



The Gig Economy in Party Manifestos: Analysing the Salience and Rhetoric of an Economic Niche Issue Across Europe

13th Annual Conference of the **European Political Science Association**
Glasgow

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22.06.2023

- **Context:** The gig economy is a rather new phenomenon in Europe and accounts for only 3-10% of the European workforce.
- **Research Gaps:**
 1. Research on the GE has mainly focussed on the U.S.
 2. Research on issue salience has mainly focussed on established issues – but how do issues emerge?
- **Aims:**
 1. Is the gig economy an issue across the entire ideological party spectrum and in all European countries?
 2. Why do parties (not) address such an economic niche issue?
 3. Which rhetorical strategies and framings do parties use when talking about the gig economy?



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- **Standard Employment:** Work that is performed “on a fixed schedule – usually full-time – at the employer’s place of business, under the employer’s control, and with the mutual expectation of continued employment” (Kalleberg et al. 2000: 258).
→ all other forms of employment/work are therefore **non-standard**
- In the EU 2021: roughly 4.1% of European workforce engaged in some form of gig work
- Different types of gig work:

	Online	Offline
Low-skilled	<i>Type A:</i> Microwork/Microtasking (e.g. labelling of photos and videos)	<i>Type C:</i> On-demand work (e.g. food delivery)
High-skilled	<i>Type B:</i> Crowdwork (e.g. software development)	<i>Type D:</i> Asset-based services (e.g. domestic services)

← Focus of my PhD project & this paper

Table 1: Four field matrix of different types of gig work (Own illustration based on Johnston 2020 and Howcroft & Berg-Kåreborn 2019).

- Salience theory: analysis of quantity and quality of issues formulated e.g. in manifestos
- Party Strategies: position emphasis, position blurring, and position avoiding
- Issue Ownership: voters distinguish parties based on their problem-solving competence regarding different issues; parties emphasize the issue they “own”



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→ **H1:** The greater the media salience and thus the public problem awareness in a country, the more likely it is that a party in that country will address the gig economy in its election manifesto.

→ **H2:** Party ideology influences the framing of the gig economy, so that the parties emphasize one aspect they traditionally own. Previous strategies on comparable issues inform this mechanism.

- Sample: 137 parties, 123 election manifestos, 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK)
- Analysis period: 2018-2022 → only most recent manifesto
- Case selection: every party with at least one seat in national parliament after the respective election, entire ideological spectrum
- Quantitative text analyses: Dictionary Analysis & Targeted Sentiment Analysis (TSA)

Concept	Dictionary entry/key
Gig economy/work	gig, crowdwork, clickwork, flexwork
Employment status	bogus, self-employment
Contract status	contractor, zero-hour, task-based, on-call, on-demand
Platform economy/work	platform

Salience of the Gig Economy in Party Manifestos

Keyword	# of matches	# of manifestos	Corpus coverage ¹	Party (Country)
Gig economy	10	7	5.69%	Labour (Ireland); Alliance, Cons, Green, LibDem, SDLP, SNP (UK)
Gig work	1	1	0.81%	Green (UK)
Platform economy	30	14	11.38%	CDV, Ecolo, Groen, NVA, spa (Belgium); SF (Denmark); PS, SDP (Finland); Greens, CDU/CSU, SPD (Germany); Pais, Podemos (Spain); GPS (Switzerland)
Platform work	11	5	4.07%	SPÖ (Austria); spa (Belgium); EK (Estonia); SDP (Finland); Left (Germany)
Crowdwork	5	4	3.25%	Greens, SPÖ (Austria); CDU/CSU, Greens (Germany)
Clickwork	1	1	0.81%	Left (Germany)
Contractor	9	8	6.50%	PVDA, spa (Belgium); Greens (Germany); FF, SF (Ireland); M5S (Italy); PiS (Poland); LibDem (UK)
Zero-hour	12	8	6.50%	spa (Belgium); SDP (Finland); Aontu, PBP (Ireland); Alliance, Labour, LibDem, SNP (UK)
Work on demand	1	1	0.81%	PdAS (Switzerland)
Work on call	4	3	2.44%	SPÖ (Austria); spa (Belgium); Left (Germany)

¹ = corpus coverage refers to the percentage of all manifestos containing the respective concept

- Gig economy an issue in party competition in 13 of the 14 countries (Latvia not represented) → corpus coverage: 27.64%
- Distinction between direct and indirect addresses; most important indirect phrase: “bogus self-employment” (19.51% coverage)
- “Platform” is the most used keyword → problem: many false positives
- Within the countries: several parties address the issue
- Keywords: country-specific usage → “gig economy”/“gig work” especially in UK
- Entire ideological party spectrum represented → extreme left (0.33 Workers’ Party of Belgium) to extreme right (7.92 Belgian New Flemish Alliance); however, tendency towards left-wing parties → social democratic, socialist, ecological, left-libertarian
- Sentiment:
 - “gig” and “zero-hour” used in positive context
 - “bogus” used in negative context

Gig economy as an economic niche issue within party competition:

- ~28% explicit coverage can be regarded quite high for a very recent and niche phenomenon
- ~20% indirect addresses through “bogus self-employment” shows that parties are aware of some features of the GE to be problematic
- National contexts (i.e. workers’ strikes or court rulings) seem to be the major predictor whether parties develop a policy position or not → focus on national patterns
- Parties do not (yet) know how to address this issue: chance for labour markets vs. threat to workers’ rights
- Parties from the entire ideological spectrum represented → rather national context than party ideology decisive

Limitations:

- Empirical analysis needs fine-tuning: dictionary too broad, more countries to add, different sentiment dictionary

Thank you for your attention!

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