial value as media stories. Most media effects on policy agendas should be visible for these types of issues – such as Crime, AIDS, and the environment.

Finally, *Government issues* are unobtrusive and can be both concrete and abstract. If they are abstract, they may be distinguished from sensational issues by their lack of "exciting or dramatic elements" (ibid. 21). Soroka considers debt and deficit and taxes as governmental abstract issues, whereas he sees political scandals as governmental concrete issues that are not always appealing for lawmakers even if they are emphasised by the media.[50] Within the agenda-setting tradition of research, studies dealing with media effects on policy have mainly focused on "symbolic" policy agendas with no concrete policy outputs (parliamentary questions and interpellations), yet it seems plausible to assume that media coverage may also impact actual passed legislation. While these studies are mainly concerned with the

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[50] Soroka's typology has been criticised for having combined disputed concepts with the result of exacerbating the ambiguities of each of them (Thesen 2012:27). Yet, even acknowledging some theoretical weakness of Soroka's model, to date, this typology has been proven empirically to be very useful also in a comparative perspective to study issue-related characteristics that may shape media logics (Walgrave et al. 2008).

relationship between media coverage and policy agendas, more recent agenda-setting research has argued that the media's impact on policy agenda is mediated by partisan agendas. In this framework, scholars explain that the agenda-setting power of the media also depends on the interaction between media and partisan agendas (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). During electoral campaigns, parties compete not only on issues over which they enjoy "ownership", but also on topics that are brought to the debate by the media. In line with these results, other scholars have illustrated that the impact of media coverage on lawmakers' priorities may be either direct or mediated by the electoral promises of governing and opposition parties (Vliegenhart and Walgrave 2010; 2011; Thesen 2011).

Expectations on the interactions between media coverage, partisan promises and policy commitments in the policy agenda

In the framework of different policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention (Chapter 2), increasing attention to specific issues in the society should make the composition of the policy agenda more complex by bringing additional information about voters' interests to lawmakers' attention. In my theory, media coverage reflects shifts in public concerns, as well as important information about the state of the world. In this sense, if for example a country faces increasing unemployment or a natural disaster, the media agenda captures this information. Policy problems brought by the media agenda enter the policy agenda via 3 mechanisms:

1. *Directly*: when what is covered by the media captures lawmakers' attention and motivates lawmakers to adopt policies tackling this issue.
2. *Indirectly via the interaction with the electoral promises of the governing parties* when media coverage works as an "updater" of the interests of the voters.
3. *Indirectly via the interaction with policy commitments* when media coverage works as a "guardian" of policy responsibilities.

Drawing on the above literature analysing the importance of the media for the policy process and its conditional impact on policy agendas, I set up a number of hypotheses analysing the relationship between media coverage, policy commitments, partisan electoral

promises and policy agendas. As in the previous chapters, the first hypothesis is exploratory and it aims at understanding the extent to which the content of the media agenda influences the content of the policy agenda (see for an overview Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Since the agenda of the media is supposed to approximate the preferences of the public or other indicators of public concern (Behr and Iyengar 1985; Entman 1989; Jasperson et al. 1998; McCombs 2004), politicians have electoral incentives to accommodate the issues that are emphasised by the media in the policy agenda. As a consequence, a simple and intuitive hypothesis follows:

H1: *The issue priorities of the media agenda are represented in the policy agenda.*

However, not all issues are equally likely to capture similar levels of attention in the media. The journalistic/commercial logic of what is "newsworthy" means that certain issues are largely emphasised to the detriment of others (see Chapter 3, fig 3.5; Thesen et al. 2013). In particular, existing contributions show that newsworthy issues are those that are sensational –such as Justice and Crime and Government operations (Soroka 2002; Mazzoleni 2008) – but also polarising – such as topics related to external and foreign affairs (i.e. Foreign Trade, International Affairs, and Defence) (John et al. 2013: 157). Differently, some issues are simply not newsworthy and lack the basic premise to influence policy agendas (Koch-Baumgartner and Voltmer 2010).This is the case with issues pertaining to the "routine oversight" of legislatures (Chaqués Bonafont and Baumgartner 2013) such as Transportation, or Energy that are rarely seen on the front pages. In this sense, not all the issues covered by the media have the same appeal for lawmakers, and, reasonably, the higher the salience in the media agenda the harder is for politicians to ignore them. Hence, a newsworthiness hypothesis attuned to issue areas can be suggested:

H2: *The influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda depends on the type of issue considered. More precisely, issues that are sensational or that polarise the public debate have a stronger impact on lawmakers' attention.*

In this sense if the media agenda influences the policy agenda, this relationship is not ubiquitous but conditional on the type of issue considered. In addition, the media's conditional agenda-setting power is also likely to depend on the timing of the mandate. As I have illustrated (Roberts and McCombs 1994; Norris et al. 1999; Brandenburg 2002; 2004),

recent studies suggest that the media have more power to influence the content of the policy agenda during non-electoral times than during election periods. During electoral campaigns, the media agenda is often purely "symbolic" (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006), since "the agenda-setting power of journalists in election times lies more in their discretion to include or exclude information of political actors than in their autonomous selection of issues" (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006: 98). Coherently, I develop a "conditional hypothesis" of the agenda-setting power of the media related to the timing of the mandate:

H3: *The impact of the media agenda on the policy agenda is stronger in non-electoral periods than during elections.*

Taken together H1, H2, and H3 shed light on whether and over which issues the agenda of the media has a direct effect on the composition of policy agendas. I now move to consider the conditions under which media influence on policy agendas is mediated by the electoral promises of governing parties and by policy commitments.

In terms of partisan moderators, it can be expected that media coverage provides information to lawmakers about the way in which voters' preferences evolve and change between elections. In this sense the impact of the media on policy agendas can be mediated by parties' electoral promises. In addition, there is empirical evidence that issue attention in the media does not produce standard effects on the content of the policy agenda (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenhart and Walgrave 2010; 2011; Thesen 2013, Tresch and Sciarini 2014) and that these effects are mediated by specific party characteristics such as government or opposition status and issue ownership.

In this research tradition, the distinction between government and opposition parties is particularly important since its results illustrate that opposition parties are less constrained than governing parties, and hence may be much more reactive to media coverage than governing parties (Thesen 2013). In this sense, one may expect that it is easier for the issues emphasised by the media to enter the policy agenda if they are also very important for the opposition. The alignment of the media agenda with the opposition agenda is likely to create pressure on the incumbent to avoid blameworthiness and electoral discredit. Coherently, two "partisan moderators" hypotheses are suggested:

H4: *The media agenda has a stronger impact on the policy agenda when it covers issues that are also salient in the electoral promises of the governing parties.*

H4a: *In particular, the media agenda has a stronger impact on the policy agenda when it covers issues that are salient for the opposition party than when it covers issues that are salient for the governing party*

In this sense the media agenda may inform lawmakers about changing preferences of their electorates. At the same time, however, media coverage may also inform lawmakers about their policy responsibilities as administrators. In this case the impact of media agenda on policy agendas is mediated by pending policy commitments. However, this shall happen rarely since often policy responsibilities originating from the EU directives do not fulfil the criteria of newsworthiness given their highly technical nature. In addition, it shall be acknowledged that certain issues that are particularly newsworthy (such as Defence, Foreign Affairs) are not even part of the agenda addressed by the EU directives (see Chapter 6). Hence, I expect the impact of media coverage on the policy agenda to be rarely mediated by policy commitments of lawmakers. Coherently, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4b: *The media agenda has a lower impact on the policy agenda when it covers issues related to policy commitments*

The composition of the agenda of the public

Before exploring the relationship between media and policy agendas, the first step of this investigation is to map the policy areas that are covered by the media to verify if across countries similar patterns of media coverage exist. This will help me in identifying the issues that are more likely to be covered by the media. According to Mazzoleni (2008) similar issue preferences across media outlets are common to different countries. This may be explained by the growing commercial imperatives that drive media attention in liberal systems. In this understanding the influence of market-oriented logics in most western media systems is likely to have produced a loss of autonomy of the media in relation to public preferences, pushing them to highlight issues that are more "saleable" to a broad public – in particular those that

are sensational or that may more easily polarise public opinion. As a consequence of this commercial logic, it is likely that certain issues are systematically over-represented in the media agenda whereas other are downplayed. The issues that are less emphasised, however, may emerge for limited amount of time – especially when they are related to specific focusing events (Mazzoleni 2008). The patterns of media attention illustrated in Figure 7.1 provide a comparative overview of these dynamics. The graphs report issue-based figures of relative yearly attention provided to each policy area in *The Times* (United Kingdom), *El Pais* (Spain), *Le Monde* (France), and the (daily) *12 o' clock radio news* (Denmark).

Figure 7.1: Patterns of attention in the media agendas of four countries by policy area (1980-2008).
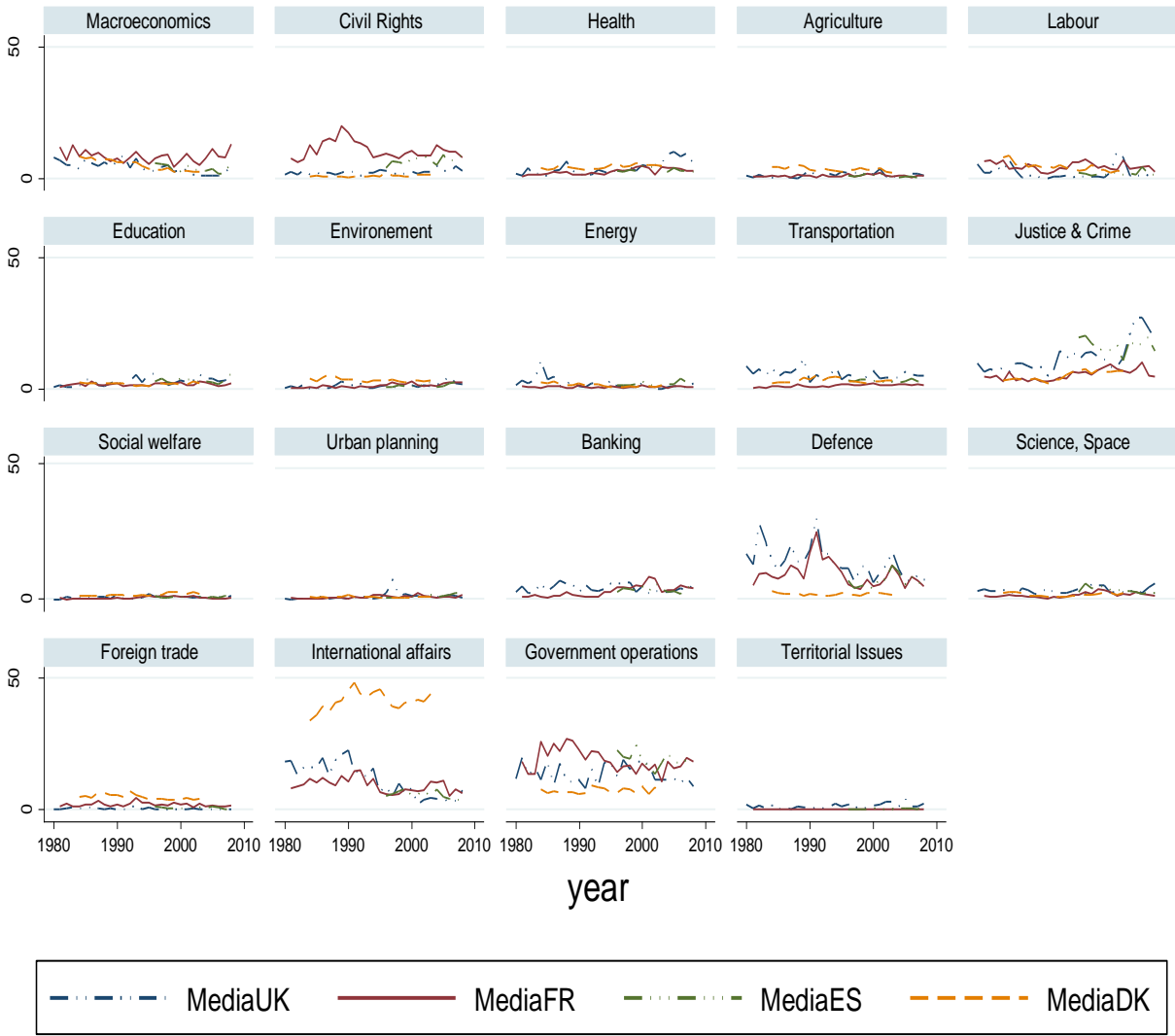
Graphs by polc

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Percentage measures.

Figure 7.1 confirms the idea that not all policy areas are equally newsworthy and that patterns of newsworthiness are rather stable across countries, since certain issues systematically receive very little media attention. This is the case, among others, for areas such as Education, Environment, Energy, Transportation, Social Welfare, Urban Planning, and Territorial Issues. Conversely, Figure 7.1 clearly shows that "newsworthy" issues tend to have considerable amounts of attention for the whole period of observation in the four countries. This is the case for Justice and Crime, Defence, International Affairs, and Government Operations. The fact that the same issues are considered newsworthy across the four countries seems to confirm the idea that issue-features (such as sensationalism and the ability to polarise the public) matter for determining the media agenda, and also that commercial logics rather than context-specific factors drive issue selection.

On the contrary, the data does not support the idea that low-salience issues enter the media agenda abruptly in combination with unexpected events, since issues that are non-salient remain steadily so for the whole period. Differently, I see that issues that already receive a considerable amount of attention are subject to important time variation. These peaks of attention are likely to be associated with major events. Among other things, the over time trend illustrates the relevance of some well-known events within each of the case studies: the Falklands War for the UK in the 1980s (Defence issues); the Gulf War and the beginning of the Rwandan genocide in the early 1990s for France (Defence issues); the ETA's call off of the ceasefire in Spain in 2007 (Civil rights issue); and the United Nation Convention for development assistance to Eritrea by Denmark in the mid-1990s (International Affairs Issues). Taken together these results suggest that issue features play a role and that similar media logics are at work in different countries leading to a number of issues that are systematically more salient than others.

Moreover, focusing events do not appear to bring media attention to issues with low salience. Rather, focusing events are able to capture the media agenda only when the issue to which they pertain is already characterised by a degree of importance. Even if it is possible that yearly observations do not capture sudden (and short) outbreaks of focusing events in media agendas in the case of low salience issues, the results show clearly that the media are primarily interested in events related to sensational and polarising issues such as Justice and Crime, Defence, International Affairs, and Government Operations. Building upon these results, the next section explores whether newsworthy issues are (or are not) "appealing" for

policymakers, by looking at the patterns of attention to different issues in the media and in the policy agendas.

The coverage of lawmakers' activities: media and policy agendas in the four countries

The discussion above highlighted that there are patterns of similarity in the degree of attention given to certain sets of issues across the different media systems in the four case studies, suggesting that issue-features matter for media logics. Sensational and polarising issues such as those related to foreign Affairs and Government Operations are systematically emphasised in the media agenda. Whereas others that lack these attributes are downplayed. In this section, I move one step further and focus on the alignment between media and policy agendas, in order to start investigating the relationship between the two. As previously discussed, "media logics" and "political logics" do not necessarily overlap (Altheide and Snow 1979; Kriesi et al. 2013), in the sense that the spectacular imperatives that drive "infotainment" by the media (Mazzoleni 1987) do not necessarily drive governments' responsibilities.

This should have two important consequences: first, media coverage shall not be necessarily proportional to the actual problems that lawmakers face since the media tend to overemphasise sensational and polarising issues above all the others. Second, lawmakers must spread their attention across a broader set of issues than the media because governance is not only about sensationalism or representing voters' interests but it is also about policy responsibilities (see Chapter 2). Consequently, if one assumes that media and political logics do not necessarily overlap, than the broad patterns of issue emphasis shall differ across the two arenas. In other words, issue attention shall not follow similar patterns in the political and media agendas. More precisely, sensational and polarising issues that are overemphasised by the media should not be given the same importance in the policy agenda.

Table 7.1 below illustrates the relative attention to different policy areas in the media agenda and in the policy agenda of the four countries between 1980 and 2008. To highlight these differences, the last column of Table 7.1 displays the difference in the relative attention provided to each of the 19 policy areas between the two venues. Bold characters highlight the six policy areas displaying the highest variation in levels of attention across the two agendas.

Table 7.1: Mean share of Media and Policy agendas for different policy areas (1980-2008, Percentages)

Policy areas	Policy agenda (1)	Media agenda (2)	Difference (2-1)
Economics	**12.58**	**5.90**	**-6.68**
Justice and Crime	**11.03**	**7.71**	**-3.32**
Government operations	10.24	12.87	2.63
Banking and finance	**8.97**	**1.39**	**-7.58**
International affairs	**7.35**	**33.87**	**26.52**
Transportation	5.99	3.39	-2.6
Labour	5.89	4.24	-1.65
Education	4.22	1.93	-2.29
Civil rights	4.07	3.85	-0.22
Urban planning	3.82	0.77	-3.05
Agriculture	3.74	2.89	-0.85
Health	3.73	4.47	0.74
Environment	3.21	2.97	-0.24
Social Welfare	3.08	1.50	-1.58
Territorial Issues	2.73	0.12	-2.61
Defence	**2.63**	**5.01**	**2.38**
Energy	2.15	1.16	-0.99
Science and technology	2.13	1.93	-0.2
Foreign trade	**1.62**	**4.05**	**2.43**

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: Cells contain proportion of attention to each of the 19 areas across countries.
Media agenda: Front pages headlines of Le Monde, El Pais, The Times, and news stories from the Danish 12 o' clock radio news.

To begin with, concerning the broad patterns of issue attention in the media and in the policy agendas Table 7.1 confirms that the media agenda concentrates on few topics, rather than equally distributing attention across the 19 issues. Very few issues concentrate most of the attention and these are International Affairs, Government Operations and Justice and Crime, whereas all other policy areas are *de facto* neglected. By comparing the two agendas, it is also confirmed that while media attention is concentrated on a small number of issues, attention in the policy agenda is spread across several policy areas. This suggests that most of the policy activities of lawmakers are of no interest for the media. In particular, the last column of Table 7.1 shows that the substantial parliamentary activity on matters such as Transportation, Urban Planning, and Energy is not mirrored in the news media.

These findings confirm that the media and lawmakers' logics are driven by different imperatives. In this sense, the results suggest that the relationship between the media and

policy agenda is indeed conditional on the type of issue considered with the media agenda covering a narrower set of issues than the policy agenda (Koch-Baumgartner and Voltmer 2010; Chaqués Bonanfont and Baumgartner 2013).

Subsequently, concerning the issues over which bigger differences exist between media coverage and passed legislation, the results confirm that the sensationalistic ones: (i.e. Foreign Trade, International Affairs, and Defence) are predictably more salient in the media than in parliaments' agendas, and hence are overemphasised by the media. This is most likely related to the fact that news outlets have a specific section dedicated to foreign affairs, whereas concrete policy measures are significantly rarer and a large share of decisions derive directly from trans-national commitments. Indeed, legislation often depends on the outcome of decisions taken by multiple national governments, intergovernmental institutions, and non-governmental trans-national actors (Rose 2014) that may nourish the media debate for a long time before (and after) a concrete decision is approved by the national parliament.

Moreover, as already discussed, International Affairs and Defence issues are often "sensational" (in Soroka's terms) and confrontational. On the one hand, policy positions and public opinion tend to be highly polarised, on the other public debates are often associated to events of high visibility such as protests, emergencies, military interventions, and terrorist attacks. These characteristics make similar policy areas highly attractive for the media but much more dangerous for governments, which may sometimes prefer inertia to unpopularity. In addition[51] from time to time there is no concrete policy that can be adopted on issues related to foreign affairs. For example, if there is a protest in Tehran about women's rights, the media will probably cover it and perhaps lawmakers will discuss it, but there is no policy that a government may implement to respond to this fact. In sum, media attention to sensational issues in the area of Foreign affairs does not necessarily mirror policy activity by national governments.[52]

The only exceptions to these patterns are Government Operations and Justice and Crime over which media and policy agendas appear to be more aligned (the differences are smaller). These are probably the issues over which there is a media effect on the policy agenda, in the sense that the media cover them and lawmakers feel somehow 'compelled' to act on those. Once detected, the issues that the media emphasise, and those over which media

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[51] The data does not capture these specific cases.

[52] For example, in the case of the Iraq war, which started in 2003, in France there has been an important media debate around this issue concerning the opportunity for France to join the US led campaign to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Yet, the fact that France led the public opposition to the invasion of Iraq implies that no concrete policy measures have been approved to formally authorise the endorsement (or the refusal) of the mission that was highly unpopular among the public.

and policy agendas appear more aligned, it remains to be explored if parties' electoral promises mediate the impact of the agenda of the public on the policy agenda. To achieve this goal, I explore the congruence between media and partisan agendas.

Subsequently, I turn to explore the relationship between media agenda and policy commitments, in order to identify the issues over which there is an indirect media effect on lawmakers' attention.

Moderators of the agenda-setting power of the media: electoral promises and policy commitments

As previously discussed, media coverage may affect the policy agenda directly or indirectly, e.g. depending on whether the media effect is influenced (or not) by two moderators: electoral promises and policy commitments of lawmakers. I begin my investigation by focusing first on partisan moderators. In line with the theoretical model of this study, the electoral preferences of the parties may be appealing to the media due to their importance for the voters (see Chapter 2), hence partisan and media agendas may be aligned. Table 7.2 displays the three most important issues in the media agenda next to the three main issues in the partisan agendas (of the party, of the PM, and of the Opposition party), in each of the four countries under observation. Bold characters indicate issues that are prioritised in both venues, or where the two agendas are aligned.

Table 7.2: Priorities in the media and partisan agendas (1980-2008)

Agenda venues	Denmark	France	Spain	United Kingdom
Media	Foreign Affairs (41.5)	**Economics (29.3)**	**Government Operations (19.1)**	Defence (13.6)
	Government Operations (7.2)	**Labour (27.5)**	**Justice and Crime (16.5)**	**Justice and Crime (13.4)**
	Economics (5.1)	Agriculture (23.6)	Defence (6.9)	Foreign Trade (13.3)
Partisan	**Economics (17)**	**Economics (12.5)**	Education (12.1)	Economics (9.7)
(PM and Opp.)	Social Welfare (15.1)	**Labour (10.5)**	**Government Operations (9.7)**	Education (9.1)
	Education (10.1)	Government Operations (9.2)	**Justice and Crime (9.6)**	**Justice and Crime (7.3)**

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: For each country, cells show relative attention to the three most salient policy areas across the two agenda venues.

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By disaggregating the results by country, it appears that media and policy agendas are to a certain degree aligned in terms of issue selection. Within countries, the two venues tend to concentrate on similar issues: Economics and Labour issues are priorities for both the media and parties in France, whereas Government Operations and Justice and Crime stand out in both agendas in Spain. Similarly, Macroeconomic policies represent one of the top-three concerns in the two agendas in Denmark, and the same applies to Justice in the UK. Despite this trend, there are some important differences across agendas, most notably International affairs in Denmark, which receives substantially different degrees of attention in the two venues. Other issues that are overemphasised in the media agenda are Agriculture in France and – to a lower extent – Defence in Spain and the United Kingdom.[53] The results outlined so far suggest that media coverage and partisan agendas are aligned on certain issues that appear to be important both for the media and for the parties. Surprisingly, alignment between partisan and media agenda is found not only on sensational and confrontational issues (such as Defence, Foreign Affairs, Justice and Crime, and Government Operations) but also on macroeconomic issues that are not sensationalistic, but that according to Soroka capture voters' attention because of their direct effects on everyday life.

I now extend this analysis to map whether policy commitments and media agenda overlap. In line with the theoretical model of this study, the issues addressed in the EU directives should not be particularly appealing for the media due to their high technicality, which may rarely fit the criteria of newsworthiness (see Chapter 2). Hence the two agendas shall seldom be aligned. Similar to the previous analysis, I consider the three most important policy areas in the media and in the EU directives. The results are reported in Table 7.3 below.

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[53] Admittedly, these results based on yearly media coverage and the electoral platforms of the parties may disguise a number of important factors distinct from the electoral platforms of the parties, which are also likely to influence the relationship between media and partisan agendas. These factors include the fact that partisan priorities may change during the mandate and the results could have been more precise if based on other sources to approximate partisan agendas continuously, such as the parliamentary questions. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this data was not available for the four countries. Yet, if some common patterns can be detected by using data that is less precise (such as party manifestos), it can be expected that this trend should appear even more clearly when using more accurate data (as has been demonstrated in case studies on parliamentary questions in Switzerland – Sciarini and Tresch 2014, and Denmark – Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010).

Table 7.3: Priorities in the agendas of the media and in the EU directives.

Agenda venues	Denmark	France	Spain	United Kingdom
Media	Foreign Affairs (41.5)	Economics (29.3)	Government Operations (19.1)	Defence (13.6)
	Government Operations (7.2)	Labour (27.5)	Justice and Crime (16.5)	Justice and Crime (13.4)
	Economics (5.1)	**Agriculture (23.6)**	Defence (6.9)	Foreign Trade (13.3)
EU directives	Agriculture (22.8)	**Agriculture (22.8)**	Agriculture (22.8)	Agriculture (22.8)
	Transportation (16)	Transportation (16)	Transportation (16)	Transportation (16)
	Banking and Finance (15.5)	Banking and Finance (15.5)	Banking and Finance (15.5)	Banking and Finance (15.5)

Source: Comparative Agendas Project
Note: For each country, cells show relative attention to the three most salient policy areas across the two agenda venues.

In line with my theory, there is little alignment between commitments of lawmakers and media agenda In particular, the results show that issue priorities across the media and EU directives do not coincide in Denmark, Spain and the United Kingdom, suggesting that this share of lawmakers' activity is not of particular interest for the media. This comes as no surprise, given the highly technical nature of many EU directives, such as the one establishing common rules for specific types of combined transport of goods between Member States (Directive 92/106/EEC) or the one on the establishment of criteria for rear-view mirrors for wheeled agricultural or forestry tractors (Directive 4/346/EEC). The exception to this trend is France, where the media and the EU agendas converge on giving special emphasis to Agriculture issues. One can make sense of this exception by considering the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy in French Politics, where most professional farming organisations have lobbied to keep state-intervention in the field of agriculture since the early stages of the communitarian decision (1962). Continuous negotiations between France and the EU on this matter contributed to the politicisation of agriculture affairs in France, not only among the public but also among governing parties, making this policy commitment a newsworthy and confrontational issue.

Taken together these descriptive results reveal that partisan and media agendas are aligned on certain types of issues (sensationalistic and Macroeconomic ones) whereas media coverage is less in line with the policy commitments of lawmakers deriving from the EU directives. What needs to be tested is the extent to which these convergences predict the content of the policy agenda.

Media coverage, partisan promises and EU commitments: reassessing lawmakers' priorities in crowded policy agendas

Media agenda can influence policy agendas either by affecting lawmakers' attention directly or indirectly. The impact of the media agenda on the content of the policy agenda should be conditioned by the content of the partisan agenda and by the relationship between media coverage and policy commitments. To test the effects of the media agenda on the composition of the policy agenda, controlling for the electoral promises of the parties and the content of the EU directives as in the other chapters, I divide this section in two parts:

1. First, I detect broad patterns of the influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda controlling for the electoral promises of the parties and EU directives by estimating pooled time-series cross-sectional regressions for the period 1980 to 2008 with panel corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995).[54] The resulting coefficients tell the reader the average effect of the content of the media agenda on the content of the policy agenda, controlling for the electoral promises of the governing parties, the EU commitments, and the interactions among the two. In other words, this analysis shows whether, and to what extent, the policy agenda is influenced by the issue priorities of the media directly and indirectly.

2. However, variations in rates of agenda-setting power of the media are to be expected due to differences in the intrinsic importance of certain issues in the media and in the partisan agenda (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Thesen 2011), but also in the media and in the policy commitments of lawmakers (see Chapter 2). Therefore, an issue-level analysis is needed to fully test the relationship between EU commitments, partisan agendas, media agenda and policy agenda. Hence, in a second part I estimate separate time-series cross-sectional regressions for each of the nineteen policy areas for the period from 1980 to 2008. In doing so, my analysis illustrates if issue characteristics account for the influence of the media agenda on policy outputs.

As before, time-series cross-sectional analyses allow the analysis of the impact of the media agenda on the policy agenda while controlling for partisan agendas and mandatory

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[54] As in Chapter 6, each of the 15 policy areas per country constitutes a panel. As before, estimations rely on 76 issue-country panels, each with around 26 yearly observations[54] from 1980 to 2008 (N=1976).

policy actions. The policy agenda is the dependent variable and the models predict the relative attention devoted to a particular issue in a particular period. For all models the time unit of analysis is 12 months. In all time-series models, the lagged value of the dependent variable controls for the autoregressive nature of the policy agenda over time and for autocorrelation (see Chapter 3 on methods for further details).

To ease the interpretation of the results, I report here again the results of Model 1 from Chapter 5 – which tests for the effect of the party system agenda and the policy agenda by considering the partisan agenda of the Prime Minister (*PM party agenda*) and of the main opposition party (*Opp. party agenda*), and of Model 5 from Chapter 6 – which controls for the effects of the content of the EU directives (*EU agenda*) and of the length of the EU membership with a variable (*EU Membership*) capturing the number of years a country has been part of the Union. I also introduce Model 6, and Model 7, controlling respectively for the content of the media agenda of the previous year (*L1.media*) for electoral and non-electoral times (*electoral:* a dummy variable taking the value of 1 for the 12 months prior to a national election, and 0 otherwise); for the interaction between the content of the media agenda of the previous year and partisan agendas of the PM and of the Opposition (*L1. media*Party PM and L1.media*Party OPP*); and finally also for the interaction between the content of the media agenda in the previous year and the content of the EU directives (*L1.media*EU agenda*).

Table 7.5 below reports the results of the pooled time-series cross-sectional analyses, proposing a test of the influence of media agenda on the policy agenda, controlling for the conditioning effect of the partisan agenda, and of policy commitments.

Table 7.5: Time-series cross-sectional analyses of media agenda, partisan agendas, EU agendas, and policy agenda between 1980 and 2008

	Model 1	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Constant	1.393 (.247)***	1.710 (.298)***	1.110 (.240)***	1.092 (.251)***
L1.policy agenda	.649 (.052)***	.614 (.052)***	.642 (.064)***	.641 (.063)***
PM party agenda	.082 (.015)***	.099 (.016)***	.074 (.0193)***	.072 (.022)***
Opp. party agenda	.004 (.002)*	.005 (.002)*	.005 (.002)**	.010 (.003)**
EU agenda		.003 (.001)**	.003 (.001)**	.003 (.001)**
Membership (years)		-.010 (.003)***	-.010 (.003)***	-.010 (.003)***
L1.Media			.050 (.023)**	.054 (.025)**
Electoral			-.023 (.051)	-.024 (.050)
L1.Media * party PM				.009 (.002)
L1. Media* party Opp.				.011 (.007)*
L1.Media * EUagenda				.008 (.003)
R-squared	0.46	0.47	0.48	0.49
N	1957	1957	1957	1957

Source: Comparative Agendas Project.
Panel corrected standard errors are presented in parentheses.
*p<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01.

As can be noticed, the coefficient of the lagged dependent variable is particularly high. This suggests strong autocorrelation, meaning that the policy agenda of a given year is strongly similar to that of the previous year. In other words, these results confirm some of the trends detected in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, i.e. that policy stability is high in the policy agenda and path-dependency appears as the strongest explanatory factor of the content of the policy agenda even when I control for partisan electoral priorities, for policy commitments originating from the EU directives, and from the content of the media agenda. As previously discussed (See Chapters 5 and 6), Model 1 and Model 5 show that some portions of the policy agenda are explained by the electoral promises of the parties and by policy commitments, especially during the early years of the EU membership when policy commitments are bigger. In addition to this, however, Model 6 reveals that there is a significant direct influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda, suggesting that a portion of lawmakers' activities is dedicated to responding to the priorities of the public.

This is in line with the expectations drawn from the theory and with previous studies that tested the influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda by looking at other indicators of lawmakers' attention (such as parliamentary questions). In addition, Model 6 informs about the impact of election time. As it turns out, the coefficient of the variable accounting for the difference between electoral and non-electoral times is not significant, suggesting that election time does not matter. This does not support H3 expecting a stronger relationship between media and policy agenda in non-electoral times, but it is coherent with recent research on the findings on the mediatization of the policy agenda at different times of the mandate (see for an overview Tresch and Sciarini 2014).

Model 7 is instead useful to shed light on the indirect mechanisms through which media agendas affect the policy agenda, e.g. via the interaction with the electoral promises of the parties and via the interaction with existing policy commitments. Results are generally in line with the hypotheses stressing the importance of partisan moderators in the relationship between media and policy agendas (H4 and H4a). More precisely, the interactions between partisan and media agenda exhibit a significant coefficient only for the agenda of the opposition party, but not of the Prime Minister, suggesting that the issues brought by the media are likely to enter the policy agenda when they are also emphasised by the opposition party. This may be understood if one considers that Challenger actors may indeed use the media coverage as a megaphone for blameworthiness of the governing majority. This is coherent with previous results (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010) suggesting that

opposition parties are more likely to take up the media's issues in order to blame those in power.

Concerning the conditioning effect of policy commitments (H5), when controlling for the interaction between media agenda and EU directives, I cannot support my original expectation. The coefficient of the interaction between the media agenda and the EU directives is not significant. Taken together these general results suggest that the media agenda influences lawmakers' attention mainly via two mechanisms: directly or via the interaction with the electoral promises of the opposition, whereas no evidence is found about the interaction between media agenda and the compulsory activities of lawmakers.

The findings illustrated in Table 7.5 inform about the general tendencies of the relationship between EU commitments, partisan promises, media coverage, and policy agendas. Yet to achieve a deeper understanding, they need to be further specified by accounting for the differences across policy areas. Hence I now turn to issue-specific analyses in policy and media agendas following the methodology used in previous chapters. For this, I have tested issue dynamics of media impact (as in Model 7) for each policy area separately. The results are presented in Table 7.6 and summarised in Table 7.7 below. Table 7.6 presents the findings on the effects of issue attention in the media agenda on the policy agenda by presenting the significant coefficient estimates for each policy area.

In addition, Table 7.7 summarises this information and it is structured as follows. In each column I list the policy areas for which the media impact on the policy agenda takes place directly (the coefficients between policy agendas and media agenda are significant), and indirectly: e.g. via the mediating effect of the electoral promises of the parties in power (the coefficients are significant and positive and I specify if it is the agenda of the party of the PM or of the Opposition that matters), or via the mediating effect of policy commitments. The final column informs about the policy areas over which election proximity appears to mediate the media's impact on the policy agenda. As before, these results are presented across the columns, enabling comparison across policy areas and mechanisms of transmission.

Table 7.6: The impact of media agenda on the composition of the policy agenda (1980-2008)

	Economics	Civil Rights	Health	Agriculture	Labour	Education	Environement	Energy	Transpor	Justice and Crime	Welfare	Housing	Banking	Defence	Science	Trade	Foreign Affairs	Government	Lands
Constant	15.55 (5.59)***	-.52 (.49)*	3.90 (1.02)***	4.08 (1.08)***	2.94 (1.01)**	5.79 (1.66)***	3.16 (.942)**	3342 (.747)**	7.65 (1.49)***	1.25 (.25)***	2.55 (1.11)*	2.55 (1.10)*	13.84 (1.93)***	NS	3.31 (.78)***	NS	7.26 (3.87)**	10.16 (3.27)**	-.055 (1.47)*
L1.policy agenda	NS	.280 (.111)**	NS	.304 (.103)***	.461 (.096)***	.388 (.115)***	NS	.196 (.103)***	.286 (.101)***	.648 (.052)***	.436 (.09)***	.436 (.090)***	.050 (.109)*	NS	.278 (.123)**	.416 (.151)***	.645 (.103)***	NS	.146 (.127)*
PM party agenda	-.055 (.018)*	.093 (.049)**	.163 (.050)***	-.184 (.110)*	.15 (.10)*	-.109 (.068)*	-.092 (.074)*	NS	-.228 (.13)**	.086 (.015)***	NS	NS	-.318 (.091)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	.244 (.127)*	NS
Opp. party agenda	-.094 (.039)**	.022 (.010)**	.009 (.005)*	NS	NS	.015 (.008)*	NS	NS	-.10 (.08)*	.004 (.002)*	NS	NS	-.154 (.059)*	NS	NS	.084 (.049)*	NS	NS	NS
EU agenda	.002 (.001)*	.004 (.002)*	NS	.005 (.001)**	NS	NS	.006 (.001)***	NS	.002 (.001)*	NS	NS	NS	.003 (.001)**	NS	.002 (.001)*	NS	NS	NS	NS
Membership	-.363 (.061)***	.071 (.025)***	NS	-.049 (.021)**	NS	NS	NS	NS	-.059 (.027)**	NS	NS	NS	-.191 (.032)**	NS	-.035 (.014)*	NS	NS	.050 (.034)*	NS
L1.media	.077 (.039)*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.012 (.008)*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Electoral	4.33 (1.35)***	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
L1.media * party PM	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
L1.media*party Opp	.019 (.006)**	NS	NS	.039 (.030)*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.010 (.008)*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	.024 (.009)*	NS
L1.media*EU agenda	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
R-squared	0.40	0.33	0.13	0.38	0.16	0.24	0.35	0.05	0.37	0.26	0.12	0.10	0.41	0.02	0.25	0.10	0.35	0.25	0.04

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

*<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01

Panel Corrected Standard Errors

Table 7.7: Summary of the effects of media agenda, policy commitments, and parties' electoral promises on the policy agenda, by policy area (1980-2008)

The impact of the media agenda on the policy agenda			
Areas influenced by media impact	Impact mediated by parties' electoral promises	Impact mediated by policy commitments	Impact mediated by elections' proximity
Economics	Economics (opp.)		Economics (+)
Justice and Crime	Agriculture (opp.)		
Government	Justice and Crime (opp.)	-	
	Government (opp.)		

Source: Comparative Agendas Project

Overall, it can be seen that that policy agendas are affected by the content of the media agenda but this is the case for a very small number of policy areas. Specifically, statistically significant effects of the media agenda are only evident for 3 policy areas (out of 15), suggesting that the media influence on lawmakers' attention is quite moderate. In particular direct media effects on the policy agenda are found in the case of Economics, Justice and Crime and Government, issues that are both concrete and unobtrusive according to Soroka's typology (Soroka 2002), i.e. their dramatic character provides them a stronger direct agenda-setting power.

In addition, a closer look at the results reveals that the media's effects are systematically mediated by the electoral promises of the opposition party rather than of the party of the Prime Minister, confirming previous results suggesting that the issues emphasised by the media are likely to enter the policy agenda when they are also emphasised by the opposition party – probably in a logic of blame avoidance (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Thesen 2011). In addition, the results show that media effects are not mediated by policy commitments confirming that the two types of policy problems barely interact. Elections proximity seems to matter only in the case of Economics, when media effects on the policy agenda increase when elections are closer. This may be understood by considering the important electoral value that Economic issues have for lawmakers, but also their importance in orienting voting behaviour, which makes Economics a newsworthy issue also for the media.

Taken together, the results provide three major substantiations of the media's impact on the policy agenda. First, as expected the policy agenda includes a set of policy activities influenced by the agenda of the media (H1) but this appears to be the case only for a narrow set of issues (Economics, Justice and Crime and Government) with special characteristics of newsworthiness and sensationalism that boost their policy appeal (H2) as theorised by Soroka (2002). Secondly, with the exception of Economic issues, election proximity does not impact the media's influence on lawmakers' attention (H3), confirming what has been found in other studies, e.g. that on most issues the media have more power to influence the content of the policy agenda during non-electoral times than during election periods (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Finally, the findings shed light on the interaction between the media and parties' agendas. I find that media and parties' electoral promises may rarely interact (H4) and this takes place via the interaction with the electoral promises of the opposition party rather than with the promises of the party of the Prime Minister (H4a), probably as a strategy to put pressure on the incumbent and avoid electoral discredit. Differently, the results show that no interaction is at work between media coverage and pending policy responsibilities of lawmakers (H4b) suggesting (unsurprisingly) that media coverage and policy responsibilities are driven by different imperatives and that policy responsibilities probably do not conform to the criteria of newsworthiness privileged by the media.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at investigating the way in which the agenda of the public as captured by the media influences lawmakers' attention, by looking at the relationship between the content of the media agenda and the content of the policy agenda. Differently from existing contributions that have focused mainly on the effects of the media agenda on the policy agenda, this chapter also discussed the way in which new policy problems brought by the media interact with the other policy problems competing for lawmakers' attention: the electoral promises of the governing parties, and the policy commitments of lawmakers. To develop the hypotheses, I relied on the literature discussing the media's effects on policy. Theories on mediatization were used to analyse and discuss the content of the media agenda where I found that a common logic of "newsworthiness" produces similar patterns of media

coverage across the four countries independently from context-specific factors, with sensational and confrontational issues such as Defence, International Affairs and government Operation being constantly emphasised and others being dismissed. Theories on the "conditionality" of the media effects on policy were used to identify and discuss the alignments between media and policy agendas. According to these theories, media and policy agendas do not follow similar logics, hence the issues that are emphasised by the media are not necessarily up taken by lawmakers, even if these dynamics may change if one considers the timing of the mandate. In addition, more recent studies on the conditionality of the media effects on policy have suggested that the agenda-setting power of the media is mediated by the agenda of the parties in office, and in particular by the agenda of the opposition that may use media coverage to blame the party in office. Differently, the media agenda was expected not to interact with the compulsory activities of lawmakers given their technical character and scarce appeal for the media.

Overall, the results of this chapter provide important empirical evidence concerning the influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda, and they all point in the direction of a moderate media effect for policy. More precisely, the findings reveal that the influence of the media on lawmakers' attention is far from being ubiquitous, but it depends on the type of issue considered. More precisely, the media's effects on policy agendas appear to be limited to specific types of issues with special characteristics of newsworthiness and sensationalism (Economics and Justice and Crime) and election proximity does not appear to boost systematically the agenda-setting power of the media. Finally, I found that the impact of the media on the policy agenda is mediated systematically by the interaction with the electoral promises of the opposition party, reasonably following the logic of emphasis and blameworthiness of the incumbents. In my sample, the interaction never occurs with policy commitments.

The evidence that I found suggests that the existing understanding of the influence of the media agenda on the policy agendas needs to be expanded. I observed that the media agenda privileges certain issues over others, and that media and policy agendas do not follow the same logics. Furthermore, the findings show that, beyond the constraints related to electoral promises of governing parties and constraints related to policy commitments, the media complicate (occasionally) the problem-solving capacity of contemporary democracies, yet, media influence depends on the nature of the policies that are debated, and on the way in which the agenda of the opposition party relates to media coverage. My findings suggest that

a more accurate understanding of the influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda demands also an investigation of the way in which media coverage interacts with other policy problems that lawmakers face. A broader sample of countries and of media sources (not only classic ones – TV and radio – but more recent ones – such as social media) may further enrich these results. In the conclusion, I analyse these findings in the light of those of the previous chapters and discuss the consequences of my research against the broad expectations presented in the introduction.

Who sets lawmakers' priorities? Conclusive remarks

Throughout this dissertation I have explored the composition of policy agendas in Denmark, France, Spain and the United Kingdom over the last three decades, by adopting a problem-solving understanding of lawmakers' priorities grounded in the idea that governments are under pressure to react to policy problems originating from their electoral and non-electoral mandates. Bringing together insights from party-mandate and public-policy approaches to the study of lawmakers' priorities, the theory suggests that lawmakers must balance their desire to deliver on their electoral mandates (i.e. discretionary policy problems) with a need to comply with existing commitments and avoid illegal decision-making (i.e. compulsory policy problems), while at the same time coping with the necessity to adapt policy priorities in response to changes in public concerns that emerge from the media agenda if they want to assure re-election and prove they are responsible administrators.

The operationalisation of the study described in Chapter 3 made it possible to capture issue-attention dynamics for different policy areas and agenda venues. The choice to model the data in a time-series cross-sectional format with country fixed effects, allowed to privilege a focus on issue-attention dynamics and cope with the natural limitations of testing the theory only for a limited number of countries. The Comparative Agendas project data makes it possible to map, systematically, issue attention across 19 policy areas and several agenda venues. In this sense, the CAP data made it possible to detect if certain policy areas were particularly important in the policy agenda as communicated in the passed legislation, if they were also the focus of discretionary policy problems as communicated by the electoral promises of the parties, if they were the focus of compulsory commitments as communicated by the EU directives, and if they were the focus of the agenda of the public as communicated by media coverage. Building on these theoretical and methodological bases, it has been possible not only to test the impact of different types of policy problems on the policy agenda, but also to control for the interactions between them.

To begin with, one of the general achievements of this dissertation is that it has explored empirically how different policy problems shape the content of the policy agenda, thus providing a preliminary answer to the initial research questions: how do lawmakers

distribute their attention across different issues? How do electoral promises, policy responsibilities, and public concerns coexist in the policy agenda? In normative terms, the general conclusion that can be drawn from the present work is that representative government is about reconciling different policy problems. The problems that shall be tackled by lawmakers at any moment in time reflect the dual role of elected politicians in contemporary democracies as representative and as administrators (Mair 2009) to address (and solve) a variety of policy problems demanding their attention. In this sense, to assure re-election, important portions of the policy agenda result from the electoral mandates of the governing parties and from the reactions to changing concerns among voters. Electoral promises of the governing parties tend to reflect parties' discretionary preferences over issues which are the sources of party reputations, images and promises mobilised during electoral campaigns (Petrocik 1996). A rational anticipation of future electoral costs leads lawmakers to attend also to other policy problems emerging in the public debate and portrayed by the media. The latter constitute a sort of "update" of the public preferences between elections. At the same time, however, avoiding reckless and illegal decision-making motivates lawmakers to deliver policies also on non-electoral mandates, originating from binding existing commitments. Hence, alongside partisan and public influence in public policy, EU directives reflect a set of policy problems that do not originate from electoral mandates, and are instead "commitments" in the sense that they are addressed by lawmakers in order for them to uphold their reputation of responsible administrators.

The proposition of a typology of policy problems that capture lawmakers' attention, and the assessment of its empirical validity, make this study innovative about its own (parties and public policy) priors exploring dynamics of policy making. As argued in the literature review, most existing studies do not encompass different sources of policy problems, but they rather privilege partisan explanations or public policy explanations and discuss their limits. This work shows that policy attention is about both. In this sense, the theory is naturally inspired by major contributions exploring policy priorities presented in the literature review (party mandate, incrementalism, and agenda-setting approaches), but its conceptualisation is distinct since it is designed to clarify under which circumstances one model of policymaking prevails over the other, and when they may interact. I argue that it is not a matter of incrementalism prevailing on party mandates or vice versa, quite the contrary I argue that in the policy agenda both coexist. I think that classic approaches do not fully integrate this question of whether "administration" prevails over "representation", which has been a long-

lasting concern of party and public policy scholars, and one of the most important concerns in the recent CAP tradition (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014).

It is important however to acknowledge that this typology of policy problems and its operationalisation do not aim at capturing the 'directionality' of policy decisions that are taken by lawmakers or brought by different policy problems (more progressive or conservative) which are important concerns when studying governments' responsiveness (Budge et al. 2001; McDonald and Budge 2007). Yet, these measures of "directionality" may be integrated in my theory dealing with lawmakers' decisions to focus on discretionary or compulsory policy problems. Hence the measures provided offer an empirical assessment of the way in which lawmakers focus on different types of policy problems. This is a general picture that, to my mind, could not have been achieved if I had included measures accounting for left and right positions over different issues. It should also be acknowledged that this theory does not aim at tracking the complete dynamics of policy agendas for two main reasons. First of all, it does not consider all possible agenda-setters that may be involved in the process of policy formation. Second, because the theory does not include other important venues of policy outputs.

Concerning the first point, the theory does not consider the agenda-setting power of all policy entrepreneurs originating policy problems for lawmakers. There are other important actors – most notably interest groups (see for an overview Rasmussen et al. 2014) and civil servants (Page and Jenkins 2005), but also members of governing coalitions (Laver 1998; Moury 2010) – that have not been considered and that may reasonably influence lawmakers' decisions to focus on certain policy problems instead of others. Most probably these actors have their own agenda-setting power that may follow different trends than those depicted here. Nonetheless, I am confident that mainstream political parties are a good start since they are key actors that, in the end, take decisions in government.

In addition, the theory and the data do not account for the types of "actions" that lawmakers may use to respond to different types of policy problems (such as, for example, whether the response to the commitments from the EU directives passes through secondary legislation) and future projects may be developed to account for these limitations. In this sense, there are other possible venues of policy outputs such as secondary legislation (Page 2001), budgets, parliamentary questions and debates (John et al. 2013; Vliegenthart et al. 2010), that follow specific agenda-settings dynamics. Yet I am persuaded that passed legislation is a comparable key component of the agendas of lawmakers, representing at least the "core" of the policy agenda of a given government.

In order to identify the types of policy problems demanding lawmakers' attention, I introduced different accounts of policy priorities. To ease the understanding, I identified two major traditions: party mandate and public policy accounts. When studied through the lenses of a party-mandate tradition, lawmakers' priorities result mainly from the direct transmission of parties' electoral promises in everyday policymaking (for a discussion, see Louwerse 2011). Differently, when studied through the lenses of public-policy approaches, lawmakers' priorities do not result exclusively from the transmission of parties' electoral promises into policies. Here, policy priorities result from a non-orderly process characterised by stability and sudden changes that are difficult to predict and that may bring different issues to the agenda. In this framework, factors such as demographic variations, governments' past commitments, policy experts and other governing subsystems or issue intrusion are more likely to explain lawmakers' priorities than the electoral promises of the governing parties.

In a nutshell, party scholars emphasise the importance of electoral promises for the composition of policy agendas, whereas public policy scholars recognise the importance of other factors that work as "constraints" of partisanship in shaping the content of policy agendas. Both traditions bring empirical evidence about the proportions of one or the other. However, most of these contributions focus on specific policy areas (and not on the entire policy agenda) and they do not consider that both electoral and non-electoral mandates may be at work to shape lawmakers' priorities. The idea that there are competing pressures on lawmakers' attention is not a new endeavour in political science. Problem-solving is an overriding concern of governments, requiring decision-makers to divide their attention across a range of social and economic problems and to manage the most salient and urgent of these (Jones 1994; 2001; Döring 1995; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Mayhew 2006; Adler and Wilkerson 2013). Policymakers possess scarce institutional and cognitive resources to process the vast array of issues that they are faced with at any moment in time. Only so many issues can be earmarked for immediate action, while others must wait for attention and some disregarded altogether. Several typologies of the issues faced by lawmakers have been discussed (Walker 1977; Adler and Wilkerson 2013).

On the basis of those I identified two "ideal types" of policy problems that I label discretionary problems (reflecting the electoral mandates of the governing parties) and compulsory problems (reflecting responsibilities from principals outside the formal chain of delegation) such as the content of binding legal acts necessitating official transposition: the EU directives. This study allowed the analysis of the dynamics at work in different policy

areas as a result of both types of inputs (electoral or not). More precisely, the argument that may be built starting from the two traditions is the following: while lawmakers may be seeking to deliver on electoral platforms, the necessities of competent and responsible government require them to be adaptive to pending non-electoral commitments as well as to the emergence of new issues and problems in the society. In this sense, my theory is like a platform permitting the evaluation of the impact of partisan and public policy accounts of lawmakers' priorities simultaneously, bringing them into a common frame: problem-solving.

Most existing studies of lawmakers' priorities do not account for the way in which lawmakers respond simultaneously to different types of policy problems and its implications. Politicians are willing to deliver on their electoral mandates, but this is not always possible since they have to distribute attention across different policy problems. In short, the general expectation was that policy agendas respond to discretionary and compulsory policy problems, but also that the two may interact with compulsory problems mediating the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda. I believe that classic interpretations do not fully address the question of how promises and commitments coexist in the policy agenda, or in other words whether and how "representation" and "responsibility" coexist in policymaking (Mair 2009).

Having summarised the major theoretical contributions made by this work, as well as locating it with respect to its predecessors and discussing its limitations, it is finally time to describe the findings more in detail.

First of all, I find that the composition of policy agendas is stable over time and across countries. The results reveal that about 80% of the agenda items are inherited from one legislature to the other in different countries. The same patters hold true when analysing patterns of stability in different policy areas across countries. Beyond Chapter 4, this is a clear finding that is common to the entire dissertation: even when controlling for electoral and non-electoral policy problems, I find that path dependency between policy agendas is the stronger explanatory factor of lawmakers' attention. Hence, every year lawmakers face this legacy that is the major driver of policy attention. In Chapter 4 I could not find any trace (at least in my sample) of what was argued by existing contributions that electoral alternation, elections proximity, partisanship of the governing parties and institutional configuration shall impinge upon the content of the policy agenda. Instead I found evidence of "policy junctures" that bring new issues in the policy agenda and produce a specific (stable) trajectory for lawmakers' attention for the years to come. Only in the case of the United Kingdom may this

"critical juncture" be convincingly justified in terms of partisan explanations, in the sense that the arrival to power of a specific party may be associated with a clear shift in policy attention. This is the case of Transport, which stopped being a priority of British lawmakers after the 1980s after the major reforms adopted in this field by the Thatcher government (John et al. 2013). In this case, this appears as a distinctive feature of conservative policy priorities.

In this sense, the impact of parties on lawmakers' priorities is far from straightforward, as is posited by party mandate approaches, and it is instead conditional on the policy sector considered. Policy agendas seem to be driven less by partisan factors than by routine, management of the state and issue-by-issue analyses revealed that policy agendas may change as a result of major events that produce dramatic changes in attention, and that do not seem to follow clear partisan patterns. In this sense the evidence confirms the expectations of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones 2005) recognising the role of other (complementary) agenda-setters than parties. This paved the way for investigating different sources of policy problems demanding lawmakers' attention.

In Chapter 5 I focused on the transmission of parties' electoral promises in the policy agenda, developing hypotheses from classic accounts of party mandate concerning the influence of parties on policies, party families, institutional determinants and elections proximity. The results confirm that lawmakers' attention substantively responds to discretionary policy problems, suggesting that partisan concerns do somehow influence the content of the policy agenda. Among the 19 policy areas considered in this study, the policy agenda responds to the electoral promises of the parties in 9 sectors: which is more than those affected by compulsory problems (only 7) and by the agenda of the public (only 3). This supports the idea that party mandates are among the most important drivers of lawmakers' attention, confirming existing accounts on the influence of party preferences on policy (Klingeman et al. 1994). Yet, my results are useful not only to shed light on the magnitude of the transmission of electoral mandates, but also to account for the way in which transmission occurs. I illustrate that the transmission of electoral promises in the policy agenda takes place not only via the preferences of the party of the Prime Minster but also via the promises of the opposition. I found that the issues receiving attention in the platform of the Prime Minister and of the main opposition party are reflected in the policy agenda.

In this sense, party mandate is assured by governing and opposition parties either seeking to pursue a consensual policy agenda that attracts support from across the political spectrum or otherwise to neutralise issues on the party-system agenda that are problematic to

them, and this is coherent with existing research on parties and policy agendas (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). In addition, I found little evidence that party families with ostensibly diverse policy priorities (Budge et al. 2001) impact the policy agenda. The results indicate that partisanship matters only for 3 out of 9 issues for which party mandate is at work. In addition the patterns detected are not so straightforwardly identifiable as "left-right cleavages" since I found that, for example, left-wing parties are more responsive on Government issues (such as scrutiny of government operations and conduct, and Intergovernmental Relations) whereas right-wing actors tend to be more responsive to policy areas such as Health and Transport. In this sense, the attention profile of governments does not seem to change depending on the partisanship of the Prime Minister. Hence, I find hard to infer from my sample that partisanship matters as argued in classic party mandate research (Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001), whereas my results point more in the direction of a cartelisation of interests and policies for governing parties (Katz and Mair 1995) at least in terms of attention distribution.

Differently, the findings concerning the impact of institutional configuration confirm the results of classic analyses on party mandate, highlighting that more majoritarian institutions with a lower number of parties in government and represented in the parliament enhance partisan influence on policy (Powell and Whitten 1993; Schmidt 1996). In the end I found only marginal evidence that "electoral business cycles effects" (Blais and Nadeau 1995) reshape the influence of parties on policies. However, the fact that electoral business cycles are at work on Economic issues is limited but important evidence, which should not lead the reader to dismiss the possibility that lawmakers may manipulate the content of the policy agenda when elections approach in order to be more responsive to their electoral mandates and maximise the chances of been re-elected. The case of Economics would indeed need to be further explored since changes in attention towards issues such as national budgets, debts, and taxation are likely to be reshaped by the economic conjuncture in which parties act. In this sense different economic conditions are likely to yield different patterns of politics (Lange 1989; Keohane and Milner 1996; Ruggie 1997;) promoting adjustments in the content of policy agendas (Froio and Grossman 2014).

Taken together the results of Chapter 5 confirm that discretionary concerns brought by the electoral mandates of the parties matter, and after path dependency are the major explanatory factor for lawmakers' priorities. However their transmission is conditional, mainly depending on the policy area considered and the "openness" of the institutional structure in which lawmakers govern. In this framework the chapter confirms the validity of

re-framing the long lasting "do parties matter question?" into "when do parties matter?" to fully understand how electoral mandates are transmitted in everyday policymaking.

As well as discretionary problems, specific portions of policy agendas are affected by pending commitments originating from the EU directives, binding legal acts adopted by the Union that demand formal transposition. European integration has promoted policy convergence across Member States (for an overview of the argument see Hix and Høyland 2011) and as a result important portions of domestic lawmakers' attention are dedicated to this type of 'binding' policy activities (Papadopoulos 2013). The broad picture that I draw from the results of Chapter 6 goes in the direction of these intuitions. Combining insights from the Europeanisation literature and from public policy accounts on policy commitments, I developed hypotheses concerning the way in which EU commitments influence domestic agendas, and the way in which addressing existing commitments reshape the transmission of discretionary problems in the policy agenda.

I provided evidence of the magnitude of existing commitments in policy agendas, by showing that these are concentrated on specific policy areas (in particular Agriculture, Environment, and Banking and Finance) that are among the older and shared competences of the Union and the Member States, confirming previous results of studies dealing with the influence of EU decisions on domestic legislation (Schmitter 1996; Börzel 2006). The results confirm that lawmakers' attention responds to compulsory policy problems, suggesting that policy commitments influence the content of the policy agenda. Among the 19 policy areas considered in this study, the policy agenda responds to the content of the EU directives in 7 sectors: which is less than those affected by discretionary problems (9) and more than those influenced by the agenda of the public (only 3). However, differently from my expectations, I found that policy commitments affect lawmakers' attention more in the early years of membership of the EU than at a later stage, suggesting that legislatures are kept busy by EU commitments when they start harmonising their own legislation with EU standards (as set by the Copenhagen criteria), which in general happens even before the official entry in the Union. Concerning whether attention to compulsory problems mediates the transmission of discretionary problems in the policy agenda the results point to mixed evidence.

First of all, attention to EU commitments moderates partisan influence only on a narrower set of policy areas over which commitments matter (in 5 policy areas out of 7) which brings to dismiss the idea that the process is systematic. Yet, for these 5 policy areas when controlling for the content of the EU directives, the coefficients associated with the

electoral promises of the parties lose explanatory power, suggesting that in these cases the electoral mandates of the parties somehow lose importance in the eyes of lawmakers. This is found to be the case for Economics, Agriculture, Environment, Transport, Banking and Finance (whereas no effects are found for more symbolic issues such as Civil Rights and Research, where commitments impact domestic legislatures without reducing the agenda-setting power of parties). The interpretation of these results shall however be cautious for at least two main reasons: first, my proxy of policy commitments is limited to a very small portion of the broader EU agenda (the directives) reflecting policy commitments only in policy areas that are treated via directives (for example, Foreign Affairs is a specific policy domain that is barely treated via directives). Second, the data is unable to account for existing EU commitments in other policy venues such as secondary legislation (Page 2001), which has been found to be particularly important for the transposal of EU directives in the countries under investigation (Steunenberg and Voermans 2006). Nonetheless, I am confident of the general intuition of the theory, given that EU directives are a limited (but accurate) source of policy commitments, since unlike other binding EU legal acts (regulations and decisions) directives are the only ones which are indirectly applicable, in the sense that they demand a formal transposition in domestic legislation and they set deadlines for this to happen (in general 5 years). Differently, regulations and decisions approximate important binding portions of the EU commitments, but they are directly applicable and hence do not need deadlines or timely policy activities.

Reflecting both the "rational anticipation" of future election outcomes (Stimson et al. 1995) and external pressures and disruption from policy problems on a day-to-day basis, the theory expects the policy agenda to be responsive to the current issue priorities of the public, as portrayed by the media. The latter approximates incoming information about new policy problems that appear in the societal agenda in general, and it captures emerging issues on a day-to-day basis and the occurrence of focusing events (John et al. 2013: 152). The relationship between the media and policies has been extensively explored (see Thesen 2011 for a summary of the debate) by scholars interested in understanding when the media matters for policy decisions. Recent investigations show that the agenda-setting power of the media is conditional upon the type of issue considered.

In this sense, there is a consensus in the literature about the idea that most media effects on policy are to be found in the case of sensational issues with dramatic features (Soroka 2002) such as Crime, and Government issues that capture more easily the public's

and lawmakers' attention. The general lesson that may be taken from Chapter 7 is that there is little evidence for the impact of the media on policy agendas. Drawing my expectations from the literature dealing with media effects on policy, the hypotheses have been proposed in order to capture the way in which media coverage influences policy agendas. In this framework, the hypotheses identified two possible types of media effects: a direct one (when what is covered by the media captures lawmakers' attention and motivates the adoption of policies) and two indirect ones.

The first, when media coverage functions as an "updater" of the interests of the voters, e.g. media coverage interacts with parties' electoral promises. The second, when media works as "guardian" of policy responsibilities, e.g. media coverage interacts with compulsory commitments that need to be addressed by lawmakers. The hypotheses also account for the influence of the proximity of elections, considering that the agenda-setting power of the media has been proved (quite counter-intuitively) to be stronger in non-electoral than in electoral times (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006) when the media are more likely to redirect lawmakers' attention instead than simply 'mirroring' what lawmakers do (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). In general, the analyses show that media impact on policy agendas is moderate and that it is indeed limited to specific policy areas with particularly sensationalist features (Economics, Justice and Crime and Government), suggesting that only a very small portion of policy agendas is responsive to public priorities.

Overall, the results are in line with those of previous contributions finding only a moderate direct impact of media coverage on policy agendas (Walgrave et al. 2007). However, the findings reveal interesting patterns about the indirect impact of media coverage on lawmakers' attention, even if the picture is mixed. My work illustrates that there are reasons to believe that media influence on policy is mediated by the interaction with the electoral promises of the governing parties, and more precisely with the discretionary problems originating from the opposition party. This suggests that stronger media effects exist when there is a convergence between what is in the news and what is emphasised by the opposition, probably as a result of a common blame avoidance strategy towards incumbents (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010).

Differently, it is hard to infer from the results that the impact of the media is mediated by the interaction with policy commitments depicted in the EU directives. This may be understood (at least intuitively) by considering that policy responsibilities often lack "newsworthiness" and hence it is hard to find systematic "alignments" between lawmakers and media attention. Concerning the impact of elections proximity, my findings do not

support the expectation that media effects shall be stronger in non-electoral times, and these results are in line with more recent studies on the impact of media coverage on policy agendas at different times of the mandate (Tresch and Sciarini 2014).

The different analytical and empirical steps taken by this study, which now moves towards its end, allow me finally to respond to the initial question of the research: in the end, who sets policy agendas? I illustrated that there is empirical evidence to support the theoretical framework of this research, in the sense that lawmakers indeed appear to divide their scarce attention between compulsory and discretionary policy problems. Hence, lawmakers' ability to stick to their electoral mandates largely depends on how they balance their attention between their electoral promises, the promises of their opponents, pending commitments and the issues salient to the public at that particular time. Lawmakers are faced with an array of competing concerns, some of which may require them to tear up their pledges (such as in the case of compulsory issues), while others may require them not to redirect policy attention (media coverage). This problem-solving approach to the study of the composition of policy agendas has highlighted the importance of balancing scarce attention between electoral and non-electoral mandates, and external events.

A variety of policy problems compete for lawmakers' attention and occasionally some of them coverage, whereas at other times they follow different agenda-setting dynamics. This does not imply however that they all have the same agenda-setting power, given that path dependency and discretionary problems appear to approximate bigger portions of policy agendas than the agenda of the public. In this sense this study represents a different way of looking at the dynamics of politics that does not dismiss the explanatory power of classic party mandate and public policy contributions, rather it brings them together through the broader frame of problem-solving that is able to approximate the complexity of policymaking that on the one hand cannot be only about representation, and on the other cannot be completely deprived of it.

The results of this work provide evidence of the validity of applying a problem-solving understanding of lawmakers' priorities. This is not because party mandate and public policy approaches are wrong, but mainly because there are some portions of lawmakers' attention that respond to different types of policy problems. However, the breadth of the theory and its implications for the study of policy agendas and more broadly representative governments leave us with important interrogations that future contribution shall address. In

this study, parties are far from being considered the key-actors of the game, however integrating mandates achieved at the time of elections with preferences emerging from the everyday activity of interest groups may further enrich the findings and help in further redefining the theory. In this sense, elections happen rarely whereas interest groups are at work constantly to try to get responses to their demands. The theoretical framework proposed distinguishing between policy problems originating from "representation" and policy problems originating from "responsibility" could be fruitfully applied to include interest groups in future analyses. In this sense, interest groups would represent additional channels for expressing voters' interest that shall be accommodated in the policy agenda for lawmakers not to be electorally sanctioned.

In addition, future investigations may assess whether the patterns observed in this study are valid for different time periods and for other countries. Adding other political systems to the four considered may make it possible to match issue approaches with country-effects approaches strengthening the explanatory power and the generalisability of the results. Secondly, it remains to be assessed what the electoral consequences of the composition of policy agendas might be. More precisely, what are the electoral consequences of whether lawmakers deliver on discretionary or compulsory problems? Furthermore, future studies need to address more carefully the impact of "the context" where policymaking takes place. In this sense, for example, favourable or unfavourable economic circumstances, higher or lower levels of euro scepticism, may all be important "controls" for the dynamics at stake. The theoretical framework and data presented here are far from providing a definitive answer to a very ambitious research question. Nonetheless, this work offers some guidelines to address and try to resolve such questions and contributes to the ongoing debate over the importance of different explanations of policy decisions, providing further evidence highlighting that lawmakers (at least in contemporary democracies) are far from being as free as individuals in a shopping mall.

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