Success and Failure in Electoral Competition:
Selective Issue Emphasis under Incomplete Issue Ownership

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Abstract

Political parties are often argued to compete for voters by stressing issues they feel they own – a strategy known as 'selective emphasis'. While usually seen as an electorally rewarding strategy, this article argues that cultivating 'your' themes in the public debate is not guaranteed to be electorally beneficial and may even become counter-productive. It describes the conditions under which 'selective emphasis' becomes counter-productive, and applies the argument to recent discussions regarding the strategies of mainstream parties confronting the extreme right.

Keywords: Issue Salience, Issue Ownership, Party Competition.

Introduction

By repeatedly returning to particular policy issues in public speeches, campaign propaganda as well as discussions and votes within the parliament and/or government, political parties develop a reputation for certain policy positions, and for being knowledgeable and trustworthy concerning given policy themes. As such, the party name becomes infused with value of its own and can be argued to transform into a 'brand name' (e.g., Jones and Hudson, 1998; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Geys and Vermeir, 2008). Through this process, parties establish *ownership* over the issue (Petrocik, 1996). Such issue ownership – defined as public trust in a "party's competence in handling these issues" (Holian, 2004, 97; Petrocik, 1996) – is important for party competition as voters are more likely to support the party owning the issue at the heart of the election campaign (e.g., Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen, 2004; Holian, 2004, 2006).[1]

As a corollary, it is often maintained that trying to shift attention in electoral campaigns towards issues you 'own' – a strategy known as 'issue competition' or 'selective emphasis' – increases parties' electoral support (e.g., Budge and Farlie, 1983; Carmines, 1991; Petrocik, 1996). The reason is that "a voter who is mostly concerned with Democratic party constituency problems will cast a Democratic vote; one mostly concerned with GOP party constituency issues will vote Republican" (Petrocik, 1996, 831). In other words, all else equal, "voters will vote for the party which generates most attention for its own issues" (Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder, 1998, 417), thus giving "parties (…) an electoral advantage on issues which they own" (Bélanger, 2003, 541).

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[1] Issue ownership in itself is, however, insufficient. The issue(s) a party owns must also have political and societal relevance or *issue salience* (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008; Kwon, 2010).

Unfortunately (from the party's perspective), this need not necessarily be true. This article illustrates that increased salience of parties' owned issues may have both positive or negative effects on its electoral prospects. The intuition behind this prediction is straightforward once one realises that in most real-world settings different parties may stake a claim to the same issue – though they are not necessarily equally successful in doing so – and different voters may have diverging opinions about who owns an issue. Hence, voters who agree that a given issue they feel strongly about is a Labour party constituency problem will vote Labour (all else equal), but those that go against this (possibly majority) opinion and consider it a Conservative party issue will vote Conservative (all else equal). Yet, under such 'contested' or 'incomplete' ownership, parties 'co-owning' an issue are not guaranteed to gain in relative terms (i.e., gain vote *share*), and may not even benefit in absolute terms (i.e., gain *votes*) from the issue's increased salience. The tipping point between electoral gain/loss depends on the relative ownership of the issue at hand (i.e., the degree to which the electorate as a whole assesses parties' relative ability to handle the issue). As gaining votes and/or vote share arguably constitutes the central objective underlying electoral competition, cultivating 'your' themes in the public debate may thus become counter-productive under some conditions.

In the next section, the definition and prevalence of 'incomplete' or 'contested' issue ownership is discussed. Then, it is shown that increasing the salience of 'owned' issues through a strategy of selective issue emphasis may have both positive and negative effects on a party's electoral prospects, *depending on the degree of 'issue contestation' between different parties*. I subsequently illustrate the main insights by referring to mainstream parties' strategies relative to the extreme right (e.g., Bale, 2003; Meguid, 2005; Coffé, 2008a; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Bale *et al*., 2010), which have attracted substantial attention

also in the political debate across Europe (e.g., Policy Network, 2011). The final section summarizes the article's main points.

Issue ownership versus issue contestation

By arguing that "each party is expected to have a distinct issue handling reputation" (Petrocik, 1996, 830; see also Van der Brug, 2004; Green and Hobolt, 2008; Green, 2007 among many others), most scholars suggest that there can at most be one party owning an issue. This view is also reflected in the coding of issue ownership in empirical work: i.e., each issue is generally allocated to at most one party using an indicator variable (e.g., Petrocik, 1996; Green and Hobolt, 2008). Yet, when one looks more closely at the underlying data[2], it becomes clear that on most issues brought forward, voters clearly fail to agree unanimously in their designation of the 'best party' to handle the issue (e.g., Petrocik, 1996, Table 1 on US data; Bélanger, 2003, Figure 1 on Canadian data; Green and Hobolt, 2008, Table 1 on UK data).

Figure 1 illustrates this using data from the UK over the period 1977-2010 (taken from MORI surveys, see also Green and Hobolt, 2008). In this figure, the vertical axis shows the share of respondents indicating that the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democratic party is best able to handle a given issue, while time is on the horizontal axis (note that the average result is displayed for years with more than one poll). Figure 1 shows that roughly half of the UK electorate in the 1970s and 1980s believed that the Conservative party was the best party to handle crime and defence. Since the early 1990s, however, the Labour and Conservative party both convince roughly 20-30% of voters on both these issues. Similarly, while Labour appears to have had a stronger position regarding unemployment and education between 1990 and

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[2] Such data most often derive from survey questions of the type "Which party has, in your opinion, the best record of dealing with this problem?".

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2005, these issues also generate an even split between the Labour and Conservative party in more recent years.

Figure 1 about here

While one could interpret these data as reflecting a general absence of undisputed issue owners in real-world politics,[3] coding the party with a relative advantage as the issue owner using a dichotomous variable (the most common approach in empirical analyses) clearly does not recognise this underlying division within the electorate's opinions. Indeed, while Figure 1 illustrates that a large share of voters can allocate issue ownership (by explicitly mentioning one party as the owner of the issue presented), it is also clear that individual respondents do not necessarily agree on such ownership. Yet, this division effectively implies that in the eyes of the electorate – which is what matters when evaluating the potential electoral implications of issue ownership – there is more than one owner for (almost) every issue. The data thus reflect that exclusive issue ownership is rare. This is the crucial observation for our theoretical argument, because this implies that different voters will have different opinions about who owns issues, and thus will cast different votes if any given issue becomes salient (see also Appendix A).

To the best of my knowledge, however, only few papers have taken into account that parties' issue ownership is rarely undisputed, and allow multiple parties to 'own' a given issue. Important exceptions include Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder (1998), Bélanger (2003), Van Aelst (2006) and Bélanger and Meguid (2008). Interestingly, while Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder (1998) thereby impose equal ownership by maintaining a dichotomous coding (1 =

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[3] It also illustrates that issue ownership is a "dynamic, not fixed, attribute of parties" (Sides, 2007, 466; see also Petrocik, 1996; Bélanger, 2003; Sides, 2006).

ownership, 0 = no ownership), Bélanger (2003) explicitly acknowledges that one party can have a stronger hold over an issue than another party: i.e., "the Reform party seems to have a stronger hold on this issue than the Conservatives" (Bélanger, 2003, 545). More recently, Green (2007, 650, italics added) makes the same point when stating that, due to parties' ideological convergence, party competition in Britain has become more centred on the question "how parties can increase *the degree* to which they are judged more competent or trusted to deliver on issues".

As shown in the next section, this 'degree' of issue ownership becomes of critical importance when more than one party is viewed as capable of handling a given issue, since it will have a central bearing on the exact nature of the relation between issue ownership and electoral outcomes. Before we do so, however, it is important to note that partisanship is likely to play an important role when asking individuals about which party is best equipped to deal with a certain issue, and thus may bias the findings in Figure 1. People may indeed have the view that 'their' is best equipped to address almost any issue. Yet, three observations strongly suggest that partisanship it is not the only thing people have in mind when answering the standard 'best party' question, and that Figure 1 thus gives a reasonable indication of issue ownership opinions across the UK population.

First, if all respondents would always identify 'their' party as the owner of an issue, no variation would be observed across issues. This clearly is not the case in Figure 1 – such that partisan preferences are only one element in respondents' answers. Interestingly, this observation closely conforms to Bélanger and Meguid's (2008) finding in Canada that only 8 to 21% of respondents systematically indicate the same party as 'best' on all issues presented. Second, though related, we employ the individual-level data from the most recent survey in

our dataset (i.e., 19-22 March 2010) to follow Bélanger and Meguid (2008) in calculating the share of respondents *not* identifying 'their' party (proxied by the answer provided on the question who respondents voted for in the last general election) as the owner of the issues presented. This shows that across all issues and all parties at least one third of respondents do *not* identify their party as the owner of the issue (comparable to the 37% to 52% of respondents in Canada reported by Bélanger and Meguid, 2008). Finally, we look – likewise for the March 2010 survey – at how respondents voting for the Liberal Democratic party, but who did *not* indicate this party as owner of the issue (on average 65% of this party's voters do this), ordered the other two parties (i.e., Labour and Conservatives) in terms of issue ownership. This, for obvious reasons, gives information on issue ownership that cannot be driven by partisanship concerns. Interestingly, the ownership patterns observed for the Labour and Conservative parties in this exercise are almost perfectly in line with those presented in Figure 1 – both in terms of their direction as what regards the margin between the parties (details available upon request) – which very strongly suggests that the patterns depicted in Figure 1 are not excessively biased by partisanship influences (see also Bélanger and Meguid, 2008 for a similar conclusion based on Canadian data).

Issue ownership, issue contestation and electoral competition

To guide the discussion, the relation between issue ownership and electoral outcomes is summarized in Figure 2. Issue ownership is represented on the vertical dimension and can lie with party A, party B, or both. Note that in the latter case ownership need not be evenly shared.[4] Assuming the issue is salient,[5] Figure 2 depicts who benefits/suffers electorally from

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[4] While other parties exist 'in the background', they cannot credibly claim the issue at hand (this is made more explicit in the numerical example provided below). Extending the analysis to a situation where more parties can claim (partial) ownership is straightforward, but superfluous to explain the basic argument. Also, a more complete analysis would obviously require a multidimensional issue-space. Once again, this only adds complexity without generating additional insights.

the issue (in terms of the party's vote total or vote share), depending on issue ownership.

Before turning to the analysis, two notes are required. First, although traditional spatial theories of party and voter behaviour (e.g., Downs, 1957) suggest that competition is most likely to occur between ideologically neighbouring parties, I do not impose such constraint here. The reason is that when partisan tactics affect both the salience and ownership of issues, it has been shown that "parties can target opponents anywhere on that dimension (…) [and] ideological proximity is no longer a requirement" (Meguid, 2005, 350). Second, the applicability of issue ownership theory is limited to so-called valence issues "on which there is agreement on the ends of politics" (Green, 2007, 629; see also Stokes, 1963; Petrocik, 1996). Examples of such issues include crime-reduction, economic growth, employment and anti-corruption (Brody, 1991; Petrocik, 1996; Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder, 1998; Van der Brug, 2004; Green, 2007).[6] Hence, without loss of generality, one can think of party A as a traditional left-wing party and party B as a left-libertarian party, with the issue at hand referring to, say, the environment.

Figure 2 about here

Two cases must be distinguished. First, though rare in reality (see above), one party might have **complete issue ownership**: e.g., party A (B) on the left-hand side (right-hand side) of Figure 2. In this case, the party with complete ownership benefits from the issue's salience both in terms of its absolute number of votes and its vote share. This follows directly from the assumption – underlying all models of issue competition (e.g., Stokes, 1963; Petrocik, 1996; Green, 2007; Bélanger and Meguid, 2008; Green and Hobolt, 2008) – that individual voters

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[5] With low salience, the issue is irrelevant in the voter's decision process and there is, obviously, little to gain electorally from issue ownership (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008).

[6] Different parties may have varying preferences regarding the relative importance of low unemployment and low inflation (e.g., Green, 2007), but there is general acceptance that bringing down unemployment (or, similarly, stimulating economic growth) is a good thing (Brody, 1991; Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder, 1998).

make their voting decision based at least in part on partisan competence evaluations on specific issues: i.e., all else equal, any given voter will cast his/her vote for the party (s)he feels 'owns' the issue (A detailed treatment of the article's modelling of voter behaviour is given in Appendix A). Consequently, if more voters believe the issue is salient (i.e., issue salience within the electorate increases), the party owning the issue will obtain a higher utility-evaluation with a higher number of voters, and, as a result, will gain voters in absolute terms. Moreover, independent of whether its new voters are individuals that did not vote before or originally voted for other parties (the only two possible origins of the party's new voters; see Appendix A), it also gains vote share. The reason is that, regarded in percentage terms, its vote total (i.e., the numerator of the party's vote share) rises faster than the total number of votes cast (i.e., the denominator of the party's vote share) in both cases.[7]

Clearly, the reverse holds for parties without ownership of the issue. While their vote tally in absolute terms either remains unchanged (i.e., when the issue-owning party only convinces previously undetermined individuals) or declines (i.e., when the issue-owning party steals their voters), they will always lose in relative terms. As before, the reason is that in the former case their vote total remains constant while the total number of votes cast increases, whereas in the latter case their vote tally declines but the number of votes cast remains constant. To summarize, the party with complete ownership expands both in terms of its absolute number of votes and its vote share (illustrated by '+' in Figure 2) at the expense of all other parties (illustrated by '–' in Figure 2).

To give a simple numerical example, assume a three-party polity with an electoral issue that can potentially be held by two of these parties (called LAB and CON); the third party (called

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[7] For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that this does not hold in a corner solution where the party started out with a vote share of 100%. In this case, its vote gain in absolute terms can only come from previously abstaining individuals, and its vote share will remain constant (at 100%).

LD) cannot capture this issue for whatever underlying reason. Each party has an initial endowment of 20 votes on a population of 100 voters, or 33.3% of votes cast (leaving 40 voters undecided).[8] Now, assume the issue is owned – uncontested by other parties – by LAB and that increasing its salience leads LAB to convince 20 voters of its superiority over the other parties. As set out in Appendix A, these voters can be individuals that did not vote before, or that originally voted either for CON or LD. In the latter case, LAB's share of valid votes increases to 66.6% (i.e., 40 out of 60 votes cast), while both other parties experience a loss of vote share (from 33.3% to 16.7%). In the former case, LAB captures 20 previously undecided voters and its vote share increases to 50% (i.e., 40 out of 80 votes cast), while that of its competitors drops to 25% (or 20 out of 80 votes). Clearly, also in all intermediate cases (where LAB's vote increase derives from a mixture of previously undecided voters and those that abandon its competitors), LAB always gains vote share while CON and LD always lose vote share. Hence, in this situation, the party with issue ownership would clearly benefit from a 'selective emphasis' strategy.

Second, both parties might have **incomplete or shared ownership** over the issue at hand – in the sense that different (groups of) voters have diverging opinions about who owns the issue (see Figure 1 above). In this case of 'issue contestation', the effect of increased issue salience on the *absolute* (i.e., number of votes) as well as *relative* (i.e., vote share) electoral success can be positive or negative (illustrated by the +/– in Figure 2).[9] The exact effect depends crucially on the relative strength of issue ownership. Specifically, two outcomes are possible:

a) Both parties contesting the issue increase their vote share at the expense of third parties not

holding ownership of the issue. Using the example from before, assume that the issue is

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[8] While the numerical example is obviously carefully constructed, its main purpose is to clarify a general relation. To keep the article accessible, I present only the example.

[9] For the absolute number of votes to increase with certainty, at least some previously undecided voters should become party-supporters following the increase in salience while the issue-contending parties do not capture voters from each other.

shared equally between both co-owning parties and that increasing issue salience allows each to gain 5 votes from *all* other parties. Clearly, exchanging 5 voters among themselves does not affect both co-owners' vote total, nor vote share. However, both also gain 5 votes from the third party that cannot capture this particular issue. Hence, the new vote distribution is 25 (LAB) – 10 (LD) – 25 (CON). This increases the vote shares of LAB and CON to 41.7% of votes cast, while LD experiences a loss of vote share (from 33.3% to 16.7%). The same occurs when allowing for a mobilisation effect through which some previously undecided voters now vote for either LAB or CON. For example, assume both parties gain 10 additional votes (and do not capture voters from each other, nor from LD). This increases their respective vote shares from 33.3% to 37.5% of votes cast (i.e., 30 out of 80), while LD experiences a loss of vote share (from 33.3% to 25%, or 20 out of 80). Both issue-owners thus gain in both absolute and relative terms.

b) One of the parties contesting the issue suffers a declining vote share. This occurs when ownership of the issue is sufficiently uneven and one party holds (much) more pronounced ownership. Assume, for example, that relative ownership is such that increasing salience leads LAB to 'steal' votes from its competitors twice as effectively as CON. For instance, an increase in salience leads LAB capture 10 voters from all other parties, while the CON only captures 5 voters from all other parties. This creates the following new vote distribution: 40 (LAB) – 5 (LD) – 15 (CON). Clearly, LAB gains in both absolute and relative terms, while CON *loses* in absolute and relative terms. The same, once again, holds when allowing for a mobilisation effect. In this case, however, one of the parties contesting the issue suffers a declining vote share *even though* it gains in absolute terms. Assume, for example, that relative ownership is such that increasing salience leads LAB to gain 15 previously-undecided voters and CON only 5 (assuming, for simplicity, that no one steals voters from another party). This increases LAB's vote share from 33.3% to

43.8% (i.e., 35 out of 80), but *decreases* CON's share from 33.3% to 31.3% (i.e., 25 out of 80) *even though* it gains five additional votes. LD in this setting drops from 33.3% to 25%.

A look at practical implications

The theoretical discussion above has important implications for the way in which we understand the relation between parties' strategic decisions in election campaigns and the resulting election outcome. Hence, it sheds some more light on any party's success or failure in electoral competition. We illustrate this here by taking a closer look at mainstream parties' strategies regarding the extreme right; an issue that has attracted substantial attention in both the academic literature (e.g., Bale, 2003; Meguid, 2005; Coffé, 2008a; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Bale *et al*., 2010) and the political debate across Europe (e.g., Policy Network, 2011).

Essentially, two strategies have been very common. First, many mainstream parties initially attempted to dismiss the extreme-right (e.g., Meguid, 2005) and aimed at "keeping traditional economic themes (…) high on the political agenda" (Coffé, 2008a, 179; Bale *et al*., 2010). The underlying idea was both to signal to voters that the issue of extreme-right parties "lacks merit" (Meguid, 2005, 349), and to benefit from one's historical ownership of such issues.[10] As an alternative strategy, and more interesting from this article's theoretical argument, mainstream parties have often been argued – and observed – to try to capture extreme-right issues by "taking a tougher stance on issues related to immigration and integration" (Bale *et al*., 2010, 410; see also Meguid, 2005; Norris, 2005; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Van Spanje, 2010). Although Meguid (2005, 348) argues that such an "accommodative

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[10] While ignoring the extreme-right issues may limit their salience in the electorate and thereby reduce extreme-right electoral support (Meguid, 2005), our analysis suggests that such a strategy may become counter-productive when extreme-right parties can capture such traditional economic themes. Whether or not they have such ability remains, however, a hotly debated issue in the current literature (e.g., Bélanger, 2003; Kitschelt, 2004; De Lange, 2007; Mudde, 2007; Coffé, 2008b).

strategy" leads to "niche-party vote loss", our analysis shows that it may well have the opposite effect and further strengthen the extreme-right party. Particularly, it will have this effect as long as the issue cannot be captured to a sufficiently large degree. The reason is that any party has an incentive to invest in issue salience as long as it *expects* to gain vote share from doing so. Hence, when a mainstream party believes to have gained some ownership of immigration and integration issues, it may acquire an incentive to further increase these issues' salience in the electorate – *even though this might promote the electoral advance of other parties in the process*.

Concluding discussion

This article contributes to the theoretical literature on issue competition. It argued that under joint issue ownership – which represents the common situation where multiple parties are deemed capable of handling an issue (though to possibly differing extents) – increased focus on an issue may electorally backfire on the party making such investment. This is not an exclusively technical argument, but may well have important practical implications regarding parties' electoral strategies. In fact, it illustrates that an electoral campaign strategy focused on what one believes to be ones core issues or aimed at 'capturing' the opponents' issues may both easily become counter-productive – and such strategic decisions should therefore be very carefully considered.

One final caveat should, however, be mentioned at this point. The theoretical argument in this article has assumed perfect information on the side of all political parties. This, evidently, is a very strong assumption. Although parties are likely to invest in, for instance, polls, focus groups and/or the interpretation of election results to gauge the relative strength of their hold over any given issue (i.e., how much more (or less) do voters trust my competence on this

issue, relative to other parties?) as well as the effect of an investment in increased issue salience on voters' voting decision (i.e., how many voters change their mind if issue X becomes more salient?), this information will generally, at best, remain incomplete. Yet, it is critical in making the right decision with regard to a 'selective emphasis' strategy under incomplete ownership. Indeed, this article illustrates that, for instance, over-optimism regarding ones ownership of an issue or of ones ability to capture it can lead to a double surprise: i.e., it might end up hurting the party's own prospects *and* stimulate the competitors more than expected.

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Figure 1: Issue Ownership in the United Kingdom (1977-2010)
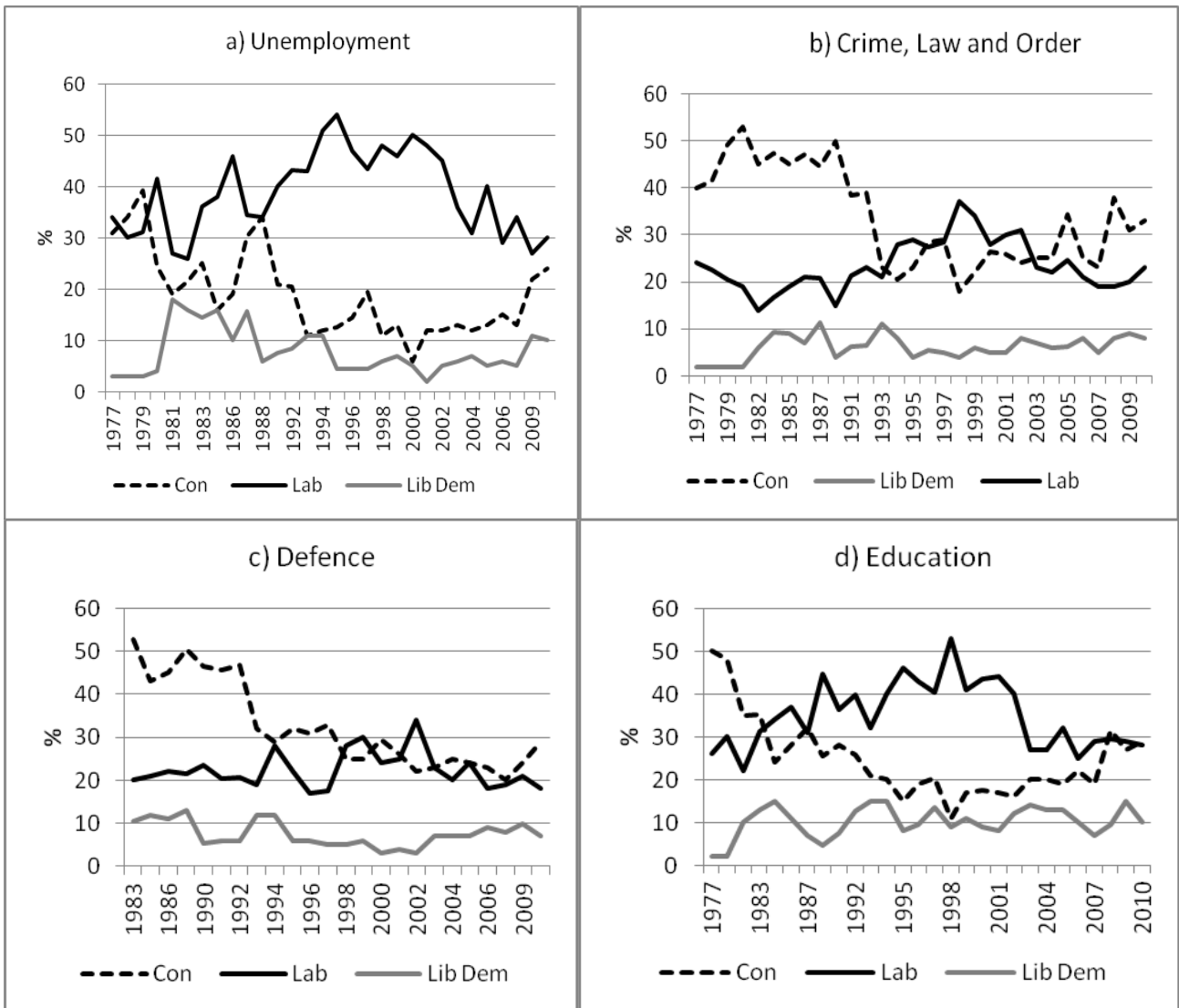
Source: Own calculations based on MORI

Figure 2: Issue ownership and electoral outcomes under (in)complete issue ownership

	Issue ownership		
	Party A	Contested	Party B
Vote share (or vote total) party A	+	+ / −	−
Vote share (or vote total) party B	−	+ / −	+

Appendix A: Modelling voter behaviour

In modelling the relationship between voter behaviour – i.e., whether or not to turn out and who to vote for – and issue ownership and issue salience, I build on the approach taken in Green (2007) and Green and Hobolt (2008). Yet, while these authors concentrate solely on the direction of the individual's vote, I additionally show that the model easily extends to the voter's turnout decision.

The basis of the model lies in the assumption that voters' decisions depend on the policy distance between candidates/parties (in the spirit of Downs, 1957) as well as a competence evaluation on each issue or policy dimension (reflecting parties' issue ownership; Green, 2007; Green and Hobolt, 2008). More specifically, the utility of party p to voter i on issue j (U_{ijp}) is given by:

$$U_{ijp} = [-(POS_{jp} - POS_{ij})^2 + C_{ijp}].w_{ij} \qquad (1)$$

where POS_{jp} and POS_{ij} reflect, respectively, the party's and voter's position on the issue, w_{ij} is a weight representing the salience of issue j to voter i (with $0<w_{ij}<1$) and C_{ijp} captures voter i's competence evaluation of party p on issue j. It should be noted that, unlike Green (2007) and Green and Hobolt (2008), I assume that this competence evaluation is voter-specific. This reflects the idea that voters may have different opinions about which party owns which issue(s) (see also Figure 1 in the main text). Equation (1) indicates that, given positive issue salience (i.e., $w_{ij} >0$), a higher competence evaluation increases the party's utility to the voter on this issue, whereas utility declines with the distance between the party and the voter's ideal point (see also Green, 2007; Green and Hobolt, 2008). It also illustrates that an increase in the importance voter i attaches to issue j (i.e., a rise in issue salience w_{ij}) strengthens the disutility of the distance between the party and the voter's ideal point as well as the utility of high party competence (or 'ownership').

Suppose now that there are two parties (A and B) and two issues (1 and 2).[11] Then voter i's choice between parties A and B depends on their relative utility (i.e., $U_{iA} - U_{iB}$), which can be written as the sum of the utility differences between both parties on both issues:

$$U_{iA} - U_{iB} = (U_{i1A} - U_{i1B}) + (U_{i2A} - U_{i2B})$$

Evidently, and assuming voter i actually turns out to vote (see below), $(U_{iA} - U_{iB}) > 0$ leads voter i to support party A, while $(U_{iA} - U_{iB}) < 0$ makes his/her vote go to party B. Using equation (1), this utility difference equals:

$$U_{iA} - U_{iB} = [(-(POS_{1A} - POS_{i1})^2 + C_{i1A}).w_{i1} - (-(POS_{1B} - POS_{i1})^2 + C_{i1B}).w_{i1}]$$

$$+ [(-(POS_{2A} - POS_{i2})^2 + C_{i2A}).w_{i2} - (-(POS_{2B} - POS_{i2})^2 + C_{i2B}).w_{i2}] \qquad (2)$$

After taking both issue salience parameters out of the square brackets and doing some minor rearranging, this can be rewritten as:

$$U_{iA} - U_{iB} = [((POS_{1B} - POS_{i1})^2 - (POS_{1A} - POS_{i1})^2) + (C_{i1A} - C_{i1B})].w_{i1}$$

$$+ [((POS_{2B} - POS_{i2})^2 - (POS_{2A} - POS_{i2})^2) + (C_{i2A} - C_{i2B})].w_{i2} \qquad (3)$$

Equation (3) can be used to evaluate how an increase in the salience of issue j (with $j=1,2$) owned by party p (with $p=$A,B) affects *a)* who individual i is likely to vote for, and *b)* his/her decision to turn out to vote. While this can be done for *both* valence *and* position issues, the issue ownership theory employed in the main text is limited to valence issues (Petrocik, 1996). As for such issues all voters and parties agree on the policy goals, this implies that $(POS_{jp} - POS_{ij})$ equals 0 (Stokes, 1963; Petrocik, 1996). Consequently, for valence issues, equation (3) reduces to:

$$U_{iA} - U_{iB} = (C_{i1A} - C_{i1B}).w_{i1} + (C_{i2A} - C_{i2B}).w_{i2}. \qquad (4)$$

First, let us look at individual i's turnout decision. Assuming individuals are rational, they will only turn out when the net expected benefit from doing so is positive (Downs, 1957;

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[11] Applying the model to a multidimensional policy space with more than two parties follows the same lines, and does not affect the conclusions discussed below.

Geys, 2006). Representing the cost of voting by COST, the probability of deciding the election in your favourite party's favour by p and the benefit of voting by B, voter i will vote when:

$$p.\text{B} - \text{COST} > 0 \qquad (5)$$

Note, however, that the benefit of voting "B stands for the difference in expected utilities from the policies of the two candidates" (Geys, 2006, 17). This utility difference was derived as $(U_{iA} - U_{iB})$ above. Hence, equation (5) can also be written as:

$$p. \, [(C_{i1A} - C_{i1B}).w_{i1} + (C_{i2A} - C_{i2B}).w_{i2}] - \text{COST} > 0 \qquad (6)$$

This shows that, *ceteris paribus*, higher salience of valence issue(s) awarded by voter i to party A (i.e., those issues for which $C_{ijA} - C_{ijB} > 0$) increases the term in square brackets in equation (6), which implies an increase in this voter's net benefit of voting. Although this may not affect most voters' turnout decision (because the low probability of affecting the election outcome, p, makes the net benefit of voting generally very small), it will have an effect *at the margin* (see Dowding, 2005; Geys, 2006; Andersen *et al*., 2011). That is, for some voters it may now become rational to turn out to vote.

Now let us turn to individual i's vote decision. From equation (4), it is clear that higher salience of valence issue(s) awarded by voter i to party A increases U_{iA} relative to U_{iB} – all else equal. To evaluate how this change affects the voter's vote choice, we have to consider the value of $(U_{iA} - U_{iB})$ for all other valence and/or position issues the voter deems salient. If, based on voter i's utility evaluation on all these issues, (s)he already voted for party A (because $U_{iA} - U_{iB} > 0$), an increase in the salience of valence issue(s) awarded by voter i to party A simply strengthens his/her resolve to do so. If, however, party B was deemed better based on the evaluation of all other issues (and $U_{iA} - U_{iB} < 0$), the increased salience of party

A's valence issue(s) might tilt the balance in favour of party A because it raises the probability that $(U_{iA} - U_{iB})$ becomes positive.

To conclude, an increase in the salience of valence issue j (with $j=1,2$) owned according to voter i by party p (with $p=$A,B) may increase party p's vote tally through two channels: a) an increase in the probability of voter i to turn out to vote, and b) an increase in the probability that voter i shifts his/her vote towards the party with ownership over issue j.