



**What Explains Political Leaders' Issue Attention in Live TV-interviews  
on Current Affairs Programs?**

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## **Introduction**

Parties face a decline in party identification, a volatile electorate and when casting a vote, voters seem to rely more on issues than on “partisan cues” (Mair, 2005: 16; Walgrave & De Swert, 2007: 64). Issue voting is becoming more important to voters and in turn, parties seem to have adapted their campaign strategy on focusing on issues they traditionally “own” (Wagner & Meyer, 2014: 1019). If voters associate an issue with a party as being the “associative owner”, voters will notice that party more (Lefevere et al., 2015: 901; Walgrave et al., 2012: 779). The concept of issue ownership means that the public perceives certain parties to handle certain issues better than other parties (Kaplan, et al., 2006: 724; Petrocik, 1996: 827; Walgrave, et al., 2007: 37). Issue ownership is important because parties can gain electoral success. If a party owns a certain issue that voters value, it is likely that voters will vote for that particular party (Walgrave & De Swert, 2007: 37).

Media attention and visibility are essential for parties to be able to communicate their important issues to the public (Hopmann et al., 2010: 13). It is therefore not so surprising that party leaders appear more frequently on e.g. television talk shows and current affairs programs to reach potential -less politically engaged- voters (Baum, 2005: 230; Brants, 1998: 316; Brants & Neijens, 1998: 149). Especially during election time most politicians will take the opportunity to talk about issues that they (and their party) find important and at the same time hope to gain good publicity (Baum, 2005: 215). For some politicians being interviewed on live TV talk shows can be a “risky” strategy (Huls & Varwijk, 2011: 49). In an interviewer-interviewee setting (i.e. in information and current affairs TV-programs) politicians could face critical questions and are forced to express an opinion or clarify their stances on issues (Brants, 2013: 326; Huls & Varwijk, 2011: 50).

Scholars have examined campaign strategies, policy issues and issue ownership in various ways. Party manifestos (Wagner & Meyer, 2014), press releases (Tedesco, 2005), news coverage (Geers & Bos, 2017), tweets (De Sio et al., 2018), televised advertisements (Kaplan et al., 2006) and speeches of Prime Ministers (Green-Pedersen & Mortenson, 2009) have been used to analyze issue ownership and the choices parties make regarding the campaign strategy. Yet, it is unclear what explains issue attention in live televised interviews with party leaders. According to Hayes (2008: 378) issue ownership has an impact on how media portray parties and their leaders. The media’s perception of party issue ownership can determine the (amount of) issue

attention in a TV interview (Hayes, 2008: 391). Media logic may also play a role, that is: the media dictate what is politically relevant for the public. Politicians have to conform their TV performance in the format of the media (Brants & Van Praag, 2006: 30). According to Shattuc (1997, 3): “*talk shows are usually structured around the moral authority and educated knowledge of a host*”. Media logic and the role of the TV-presenter setting the agenda and controlling the conversation in an unscripted format (Lauerbach & Aijmer, 2007: 1393) may hinder the politician in highlighting the party’s issues agenda. Therefore, to fill these gaps the following research question guides this empirical study:

*RQ: What explains issue attention during election campaigns in live televised interviews with party leaders on Dutch current affairs programs?*

The concept of issue ownership is used as a starting point for explaining party leaders’ issue attention to important party (owned) issues in TV interviews. The study is scientifically relevant to get a better understanding of the party’s campaign strategy, and its issues profile represented by the party leader compared to other competing parties. Also, political parties can gain electoral advantage by tailoring their campaign strategy in order to distinguish themselves from their adversaries while appearing on TV programs.

The Dutch election campaign prior to the 2017 National Election -that is used for this study- provided a unique opportunity to investigate the concept of issue attention. The Netherlands has a multi-party system with many (big and small) parties competing for the electoral vote. There is a high number of parties participating in the electoral arena and the ideological differences between these parties are rather small. Issue overlap between parties can therefore occur, while issue competition in a multi-party system is regarded a dynamic and complex arena (Wagner & Meyer, 2014: 1019). Another factor what is interesting about the Dutch campaign trail is that PVV’s right-wing populist party leader Wilders did not appear on television programs which he considered “leftist media” (Jonker & De Winther, 2017). But other political leaders were (sometimes) challenged by the TV presenter to discuss PVV’s party issues during their own television interviews. So, while absent on live TV programs Wilders was still able to dominate the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee.

In the first section issue ownership theory will be explained and the hypotheses will be presented. In the second section the case will be introduced, followed by the data and methodology. In the third section the analysis and results will be presented. Finally, the research question will be addressed in the conclusions and suggestions for further research will be provided in the discussion section.

### **Issue Ownership as a Theoretical Perspective**

Issue ownership is a concept that refers to the competency of parties to handle certain issues better than other parties from a voter's point of view (Petrocik, 1996: 826). The concept was designed to get a better understanding of party competition and election outcomes (Budge & Farlie, 1983: 57; Petrocik, 1996: 826, Petrocik, et al., 2003: 601). It is a matter of party's reputation which issues to emphasize and which ones to downplay. Especially during election campaigns parties make strategic choices by focusing on advantageous "owned" issues to win electoral support (Petrocik, 1996: 827). According to Petrocik, et al. (2003: 601) issue ownership is a powerful asset for politicians to attract voters. Campaigning on issues can make a difference in influencing the electorate. Politically engaged voters have a general idea about the best suited policy to fix a certain problem. Less-politically engaged voters however, seem to use issues as a guidance to determine which party to vote for, as voters are more volatile and feel less connected to political parties in general (Walgrave & De Swert: 38).

As explained, issue ownership involves reputation and competency and are important elements for parties when making strategic decisions on which issues to focus on during an election campaign. In a two-party system Democrats and Republicans emphasize different issues. Issues such as health care and social security are considered to be handled better by Democrats. Republicans are perceived to handle the issues defense and crime best (Hayes, 2005: 910). Typically, in this system one party is the governing party while the other is the opposition party both competing on (usually) contrasting issues (Budge, 2015: 418; Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2016: 381). In contrast to a multi-party system, it is not a foregone conclusion that voters consider just one party as the exclusively dominant one to be more competent in handling a particular issue (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007: 131; Kleinnijenhuis & Walter, 2014: 228; Klüver & Sagarzazu, 2016: 381). There are some exceptions, i.e. voters consider Green parties as the

owner of the environment issue (Kleinnijenhuis & Walter, 2014: 236; Wagner & Meyer, 2014: 1025). In general, parties who are identified as the “clear” issue owner will campaign on issues with a successful “track record” (Green parties). Parties can also adopt different issue ownership strategies to compete for votes (Budge, 2015: 417). Wagner and Meyer (2014: 1038) found that in an election campaign some parties may focus on similar issues. If parties compete on similar issues (issue overlap), those parties who succeed in being perceived as the owner of that particular issue will have more impact on the electorate than those who are not perceived as the issue owner (Hopmann et al. 2010: 5). For example, the Dutch right-wing populist party *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) and the liberal party *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) both engage the similar issue crime. However, the parties differ on the reputation-competence dimension. PVV has a reputational advantage on the crime issue, but the VVD is perceived as slightly more competent in dealing with it (Bos et al., 2017: 23).

Another strategy is that parties want to focus on different issues and avoid certain issues. For example, the government in Denmark wanted to avoid discussing the immigration issue. But the right-wing opposition party successfully managed to draw attention to its owned immigration issue forcing the government party to anticipate and talk about the issue at hand (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2009: 18). Some parties may even employ a “hijack” strategy by emphasizing issues (trespassing) of other parties that are the perceived owner (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007: 131; Holian, 2004: 116). For example, in the 1992 campaign the democrat Bill Clinton was successfully able to steal the republican owned issue of crime; also known as “trespassing”. An election campaign in a multi-party system usually revolves around two or three main issues (Aalberg and Jenssen, 2007: 131). Parties can maintain or (re)claim the ownership of a particular issue by frequently talking about it in the media and increasing the issue salience (Van Der Brug, 2004: 211; Walgrave, et al., 2009: 157). Politicians rely on television to convey their most important issues to a wider audience (Budge, 2015: 418). Television is also an important source where voters usually get their political information from (Aalbergen & Jenssen, 2007: 131).

Another way of claiming ownership is by focusing on the given issue or a set of issues in the party’s manifesto (Walgrave, et al., 2009: 157). Party manifestos play a major role in election campaigns. It is a policy statement, a guide designed for the public and the media and it describes what the party stands for. It presents the party’s policy stances, (competing) ideas, important issues, and the problems their voters are concerned about, are addressed. It is usually

issued at the start of an election campaign. (Budge, 2015: 417). The majority of voters though, do not read manifestos, instead -as mentioned earlier- they turn to the media for political information (Budge, 2015: 418; Daübler, 2012: 58; Eder, et al.: 76; Walgrave & De Swert: 39). Still, the party manifesto is a good starting point for identifying the party's important issues. According to Van Der Brug and Berkhout (2015: 874) parties "claim" certain issues by putting the key issues together in their party manifesto. Parties will give more attention to issues which will benefit their campaign, and thus put emphasis on a selective set of issues (Budge & Farlie, 1983: 24). The focus on the emphasis on own issues leads to the following hypothesis:

*H1 – The higher the attention to an issue in a party manifesto, the higher the attention to the issue in televised interviews with the party leader.*

Party manifestos have several purposes besides stating a party's position and informing voters. According to Daübler (2012: 58) party manifestos' content can also be used as input for coalition negotiations -if applicable- or policymaking, as a narrative tool for the party's representative to express the key issues, for other stakeholders (i.e. party activists, interest groups). Both the media and party's opponents study manifestos thoroughly in preparation for interviews, debates and news coverages (Daübler, 2012: 58; Eder, et al.: 76).

Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2009: 3) argue that issue competition between parties depends on the position a party has. Opposition parties experience less boundaries to talk about beneficial issues, whereas government parties are more pressured to react to issues brought up by the opposition. If political leaders participate in e.g. television debates opponents can push their counterpart to respond to what they are saying about issues (Budge 1982: 149). According to Van der Brug and Berkhout (2015: 874) a competition between parties is based on (presenting) differences in party policy on the same issue as well is deciding on the key issues which parties give attention to for electoral benefits. Drawing on the notion that parties compete intensively for issue ownership is represented by the following hypothesis:

*H2 – The higher the attention to an issue in competing party manifestos, the higher the importance of that issue in TV interviews with the party leader.*

The research model in figure 1 outlines this study.

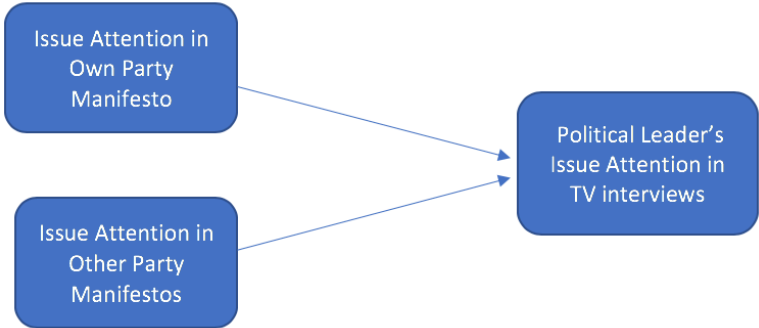


Figure 1. Research Model

**Data, Case Selection and Method**

*The Dutch Case*

The 2017 campaign trail generated a lot of media attention because the Netherlands was chronically the first country of the Western European democracies to have another National election before Germany and France held their elections. The Dutch election was seen as an important indicator regarding the rise of populism in Europe (Corder, 2017). (New) parties successfully entered the political arena with provocative populist stances (De Sio & Paparo, 2017: 90). In the Netherlands the PVV seemed to gain electoral success and received a lot of international media attention (Emanuele, et al., 2017: 21). For this study the Netherlands was chosen because of the intensified party competition in a multi-party system. A large number of parties (28) participated in the election campaign competing for the electoral votes. Only seven major parties are included based on the level of support as indicated in the Dutch polling indicator (Peilingwijzer): VVD, the Christian Democrat Appeal (CDA), the Democratic 66 (D66), the Green party GroenLinks (GL), the Socialist Party (SP), and the Labor Party (PvdA) and PVV.

***Selection of Television Programs***

*Jinek and Nieuwsuur*

Both commercial and public broadcasters aired television debates and interviews with party leaders. Party leaders of mainstream parties appeared on various television programs. For feasibility reasons only two TV-programs were included: current affairs program *Nieuwsuur*

(News Hour) and the interview program *Jinek* (the program carries the host's last name). Six out of the seven party leaders Rutte (VVD), Buma (CDA), Pechtold (D66), Klaver (GL), Roemer (SP), and Asscher (PvdA) each appeared on these two shows. Unfortunately, PVV -the second largest in the polls- was not included. PVV's party leader Wilders did not participate in the live TV-interviews of *Jinek* and *Nieuwsuur*. Wilders deliberately avoided these two TV-programs as he accuses these programs to be bias (Jonker & De Winther, 2017). This study focuses on (live or unedited) interviews therefore debates are excluded because of the competing and dueling aspect. In general, the format of these two programs is different. *Jinek* was chosen because it is a popular talk show and one of the most watched programs on Dutch television (Nouwens, 2017). *Nieuwsuur* was chosen for its hard news genre.

*Jinek* is a late-night infotainment talk show and mixes entertainment, human interest with current affairs, news and has a non-participating audience. *Jinek* usually has a variety of prominent guests on the show. The host, Eva Jinek, discusses i.e. current topics with pundits, interviews a politician about a certain issue, interviews a medal-winning ladies soccer team, or talks about the latest movie with an actor. All the different guests are set at a table with the possibility of everyone participating in the interview.

*Nieuwsuur* is a broadcast journalism program that focuses on in-depth reporting of current affairs topics (Van Santen & Vliegenhart, 2010: 26). The program is hosted by two different anchors (Twan Huys and Marielle Tweebeeke) taking turns. Sometimes expert guests (i.e. politicians, CEO's, university professors) are interviewed to elaborate on certain subjects. Normally, no audience is involved but during the run-up to the National elections, *Nieuwsuur* changed the format of the program for this occasion. Every night a major party leader was invited, an audience was present, and the program was centered around the only guest at the table: the party leader. A few preselected guests from the audience were invited to ask questions with the host conducting the interview.

The interviewers of both TV-programs will challenge the politician by posing critical and sometimes tough questions. Politicians' discourse also depends on the personality of the



television host as well as the format of the television program on which they appear (Brants & Neijens, 1998: 153).

Each interview with a party leader conducted by Jinek took place in January/February 2017 at the beginning of the election campaign. *Nieuwsuur* held six interviews with the respective party leaders two weeks prior to the election date March 15, 2017. Either Huys or Tweebeeke conducted two or more interviews. The campaign-timeline of three months covers the beginning and the end of an election campaign.

### ***Selection of Party Manifestos***

#### *Seven biggest parties in the polls*

Party manifestos offer a good insight in which issue parties find important to highlight during the election campaign. Therefore, party manifestos are a good starting point to compare issue attention in TV interviews as well as in the manifestos. Albeit, the length in words differs per manifesto. PVV's party manifesto is only one page consisting of 25 sentences. Issue attention in such a small manifesto can have a bigger impact on the share of issue attention compared to the other six party manifestos. It is a third drawback in applying the Manifesto's coding rules.

According to Otjes (2012: 86) what a party or its political leader expresses (in the media) does not per se have to be in accordance with what is written in the party manifesto. The political leader may be pressured to either answer a question asked by the media or have an opinion on issues that are not necessarily related to the party's issues. Each party manifesto of the seven parties (VVD, CDA, D66, GL, SP and PvdA) are included. The manifestos are already coded by the Manifesto Project. The existing data from the Manifesto Project is used for measuring the issue attention in the party's "own" manifesto as well as the issue attention in "other" party manifestos. The Project has unitized and coded each manifesto. This involves "*cutting text into quasi-sentences*" (coding unit) usually a full sentence containing one argument. If the sentence consists of more "*than one unique argument the sentence will be split*" (Manifesto Project, 2017: 6). Seven policy domains (external relations, freedom & democracy, political system, economy, welfare & quality of life, fabric of society, and social groups) consist of 56 main categories and sub categories. To fit the purpose of this research some adjustments have been done to reduce the categories. First, the negative and positive categories are grouped into one category (e.g.

military, internationalism) and only the main categories were used. Second, some categories are aggregated into one issue area following the example of Wagner in a similar way (2012: 8). For this study the categories National Way of Life, Multiculturalism, Non-Economic Demographic Groups are aggregated into a “Cultural-ethnic relations” issue. The category Anti-Growth and the Environmental category are aggregated into one “Environmental” issue (see the Appendix for more details). Third, the category “No Meaningful Categories Apply” is not included. Finally, the categories in the party manifestos have been downsized to 29 categories (see the appendix for the coding scheme and the categories that have been left out). Advantages and disadvantages of using the Manifesto Project’s codebook as well as the reasons for aggregating categories into one or more issues will be explained in the next sections.

### ***Transcriptions of Interviews and Coding Procedure***

The internet database *TV-blik* (TV reel box) was used to search for television appearances of the party leaders. Each name combined with the indicated program and the period of the 2017 campaign trail (January until the election date of March 15) was entered as a search option, then the link of the program was noted down in a table and checked whether the politician indeed appeared. This resulted in a sample of 12 interviews (*Nieuwsuur* and *Jinek*). Most interviews had subtitle files which were downloaded from the internet and used for transcribing and coding the interviews. The transcripts were imported in Atlas.ti which is a software tool that is mostly used for qualitative analysis. Each quasi-sentence spoken by a political leader was coded using the Manifesto Project’s codebook (see the appendix). Questions of the interviewer, video clips, introductory cues, fact-checking items on television programs will not be coded. The corresponding quasi-sentence was then assigned to the same category as is coded in the party manifesto. If a political leader mentions “refugee” in the transcript, this word was typed in the “find” tool in the Manifesto Project’s database to make sure the same category was coded.

On the one hand using the Manifesto project’s “pre-coded” data make it easier to assign a certain subject (a quasi-sentence) to the right category (based on the same rules). This makes the coding procedure less time consuming and the procedure can also be replicated. On the other hand, this method -comparing the Manifesto Project’s coded data of party manifestos and the transcripts of each interview- uncovers some drawbacks. First of all, when searching “refugee” in the Manifesto Project dataset of one party can result in multiple codes in the party’s manifesto

(see table 1). Adding the word “country of origin” to make sure both words are intended for the same context, still resulted in multiple categories. This also applies for the other six parties. If this occurred, the party leader’s verbatim will be compared with the quasi-sentence in the manifesto. Then the most frequently used category in the party manifesto was coded. For example, GL political leader Klaver talks about refugees: “*We need to shelter people who seek refuge from war and violence*”. The Manifesto Project assigned similar quasi-sentences in the GL-manifesto to the “Human Rights” category (code number 201). But in the SP-manifesto the quasi-sentences concerning “refugees” are coded “Internationalism” (code number 107). The assignment of codes is kept the same for each party.

TABLE 1  
THE MANIFESTO PROJECT’S ASSIGNMENT OF DIFFERENT CODES FOR THE ISSUE “REFUGEES”

	Refugee / Country of Origin					
CDA	D66	GL	PvdA	PVV	SP	VVD
603	607	201	107	601	107	601

There are more inconsistencies in the pre-coded party manifestos (see table 2). For instance, the words “climate change” and “Paris”: the categories in the party manifesto GL, PvdA, VVD and D66 are “Environmental Protection”. For CDA, SP and (again) D66 it falls under the category “Anti-Growth Economy”, code number 416 (actually the subcategory of Anti-Growth Economy is “Sustainability”, code number 416.2, but no subcategories were used).

TABLE 2  
THE MANIFESTO PROJECT’S ASSIGNMENT OF DIFFERENT CODES FOR THE ISSUE “CLIMATE CHANGE”

	Climate Change / Paris					
CDA	D66	GL	PvdA	PVV	SP	VVD
416.2	416(.2) / 501	501	501	---	416.2	501

Overlapping and inconsistency in coding are the main reasons to follow Wagner’s (2012: 20) example for aggregation. Whereas some overlapping categories are aggregated into one issue, some of the Manifesto Project’s categories are too broadly defined. This is a second drawback of using the Manifesto Project’s codebook. For example, the category “Welfare State Expansion” consists of the subjects Health Care, Social Housing, etc. In general, the two mentioned categories are separate chapters in the various party manifestos and each subject is considered an

important issue. In other words, because certain categories are not differentiated into separate categories, it is therefore difficult to measure the attention for the issues Health Care and Social Housing. This could have an impact on the validity. Another broadly defined category is Political Authority as described in the Manifesto's Coding Instructions. This category is comprised of 1) party competence: references to govern and/or lack of other party's lack of such competence, 2) personal competence: references of party leader's and/or other party leader's lack of such competence, 3) strong government (Werner, et al., 2015: 19).

In TV-interviews party leaders are frequently asked or "questioned" about their leadership. For example, Jinek confronted SP-leader Roemer with a news article that his own SP-colleagues in parliament anonymously criticized his leadership (Van Der Aa & Hoedeman, 2016). A big portion of that interview was devoted to whether or not Roemer was suitable enough to lead his party up to the elections. In *Nieuwsuur* GL-leader Klaver was asked if (due to his relatively young age) he was mature or experienced enough to be the next leader. The other party leaders were also asked about their leadership qualities. In fact, the interviews in *Nieuwsuur* were set up in a certain order. The first part is about the party leader's personal competency, the party's competency, the party's electoral chances. The second part deals with voter's concerns or problems highlighted by interest groups and which solutions the party leader suggests. In the final part the party leader answers a question posed by an opponent who previously appeared in *Nieuwsuur*. Then the host asks the party leader to formulate a question for the party leader who will appear next on the show. The program ends once the party leader predicts the election outcome for his party.

## **Measurement Approach**

A quantitative content analysis is conducted to answer the research question and to test the hypotheses. The method is chosen to systematically analyze the interviews over a specific period of time during the 2017 campaign trail. The advantage of this type of content analysis is that the collection of data is quantified, and the content is assigned to categories by applying rules. Then, by using statistical methods, data was analyzed to identify relationships or patterns involving these categories (Riffe et al., 2005: 3).

*The dependent variable:* issue attention in TV-interviews is operationalized using the same rules and the same codebook of the Manifesto Project. The difficulty in verbatim

transcriptions of interviews is that it is not always clear what one sentence is. So, in this case the aim is to code one argument consisting of an issue. All other irrelevant verbatim is coded as “no meaningful category applies”. This category (in party manifestos and in transcripts) is not included in the dataset. The outcome variable issue attention in TV-interviews (H1) is measured as the percentage of the transcript covering of each category (issue area or aggregated issue area). Each case is the party leader’s issue attention on each of the 29 issue areas. Six TV-interviews of party leaders and 29 issues is a total of 174 cases. The issues that were mentioned most frequently by party leaders in TV-interviews are listed in the code scheme in the appendix.

*The first independent variable own party manifesto:* issue attention in the party’s (own) manifesto is measured as the (mean) percentage of the manifesto for each category (issue area or aggregated issue area). The variable measures the number of times a party mentions an issue in the manifesto.

*The second independent variable other party manifestos:* issue attention in other party manifestos is measured as the (mean) percentage of the manifesto for each category (issue area or aggregated issue area), excluding the party itself when comparing issue attention for each issue with other parties. The variable measures the number of times other parties mention an issue in their party manifesto.

Multiple regression analysis was performed to measure the predictor variables (issue attention in own and issue attention in other party manifestos) and the outcome variable (issue attention in TV-interviews). Initially, a total of 30 categories were included in the dataset. For the party manifestos these issues were the most important ones. According to De Vries (1999: 4) the Project Manifesto’s codebook includes issues that apply for post war countries. Issues may therefore not apply for Dutch parties in general. This can result in very low scores and is a third drawback for using the Manifesto Project’s dataset. So, if the mean of the category (weighted for all party manifestos) was less than 0,5 percent, these categories were left out of the dataset. Only one category (Political Authority) was removed as an outlier from the data, so the data was condensed to 29 issues in total. The quasi-sentences (coded in TV interviews) dealt with the competency of the party(leader) and were assigned to the category Political Authority. This resulted in a high number of codes assigned to this particular category. This was the case for each of the six party leaders. This outlier was significantly deviant (249 quasi-sentences, M 41,6; SD 8,9) from the remaining portion of the dataset. Before removing the outlier z-scores were

calculated; the outlier was first included in the set for one party and then excluded to see whether or not the outlier deviates significantly (see the appendix).

**Intercoder Reliability**

The intercoder reliability is calculated by calculating the Krippendorff’s Alpha. A small sample of transcripts was double coded by one coder and the reliability measures 0,68. Although the norm is 0,80 or higher the indicated measurement is just above the minimum (De Swert, 2012: 2). One reason for the difference in measurement between the two coders is that the second coder is not familiar with the subject and does not have any “training” in coding. Another reason is that the second coder indicated that when a political leader sums up several issues in one sentence these were then assigned to the categories respectively. For example, Rutte said: “health care is very important for the VVD, but also roads, police, military and so on”. The first coder only coded health care because this was the main subject of the interview. With extra training the expectation is that the reliability measure would increase. Also, if the Manifesto Project’s codebook is tailored to coding TV-interviews could also improve the reliability measure.

**Results**

What explains issue attention during election campaigns in live televised interviews with party leaders on Dutch current affairs programs? The findings in this section will present an answer to that question. In general, the party leaders addressed similar issues in interviews (apart from a few exceptions) as outlined in their party manifestos. Table 3 lists the 29 issues in the seven manifestos sorted from largest to smallest (percentage of quasi sentences coded), along with the issues emphasized by the six party leaders in TV interviews. This table gives a general idea of issue attention in party manifestos and party leaders’ issue attention in TV-interviews.

TABLE 3  
ISSUE ATTENTION IN SEVEN PARTY MANIFESTOS AND IN SIX TV INTERVIEWS

	Issue Attention in Party Manifestos	%	Issue Attention in TV Interviews	%
1	Cultural Ethnic Relations	11,13	Democracy	9,07
2	Environmental Protection	10,34	Cultural Ethnic Relations	7,74
3	Welfare	8,16	Welfare	6,41
4	Education	5,69	Traditional Morality	3,43
5	Law & Order	5,20	Education	3,32

6	Equality	4,93	Environmental Protection	3,30
7	EU EC Integration	4,62	Civic Mindedness	2,68
8	Technology & Infrastructure	4,01	Internationalism	2,41
9	Controlled Economy	3,60	Controlled Economy	2,14
10	Market Regulation	3,47	EU EC Integration	1,99
11	Traditional Morality	3,44	Equality	1,84
12	Freedom & Human Rights	3,41	Nationalization	1,31
13	Democracy	3,39	Military	1,29
14	Culture	2,80	Gov. Admin Efficiency	1,16
15	Internationalism	2,71	Decentralization	1,14
16	Military	2,69	Law and Order	1,03
17	Decentralization	2,10	Protectionism	0,94
18	Civic Mindedness	2,10	Freedom & Human Rights	0,91
19	Gov. Admin Efficiency	1,85	Free Market Economy	0,89
20	Free Market Economy	1,77	Economic Orthodoxy	0,87
21	Agriculture	1,72	Constitutionalism	0,76
22	Constitutionalism	1,35	Culture	0,51
23	Economic Orthodoxy	1,33	Labor groups	0,44
24	Corporatism/Mixed Economy	0,99	Incentives	0,36
25	Incentives	0,85	Market Regulation	0,31
26	Nationalization	0,84	Corporatism/mixed economy	0,31
27	Peace	0,71	Technology & Infrastructure	0,00
28	Labor Groups	0,61	Agriculture	0,00
29	Protectionism	0,47	Peace	0,00

For each party multiple regression analyses were performed to distinguish differences. These outcomes are displayed in scatter plots per party (see appendix) to get an idea of the relationship between 1) issue attention in TV-interviews (y-as) and own party manifesto (x-as) and 2) issue attention in TV-interviews (y-as) and other party manifestos (x-as). As an example, the figures 1 and 2 and table 4 of GL will be discussed in detail and the main outliers will be explained.

Figure 2 shows a positive correlation between issue attention in GL's own party manifesto and GL party leader's issue attention in TV interviews,  $r = .60$ ,  $N = 29$ ,  $p < .001$ . Figure 3 also shows a positive correlation between issue attention in other party manifestos and GL party leader's issue attention in TV interviews,  $r = .68$ ,  $N = 29$ ,  $p < .001$ . In figure 3 the multiple regression analysis scatter plot shows that 51% of the variance is explained by the two independent variables combined; whereas only 36% (figure 1) and 47% (figure 2) is being accounted for by any variable individually.

FIGURE 1

GL ISSUE ATTENTION IN TV INTERVIEWS \* OWN PARTY MANIFESTO

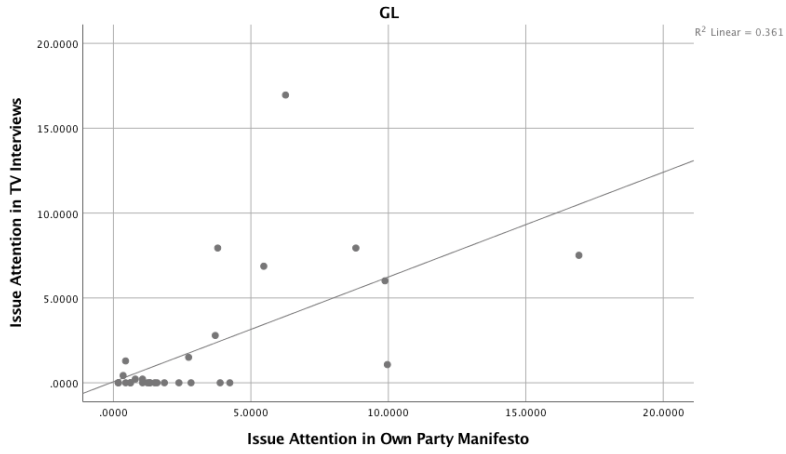


FIGURE 2

GL ISSUE ATTENTION IN TV INTERVIEWS \* OTHER PARTY MANIFESTOS

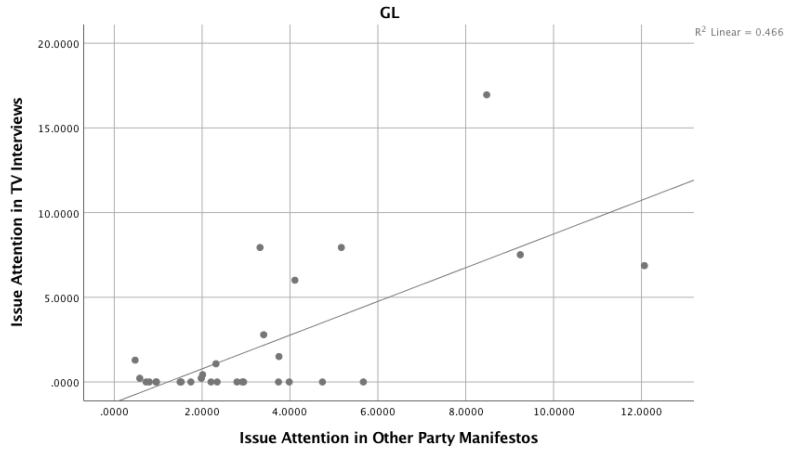


FIGURE 3

GL ISSUE ATTENTION IN TV INTERVIEWS \* OWN AND OTHER PARTY MANIFESTOS



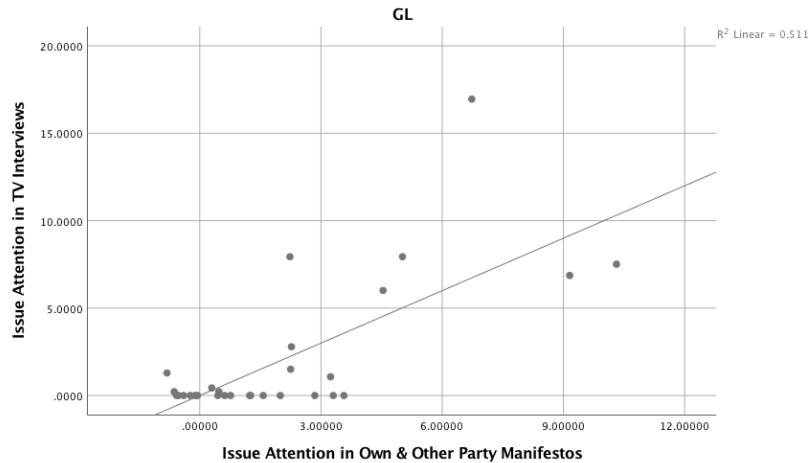


TABLE 4

REGRESSION MODEL OF ISUE ATTENTION IN TV INTERVIEWS GL

<b>Model 1</b>	
Constant	-1.29 (0.85)
Issue attention in own party manifesto	0.28* (0.18)
Issue attention in other party manifestos	0.74** (0.26)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.51
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.47
N	29

*Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.*

\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05

In the case of GL issue attention in own and other party manifestos had an impact on the party leader’s issue attention in TV interviews. The overall model fit was  $R^2 = .51$ ,  $F(2, 26) = 13,57$ ,  $p < .001$  (see also table 4). There are outliers that clearly deviate from the regression line (i.e. in figure 4). For instance, GL party leader Klaver gave more attention to the issue Welfare (17%) compared to GL’s own party manifesto (6,3%). One of the reasons is that the welfare issue was the main topic that was discussed in the TV-interview with Jinek. The number one issue Environmental Protection in GL’s party manifesto (16,9%) and the number two issue Human Rights (10%) received less attention in TV-interviews (the former 7,5% and the latter 1,1%). In table 5 GL’s top ten issue attention in their party manifesto is displayed in column one, followed by issue attention in other party manifestos and issue attention in TV-interviews.

TABLE 5

GL ISSUE ATTENTION IN PARTY MANIFESTOS OWN/OTHER (excl. GL), TV-INTERVIEWS

	Issue Attention in own PM	%	Issue Attention in other PM	%	Issue Attention in TV Interviews	%
1	Environmental Protection	16,9	Cultural-Ethnic Relations	12,1	Welfare	17,0
2	Human Rights	10,0	Environmental Protection	9,2	Democracy	7,9
3	Equality	9,9	Welfare	8,5	Education	7,9
4	Education	8,8	Law & Order	5,7	Environmental Protection	7,5
5	Welfare	6,3	Education	5,2	Cultural-Ethnic Relations	6,9
6	Cultural-Ethnic Relations	5,5	EU – EC Integration	4,7	Equality	6,0
7	Technology & Infrastructure	4,2	Equality	4,1	Traditional Morality	3,7
8	EU – EC Integration	3,9	Technology & Infrastructure	4,0	Controlled Economy	1,5
9	Democracy	3,8	Controlled Economy	3,8	Protectionism	1,3
10	Traditional Morality	3,7	Market Regulation	3,7	Human Rights	1,1

As Daübler stated a party manifesto can be used as a narrative tool and during campaigns usually two or three main issues will be emphasized (2012: 58). This seems to be the overall case for the party leaders. The issue Democracy is more emphasized in TV-interviews by CDA, D66, GL, and SP compared to the attention given in their parties' manifestos. For instance, the issue Democracy has position 14 in CDA's party manifesto, but party leader Buma gave the most attention to this issue in TV-interviews. An explanation could be that during a campaign, political leaders talk about the topic "elections" more often and encourage the public to vote. Except for the party leaders Rutte (VVD) and Asscher (PvdA). They did not emphasize the Democracy issue. Instead, they focused on being the Prime Minister and the (Deputy Prime) Minister of Social Affairs and Employment. Both party leaders stressed what they have achieved as incumbents.

Table 6 presents the regression party-by-party results of issue attention in TV-interviews.

TABLE 6

REGRESSION MODEL ISSUE ATTENTION IN TV-INTERVIEWS ALL SIX PARTIES

	CDA	D66	GL	PvdA	SP	VVD
Constant	0.68 (1.4)	0.40 (1.1)	-1.29 (0.85)	0.79 (0.76)	0.96 (0.82)	-0.90 (0.62)
Issue attention in own PM	0.38 (0.31)	0.03 (0.30)	0.28 (0.18)	0.23 (0.32)	0.02 (0.21)	0.43 (0.21)
Issue attention in other PM	0.13 (0.32)	0.47 (0.30)	0.74** (0.26)	0.29 (0.37)	0.21 (0.24)	0.32 (0.21)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.09	0.15	0.51	0.25	0.06	0.71
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.09	0.47	0.50	0.23	0.46
N	29	29	29	29	29	29

Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05

The regression model indicates that issue ownership (or at least “claiming” issue ownership) has an impact on which issues party leaders focused on during an interview. Party leaders discussed the issues that were brought up by the TV-hosts or its guests. For example, D66 party leader Pechtold was confronted by a guest who indicated that he suffers in life and does not want to live any longer. The only “problem” was the fact that he was younger than 75. In 2018 D66 has proposed a revised euthanasia law to the existing Termination of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide Act. The proposal states that anyone of the age of 75 and above without any mental or physical illness is allowed to request euthanasia. This explains why D66 gave more attention to the issue Traditional Morality (one of the outliers) in TV-interviews compared to the issue attention in their party manifesto. Another example of issues brought up by the TV-host was the Environmental Protection issue. Traditionally an issue that is considered a Green party issue, also D66 has the issue at the top of the list in its party manifesto. Party leader Buma was asked why CDA’s party manifesto hardly paid any attention to the climate deal made in Paris. The fact that Buma had to talk about this issue (which is not even one of the top 5 priorities in CDA’s party manifesto) explains the outlier. SP is one of the other parties that has the Environmental Protection issue listed as number one. But SP party leader Roemer hardly mentioned the issue at all. Roemer focused on Democracy, Welfare, Nationalism and Internationalism. The attention to the Welfare issue in TV-interviews was equal to the issue attention in SP’s party manifesto. But Roemer gave more attention to the other three issues in TV-interviews compared to the issue attention in SP’s party manifesto. Rutte (VVD) stressed the health care issue more often than one would expect from a liberal party. When Rutte was confronted about the somewhat odd issue choice, he merely stated that his party always considers health care an important issue. The Welfare issue is not in the VVD’s top 3. Strikingly, Rutte never mentioned the issue Technology & Infrastructure issue, which is VVD’s second important issue. PvdA’s party leader Asscher was asked why the Dutch working class faces fierce competition of other cheap laborers from Europe. Asscher answered the question in his role of Minister because he was responsible for implemented legislation regarding this topic.

TV-hosts sometimes posed questions regarding topics which are not in the party manifestos. For example, Roemer was asked about his strategy to win back voters who have switched to Wilders’ PVV. Rutte was asked about the situation around Turkey wanted to

campaign in the Netherlands. He too -just like Asscher- was addressed in his role of Prime Minister.

In general party leaders devoted more attention to their own set of issues (H1) than to issues closely related to issues of other parties (H2). As expected, the higher the issue attention in the party's manifesto, the higher the attention to the issue in TV-interviews. As for the second hypothesis it seems that party leaders did not specifically focus on other party's issues. There is some support but that is mainly because the party has earmarked these (similar) issues as important. Overall, issue attention in TV-interviews increases when both predictors (issue attention in own and in other party manifestos) are combined.

FIGURE 4  
ISSUE ATTENTION IN TV INTERVIEWS \* OWN AND OTHER PARTY MANIFESTOS

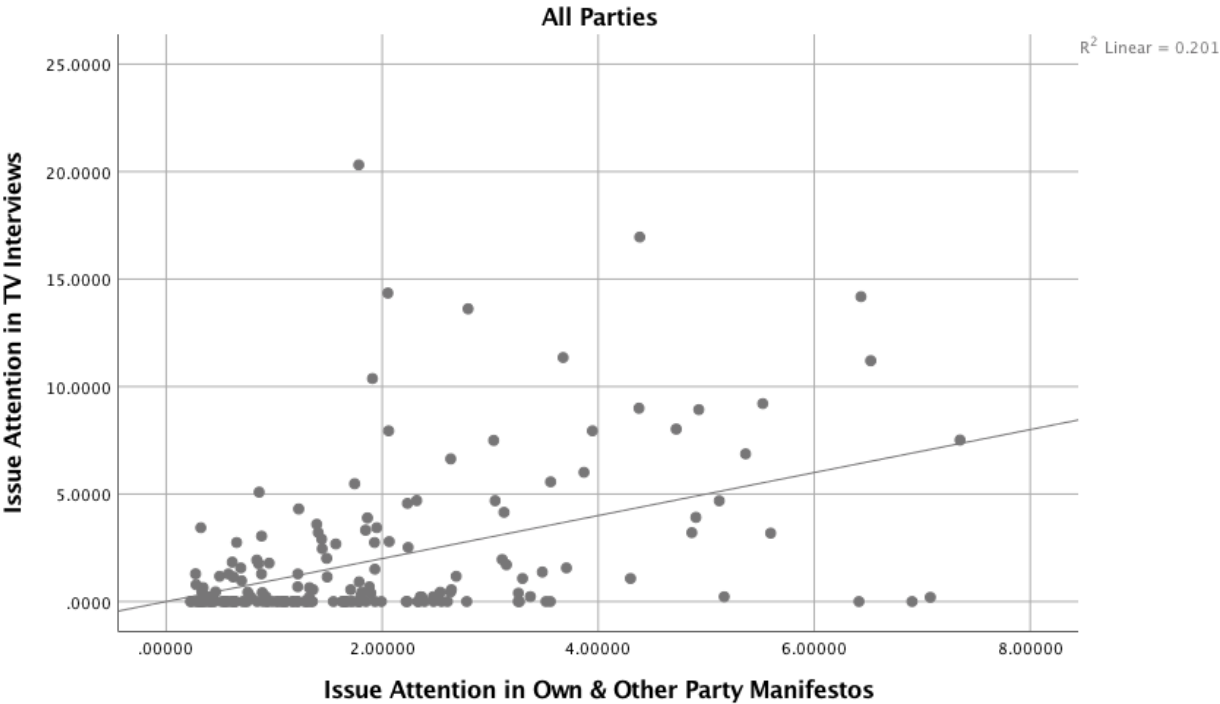


TABLE 7  
REGRESSION MODEL OF ISSUE ATTENTION IN TV INTERVIEWS

	<b>Model 1</b>
Constant	0.04 (0.38)
Issue attention in own party manifesto	0.25* (0.10)
Issue attention in other party manifestos	0.33* (0.11)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.20
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.18
N	174

*Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.*

\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05

Issue attention in own and other party manifestos had an impact on the party leaders' issue attention in TV interviews. The overall model fit was  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $F(2, 171) = 211.15$ ,  $p < .001$  (see also table 7).

## Conclusions

This study was focused on the concept of issue attention and if this can be explained by looking at issue ownership. The key argument is that parties and their party leaders stick to their last. Party manifestos were used as a campaign tool (Daübler, 2012: 58) and party leaders did pick three to five main issues to present as their core message. The manifestos also served as a script for the TV-interviews. Phrases were sometimes repeated word for word in interviews. Some party leaders were able to elaborate more on a few dominant issues while others managed to highlight multiple issues. According to Petrocik (1996: 826) the concept of issue ownership refers to the competency of parties to handle certain issue better than other parties from a voter's point of view. It is designed to get a better understanding of party competition and election outcomes (Budge & Farlie, 1983: 57) and which issues to emphasize and which to downplay. In this case the findings show that some parties have issues listed in the top five of their party manifestos, but party leaders hardly mentioned these issues even though the party could distinguish itself from others. For example, the VVD takes pride in the issue Technology & Infrastructure, yet Rutte never addressed the issue. Other parties do not find this particular issue as important, so the VVD could yield some success in that field. Buma on the other hand managed to put issues on the media agenda that other party leaders care less about. For instance,

he promoted that the national anthem should be included in the school's curricula. Exposure on TV-programs gave party leaders the opportunity to channel their issues (Hopmann, et al. 2010: 13). But in most case the TV-host was leading in choosing the topic which was challenging for the political leader to redirect the conversation back to their core message. For example, Roemer was asked about his leadership and how he would win back from the PVV. Rutte was questioned about his trustworthiness since he broke his promise regarding an issue about a health care premium. As stated by Huls and Varwijk (2011: 49) giving interviews can be a risky business where critical questions are asked. In conclusion this study focused on what explains issue attention during election campaigns in live TV-interviews. The results show a positive correlation between issue attention in own and other party manifestos and issue attention in TV-interviews.

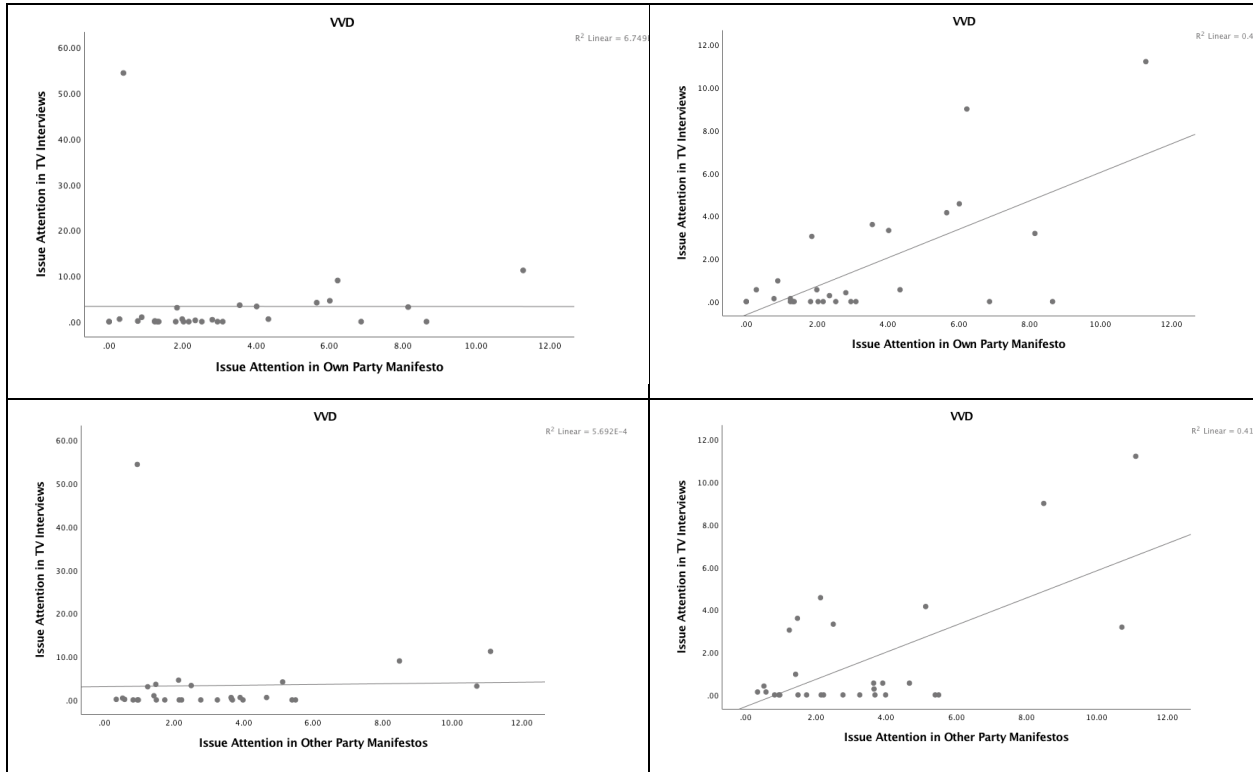
## **Discussion**

This study has its limitations concerning the generalizability. The focus was on six parties and their party leaders. However, the concept of issue attention can be useful in other fields such as political marketing PR- and communication. Parties can identify their unique selling point by focusing on issues other parties do not. Another limitation is the method used for coding as explained in the method section. Just coding the number of times an issue is mentioned does not always explain which solution a party has for this issue. In TV-interviews the codebook is not always applicable either. For instance, Environmental Protection was not a very important issue in CDA's party manifesto. The party leader was asked about this issue in a TV-interview and therefore the number of times this issue was mentioned was coded. It would be better to design a codebook specifically for TV-interviews that deals with the content of an issue (what is the party's position on this issue and how is the party going to "deal" with it). Also, another category can be added to the (TV-interview) codebook: self-presentation. In TV-interviews party leaders were asked about their ambition, their leadership, and so forth. It resembles a job interview and deals with the personal competency. Another factor of concern was the length of a party manifesto. For instance, PVV's single page party manifesto consists of 25 sentences. The coded quasi sentences resulted in high percentages assigned to a small dataset which can have an impact on the scores. If PVV was left out of the dataset maybe the correlation would be much stronger. Finally, further analyses may be done on how parties can use other platforms for

campaigning on issues. What also is interesting to know is to compare issue attention in TV-interviews between party leaders. This can give more of an insight what a party stands for in dealing with issues. Future research can be conducted in whether or not these TV-interviews had an impact on vote choice after the election. In that way parties can finetune their TV-campaign in focusing on issues voters find important. Since the majority of voters do not read party manifestos television/social media are perfect channels to convey their message.

# Appendix

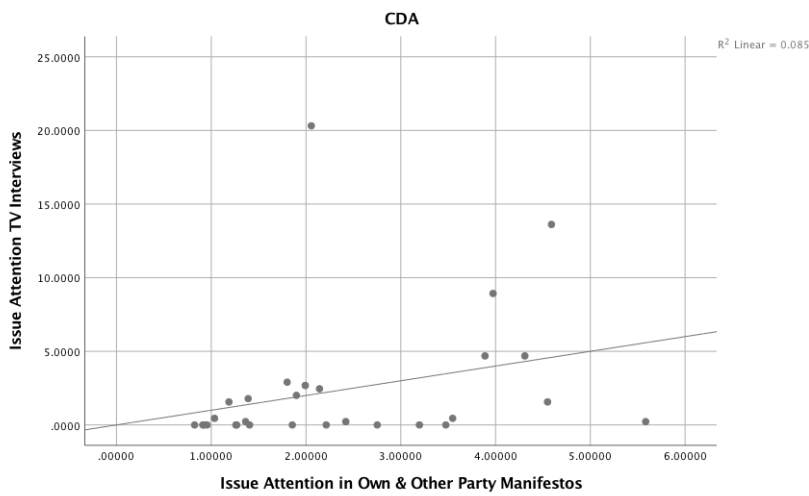
## EXAMPLE OF AN OUTLIER



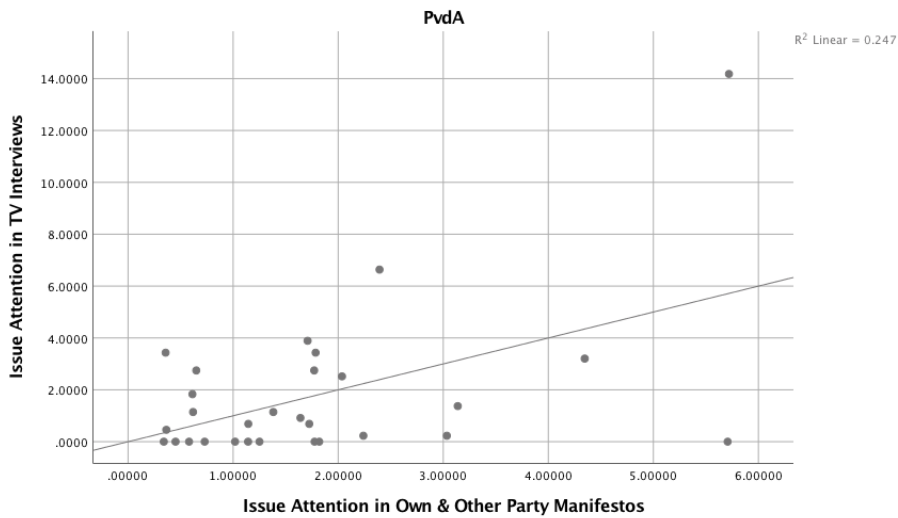
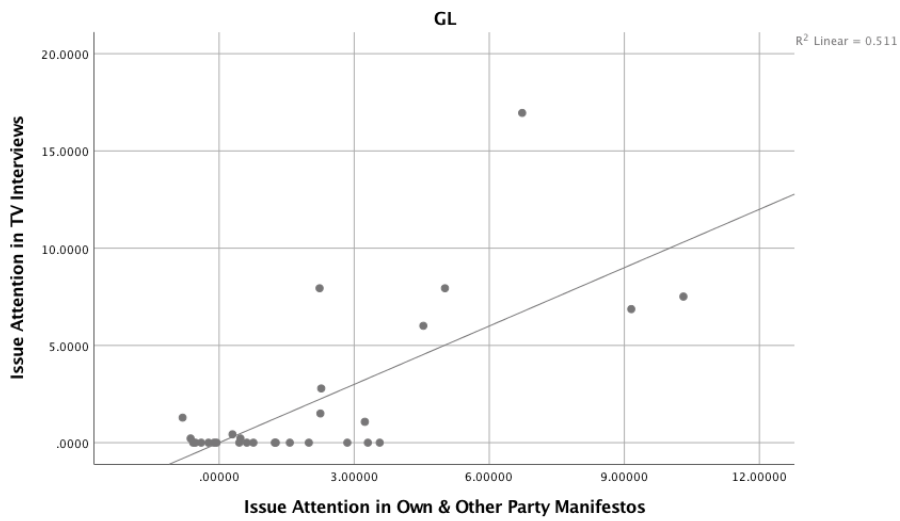
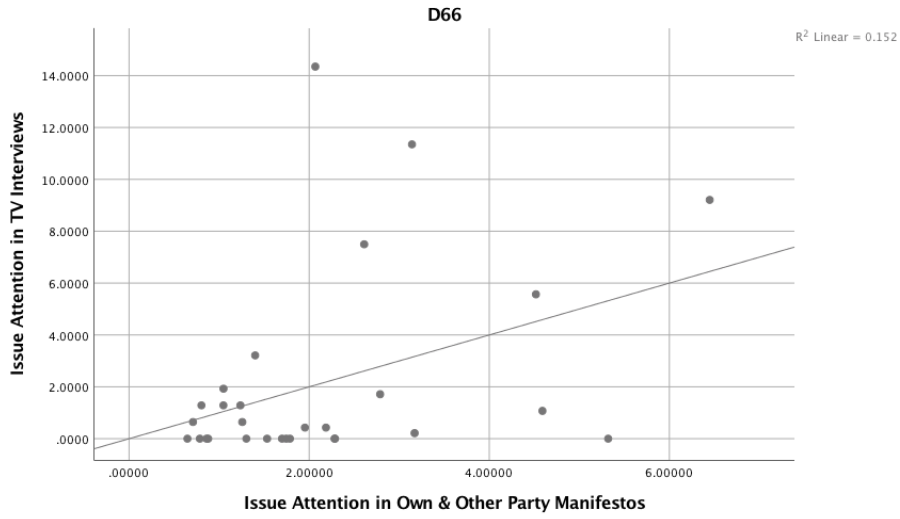
VVD's issue attention (on the top left the outlier: Political Authority).

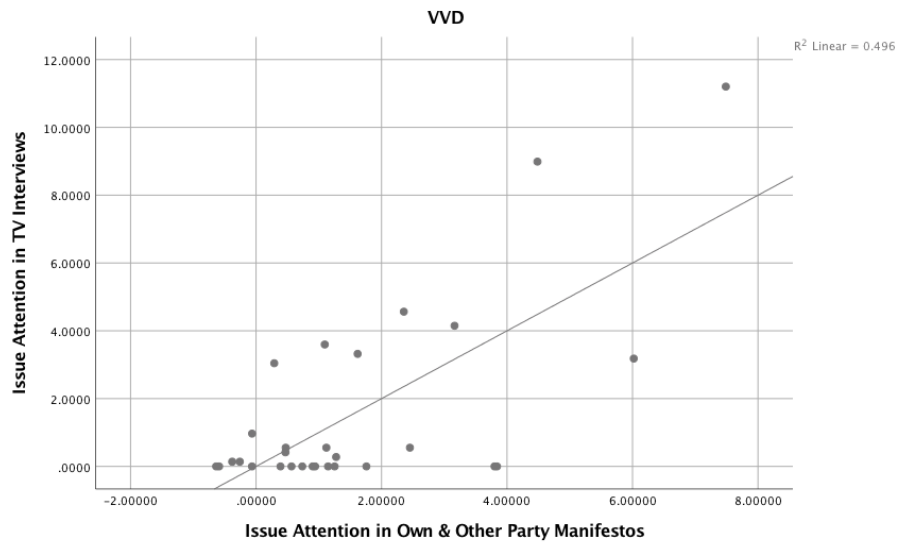
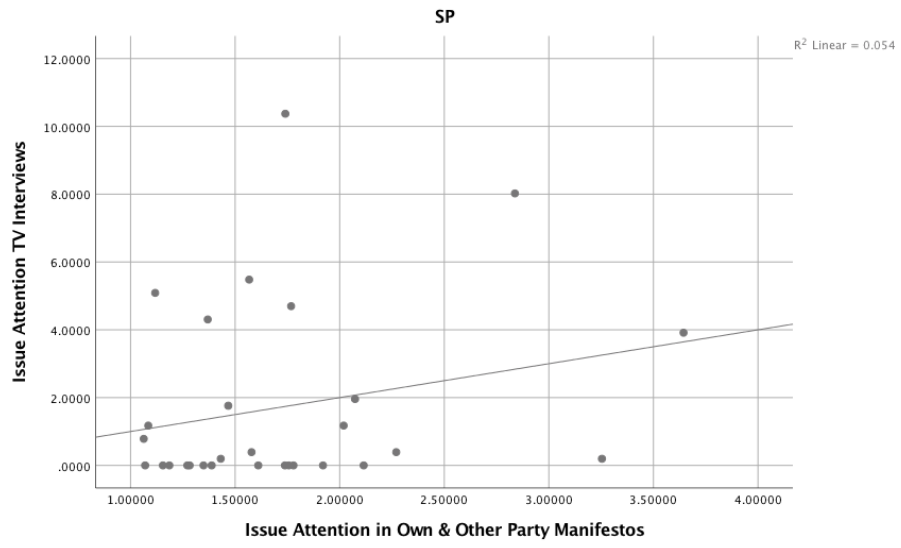
VVD's issue attention (without the outlier).

## SCATTERPLOTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSES PER PARTY









LIST OF APPEARANCES OF PARTY LEADERS AND THE WEBSITE LINKS FOR SUBTITLES

Political Leader	Program	Date	Link TV Program / Subtitles
Rutte - VVD	Jinek	2017.02.07	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/07-02-2017/KN_1688598">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/07-02-2017/KN_1688598</a>
	Sub Jinek		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1688598/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1688598/nl_NL/</a>
	Nieuwsuur	2017.03.10	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/10-03-2017/VPWON_1267604">https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/10-03-2017/VPWON_1267604</a>
	Sub Nieuw		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267604/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267604/nl_NL/</a>
Buma - CDA	Jinek	2017.01.18	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/18-01-2017/KN_1687310">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/18-01-2017/KN_1687310</a>
	Sub Jinek		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687310/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687310/nl_NL/</a>
	Nieuwsuur	2017.03.06	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/06-03-2017/VPWON_1267600">https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/06-03-2017/VPWON_1267600</a>
	Sub Nieuw		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267600/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267600/nl_NL/</a>
Pechtold - D66	Jinek	2017.01.27	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/27-01-2017/KN_1687317">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/27-01-2017/KN_1687317</a>
	Sub Jinek		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687317/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687317/nl_NL/</a>
	Nieuwsuur	2017.03.02	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/02-03-2017/VPWON_1267596">https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/02-03-2017/VPWON_1267596</a>
	Sub Nieuw		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267596/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267596/nl_NL/</a>
Klaver - GL	Jinek	2017.01.20	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/20-01-2017/KN_1687312">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/20-01-2017/KN_1687312</a>
	Sub Jinek		NA
	Nieuwsuur	2017.03.08	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/08-03-2017/VPWON_1267602">https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/08-03-2017/VPWON_1267602</a>
	Sub Nieuw		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267602/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267602/nl_NL/</a>
Roemer - SP	Jinek	2017.01.09	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/09-01-2017/KN_1687303">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/09-01-2017/KN_1687303</a>
	Sub Jinek		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687303/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687303/nl_NL/</a>
	Nieuwsuur	2017.03.01	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/01-03-2017/VPWON_1267595">https://www.npostart.nl/nieuwsuur/01-03-2017/VPWON_1267595</a>
	Sub Nieuw		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267595/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/VPWON_1267595/nl_NL/</a>
Asscher - PvdA	Jinek	2017.01.12	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/12-01-2017/KN_1687306">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/12-01-2017/KN_1687306</a>
	Sub Jinek		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687306/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1687306/nl_NL/</a>
	Jinek	2017.02.10	<a href="https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/10-02-2017/KN_1688601">https://www.npostart.nl/jinek/10-02-2017/KN_1688601</a>
	Sub Jinek		<a href="https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1688601/nl_NL/">https://rs.poms.omroep.nl/v1/api/subtitles/KN_1688601/nl_NL/</a>

CODING SCHEME

<p><b>Domain 1: External Relations</b>            104_5 Military            106 Peace            107_9 Internationalism            108_10 European/LA Integration</p> <p><b>Domain 2: Freedom and Democracy</b>            201 Freedom and Human Rights            202 Democracy            203_4 Constitutionalism</p> <p><b>Domain 3: Political System</b>            301 Decentralisation            303 Governmental and Administrative Efficiency</p> <p><b>Domain 4: Economy</b>            401 Free-Market Economy            402 Incentives            403 Market Regulation            405 Corporatism            406_7 Protectionism            411 Technology and Infrastructure            412 Controlled Economy            413 Nationalization            414 Economic Orthodoxy</p>	<p><b>Domain 5: Welfare and Quality of Life</b>            502 Culture            503 Equality            504 Welfare State Expansion            506 Education Expansion</p> <p><b>Domain 6: Fabric of Society</b>            603_4 Traditional Morality            605 Law and Order            606 Civic Mindedness</p> <p><b>Domain 7: Social Groups</b>            701_2 Labour Groups            703 Agriculture and Farmers</p> <p><b>Environmental Protection Issue</b>            416 Anti-Growth Economy            501 Environmental Protection</p> <p><b>Cultural-Ethnic Relations Issue</b>            601_2 National Way of Life: Positive            607_8 Multiculturalism            706 Non-Economic Demographic Groups</p>
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