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How stable is political parties' issue ownership? A cross-time, cross-national analysis

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Abstract. Research on issue ownership is accelerating and so is its use in studies of voting and party behavior. Yet, we do not know how stable issue ownership is. Does it describe a solid, persistent association between a party and an issue in the eyes of the electorate, or does it describe a more fluid and fragile issue reputation of a party among the electorate? As a legacy from the seminal work of Petrocik (1996), theoretical and empirical work suggest both stability and variability in issue ownership. To get closer to an answer, this article presents and analyzes unprecedented comprehensive data on issue ownership. The analysis identifies stability rather than change in issue ownership over time and similarity more than difference across countries and therefore suggests that issue ownership is a general and long-term rather than a local and short-term phenomenon. The implications for how voters perceive parties are important.

Key words: issue ownership, parties, voters, comparative analysis.

Research on issue ownership is a growth industry (Lefevere, Tresch, and Walgrave 2015). Yet, advancement in the understanding and use of issue ownership is impeded by a lack of systematic knowledge on its stability and variability. Is it a general and long-term phenomenon describing a solid and persistent association between a party and an issue in the eyes of the electorate ensured by a party's long-held link to a certain position and constituency on an issue? Or is it a context-dependent, short-term phenomenon describing a fluctuating and hard-to-uphold reputation of a party on an issue decided by the current performance on the issue?

Knowledge on the stability over time of issue ownership and its similarity across countries is important because it has major implications for our understanding of parties and voters. If issue ownership is a product of day-to-day politics, it may just be another word for framing-effects or political communication – issue ownership is something amenable in the minds of voters that is constantly formed and reformed by current messages from the parties. Issue ownership becomes something that can explain single events but does not travel beyond its immediate context. For instance, accounts of recent elections in Britain have centered closely on the party best able to portray itself as currently most competent in managing the economy (Clarke et al. 2009; Whiteley et al. 2013).

If issue ownership instead appears as a permanent factor from election to election, it expresses something more fundamental about how voters perceive parties equivalent to the role of ideology. Issue ownership means something: Even if a voter identifies with a party and agrees with its opinions, she may still prefer another party to take care of a certain issue. She may even vote for this party if this issue becomes important to her. Obama's mobilization on the traditional democratic issues of health and unemployment thus features as a key ingredient in his 2008 victory (Wright 2012). In this scenario, parties can take advantage of issue ownership to connect to voters, but will also be constrained by issue ownership in the sense that strategies have to be

put together around issue ownership. It is a basic structure for party competition which reflects historic political conflicts, though cleavages and class-politics may be long gone.

Existing work suggests both stability and change in issue ownership. The seminal work by Petrocik (1996) introduces issue ownership in a short-term and a long-term version, and subsequent work has only shown modest interest in clarifying the uncertain degree of stability and change in issue ownership that stems from his work despite its enthusiastic use of issue ownership to understand parties and voters (Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2012; Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere 2015). By either using issue ownership as a constant to understand voting and party behavior (e.g. Meguid and Belanger 2008; Dolezal et al. 2013) or investigating how issue ownership erodes or is overtaken (e.g. Holian 2004; Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2012; Dahlberg and Martinsson 2015; Brasher 2009; Belanger 2003), empirical work emphasizes stability as much as instability in issue ownership. So the puzzle remains: Is issue ownership a stable, long-term phenomenon?

In a mediatized world concentrated on politicians' competences and performance and their short-term strategies to undercut each other, day-to-day news coverage easily gives the impression that issue reputations are highly conditional. However, this may not be the case if we take one step back and examine the broader patterns. Yet, existing work does not provide such systematic overview. So far, most studies have looked at only a few issues and typically only in one country (e.g. Brasher 2009; Egan 2013; Pope and Woon 2009). As a consequence, systematic knowledge is yet to be seen on how stable voters' perceptions of parties' issue ownerships are, and this hampers progress in the understanding of stability and change in issue ownership.

In this paper, a novel database is presented that allows a systematic and comprehensive test of the stability of issue ownership. The database covers issue ownership from 136 national election surveys in 17 countries across three decades. The analysis shows that stability over time

and similarity across countries in issue ownership is the norm rather than the exception. On about two out of three issues, issue ownership overall belongs to a party from the same side of the ideological divide over time and across countries. This evidence suggests that issue ownership is a long-term and distinct phenomenon.

The disagreement on the stability of issue ownership

As a macro-phenomenon, the interest in parties' issue connections has a long history. It emanates from the pioneering work of Schattschneider (1960), Robertson (1976), Budge and Farlie (1983), Carmines (1991), and Riker (1996) to understand party behavior. At the heart of this classic strand of research is the idea that parties not only compete by taking diverging positions on a pre-given issue as spatial modelling in the tradition of Downs (1957) would suggest. Parties compete in a multi-dimensional space on multiple issues to decide which issue will dominate political conflict. This issue selection will be subject to party competition because no issue is advantageous to all parties at the same time. Position-taking for a party is not equally beneficial across issues. Without unveiling exactly how issues matter, this idea about the importance of issues for party competition is at the core of this approach.

The idea that parties have diverging connections to issues and that this is central to party competition for votes therefore has deep roots, but it was not explicitly conceptualized until Petrocik (1996) introduced and popularized the concept of issue ownership. In his words (1996, 826), issue ownership is “[a] reputation for policy and program interest, produced by a history of attention, initiative, and innovation toward problems, which leads voters to believe that one of the parties is more sincere and committed to do something”. Hence, the connection between parties and issues involves far more than the mere position a party takes on an issue. It is also about a party's reputation for showing concern to the issue and being able to solve problems on

the issue. This raises the question: can a party easily change a rival's connection to an issue, and can a party count on its connection to an issue in its competition for votes?

Theoretical work on issue ownership does not provide a clear answer. The lack of an answer goes back to Petrocik's seminal work (1996) on issue ownership where a party's connection to an issue comes in two versions, one of them suggesting change, and the other suggesting stability. Petrocik talks about "a performance-based issue ownership" which suggests change in issue ownership. Here, the issue-handling record of the incumbent can "provide one party with a 'lease' – a short-term ownership – of a performance issue" (Petrocik 1996, 827). He mentions wars, unemployment, and inflation as examples of this variable type of issue ownership. He also introduces a "party constituency issue ownership, [which is] much more long-term and stable because its foundations is (1) the relatively stable, but different social bases, that distinguish party constituencies in modern party systems and (2) the link between political conflict and social structure" (Petrocik 1996, 827). Petrocik does not provide many examples of this latter more stable kind of issue ownership, but social democratic parties' reputation on welfare and their efforts to promote the interest of the low-skilled and low-paid, namely to foster redistribution through welfare programs and provide safety from the market comes to mind (Hibbs 1977). In Petrocik's optic, some issues belong to the short-term category and others belong to the long-term category. Such distinction inevitably raises the questions: Can all issues be categorized as either stable or unstable, or do some fall in between? Do some issues change category over time? Are some issues in different categories across countries? These are key questions for the understanding of the general stability of issue ownership. It is the aim of this paper to seek an answer.

Over the last two decades, the interest in Petrocik's two versions of issue ownership and the questions his distinction raises has been modest. Lately, the lack of clarity on the stability of issue ownership has become a question of definition (Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere 2015;

Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2012; Camp et al. 2014; Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2012; Therriault 2015; Stubager and Slothuus 2013). Survey experiments stemming from this exercise come close to reproducing Petrocik's two versions of issue ownership by identifying a handling issue ownership as opposed to an associative issue ownership for each issue. The experiments indicate that the latter features much more stability than the former. However, carried out at the individual level, these experiments do not tell whether issue ownership as a macro phenomenon that decides winners and loser at elections is stable or not, and even the stability of the handling part of issue ownership may be underestimated (see also Kleinnijenhuis and Walter 2014). The degree of stability remains an empirical rather than a definitional question.

Although empirical research on issue ownership is currently a growth industry (Lefevere, Tresch, and Walgrave 2015), an answer to the degree of stability and change in issue ownership is yet not provided. Most analysis of issue ownership at the macro-level focus on fluctuations over time in issue ownership (Green and Jennings 2012; Pope and Woon 2009; Brasher 2009; Damore 2004; Belanger 2003) or identifies instances in which issue ownership was temporarily undermined or hijacked (Holian 2004; Davidsson and Marx 2013; Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004; Arndt 2014). At the same time, stability in issue ownership is also emphasized (e.g., Egan 2013; Wright 2012). Alongside, issue ownership is widely used in studies of voting behavior (Green and Hobolt 2007; Meguid and Belanger 2008; van der Brug 2004) and party behavior (Spoon, Hobolt, and De Vries 2013; Meguid 2008; Dolezal et al. 2013) as the predictor constant across time and identical across countries.

This leaves the impression that issue ownership is stable and unstable at the same time. Moreover, the evidence remains provisional because it covers only a limited number of issues, countries, or years. Conclusions from existing research may be an artifact of a particular point in time or may only apply to a particular set of issues or group of countries. Only comprehensive empirical evidence allows for more general conclusions on the stability of issue ownership. In

such investigation, a cross-country analysis is just as important as a cross-time analysis because issue ownership may be stable over time in two countries, but associated with the left in one country and the right in another country. In this case, it is as context-dependent as if issue ownership in a country belonged to the left in the 90s, but the right in the 00s. In both situations, issue ownership is not a unique marker of what a left party generally is in the eyes of the electorate. Moreover, if an issue ownership is unstable over time in a country, this will probably also show up in the analysis as an increasing departure from other countries in the issue-party link. With the massive interest in and use of issue ownership in voting and party studies, it is somewhat surprising that such comprehensive analysis remains to be seen.

A thorough examination of the stability of issue ownership is important because its result has major implications for how voters perceive parties. If issue ownership is stable, issue ownership describes something fundamental about parties in the eyes of the voters. Issue ownership is something that voters use to navigate the political landscape and distinguish parties from each other. Issue ownership is distinctive. In this scenario, parties are not only ideological creatures defined by their opinion (Budge 1994), but also entities defined by the issues they are associated with (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Green-Pedersen 2007). Issue ownership is hard to change, but offers at the same time parties an advantage in the competition for votes. It is a basic structure for party competition which reflects historic political conflicts, though cleavages and class-politics may have waned. If issue ownership is unstable in contrast, it resembles little more than the momentary priming or persuasion effects on public opinion that may arise from parties' short-term strategic communication. It is not as distinctive as if it was a long-term phenomenon. It may provide great leverage in explaining a particular election outcome, but the knowledge about issue ownership in this exact setting may not travel far. Here, parties cannot count on an issue ownership, but can instead built more transient reputations for

issue-handling competence from one election to the next. In this scenario, issue ownership does not provide much general analytical value.

A new database on issue ownership on multiple issues across countries and time

To study the stability of issue ownership, a comprehensive dataset is required that provides information on many issues across many countries over long time. To meet these ambitious data demands, a novel database has been compiled from 136 National Election Studies that collects available information on 46 issues across 17 countries over three decades, mostly from elections but when available also from years in between.ⁱ The 17 countries are Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the UKⁱⁱ, Ireland, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Among the 46 issues, only 12 have sufficient observations for a robust cross-country, cross-time analysis (see below). These issues are the economy, health, education, environment, law and order, unemployment, tax, asylum/immigration, social security, elderly care, families, and the EU (for EU member states). Table 1 provides an overview.

[Table 1]

Though the analysis is primarily concerned with stability in issue ownership across time and countries, it is worthwhile considering what can be expected as the preferred party on each issue. Existing studies seem to agree that issues related to public finance like public debt, deficit on the public budget, and tax, and issues related to the national interest such as law and order, asylum/immigration, defense, international affairs, and to some extent also the EUⁱⁱⁱ (for EU member states) are associated with right-of-center parties. Issues related to the welfare state – such as health, education, unemployment, jobs, social security, families, and elderly care – are related to the social democratic party or the socialist party. This is also true for the environment

if a green party does not own the issue. Several studies report that the economy does not belong consistently to any party (Belanger 2003; Pope and Woon 2009; Brasher 2009; Petrocik 1996).

For the analysis of these issues, information on issue ownership is collected at the voters' level in each of the national election surveys via a question about the preferred party on an issue (see below). Although issue ownership is a macro-phenomenon reflecting an asset of a party, it is rarely measured through party statements or elite interviews (an exception is Busemeyer, Franzmann, and Garritzmnn 2013), but typically as an aggregate of voters' perception of the party (see e.g., Egan 2013; Stubager and Slothuus 2013; Petrocik 1996).

In the survey-question, respondents can choose one party on each issue. The party with the strongest reputation is referred to as the issue owner. Adhering to standards in the literature (Petrocik 1996; Egan 2013: 66; Brasher 2009), this is calculated in two steps. First, the proportion of respondents naming each party on an issue is calculated, and respondents who did not name a party are excluded. Second, to identify the party with the strongest reputation among these endorsements on each issue, the score for the right-of-center party (or scores for the group of rightwing parties in multiparty systems) has been subtracted from the score of the left-of-center party at each point in time (the coding of parties is explained below). The measure of issue ownership thereby ranges from -100 (a left-of-center party gets all voter endorsements on the issue) to +100 (a right-of-center party gets all voter endorsements on the issue). If, for instance, the left-of-center party is endorsed by 30 percent of the voters, and the right-of-center party by 70 percent, this generates an issue ownership of +40 to the right-of-center party.^{iv}

This measure is not only applied in existing studies in two-party systems but also in multiparty systems (Stubager and Slothuus 2013) because also in this context it provides a parsimonious way to decide across a large number of countries and elections which side of the political spectrum has issue ownership. As party competition in multiparty systems usually is organized into two rival blocs on the left-right scale through the formation of a government

together with parties that do not seek to replace it against the opposition, it is often more important to know whether left or right has issue ownership than, e.g., the communist party or the socialist party. Important consequences of a switch in issue ownership like a change of government are more likely in the former case (Andersen 2003). This focus is also evident in studies of party competition which predominantly look at mainstream parties' efforts to make voters switch side through issue ownership (Meguid 2008; Bale 2003; Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen 2004; Davidsson and Marx 2013; Arndt 2014; one exception is Spoon, Hobolt, and De Vries 2013).^v

In the analysis, the most popular party (or group of parties in multiparty systems) on an issue across time and countries is estimated in a univariate regression model with fixed effects across the country panels. In this model, which only includes the issue ownership variable, the intercept term estimates a weighted average across all observations taking into account that the number of observations (time points) as well as the variance of these observations vary across countries. The intercept indicates the average issue ownership across countries and over time. If this intercept is statistically significant, the issue ownership score is systematically different from zero (to the left or the right on the -100 to +100 scale) and hence rather similar across countries. If issue ownership changes a lot over time in each of the countries or is very different between countries, the observations in the regression will be positive and negative, and the regression estimate will be close to zero and probably statistically insignificant.

To ensure robust comparison, an observation on an issue for a country in a given year is only included if it contains at least 50 respondents. For the same reasons, the analysis only contains issues where more than five countries are present among which at least three have more than three time points. This reduces the number of issues from 46 to 12. Generally, information on these 12 issues is available for most countries across the full period, but it does vary (see Table 1). However, in several countries, measures of issue ownership have only been introduced

recently. This information is important in order to shed light on the between-country variation in issue ownership, but may mislead the investigation of the temporal variation. If this group of countries is included in a temporal analysis and an issue ownership grows less certain, it may be a true temporal dynamic or a natural consequence of gradually including more countries as data becomes available. Similarly, countries with long time-series data on an issue and changes in issue-ownership over time may wrongly indicate great dissimilarity in a cross-country analysis even if the current issue ownership is similar to other countries. To avoid such uncertainties, the analysis is divided into two parts. The cross-time analysis includes only countries that have at least three observations on the issue. The cross-country analysis looks at information only after 2000 for each country. A cross-country analysis before 2000 is not possible due to the smaller number of countries in this time period.

To allow comparison, parties have been coded into party families using the approach of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2014),^{vi} where liberal parties^{vii} have a code just like conservative, Christian democratic, agrarian, and extreme right parties (the right-of-center parties in the analysis)^{viii}, as well as social democratic, green, and socialist/communist parties (the left-of-center parties).^{ix} Parties not in parliament are left out. This classification does not affect the calculation of the overall left-right issue ownership which is still based on information at the party-level. The classification only ensures that parties are rightly assigned to either the left or the right across countries.

Similarly, question items have been content-coded into issue categories^x, i.e., questions on health into one category etc.^{xi} Questions about multiple issues are excluded. This issue coding was rather straightforward, but coding questions from different election studies is not necessarily unproblematic. First, question wording varies across countries, i.e., the voter is asked to pick which party “is best at solving (or dealing with) an issue” or “will do a better job at solving an issue”, which is the standard in most countries, or to choose the party with “a good policy” in

Sweden and “the party closest to own view” in Australia. These are not trivial variations and have been shown to affect which predispositions voters use to choose a party (Camp et al. 2014). However, it is also shown that the choice of the preferred party in the aggregate is much less affected (Camp et al. 2014), and this is the information of interest in the current analysis.^{xii}

Second, the phrasing of the issue on which to evaluate the parties differs in a few examples like unemployment where voters are asked to evaluate parties with regard to “fighting unemployment” in Germany and Denmark, “creating jobs” in Canada, and “their policy on employment” in Sweden. This may become a problem for temporal and spatial comparison insofar as the aggregate choice of party differs across these options. In most cases, though, the same presentation is used across countries. Instead of asking about an issue just by its name, voters are asked which party is best able to e.g. “lower the tax burden”, “fight crime”, or “protect the environment” (e.g. in Germany, Canada, and Denmark). In these instances, voters may be sent in a certain direction in terms of choosing a party. But since they are usually sent in the same direction across time and countries, this makes relative comparisons less of a concern and probably genuinely reflects how voters think about an issue and therefore also the preferred party – in many cases, the content reflects a widely shared goal.

Issue ownership stability and change: empirical evidence

An issue is unequivocally associated with a certain type of party if a systematic and consistent pattern in the preferred party on an issue emerges across time and space. This is tested in Figure 1, which reports the overall left-right endorsement across issues (the right-of-center party score subtracted from the left-of-center party score) for all countries in the entire period. The dots in Figure 1 display the intercept term from the univariate fixed effect regression for each issue with countries as panels (reported in Table A3 in the online appendix). The short horizontal lines

indicate its confidence interval. If the line is to the right (left) of and does not touch the vertical line, a right (left) party generally has the issue ownership.

[Figure 1]

The issue ownership estimates fall on a diagonal line. At both ends of the line, some issues are strongly affiliated with one type of party. Several issues are close to a score of 40, which means that one party is endorsed by maybe 70 percent and the other only by 30 percent. The advantage is in most parts considerable, and though the highest scores do not exceed 50, they typically mean that one party is endorsed by a majority of voters – even the party with the weakest score will get some endorsement, pushing the relative advantage score below 50. To the left of the vertical line, the environment, social security, health, families, and elderly care are firmly associated with left parties. To the right of the vertical line, law and order, asylum and immigration, the EU, tax, and the economy are solidly associated with right parties. This is much in agreement with previous findings, apart from the economy which is often found not to belong to any party. In the middle of the diagonal line, two issues do not escape the vertical line. The negative coefficients for education and unemployment indicate that left parties have issue ownership, but the intersection of the confidence intervals with the vertical line reveals that this is not systematic. The direction of issue ownership corresponds to previous studies that also attach these issues to left-of-center parties. These latter issue ownerships may be truly unsettled, but the finding may also be driven either by certain countries or by a certain period (cf. the discussion of data). The same could apply for the larger group of more settled issue ownerships. To find out, the analysis proceeds in two directions: cross-country variation in associations between parties and issues and cross-time variation.

Cross-country pattern

The cross-country pattern is displayed in Figures 2 and 3, where the former gives the overview, and the latter comes with more detail. The estimates in Figure 2 are calculated like those in Figure 1, except now based on observations after 2000 (reported in Table A4 in the online appendix). Hence, the black markers give the average issue ownership across the countries and the confidence intervals indicated by the horizontal lines indicate the variation in issue ownership across the countries. Estimates from Figure 1 on the entire dataset are included as grey markers to accentuate changes. Figure 3 provides with the many circles on the horizontal lines the average left-right issue ownership in the 2000s for each country across the issues (observations reported in Table A5 in the online appendix).

The comparison in Figure 2 reveals that the estimates for the issues at the ends of the diagonal line – the environment, social security, economy, tax, the EU, law/order and asylum/immigration – move even further away from the vertical line and the confidence intervals shortens in several instances. Narrowing the timeline to only the 2000s and concentrating on the cross-country variation suggests similar issue ownership across countries for this cluster of issues. This similarity is also evidence in Figure 3, where the country-estimates except for a very few exceptions fall consistently on the same side of the vertical zero-line.

In contrast, the estimates for the remaining group of issues at the middle of the diagonal line in Figure 2 moves closer to the vertical line, indicating less similar issue ownership across countries. This is certainly true for unemployment, elderly care, and education, but less so for health and families which keep clear water to the vertical line (for families at the 0.10 level of significance). Compared to previous findings, this less clear issue ownership to left-of-center parties on the three issues in the middle is surprising. Figure 3 also documents this less uniform pattern with country-estimates more spread out and on both sides of the vertical zero-line, especially for unemployment, elderly care, and education.

Over all, nine out of twelve issues display quite similar issue ownership across countries in the 2000s. Most notable among the three issues diverging from this pattern, the issue ownership of unemployment is highly unclear in the cross-country analysis.

[Figures 2 and 3]

Cross-time pattern

The cross-time pattern is visible in Figure 4, which draws the marginal plots for each issue of a fixed effect regression with countries as panels (reported in Table A6 in the online appendix). In the regression, the issue ownership is predicted by a simple linear count variable. If the count variable has a statistically significant effect on issue ownership, then issue ownership changes systematically over time across all countries. If a squared count variable indicated the best fit, this is reported. In Figure 4, the issue ownership is indicated on the x-axis, and the further the line is towards -100 (+100) on the left (right) of the figure, the more the issue is associated with a left-of-center (right-of-center) party.

[Figure 4]

Large parts of the pattern from the cross-country analysis can be reproduced in the cross-time display in Figure 4. The issue ownerships most discernable across countries are also the most discernable across time. As should be expected from previous examination of issue ownership patterns, the marginal effect line is persistently to the right of the vertical zero-line for law and order, asylum and immigration, and the EU. Similarly, the environment is persistently to the left of the zero-line. Neither line is completely vertical, so the issue ownerships do move over time in most instances. The issue ownerships of the environment, the EU, and asylum/immigration have moved further away from the vertical line and hence grown stronger. The issue ownership of law and order first weakened during the 1990s hitting a low around 2001, but then became more solid again in the 2000s. However, the key point is that each line stays on one side of the zero-line, indicating overall stability across time.

Education and especially health appeared in Figures 1 and 2 to be generally associated with the left parties across countries, and this also seems to be the case across time in Figure 3. Both margins plots stay to the left of the zero-line, but both also remain in the vicinity of this zero-line with confidence intervals in parts of the interval only barely escaping the zero-line. This applies especially to education and could explain why its confidence interval in Figure 1 crosses the zero-line. This pattern also applies to social security, though a stronger issue ownership was indicated in Figures 1 and 2. With a marginal effect line becoming less discernible from the zero-line, and a confidence interval enclosing the zero-line towards the end of the interval, the somewhat uncertain issue ownerships on social security and education appear to be a more recent phenomenon. Historically, it looks to be associated with the left. Hence, for this largest part of the issues, the issue ownership pattern corresponds to the results of previous studies.

Whereas tax and the economy were found to belong to right parties in the cross-country analysis, this is less clear across time. The tax issue is just to the right of the zero-line, and its confidence intervals do not escape it for the first part of the period, which indicates a rather unclear issue ownership across time. This is surprising given that existing work firmly associates the issue with right-of-center parties. Likewise, the economy moves from a rather clear right issue ownership to be almost a left issue ownership at the turn of the millennium and back again. Unlike the tax issue, the instability of the economy is expected from previous studies. In contrast to these issues, the issue ownership of unemployment, which looked ambiguous across countries in Figure 2, appears much clearer across time as should be expected based on previous studies. Early in the period it is more unclear, but then it moves firmly and persistently to the left.

The issue ownerships for elderly care and families become less clear across time compared to the overall view in Figure 1 where these issues were associated with left-of-center parties. Only for these two issues does the marginal effect line move straight from one side to the other of the zero-line. This indicates a change in issue ownership. Elderly care moves from a very

weak right issue ownership to a strong left issue ownership. The issue ownership of families moves opposite. As with the unclear cross-country pattern for these issues in Figure 2, we should be careful to conclude too much from this. It may reflect genuine changes, but it may also be an artifact of the low number of observations in the sample on these issues.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that issue ownership appears rather stable across time for a large majority of the twelve issues. The issues of law and order, asylum and immigration, the EU, and the environment are stable across countries and time. This also counts for health, education, unemployment, and social security, although these issues display some less solid issue ownership both across countries and across time. This pattern between issues and parties matches findings in previous work. The issue ownerships of elderly care and families appear rather unsettled across countries and across time. Tax and the economy were found to consistently belong to the right parties across countries in the 2000s, but a cross-time examination reveals less certainty. This matches results of prior studies for the economy, but not for the issues of tax, elderly care, and families.

Robustness

To test the robustness of these findings, each estimation reported in Figures 1, 2, and 4 has been replicated with one country excluded at a time (this jackknife analysis is reported in Tables A3, A4, and A6 in the online appendix). The replications show that the overall findings do not change in any important ways. That is, the timelines or the cross-country lines stay on the identified side of the vertical zero-line in most instances. In some cases, the significance level comes closer to 0.2 than 0.05, like unemployment across time and countries, the EU, social security, and education over time, as well as health in the general cross-time cross-country analysis. However, each estimate stays on the identified side of the vertical line, and the inevitable drop in observations in these cases with excluded countries therefore suggests that it

probably has to do with the weakened statistical power of the estimation more than a genuinely unclear issue ownership.^{xiii}

The issue ownership of education loses its statistical significance entirely in one instance in the cross-country analysis when Australia is excluded from the cross-country analysis. Similarly, the weak issue ownership of unemployment in the cross-country analysis is reflected in the robustness check, where elimination of countries sends the estimate in both a positive and a negative direction. Finally, the robustness check confirms the lack of clarity especially across countries on the issues of families and elderly care where estimates especially for elderly care switch from negative to positive. These are among the issues with the smallest number of countries for analysis, which may explain a large part of this lack of clarity across time and countries.

Summing up, the robustness check to a large degree reaffirms the information from the main analysis that a majority of issues displays clear issue ownership across countries and time, and a minority of issues, especially elderly care and families, appears to have unclear issue ownership.

Implications

Based on an unprecedented, comprehensive dataset from 136 national election studies collecting available information on issue ownerships for 12 issues across 17 countries over three decades, this study attempts to address a major unresolved aspect of issue ownership, namely its stability across time and similarity across countries. A previous lack of such evidence has caused an inconvenient confusion in the use of this central concept connecting voters and parties at the issue level: Issue ownership is applied as the “critical constant” in voting and party behavior, but research on issue ownership meanwhile centers on its instability. This ambiguity can be traced

back to the seminal work of Petrocik (1996), who introduced a short-term and a long-term version of issue ownership stressing both stability and change.

Judging from a large majority of the 12 issues in the analysis, issue ownership appears quite stable across time and quite similar across countries when comparing the links between issues and parties to the left and right of the political spectrum. It is fairly accurate to talk about an association between left parties and issues related to the welfare state such as health, education, social security, unemployment as well as the environment. Right parties are associated with issues related to national interests such as law and order, asylum and immigration, the EU, and to some extent also the size of the state, such as taxes. This pattern of issue-party connections matches previous findings. Whereas elderly care and families today appear to belong to the left across countries, and tax and the economy to the right, this residual group of issues appears to be unconnected to a particular party over time. Existing studies also report such instability over time on the economy, but not on the three other issues. The level of stability is probably lower at the level of individual parties, where issue ownership may be switching back and forth between a conservative and a liberal party or a socialist and a communist party, but the important point from this analysis is that issue ownership does not tend to cross-over from left to right potentially spurring a change of government.

The most important message of this study is that connections between parties and issues in the eyes of the voters are generally persistent despite changes in the political landscape where cleavages and alignments between parties and voters as a structure for political conflict are found to be eroding (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Green-Pedersen 2007). According to the analysis, a party's historical affiliation with an issue seems in the long run to make its issue association robust to short-term fluctuations in parties' performance on issues and the specific context. In this sense, the study takes a step towards clarifying the ambiguity from Petrocik's

conceptualization of issue ownership by highlighting long-term stability over short-term instability (1996, 826-8).

The implications for our conception of the relationship between parties and voters are important. This study indicates that issue ownership is a key source of information on how voters generally perceive parties – issue associations are an integral part of what parties are. Parties are not only ideological creatures defending a particular standpoint (Budge 1994), but also entities defined by the issues they are associated with (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Green-Pedersen 2007). Issue ownership is distinctive and can be used to mobilize voters. Hence, parties can take advantage of issue ownership in their competition for voters, but will also be constrained by issue ownership in the sense that strategies have to be put together around issue ownership.

The data in this paper not only allows a more accurate use of issue ownership to study party and voting behavior across countries and time, its general scope also opens up opportunities to advance insights on issue ownership. An important challenge is to gain a stronger account of the forces upholding the general pattern of issue ownership across time and across countries. One way forward is to comparatively investigate variation in stability underlying the general findings presented in this paper: Why is issue ownership of some issues easier to uphold? Why are some issue ownerships particularly similar across countries? Although research on issue ownership has been conducted for decades and has flourished recently, this paper shows that there is still a lot to be learned.

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Table 1. Overview of data on issue ownership across countries over time.

	Economy	Health	Education	Environ- ment	Law and Order	Unemploy- ment	Tax	Asylum/ immigration	Social security	Elderly care	Families	EU
Sweden	91-10 (6)	02-10 (3)	94-06 (4)	91-02 (4)	91-02 (4)	79-10 (8)	91-10 (6)	91-02 (4)	91-98 (3)	98-10 (4)	94-10 (5)	91-02 (4)
Denmark	90-11 (7)	98-11 (5)	01-11 (4)	94-11 (6)	94-11 (6)	90-11 (7)	94-07 (5)	98-11 (5)	90-11 (5)	98-11 (5)	98-07 (4)	94-11 (6)
UK	95-13 (13)	90-12 (12)	90-12 (12)	95-98 (3)	92-12 (11)	78-12 (15)	92-12 (11)	04-13 (5)			95-08 (7)	95-07 (7)
US	90-12 (10)	92-12 (4)	96-12 (4)	90-98 (5)	90-12 (6)	76-12 (7)	94-12 (3)	12 (1)	92-12 (5)			
Australia	93-13 (3)	90-13 (9)	90-13 (9)	90-13 (9)	93 (1)	90-10 (8)	90-13 (9)	96-13 (7)	93 (1)			
NZ	90-11 (6)	90-08 (5)	90-11 (6)	90-08 (3)	90-08 (6)	90-08 (3)	99-05 (2)	90-05 (4)				
Norway		01-05 (2)	01-09 (3)	01-09 (3)			01-09 (3)	01-09 (3)		01-09 (3)	01-09 (3)	01-05 (2)
France			02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)	02-07 (2)		
Italy	06-08 (2)	01-06 (2)	01-06 (2)		01-06 (2)	01-08 (3)	01-08 (3)	01-08 (3)				01 (1)
Germany	90-02 (3)	02 (1)		90 (1)	90-98 (2)	76-11 (16)	98-02 (2)	90-05 (3)	05 (1)			
Switzerland	11 (1)	03-11 (3)	07 (1)	03-11 (2)	03-11 (3)		11 (1)	03-11 (3)				03-11 (3)
Canada	08-11 (2)	04-08 (3)		04-08 (3)	04-08 (2)	04-08 (2)	04-06 (2)				04 (1)	
Belgium	09 (1)			09 (1)	09 (1)	09 (1)	09 (1)	09 (1)				
Finland		07 (1)		07 (1)		07-11 (2)			07-11 (2)	07 (1)		
Netherlands	06-10 (2)	06 (1)						06-10 (2)	06 (1)	06-10 (2)		
Austria	09 (1)					09 (1)		09 (1)				
Ireland	09 (1)	09 (1)			09 (1)							
TOTAL	90-13 (58)	90-13 (52)	90-13 (48)	90-13 (43)	90-12 (47)	76-12 (76)	90-13 (50)	90-13 (44)	90-12 (20)	98-11 (17)	94-10 (21)	91-11 (23)
Countries (#)												
Full model	14 (58)	14 (52)	10 (48)	13 (43)	13 (47)	13 (76)	13 (50)	14 (44)	8 (20)	6 (17)	5 (21)	6 (23)
Cross-country	14 (38)	14 (36)	10 (29)	10 (23)	11 (26)	13 (35)	13 (32)	14 (33)	6 (10)	6 (15)	5 (14)	6 (15)
Cross-Time	7 (48)	8 (44)	7 (42)	9 (37)	7 (38)	8 (67)	8 (42)	9 (37)	3 (13)	3 (12)	4 (19)	4 (20)

Note. Cell entries are the time interval in which data on issue ownership is available for the country on that issue. The brackets report a count of the time points for analysis.

Figure 1. Issue ownership (pct.) across countries and over time.

Note. Estimates are reported in Table A3 in the online appendix. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of observations included.

Figure 2. Issue ownership (pct.) across countries in the 2000s.

Note. Estimates are reported in Tables A3 and A4 in the online appendix. Estimates based on >2000 marked by black; estimates for entire period marked by grey. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of observations included.

Figure 1 is a dot plot showing the relative importance of 12 social issues for 15 European countries. The issues are listed on the y-axis: Asylum/immigration, Law and Order, EU, Tax, Economy, Education, Elderly care, Unemployment, Families, Health, Social security, and Environment. The countries are listed on the x-axis: UK, US, NZ, CH, DE, FR, IT, NL, DK, BE, GR, SE, AU, FI, NO, IE, CA. A vertical dashed line at 0 indicates the average importance. Countries are labeled with their two-letter codes near their respective dots.

Figure 4. Margins plot of issue ownership (pct.) across countries over time.

Note: Margins plots with 95 pct. confidence intervals are based on the estimates reported in Table A4 in the online appendix. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of observations included.

Online Appendix

Table A1 reports the questions from the national election studies used to compile the data on issue ownership. When the question asks about the [most important problem], this bracket refers back to a preceding question where the respondent is asked to name the most important problem. The [...] refers to the issue content of the question, which typically is a single noun like crime, health, or education. If a simple version of the issue content is not used, the alternative is mentioned in Table A2. If no year is recorded in Table A2, the text is used in every survey.

Table A1. Questions from the national election studies

Text	Country	Year
Which party will do a better job at ... or which party is best at ...	USA, UK, Switzerland, NZ, Finland, Belgium, Italy	
Which party would be best at ...	France	
Which party is best able at solving [...]	Denmark	
Which party is best at dealing with [most important problem]	Austria	
Which party is best able to solve [most important problem]	Ireland	
Which party is best able to solve [most important problem]	Netherlands	
Problem solving competence: Which party is best able at solving [...]	Germany	
Which party is closest to own view on [...]	Australia	
Is there, in your opinion, any party or parties with a good policy on [...]	Sweden	

Which party has the best policy, when it comes to [...]	Norway	
What is the best party dealing with [...] or best party dealing with [most important problem]	Canada	2011, 2008
What is the party closest on [most important problem]	Canada	1990, 1993, 1999, 2005
Which party could best solve that [most important problem]	Canada	2002

Table A2. The issue content of the question. Phrases deviating from the standard question

Text on unemployment	Country	Year
“Fighting unemployment”	Germany	1998
“Employment”	Sweden	
“Creating jobs”	Canada	
“Fighting unemployment”	Denmark	
Text on tax		
“Lower the tax burden”	Germany	1998
“Cutting taxes”	Canada	
“Ensure balance btw. tax burden and social security”	Denmark	2007
”Keep taxes from rising”	Denmark	2005
Text on crime		
“Fight crime”	Germany	1998
Text on asylum/immigration		
“Xenophobia”	Germany	2005
“Regulating the influx of immigration”	Germany	1998
“Ensure reasonable asylum and immigration policy”		
Text on education		
“Schools and education”	Sweden	
“Schools and education”	Norway	
“Ensure good teaching in primary school”	Denmark	
Text on EU		
“Norway’s relationship to the EU”	Norway	

“Take care of Denmark’s interests in the EU”	Denmark
Text on environment	
“Protecting the environment”	Canada
“Protect the environment”	Denmark
Text on health	
“Improving health care”	Canada
“Ensure proper health care”	Denmark
Text on social security	
“Improving social welfare programmes”	Canada
Text on elderly care	
“Ensure acceptable conditions for elderly people”	Danmark

Table A3a. Estimates of issue ownership across countries and the entire period.

Asylum/immigration				Law/order			EU			Tax		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Constant	30.65*** (3.19)	35.97*** (2.69)	38.65*** (2.92)	27.17*** (3.03)	29.23*** (2.72)	36.91*** (3.70)	21.86*** (3.93)	24.71*** (3.58)	28.37*** (3.48)	11.69*** (2.93)	13.92*** (2.87)	14.80*** (4.02)
Observations	39	47	42	50	56	36	16	28	24	57	59	39
Country excluded	UK		Denmark	Denmark		UK	UK		Sweden	Canada		UK

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. Observations are country-years.

Table A3b. Estimates of issue ownership across countries and the entire period.

Economy				Education			Elderly care			Unemployment		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Constant	10.52*** (3.12)	12.61*** (2.82)	17.15*** (3.34)	-7.83*** (2.85)	-11.13*** (2.73)	-13.64*** (3.84)	4.39 (4.55)	-6.42 (4.45)	-9.46* (4.59)	-3.98 ^a (3.29)	-8.49*** (2.59)	-15.28*** (2.89)
Observations	56	63	45	53	57	35	12	17	16	72	102	74
Country excluded	Denmark		UK	US		UK	Denmark		Finland	UK		Germany

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. ^a p is 0.24. Observations are country-years.

Table A3c. Estimates of issue ownership across countries and the entire period.

Families				Health			Social security			Environment		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Constant	-2.00 (5.86)	-8.98* (5.14)	-13.39** (4.74)	-9.76*** (3.18)	-14.83*** (2.54)	-17.49*** (2.65)	-24.25*** (4.17)	-27.59*** (3.80)	-32.50*** (2.39)	-37.75*** (2.52)	-40.87*** (2.20)	-45.19*** (2.18)
Observations	21	25	13	40	63	60	18	20	15	37	43	34
Country excluded	Denmark		UK	UK		Canada	France		US	Denmark		UK

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. Observations are country-years.

Table A4a. Estimates of issue ownership across countries in the 2000s.

Asylum/immigration			Law/order			EU			Tax			
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Constant	36.67*** (3.51)	42.27*** (2.77)	42.29*** (2.81)	34.84*** (3.56)	37.54*** (3.36)	46.10*** (4.97)	21.75*** (2.21)	27.42*** (3.98)	31.45*** (4.10)	19.42*** (3.32)	22.65*** (3.22)	24.64*** (3.45)
Observations	28	36	35	28	30	20	11	17	16	34	36	33
Country excluded	UK		Belgium	France		UK	UK		Sweden	Canada		Sweden

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. Observations are country-years.

Table A4b. Estimates of issue ownership across countries in the 2000s.

Economy				Education			Elderly care			Unemployment		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Constant	15.16*** (4.32)	16.91*** (3.92)	22.54*** (4.92)	-1.45 (3.48)	-5.23* (3.07)	-8.79** (4.06)	-9.10* (4.71)	-5.67 (4.55)	3.02 (3.88)	-9.16** (3.67)	0.50 (3.15)	7.40* (3.58)
Observations	36	40	28	29	34	23	14	15	11	35	45	35
Country excluded	Denmark		UK	Australia		UK	Finland		Finland	Germany		UK

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. Observations are country-years.

Table A4c. Estimates of issue ownership across countries in the 2000s.

	Families			Health			Social security			Environment		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Constant	-9.49 (5.61)	0.44 (5.19)	9.78 (5.96)	-10.48*** (2.86)	-7.00** (2.67)	-5.40* (2.76)	-22.59*** (3.80)	-29.60*** (3.01)	-34.47*** (3.50)	-41.60*** (2.87)	-44.73*** (2.85)	-51.09*** (2.98)
Observations	10	16	13	39	42	39	8	10	8	21	23	18
Country excluded	UK		Denmark	Canada		NZ	France		Finland	France		Australia

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. Observations are country-years.

Table A5. Average issue ownership in the 2000s across countries and issues.

	Environ- ment	Social security	Health	Families	Unemploy- ment	Elderly care	Education	Economy	Tax	EU	Law and Order	Asylum/ immigration
Sweden	-70.6		-17.9	23.7	-9.1	-6.2	-12.1	-0.4	0.8	-37.1	38.1	11.4
Norway	-19.6		-0.1	-6.6	-2.5		2.4		23.8	25.8		27.1
Denmark	-56.6	-28.0	-13.1	-8.9	-40.0	-9.6	-29.6	32.6	23.1	31.2	51.5	14.9
Finland	-5.7	-10.1	32.6			16.9	42.3					
Belgium	-100.0					-58.8		60.3	71.0		62.9	41.8
Netherlands		-64.8	-40.4				-2.6	35.9				41.5
France	-77.7	-57.6		13.9		-28.7	12.5		22.5		75.3	82.3
Italy			1.1	-5.7		17.2		33.7	16.4	13.8	15.3	28.5
Germany		-1.4	2.6			34.3		35.9	36.0			62.6
Austria						-2.3		27.4				57.4
Switzerland	-79.1		-14.9	47.5				41.2	29.9	28.7	46.2	52.7
UK			-9.6	2.2	17.0	-23.6		3.8	18.4	37.8	20.4	61.9
Ireland			73.1					81.0			78.8	
US		-10.2	-40.6	-65.0		-34.0		-21.1	-7.4		-36.0	34.3
Canada	-26.0		38.3		59.9	59.0		65.9	77.5		72.8	
Australia	-21.8		-17.7	-27.2		2.4		23.6	11.9			25.7
NZ	-66.7		-27.7	-19.0		-43.9		5.6	50.5		35.7	58.3

Note. Cell entries are the average left-right issue ownership estimates in the 2000s for each country on each issue.

Table A6a. Estimates of issue ownership across countries over time.

Asylum/immigration				Law/order			EU			Tax		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Year	0.34 (0.73)	0.45 (0.64)	0.03 (0.63)	-3.59** (1.60)	-4.47*** (1.58)	-3.34 (2.27)	1.36 (0.83)	0.45 (0.91)	-0.85 (0.97)	1.15* (0.60)	0.71 ^b (0.49)	0.37 (0.44)
Year ²				0.16** (0.07)	0.20*** (0.07)	0.12 (0.10)						
Constant	21.32** (9.49)	26.72*** (8.93)	32.89*** (9.08)	37.24*** (7.68)	40.36*** (7.46)	45.98*** (10.45)	13.95 ^a (10.04)	20.45* (10.14)	30.96** (11.31)	-4.90 (7.62)	1.51 (6.24)	5.93 (5.64)
Observations	32	40	37	41	47	27	21	25	13	42	51	46
Country excluded	UK		Germany	NZ		UK	Sweden		UK	Australia		Denmark

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. Observations are country-years. ^a p is 0.18. ^b p is 0.15.

Table A6b. Estimates of issue ownership across countries over time.

	Economy			Education			Elderly care			Unemployment		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Year	-3.97** (1.72)	-5.31*** (1.59)	-6.18*** (1.69)	-0.62 (0.66)	0.26 (0.45)	0.40 (0.45)	-0.43 (7.58)	-3.34 (4.61)	-9.30* (3.62)	-1.47 (1.58)	-3.42*** (1.11)	-3.68*** (1.17)
Year ²	0.19** (0.07)	0.25*** (0.07)	0.28*** (0.07)				-0.12 (0.56)	0.08 (0.35)	0.49 (0.28)	0.05 ^b (0.04)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)
Constant	17.48* (8.78)	22.74*** (8.13)	25.78*** (8.76)	-10.62 ^a (8.77)	-16.33*** (5.80)	-18.16*** (5.67)	-9.06 (21.54)	2.38 (12.54)	30.01* (9.62)	-3.62 (12.89)	10.86 (8.87)	16.25* (9.41)
Observations	47	53	50	30	52	48	8	12	7	64	94	86
Country excluded	Canada		Germany	UK		Denmark	Sweden		Denmark	UK		Sweden

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. ^a p is 0.24. ^b p is 0.18. Observations are country-years.

Table A6c. Estimates of issue ownership across countries over time.

	Families			Health			Social security			Environment		
	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max	Min	Full model	Max
Year	-0.66 (1.14)	2.66** (1.11)	4.28*** (1.35)	-0.99* (0.58)	0.42 (0.44)	0.43 (0.45)	-0.14 (1.43)	0.37 (0.78)	0.73 (0.49)	-0.44 (0.53)	-0.26 (0.45)	-0.24 (0.46)
Year ²												
Constant	-13.59 ^a (11.50)	-33.13*** (10.03)	-46.86*** (11.98)	-1.69 (8.11)	-23.36*** (5.91)	-26.63*** (5.98)	-20.10 ^b (12.95)	-28.84*** (8.58)	-39.99*** (5.34)	-27.50*** (5.63)	-33.66*** (5.00)	-38.24*** (5.22)
Observations	12	24	19	32	55	52	8	13	8	31	37	34
Country excluded	UK		Sweden	UK		Canada	Denmark		US	Denmark		UK

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Fixed effects regression with country-panels. Jackknife analysis with countries excluded one by one. The estimations with the weakest and strongest coefficient are reported alongside the full model for each issue. ^a p is 0.27. ^b p is 0.18. Observations are country-years.

Figure A1. Average issue ownership scores in the 2000s for each party across countries and issues.

Figure A1 (continued). Average issue ownership scores in the 2000s for each party across countries and issues.

Note: Green party (black square); Communist or socialist party (black diamond); Social democratic parties (black circle); Liberal parties (hollow circle); Christian Democratic parties (hollow triangle); Conservative parties (hollow diamond); agrarian party (grey circle); extreme right or regional party (hollow square). On the vertical axis, the abbreviations refer to the countries in the analysis.

ⁱ To avoid influential observations, the part of a time series that extends back in time for only one country or a few has been eliminated.

ⁱⁱ Since time series data on the UK is not available from the British Election Study, data that in content is equivalent to that provided by National Election Studies have been collected from Ipsos Mori.

ⁱⁱⁱ The issue ownership of the EU is more unclear though since the rivals tend to be the mainstream parties on both sides of the center against parties at each end of the political spectrum (Taggart 1998).

^{iv} A weakness of this measure is that the right-of-center parties together may have issue ownership, but the Social Democrats may have the clearly largest issue ownership score. However, as reported in Figure A1 in the appendix, such situation very rarely occurs.

^v Figure A1 in the appendix reports the information on issue ownership scores for each party in each country that is used to calculate the overall left-right issue ownership across countries.

^{vi} In Denmark, voters are asked to choose the left or the right bloc. With multiple parties in parliament, the Danish measurement deviates from the typical measurement at the party-level. Since party competition in Denmark centers around the two main parties of the left and the right, the Social Democrats and the Liberals (at least from the mid-90s), these parties were used to CMP-code the issue ownership question in Denmark.

^{vii} The Liberal Democrats in Britain before the 2010-coalition should probably be classified as a centrist if not a left-of-center more than a right-of-center party. However, this does not affect the results since issue ownership in Britain for this analysis is only measured for Labour and Conservatives.

^{viii} Christian democratic parties are coded as part of the right-of-center parties, which are not expected to have issue ownership of welfare issues (as discussed above). However, in countries historically dominated by a Christian democratic party such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria, welfare issues connected to the family may belong to this party (Kersbergen 1995). Since data is not available for these countries on these issues (see Table 1), this cannot be further investigated in the analysis, and it cannot cause cross-country divergences on these issues in the analysis.

^{ix} This is a standard classification in research on parties and voters (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). In the CMP codebook, the US Democrats and the British Labour party are coded as belonging to the social democratic party family. More centrist parties such as the Liberal Democrats in the UK or the Social Liberals in Denmark are also coded according to the CMP codebook and therefore as part of the right parties. Ideally, each of these centrist parties were coded in detail over time according to which government, they would join or support. However, with the number of elections to cover, this would be an overwhelming task, and it would probably not change the results substantively based on the current analysis where the large number of elections in multiple countries helps such measurement error to cancel out.

^x I used the issue content codebook from the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner, Jones, and Wilkerson 2011).

^{xi} To reflect the perception of welfare in the US, this was coded as social security.

^{xii} See Tables A1 and A2 in the online appendix for a list of questions.

^{xiii} In the cross-time analysis, the intercept for tax and the coefficient for the time-effect for health change sign. However, this does not change the overall conclusions with an issue

ownership of tax generally to the right and an issue ownership of health generally to the left. It only suggests more movement over time when specific countries are left out of the estimation.