

Negative Issue Ownership

MARKUS WAGNER

THOMAS M. MEYER

Abstract

Existing research considers issue ownership to be a positive attribute of political parties, which are seen as ‘owning’ those policy areas where they are particularly competent and engaged. However, for some citizens a party may also be a negative issue owner if it has a particular bad reputation at handling the issue. The article describes and explains aggregate and individual-level patterns of negative issue ownership using a survey-based measure of handling perceptions from the 2013 Austrian National Election Study (n=3,266). Naming a particular party as a negative issue owner is affected by partisanship, but also policy preferences and government performance evaluations. The effects of issue importance vary across issues. These findings lay the groundwork for more research on negative attributions of issue ownership and its empirical consequences on vote choice.

Key words: negative issue ownership, party reputation, issue handling, individual-level perceptions, aggregate-level patterns

Accepted for publication in *West European Politics*

Introduction

Issue ownership has become an established concept in the literature on party competition and voting behaviour. Building on the issue salience approach of Budge and Farlie (1983), Petrocik (1996) introduced the idea that parties have long-standing reputations for competence and handling ability on certain issues. A party ‘owns’ an issue when voters perceive that party as being the most competent on that topic and most able to handle it well (Stubager and Slothuus 2013). The issue ownership concept has become widely used in the literature on both party competition (e.g. Green-Pedersen 2007, Walgrave and de Swert 2007) and electoral behaviour (e.g. Bélanger and Meguid 2008, Green and Hobolt 2008, Meyer and Müller 2013, Stubager and Slothuus 2013). Recently, our understanding of issue ownership has improved significantly, with research showing that issue ownership has an associative and a competence component (Walgrave *et al.* 2012) and that perceptions of ownership can be acquired and changed (e.g. Bélanger 2003, De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Tresch *et al.* 2013; Walgrave and de Swert 2007; Walgrave *et al.* 2009; but see Walgrave *et al.* 2014a). What all these approaches have in common is that they see issue ownership as a positive attribute: parties own issues on which they have a good reputation, and they will benefit if elections focus on these issues because voters decide in part based on their ownership perceptions.

In this paper, we establish that a party can also have *negative* issue ownership. In this case, its strong reputation on an issue is not for being good at tackling it and for proposing the right solutions; instead, it is for being unable and ill-suited to resolve the problem and for suggesting wrong-headed policies. In sum, some parties may be seen as having a handling *inability*. For example, while for some voters in Europe radical-right parties are positive issue owners on issues relating to integration and immigration, for many other voters they are negative issue owners as they are seen as the least able and least well-suited to resolve these problems.

In adding a negative component to issue ownership, we follow an approach used for most attitudes and opinions, which tend to capture both positive and negative aspects: party sympathy, perceptions of party leaders and placements on policy scales all relate to voters’ positive *and* negative evaluations of parties. Even partisanship is sometimes seen as having a negative incarnation (Rose and Mishler 1998, Medeiros and Noël 2014).

There are two reasons why adding a negative version of issue ownership is important. First, understanding negative issue ownership can provide us with better descriptions and predictions of election campaigns and party strategies. If voters perceive a party as being

particularly bad at dealing with certain problems and as suggesting particularly bad solutions, that party will try to make sure that the election does not revolve around these topics. In contrast, other parties may want the campaign to focus on precisely those issues in order to, for example, convince undecided voters or to mobilise supporters by strengthening their dislike of key adversaries (for a related argument, see Vavreck 2009).

Second, perceptions of negative issue ownership could provide an additional explanation for voting behaviour. While we do not consider voting decisions in this paper, negative considerations might be particularly important in decision-making processes. Research in psychology shows that both positive and negative evaluations are relevant in decision-making processes, though their influence is not identical (Cacioppo *et al.* 1997; Holbrook *et al.* 2001). Individuals tend to think more about, put more emphasis on, and place greater credibility on negative assessments than on positive ones (see Lau 1982; Soroka 2014). Similarly, there is evidence from performance assessments in other fields that negative behaviour has more influence on overall evaluations than positive behaviour (DeNisi *et al.* 1984; Soroka 2014; Ybarra and Stephan 1996,).

We present evidence on the prevalence and characteristics of negative issue ownership from the 2013 Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES; Kritzinger *et al.* 2013, 2014). In a face-to-face survey with 3,266 respondents, we asked, for five different policy areas, which party had made the worst suggestions on how to handle the issue. We use this information to provide aggregate-level information on negative issue ownership and to consider individual-level predictors of these perceptions.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss in detail the concept of negative issue ownership and how the phenomenon differs from related concepts. Then, we use the 2013 Austrian results to present an aggregate-level analysis of negative issue ownership. Finally, we construct an individual-level model predicting perceptions of negative issue ownership. We conclude by considering how the concept of negative issue ownership could be used in future studies of electoral behaviour and party competition.

Negative issue ownership

A party is a negative issue owner if it is seen as the least able and least well-suited to resolve a problem and bring about positive outcomes in that issue area. Note that this definition is based on the competence rather the associative aspects of issue ownership (Walgrave *et al.* 2012, 2014); both aspects are present in Petrocik's (1996) original definition of (positive) issue ownership. Other work sees ownership perceptions as based on the extent to which

voters trust and have confidence in parties' ability and willingness to do a good job (e.g. Holian 2004). Seen from this perspective, negative issue ownership exists when a voter has clear mistrust and a lack of confidence in a party's ability to do a good job on an issue area.

To illustrate this concept, it is worth providing some examples of issues where voters perceived a party as having negative issue ownership. For instance, the Democrats may have been negative issue owner on law and order, at least until Clinton 'stole' the issue (Holian 2004). Historically, Britain's Conservative party may also have been the negative owner of health care. However, perceptions of issue ownership may also be mixed, especially in multi-party systems: some voters may perceive a party as particularly competent on an issue, while others will think that the same party is particularly unable to handle that issue well. For example, some voters will see a radical-right, nationalist party as particularly competent on immigration, while many others will exhibit intense mistrust towards that party on the issue. Parties may also be able to acquire negative issue ownership: in the UK, the Conservatives may have taken such a role on the economy after Britain's withdrawal from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), while the Liberal Democrats may have become negative owners of the issue of tuition fees after their broken pledge on this topic.

As with its positive variant, negative issue ownership is both an aggregate- and individual-level phenomenon. At the individual level, voters will have perceptions about parties' competence and handling abilities. Averaging these perceptions across voters provides us with an overall picture of how a party is perceived. This general picture is the aggregate-level version of negative issue ownership. To illustrate this, Figure 1 shows four hypothetical distributions of voters' average competence and handling ability perceptions, where high values indicate a (net) positive perception (i.e. many voters perceive a party as particularly competent, few as particularly incompetent at handling an issue), and negative values indicate a (net) negative perception (i.e. many voters perceive a party as particularly incompetent, few as particularly competent at handling an issue). The two rows respectively show situations where party D is (Scenarios 1 and 2) and is not (Scenarios 3 and 4) a negative issue owner, i.e. whether it clearly has the most negative average competence perceptions. The two columns respectively show situations where party A is and is not a positive issue owner.

Figure 1 about here

To be a meaningful concept, negative issue ownership needs to be more than the mirror image of its positive variant, and this Figure illustrates why this holds true in theoretical terms. Negative issue ownership is not merely the absence of positive issue

ownership: there may be a positive but no negative issue owner (Scenario 3) or vice versa (Scenario 2). Some issues may have no owner whatsoever, be it positive or negative (Scenario 4). The complexity of possible ownership patterns obviously increases as the number of parties increases, and the United States' two-party system may obscure how varied these patterns can be (Aalberg and Jensen 2007: 119).

As noted, issue ownership as an aggregate-level phenomenon results from perceptions of individual voters. Just as in Figure 1 for the system as a whole, each individual may or may not see a party as a negative or positive issue owner. Whether a voter thinks there is a positive or a negative issue owner again depends on his or her individual pattern of competence perceptions: so, a citizen may or may not identify a party that stands out as particularly competent (a positive issue owner) and/or a party that is particularly unable to deal with an issue (a negative issue owner).

Thinking of ownership as an individual-level perception also raises the question of what determines these perceptions. This is important because, to be useful, negative issue ownership also needs to be more than the expression of negative affect towards parties or indeed of negative partisanship (Medeiros and Noël 2014; Rose and Mishler 1998; see also Stubager and Slothuus 2013). This means that perceptions of negative issue ownership should not just reflect general attitudes towards that party. To study this question, we need to consider individual-level sources of negative issue ownership perceptions.

Explaining negative issue ownership perceptions

Where do negative issue ownership perceptions come from, so what determines these views at the individual level? Based on Stubager and Slothuus (2013), we highlight four key factors: partisanship, issue importance, policy preferences, and government performance evaluations.

An important and potentially problematic possibility is that the tendency to identify a party as a (positive or negative) issue owner may depend largely on *partisanship*. As noted by Stubager and Slothuus (2013), partisanship affects how individuals evaluate parties and thus acts as a 'perceptual screen' in how they react to new information and form opinions (Campbell et al. 1960; Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller 1992,). Partisanship may thus lead voters to have a polarised perception of party competition where 'their' party competes against one or more 'enemy' parties. Thus, respondents are likely to identify issue owners based on their own positive and negative partisan leanings. Individuals with strong negative affect towards a political party, which some have called negative partisanship (Medeiros and

Noël 2014; Rose and Mishler 1998), may name a party as a negative issue owner because it is their main antagonist. Conversely, positive partisanship should make it less likely that the party is identified as a negative issue owner.

It is also possible that ownership perceptions drive partisan identification. This possibility is strongly argued by Fiorina (1981), who sees partisanship as a ‘running tally’ of continuous evaluations. More recently, Green and Jennings (2012a) have shown that party support in the UK responds to competence perceptions. Hence, strong correlations between partisanship and ownership perceptions may also reflect the influence of ownership perceptions on partisanship rather than just vice versa. In any case, if partisanship is very strongly associated with perceptions of issue ownership, then this could indicate that the concept has little added value. However, Stubager and Slothuus (2013) also point to other possible drivers of ownership perceptions.

Issue ownership may also hinge on *voter perceptions of party issue emphasis*. We argue that voters are most likely to identify a party as issue owner if they perceive the party as being strongly affected by the issue. Regarding positive issue ownership, the more parties talk about an issue and show their commitment to solving the problem, the more likely they are to be seen as positive issue owners (Walgrave *et al.* 2009, 2014b). Yet, voter perceptions of party issue emphasis may also increase the likelihood of negative issue ownership: if the approach and positions highlighted by the party are *unpopular* with voters, this association may in fact lead them to see the party as a negative issue owner. For example, a supporter of immigration restrictions may see a Green party as a negative issue owner due to its focus on migration issues and its liberal stance on the issue. Hence, the effect of issue emphasis depends on the popularity of the party’s position. So, how voters perceive party issue salience should in some cases be linked to negative issue ownership perceptions. Note that this implies that associative issue ownership may be correlated with both positive *and* negative issue ownership.

Moreover, an individual should be more likely to name a negative issue owner the more *ideologically distant* they are from that party (Stubager and Slothuus 2013). Ideological distance and perceptions of competence are often related in voters’ minds (Wagner and Zeglovits 2014) voters who do not agree with the direction in which a party wants to move policy also tend to perceive this party as less competent. In other words, voters are likely to think that a party is not proposing good solutions if the content of those solutions does not match their own preferences. Moreover, policy proximity can act as a heuristic in assessing issue ownership (Stubager and Slothuus 2013; Wagner and Zeglovits 2014). If voters have

little information about parties' suggestions, they may be likely to use positional distance as an alternative source of judgements.

Finally, perceptions of issue ownership should be related to *performance assessments* (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Petrocik 1996; Stubager and Slothuus 2013). As Stubager and Slothuus (2013: 570) note, 'a party's perceived competence in handling specific problems will be sensitive to actual developments in the economy, national security and other issues. Consequently, voters' perceptions of such developments should have an important influence on their issue ownership perceptions.' This idea is akin to accountability via economic voting and performance voting (e.g. Ashworth 2012; Healy and Malhotra 2013; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007), whereby parties are rewarded for beneficial and punished for unsatisfactory performance. Obviously, performance evaluations should have different effects for government parties and those in opposition. Positive evaluations should decrease the probability that a government party has negative issue ownership, while the probability should increase for opposition parties.

In sum, there are four possible factors determining individual-level negative issue ownership perceptions: partisanship, voters' perception of party issue importance, policy preferences, and government performance evaluations. If negative ownership perceptions are related to voters' perception of party issue importance, policy proximity and performance assessments, then this concept is more than a reflection of partisanship and thus adds something to our understanding of how voters see politics and parties. Thinking of ownership as an individual-level perception also points to the possibility that the sources of these perceptions may differ between positive and negative ownership. For comparison, we thus also report the results for perceptions of positive issue ownership below.

Measuring negative issue ownership

There is no agreed-upon method of measuring issue ownership in voter surveys (Walgrave *et al.* 2014b), and thus there would of course be many different ways of measuring negative issue ownership as well. However, most approaches to measuring positive ownership ask respondents to assess which party would be best able to handle or solve a specific issue or problem (e.g. Petrocik 1996; Stubager and Slothuus 2013). Another frequent question wording asks survey participants to state who they trust more to do a good job on a given issue (e.g. Egan 2013: 49-51; see also Holian 2004). Thus, these studies ask which one party

has competence issue ownership on a political issue. This is the approach we follow in our study, albeit also asking about the least competent party.¹

We measure positive and negative issue ownership towards the start of the survey. The question we asked was: ‘Five parties are currently represented in the Austrian National Council: SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, BZÖ and the Greens. Which of these five parties has made the best suggestions on [ISSUE] since the last national elections? And which of these five parties has made the worst suggestions in the domain of [ISSUE] since the last national elections?’ In addition to naming one of the five parties, we recorded four further unprompted responses: another party, no party, don’t know and no answer.

This question wording differs from that used in previous research as we ask about the quality of recent ‘proposals’ rather than about handling abilities, competence or trust (though see Aalberg and Jenssen 2007, Green and Hobolt 2008 and Lachat 2014 for studies that also refer to best solutions or policies; see also Walgrave et al. 2014b). We decided on this question wording based on cognitive pre-testing (Wagner and Zeglovits 2014). Respondents struggled less when asked about ‘proposals’ than when asked about the party ‘best/worst at dealing with issue X’, perhaps because thinking about past actions is more concrete than considering hypothetical handling abilities. Our question may bring to mind various past events such as political blunders or unpopular policy suggestions. One concern is of course that referring to proposals means that we are partly capturing positional as well as competence assessments. However, the cognitive interviews also indicate that *all* questions that measure issue competence, irrespective of question wording, contain significant reasoning in terms of policy preferences (Wagner and Zeglovits 2014). This suggests that perceptions of competence and positions are related in the voters’ mind and separating the ‘pure’ effects of these different concepts is a task for researchers rather than for respondents.²

1 Instead of asking for the single best and worst party, another approach, used by Walgrave et al. (2012: 774), is to ask respondents to assess the handling abilities of all parties on a scale from 0 to 10.

2 To test whether we are indeed measuring the same thing using our new question wording, we carried out a comparison with an established question format. Respondents were also asked to identify the party ‘best able to handle’ the issue that they perceive to be ‘most important to [them] personally in the upcoming national parliamentary election’. We matched responses to this question to our five issues and compared the responses. Depending on the issue, between 74 and 84 per cent of respondents name identical parties in both questions, suggesting that they do measure the same concept.

The five parties mentioned in the question are those represented in parliament since the last general election.³ The Social Democratic SPÖ and the Christian Democratic ÖVP were in government, while the Greens and the populist radical-right FPÖ and BZÖ were in opposition. In terms of party size, the SPÖ, the ÖVP and the FPÖ all tend to receive between 20 and 30 per cent of the vote, while the Greens generally obtain about 10 per cent. The BZÖ was founded by Jörg Haider in 2005 as a splinter party from the FPÖ, but had faded into relative insignificance after Haider's passing in 2008. Overall, a noteworthy feature of Austrian politics is that the two largest parties have often formed 'grand coalitions', while smaller parties on the left (Greens) and right (FPÖ and BZÖ) generally remain in opposition. So, the government-opposition divide coincides in part with party size and focus on materialist versus post-materialist values.

In this paper, we discuss responses on five topics: tackling the financial and Euro crisis, schools, tackling unemployment, immigration and tackling corruption. These five topics cover a wide range of policy areas, and all were important and the focus of media reporting at the time of the survey. It is therefore reasonable to expect voters to have opinions about parties' actions on each issue. The issues also cover some perennial topics of debate (immigration, schools) as well as newer topics (corruption, the financial crisis). Some issues are discussed more in valence terms (unemployment, corruption) while party policy positions are highly polarised on others (immigration). In sum, the five topics reflect a wide range and types of issues. The order of the five issues was randomised. We first asked which party made the best suggestions for all five topics and then about the party that made the worst suggestions.

The questions were asked as part of the 2013 Austrian National Election Study (Kritzinger *et al.* 2013, 2014), which conducted a 45-minute face-to-face survey using CAPI in the period of November-December 2012 and April-June 2013, so several months before the election on 29 September 2013. The total number of interviews was 3,266, with an AAPOR response rate of 61.2 per cent. The sample was drawn based on regional stratification and the random selection of geographical clusters, within which buildings and households were then also randomly selected (for more details, see Kritzinger *et al.* 2014: 11f.).

³ Another party, *Team Stronach*, gained the status of a parliamentary party group in November 2012. Because the question asks about the party's record since the last national election, *Team Stronach* was not listed in the question.

Aggregate Patterns of Negative Issue Ownership

We begin our analysis of survey responses by discussing issue ownership as an aggregate phenomenon. Figure 2 shows that a similar share of respondents identifies specific parties as negative and positive issue owners.⁴ For example, 60 per cent of respondents identify a positive issue owner on the financial crisis and 57 per cent a negative owner. The biggest difference is on schools, where 68 per cent identify a positive issue owner, but only 53 per cent a negative one. Overall, while between 60 and 74 per cent of respondents can name a positive issue owner, almost as many (between 53 and 73 per cent) can name a negative issue owner.⁵ Overall, voters do not seem to have difficulties in naming a negative issue owner. Perceptions of negative issue ownership are therefore as common as perceptions of parties that are able to handle an issue particularly well.

Figure 2 about here

The distribution of parties identified as negative issue owners on the five issues is shown in Figure 3 (black bars). Following Walgrave and De Swert (2007: 44), we can identify issues with and without issue ownership based on the extent to which a single party is chosen by respondents as the party making the worst suggestions. However, we can see that there are no clear monopolies on negative issue ownership: there is no case where an absolute majority of respondents agrees on which party is typically worst. On two issues, parties have substantial negative leads over competitors. On the financial crisis, the FPÖ is chosen 10 per cent more often than the next party, the Greens. On immigration, there is arguably shared negative issue ownership, as both the FPÖ (39 per cent) and the Greens (34 per cent) are chosen far more often than their competitors. What is noticeable is that the FPÖ also tends to do badly across the board. The party is more often negatively perceived than all other parties, and its score never falls below 20 percent. The two governing parties

4 Respondents who do not identify a specific party as (positive or negative) issue owner are those who reply ‘no party’, ‘don’t know’ or who refuse to answer. See also Tables A.2 and A.3 in the Appendix.

5 Explaining why voters identify *any* party as a positive or negative issue owner while others choose not to do so is beyond the scope of this paper. Additional analyses suggest that the effects do partly differ for negative and positive issue owners. For example, voters with more extreme policy preferences are more likely to identify a negative issue owner, but the effect of voter extremism on identifying a positive issue owner is weaker and differs across issues. Similarly, satisfaction with democracy increases the probability of identifying a positive issue owner, but dissatisfaction does not necessarily increase the probability of identifying a negative issue owners.

(SPÖ/ÖVP) tend to escape voter opprobrium, though the ÖVP is somewhat negatively associated with corruption.

Figure 3 about here

The responses on negative issue ownership can be compared with those for positive issue ownership (also shown in Figure 3; grey bars). It is noticeable that there are more clear positive than negative issue owners. Thus, there is strong positive issue ownership ('monopolistic issue ownership') on four issues: the financial crisis (ÖVP), schools (SPÖ), unemployment (SPÖ) and corruption (Greens). On other issues, it is harder to identify clear owners. The two governing parties have similar scores for dealing with the financial crisis, and the responses on immigration are even more varied, though the FPÖ has a small lead here.

A particular interesting issue is immigration. Here, the FPÖ is both a strong negative (39 per cent) and positive (34 per cent) issue owner, and thus appears to be very polarising on this topic. This is another indication that negative and positive issue ownership are not mirror images of each other: instead, parties can be both positive *and* negative issue owners, depending on which subgroup of voters we consult. Part of the reason here may lie in the party's extreme, polarising and highly salient stance. We will consider the role of party positioning in determining individual-level perceptions in greater detail below.

The broad distribution of responses for negative issue ownership and the consistently negative scores for the FPÖ might be taken to indicate that respondents are guessing or giving answers based on their (positive or negative) partisanship. However, there is evidence disconfirming this hypothesis. For one, the percentages for each party vary across issues. For example, the two government parties are more often seen as negative issue owners for school and corruption (jointly about 50 per cent of the respondents) than for the financial crisis and unemployment (about 30 per cent) or even immigration (less than 20 per cent). The scores for the FPÖ also range from 20 per cent (schools) to 39 per cent (immigration). Perceptions of negative issue owners are at least somewhat issue-specific and thus cannot be fully explained by partisanship. Moreover, for some issues the rather broad spread of responses seems reasonable: concerning corruption, we note that accusations and trials for bribe-taking are underway against several parties, so respondents may respond to this by naming many different parties.

Overall, this aggregate analysis leads to two conclusions. First, we have evidence that positive and negative issue ownership are not mirror images of each other, but that the patterns are complex and issue-specific. Second, what is clear from the differences *between*

issues is that perceptions of issue ownership, both positive and negative, must be determined by more than just voter partisanship and parties' overall reputations. To understand better why positive and negative perceptions vary and why differences between issues exist, we need to know more about the individual-level determinants of perceptions of negative issue ownership. For this, we now turn to a series of regression analyses.

Individual-level perceptions of negative issue ownership

For each policy issue, we estimate a conditional logit regression model where the dependent variable is the party that is perceived as negative issue owner. Thus, the dependent variable indicates whether a respondent has identified a party as having made the worst suggestions on a particular issue (1=yes, 0=no). For comparison, we estimate the same regression models for perceptions of positive issue ownership.

All regression models contain the same set of alternative-specific and case-specific predictor variables to compare factors associated with negative and positive issue ownership. *Positive partisanship* indicates whether the respective party is the party a respondent 'feels closest to' (1=yes; 0=no). We identify those alternatives where respondents indicate sympathy scores (0-2 on a 0-10 scale) as instances of *negative partisanship* (1=yes; 0=no). *Ideological distance* captures the absolute difference between a voter's perception of a party's policy platform and his or her personal policy preferences on the 0-10 left-right scale.⁶ Moreover, we measure the *respondents' perception of party issue emphasis* using an indicator variable for whether a party is identified as the one that 'has said most about [issue] since the last general election' (1=yes; 0=no). Finally, a respondent's *perceived government performance* varies across respondents (but not parties) and thus enters the model in form of four party-specific covariates (the SPÖ is chosen as reference category). To assess the perceived performance of the incumbent government, we use three survey questions that indicate the perceived performance on 5-point scales on economic matters and on the government's success in dealing with the immigration issue. We use factor scores derived from an exploratory factor analysis of the three performance indicators. Positive values indicate more favourable evaluations of the government's performance. All variables and the full question texts can be found in the Appendix (Table A.1).

⁶ Unfortunately, our survey does not contain policy distance measures for all five issues. However, analyses (not reported) using policy distances for the economy and immigration instead of the general left-right scale produce similar results to those presented here.

Instead of presenting regression tables, we simply show the effect of each variable on the predicted probability of naming a party as an issue owner.⁷ Figure 4 thus presents the predicted change in probabilities of choosing a particular party (here: the SPÖ) as the negative issue owner when the respective variable increases from zero to one (dichotomous variables) or from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean (continuous variables). All remaining covariates are held constant at their mean (continuous variables) or mode (dichotomous variables).⁸ Estimates are reported for the five different issues: financial and Euro crisis (E), schools (S), unemployment (U), immigration (I), and corruption (C).

Figure 4 about here

As expected, feeling close to a party decreases the probability that a party is seen as negative issue owner, while negative partisanship has a positive effect. Moreover, note that the effect of negative partisanship is somewhat larger than that of positive partisanship. There is also evidence that the probability of negative issue ownership increases with policy distance. The effect of perceived party issue emphasis depends on the issue. Here, being identified as the party that talks most about an issue decreases the probability of having negative issue ownership on corruption (C) and unemployment (U), while it has a positive impact on being a negative issue owner on immigration (I). Finally, government performance matters, but only for some issues. As expected, more positive evaluations decrease the chances that the SPÖ has negative issue ownership. Yet, the effects are largest for corruption (C) and immigration (I) and smaller and insignificant for schools (S).⁹

We can contrast these results with the effects on positive issue ownership (Figure 5). Unsurprisingly, positive partisanship increases the probability of identifying a party as

7 Regression tables with the exact results are shown in the Appendix (Tables A.4 and A.5).

8 Here, we focus on the largest party to illustrate changes in probabilities. Which party we choose matters only insofar as the effect of government performance on negative issue ownership should be negative for government parties and positive for parties in opposition. Moreover, effects differ across parties as the model captures party-specific constants. Apart from these differences, the results are similar for all parties.

9 As discussed above, partisanship is related to various voter perceptions of politics, including government performance evaluations and perceptions of party issue emphasis. To test whether our results are driven by partisanship, we also ran the regression models excluding partisan identifiers (about 60 per cent of all respondents). However, the conclusions we draw for the remaining variables are substantively the same as those in Figures 3 and 4 (Tables B.1 and B.2 in the supplementary online appendix).

positive issue owner, while the effect is negative for negative partisanship. The effects of partisanship are also stronger for positive than for negative issue ownership. For ideological distance, the results mirror those of negative issue ownership as increasing distance between policy preferences of a party and a respondent lower the chances that a party is perceived as the positive issue owner. In contrast, voter perceptions of party issue importance matters much more for identifying positive than negative issue owners. Moreover, the effects are positive and statistically significant for all issues, whereas on negative issue ownership the effects were inconsistent. We reflect on potential reasons for this in our discussion below. Finally, more positive evaluations of government performance increase the chances that the SPÖ is perceived as the party that owns an issue, but this positive relationship only occurs for immigration (I) and corruption (C).

Figure 5 about here

Connecting Individual-level Perceptions and Aggregate-level Patterns

Overall, we find that a mix of partisanship, policy distance and government performance matters for perceptions of negative issue ownership, while the impact of the voters' perceived party issue importance varies across policy issues. While partisanship is an important predictor, there is still ample room for other variables to influence perceptions. These results largely mirror those for perceptions of positive issue ownership, with the exception of perceived issue emphasis.

Perceived issue emphasis has a consistently positive effect on public perceptions of positive issue ownership. This matches existing findings that parties are often positive issue owners if they themselves address these issues a lot or if the media explicitly links them to the topic (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Egan 2013; Walgrave and de Swert 2007; see also Figure 5). However, the patterns for negative issue ownership are far more complex. Here, the effects of perceived issue emphasis were inconsistent, pointing in both directions. This may be related to the extent each issue is more position- or more valence-dominated: issue emphasis decreased negative issue ownership on the valence issues of corruption and unemployment, but increased it on the positional issue of immigration. In other words, voters will be more likely to assign negative ownership to a party when they see the party as talking a lot about a position they dislike.

To generalise, this finding means that negative issue owners should be readily identified on politicised issues with clearly identifiable parties at the positional poles. When parties are polarised, the views of outlying parties are often unpopular with at least part of the

electorate. On such topics, issue emphasis will both help and hurt a party: voters who agree with the party will assign it positive issue ownership, but voters who disagree with it will see it as a negative issue owner. On non-polarised valence issues, the effect of issue salience will be more uniform, as talking about the topic will improve the party's reputation among most if not all voters.

What do these findings tell us about the aggregate results presented in Figures 2 and 3? Aggregate patterns of course emerge from individual-level perceptions. Our regression results therefore lead us to expect negative issue owners to emerge when the party takes up an unpopular issue position and if it seen as having performed badly. For instance, if many voters see the government as having introduced wrong-headed policies or having performed incompetently, it should be more likely for government parties to be negative issue owners. These conclusions match those in the literature for positive issue ownership, which may result from having by far the most popular position (Stubager and Slothuus 2013) or from having a very positive perceived performance (i.e. track record) on that issue (De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Petrocik 1996).

These findings clearly apply to the aggregate-level patterns we identified. For example, the FPÖ is a negative issue owner on immigration, an issue it emphasis a lot and where it takes a polarising position. The ÖVP meanwhile does badly on corruption, where it has recently been embroiled in scandals. On unemployment and schools, neither performance, positions nor emphases are particularly strong characteristics of any political party, and hence no clear negative issue owner emerges. Finally, our findings also explain why patterns on positive issue ownership are clearer, as the effects of partisanship are stronger and the effects of issue importance more consistent.

Conclusion

We have proposed a new concept – negative issue ownership – that captures a party's reputation for being unable to solve a problem and for being insincere and not committed to addressing it. Thus, in addition to perceptions of positive issue ownership, voters may also form an opinion that captures a party's negative image on an issue and its inability to deal with the issue at hand.

Our study of Austrian voters has shown that negative issue owners are identified almost as readily as positive issue owners. Importantly, it appears that negative issue ownership perceptions stem from substantive political opinions. Thus, perceptions of negative issue ownership result from more than pure partisanship. Specifically, a party's

probability of being identified as a negative issue owner increases with perceived government performance and with its policy distance from the respondent. The effect of perceived issue emphasis is more nuanced and highlights the importance of distinguishing between negative ownership on position and on valence topics.

Our analysis should be seen as a first step in the study of negative issue ownership. For one, future research should examine the effects of differences in question wording on assessments of negative issue ownership. Indeed, given the heterogeneity with which positive issue ownership itself is measured, the field may benefit from greater reflection on the quality of survey measures used.

A further way of extending our findings would be to examine whether they also hold in other electoral and national contexts. As electoral competition in Austria broadly resembles that of many other parliamentary systems in Western Europe, we have little reason to treat our study as anything but a representative case. Yet, without a more comprehensive analysis of negative issue ownership in various contexts, we cannot know whether our findings also hold beyond the Austrian case. In particular, it would be worth exploring whether negative issue ownership is a useful concept in two-party systems such as the United States. On the one hand, even in a two-party context the difference between ‘non-ownership’ and ‘negative ownership’ on a certain issue may be decisive for otherwise undecided voters. Negative issue ownership may also affect mobilisation in two-party contexts. On the other hand, it may be that in a two-party system these differences are less relevant than in multiparty contexts.

Many important questions regarding the origins of these perceptions remain. Most importantly, we have focused little on issue-by-issue differences. Yet, the effects of our predictors are not the same across policy areas. For instance, the perceived emphasis parties place on issues only matters in some cases, but not in others. Moreover, the aggregate analyses show that on some issues, for instance immigration, perceptions of negative issue ownership coalesce more strongly around a small number of parties than on other issues.

Another open question is how negative issue ownership changes over time. Positive issue ownership has long been treated as a rather stable phenomenon (Budge and Farlie 1983, Petrocik 1996, Petrocik *et al.* 2003), but recent research has highlighted its dynamic aspects as well (Bélanger 2003; De Bruycker and Walgrave 2014; Tresch *et al.* 2013; Walgrave and de Swert 2007; Walgrave *et al.* 2009; but see Walgrave *et al.* 2014a). With data from just one election, it is of course impossible to track changes of negative issue ownership over time. In fact, our results indeed just reflect one snapshot that itself may be the result of many long-

term influences. Green and Jennings (2012a, 2012b) show that party evaluations on issues tend to run in tandem, decreasing or increasing in concert across time. This suggests that, despite differences in levels, voters use some issues as shortcuts to evaluate a party's performance. The same may hold true for negative issue ownership. Moreover, such dynamic analyses might help to disentangle the mutual influence of partisanship and negative ownership perceptions. Future research should try to understand better when and why negative issue owners emerge and why the effects of individual-level predictors vary.

Finally, we have concentrated here on describing and understanding negative issue ownership. However, for this concept to be important future work, we also need to consider its impact on voting behaviour and party politics. Several obvious questions emerge. For instance, how do negative issue ownership perceptions affect electoral decisions? About 86 per cent of our respondents do not vote for a party if they see it as a negative issue owner on any of the five issues. This means that we can say which party people will *not* vote for, so we know which parties voters rule out. However, we still do not know which of the remaining parties they will endorse. Negative issue ownership could nevertheless be important for vote choice. For example, it could play a particular key role as a 'tie-breaker' when voters are unsure which one of several parties to vote for. Here, seeing one of these parties as a negative issue owner may tip the scales in favour of another party.

Negative issue ownership may also affect turnout. Seeing one party as a negative issue owner increases voters' motivation to prevent it from gaining or maintaining power, for instance by voting for its main rival. Perceptions of negative issue ownership may thus mobilise supporters who have strong attitudes regarding a rival party's handling inabilities. Yet, if negative perceptions predominate among a voters' assessments, this could also reduce their probability of turning out to vote, especially if they see only negative owners for issues that are very important to them.

A final question concerns how perceptions of negative issue ownership affect party strategies. Research on competence indicates that negative issue owners may emphasise these topics less (e.g. Green 2009; Spoon and Klüver 2014; Vavreck 2009; Wagner and Meyer 2014), while they may provide easy targets for negative campaigning. This may be particularly relevant if parties compete for similar voter groups or need to mobilise their own supporters. These questions should provide an important impetus for further research.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the FWF (Austrian Science Fund) for their support under grant numbers S10902-G11 and S10903-G11. Previous versions of this manuscript have been presented in seminar series at the University of Nottingham and the University of Vienna. We would like to thank all participants for valuable comments and suggestions.

References

- Aalberg, Toril and Anders Todal Jenssen (2007). 'Do Television Debates in Multiparty Systems affect Viewers? A Quasi-experimental Study with First-time Voters', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30:1, 115-35.
- Aichholzer, Julian, Sylvia Krizinger, Markus Wagner and Eva Zeglovits (2014) 'How has radical right support transformed established political conflicts? The case of Austria', *West European Politics*, 37:1, 113-37.
- Ashworth, Scott (2012). 'Electoral Accountability: Recent Theoretical and Empirical Work', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15:1, 183-201.
- Bélanger, Éric (2003). 'Issue Ownership by Canadian Political Parties 1953-2001', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 36:3, 539-58.
- Bélanger, Éric and Bonnie M. Meguid (2008). 'Issue salience, issue ownership, and issue-based vote choice', *Electoral Studies*, 27:3, 477-91.
- Budge, Ian and Dennis Farlie (1983). *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Cacioppo, John T., Wendi L. Gardner and Gary G. Berntson (1997). 'Beyond Bipolar Conceptualizations and Measures: The Case of Attitudes and Evaluative Space', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 1:1, 3-25.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes (1960). *The American Voter*. New York, London: John Wiley and Sons.
- De Bruycker, Iskander, and Stefaan Walgrave (2014). 'How a New Issue Becomes an Owned Issue. Media Coverage and the Financial Crisis in Belgium (2008-2009)', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 26:1, 86-97.
- DeNisi, Angelo S., Thomas P. Cafferty and Bruce M. Meglino (1984). 'A Cognitive View of the Performance Appraisal Process: A Model and Research Propositions', *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 33:3, 360-96.
- Egan, Patrick J. (2013). *Partisan Priorities: How issue ownership drives and distorts American Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiorina, Morris P. (1981). *Retrospective voting in American national elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Green, Jane and Sara Binzer Hobolt (2008). 'Owning the issue agenda: Party strategies and vote choices in British elections', *Electoral Studies*, 27:3, 460-76.

- Green, Jane (2009) 'When Voters and Parties Agree: Valence Issues and Party Competition', *Political Studies*, 55:3, 629-55.
- Green, Jane and Will Jennings (2012a). 'Valence as macro-competence: an analysis of mood in party competence evaluations in Great Britain', *British Journal of Political Science*, 42:2, 311-43.
- Green, Jane and Will Jennings (2012b). 'The dynamics of issue competence and vote for parties in and out of power: An analysis of valence in Britain, 1979-1997', *European Journal of Political Research*, 51:4, 469-503.
- Green-Pedersen, Christoffer (2007). 'The Growing Importance of Issue Competition: The Changing Nature of Party Competition in Western Europe', *Political Studies*, 55:3, 607-28.
- Healy, Andrew and Neal Malhotra (2013). 'Retrospective Voting Reconsidered', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16:1, 285-306.
- Holbrook, Allyson L., Jon A. Krosnick, Penny S. Visser, Wendi L. Gardner and John T. Cacioppo (2001). 'Attitudes toward presidential candidates and political parties: Initial optimism, inertial first impressions, and a focus on flaws', *American Journal of Political Science*, 45:4, 930-50.
- Holian, David B. (2004). 'He's stealing my issues! Clinton's crime rhetoric and the dynamics of issue ownership', *Political Behavior* 26:2, 95-124.
- Kritzinger, Sylvia, Eva Zeglovits, Julian Aichholzer, Christian Glantschnigg, Konstantin Glinitzer, David Johann, Kathrin Thomas and Markus Wagner (2013). 'AUTNES Pre- and Post-Election Survey 2013', GESIS Datenarchiv: Köln. ZA5859 Data File Version 1.0.0.
- Kritzinger, Sylvia, Eva Zeglovits, Julian Aichholzer, Christian Glantschnigg, Konstantin Glinitzer, David Johann, Kathrin Thomas and Markus Wagner (2014). 'AUTNES Pre- and Post- Election Survey 2013 – Documentation', University of Vienna, Vienna.
- Lachat, Romain (2014). 'Issue Ownership and the Vote: The Effects of Associative and Competence Ownership on Issue Voting', *Swiss Political Science Review*, 20:4, 727-40.
- Lau, Richard R. (1982). 'Negativity in political perception', *Political Behavior*, 4:4, 353-77.
- Lewis-Beck, Michael S., and Mary Stegmaier (2007). 'Economic Models of Voting', in Russel J. Dalton and Hans.-Dieter Klingemann (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 518-37
- Medeiros, Mike and Alain Noël (2014). 'The Forgotten Side of Partisanship: Negative Party Identification in Four Anglo-American Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies*.

- Meyer, Thomas M. and Wolfgang C. Müller (2013). 'The issue agenda, party competence and popularity: An empirical analysis of Austria 1989-2004' , *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 23:4, 484-500.
- Petrocik, John R. (1996). 'Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study' , *American Journal of Political Science*, 40:3, 825-50.
- Rose, Richard and William Mishler (1998). 'Negative and positive party identification in post-Communist countries' , *Electoral Studies*, 17:2, 217-34.
- Soroka, Stuart N. (2014). *Negativity in Democratic Politics: Causes and Consequences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spoon, Jae.-Jae and Heike Klüver (2014). 'Do parties respond? How electoral context influences party responsiveness' , *Electoral Studies*, 35, 48-60.
- Stubager, Rune and Rune Slothuus (2013). 'What Are the Sources of Political Parties' Issue Ownership? Testing Four Explanations at the Individual Level' , *Political Behavior*, 35:3, 567-88.
- Taber, Charles. S., and Milton Lodge (2006). 'Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs' , *American Journal of Political Science*, 50:3, 755-69.
- Tresch, Anke, Jonas Lefevere and Stefaan Walgrave (2013). "Steal me if you can!": The impact of campaign messages on associative issue ownership' , *Party Politics*. doi: 10.1177/1354068812472576
- Vavreck, Lynn (2009). *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wagner, Markus and Thomas M. Meyer (2014). 'Which Issues do Parties Emphasise? Salience Strategies and Party Organisation in Multiparty Systems' , *West European Politics*, 37:5, 1019-45.
- Wagner, Markus and Eva Zeglovits (2014). 'Survey questions about party competence: Insights from cognitive interviews' , *Electoral Studies*, 34:0, 280-90.
- Walgrave, Stefaan and Kurt De Swert (2007). 'Where Does Issue Ownership Come From? From the Party or from the Media? Issue-party Identifications in Belgium, 1991-2005' , *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 12:1, 37-67.
- Walgrave, Stefaan, Jonas Lefevere and Michiel Nuytemans (2009). 'Issue Ownership Stability and Change: How Political Parties Claim and Maintain Issues Through Media Appearances' , *Political Communication*, 26:2, 153-72.
- Walgrave, Stefaan, Jonas Lefevere and Anke Tresch (2012). 'The Associative Dimension of Issue Ownership' , *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76:4, 771-82.

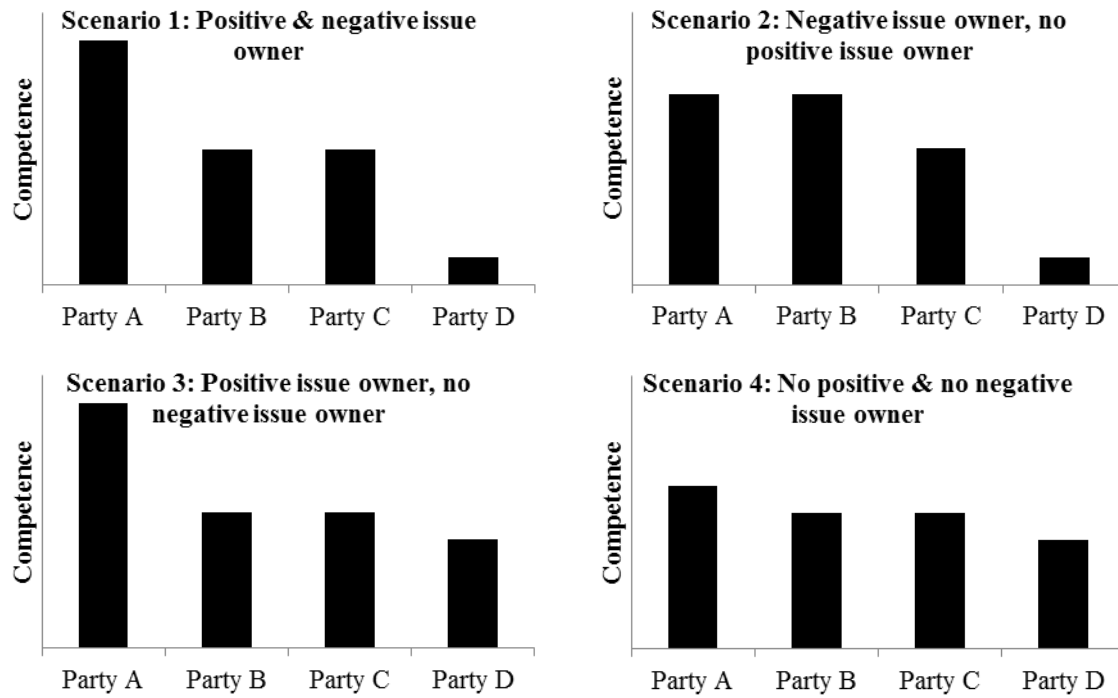
Walgrave, Stefaan, Jonas Lefevere and Anke Tresch (2014a). 'The Limits of Issue Ownership Dynamics: The Constraining Effect of Party Preference' , *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 24:1, 1-19.

Walgrave, Stefaan, Jonas Lefevere and Anke Tresch (2014b). 'From Issue Ownership to Issue Linkage: The Conceptualization and Measurement of the Connection between Issues and Parties in People's Minds' , This issue.

Ybarra, Oscar and Walter G. Stephan (1996). 'Misanthropic person memory' , *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70:4, 691-700.

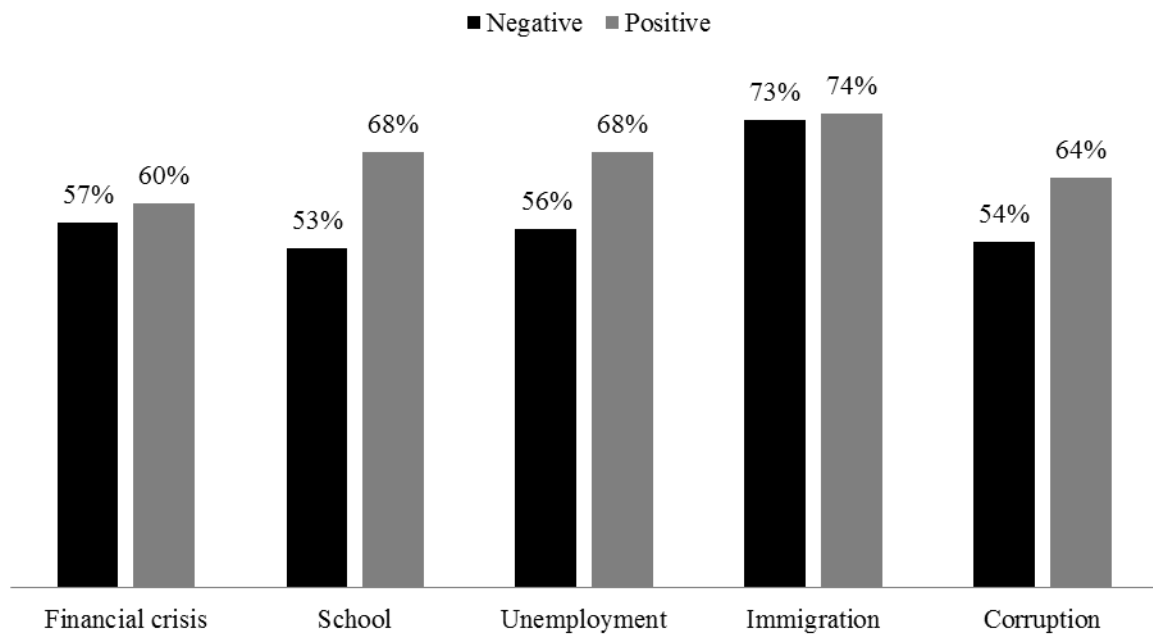
Zaller, John R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Figure 1: Four hypothetical scenarios of positive and negative issue ownership



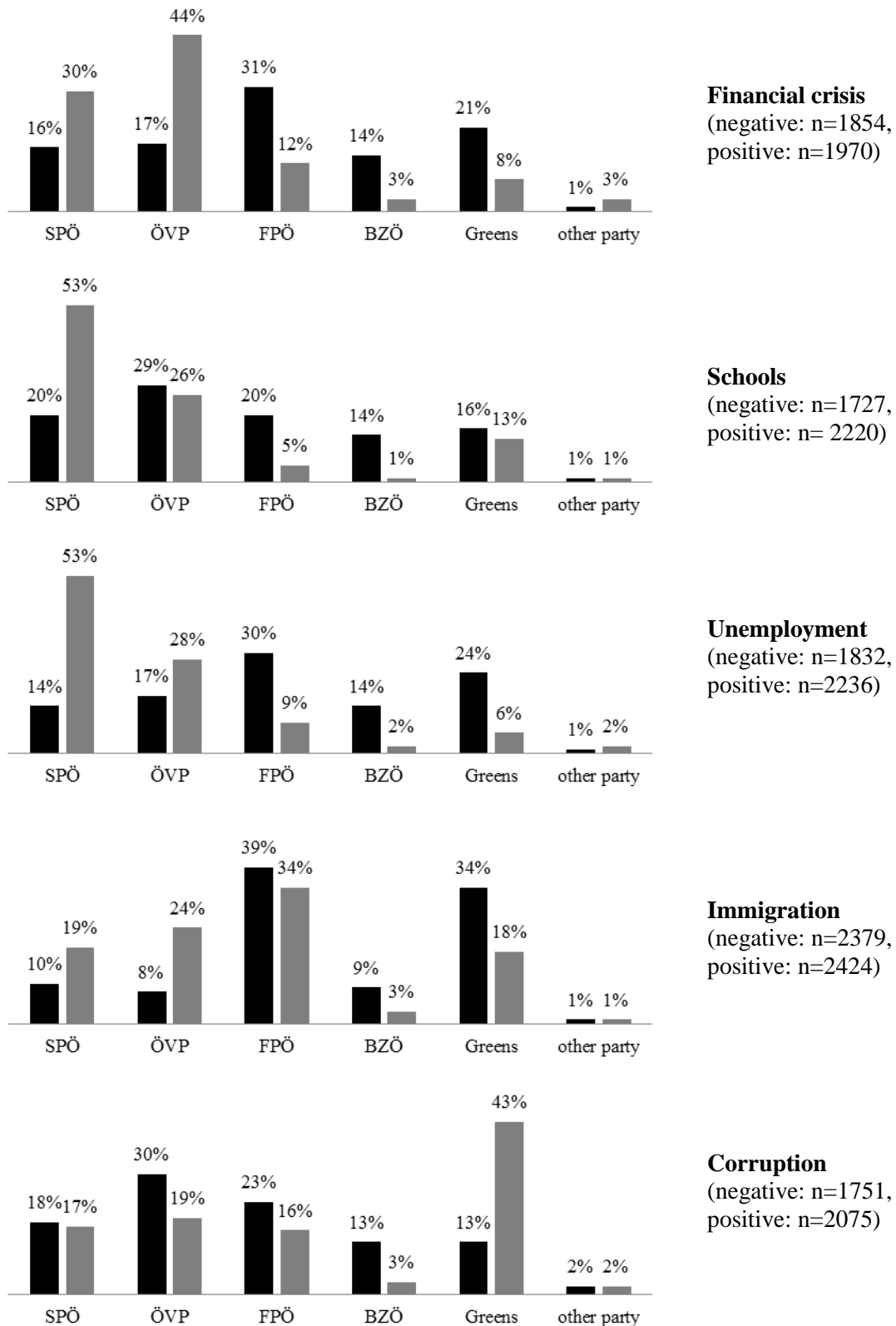
Note: Y-axis shows the perceived competence of the party.

Figure 2: Identification of a negative or positive issue owner



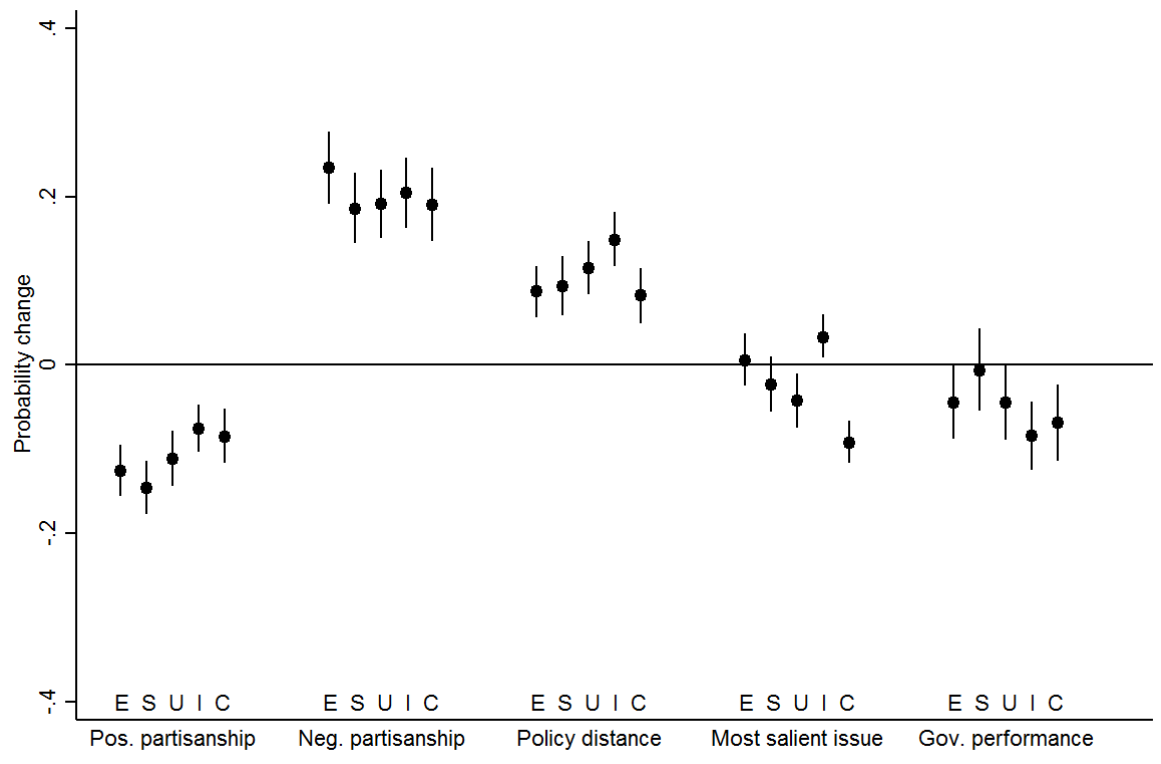
Note: Table shows the proportion of voters who name a party as a positive and negative issue owner, respectively. Detailed results in Tables A.1 and A.2. N = 3266. Data weighted using a post-stratification weight to account for differences in sample selection probabilities and response rates.

Figure 3: Perceptions of negative and positive issue ownership



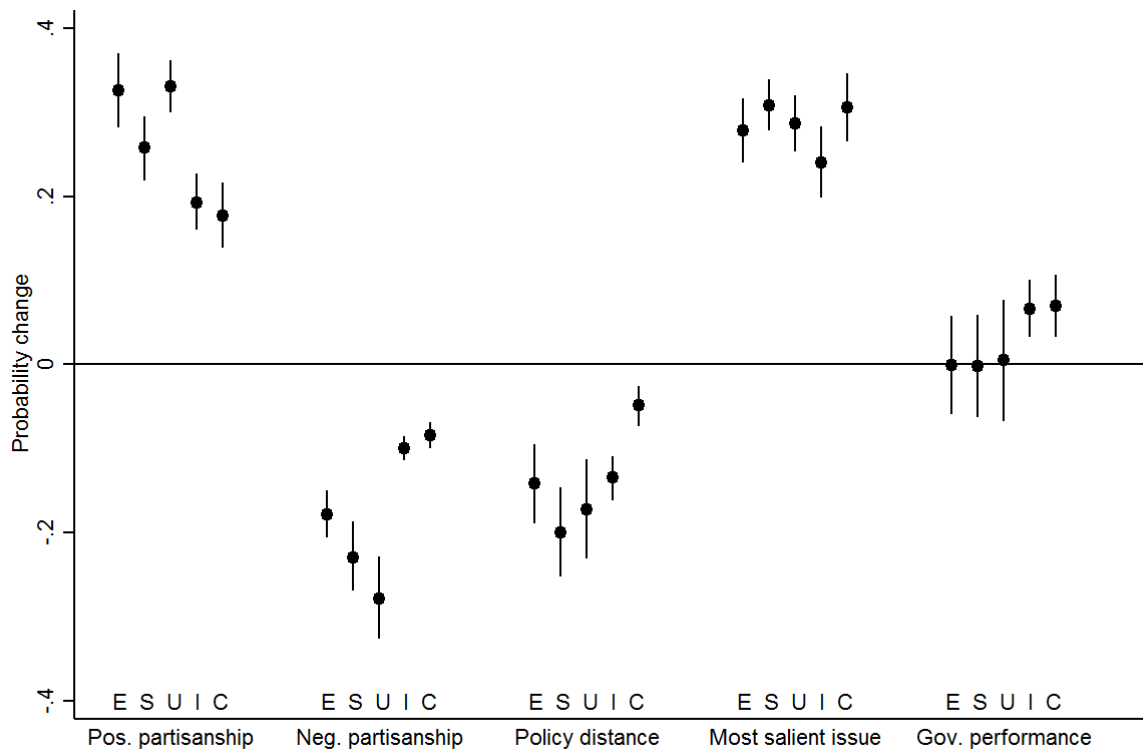
Note: Negative ownership in black, positive ownership in grey bars. For full results, see Tables A.1 and A.2. Data weighted using a post-stratification weight to account for differences in sample selection probabilities and response rates.

Figure 4: Change in probabilities for identifying a specific negative issue owner



Notes: Changes in probabilities for naming a specific party as negative issue owner when the respective variable increases from one standard deviation below to one above the mean value (continuous variables) or from zero to one (dichotomous variables): economic crisis (E), school (S), unemployment (U), immigration (I), and corruption (C). Lines denote 95% confidence intervals. All estimates based on Table A.4.

Figure 5: Change in probabilities for identifying a specific positive issue owner



Notes: Changes in probabilities for naming a specific party as positive issue owner when the respective variable increases from one standard deviation below to one above the mean value (continuous variables) or from zero to one (dichotomous variables): economic crisis (E), school (S), unemployment (U), immigration (I), and corruption (C). Lines denote 95% confidence intervals. All estimates based on Table A.5.

Online appendix for ‘Negative issue ownership’

Table A.1: Question wording and indicators

Indicator	Question wording	Measure
Negative issue ownership	<p>Five parties are currently represented in the Austrian National Council: SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, BZÖ and the Greens.</p> <p>A: Which of these five parties has made the best suggestions [ITEM] since the last national elections?</p> <p>B: And which of these five parties has made the worst suggestions in the domain of [ITEM] since the last national elections?</p>	Party named as worst party (1) or not (0)
Positive issue ownership	<p>[items randomized]</p> <p>Item 1 to manage the financial and Euro crisis</p> <p>Item 2 in the area of schools</p> <p>Item 3 to reduce unemployment</p> <p>Item 4 in the field of immigration policy</p> <p>Item 5 to fight corruption</p>	Party named as best party (1) or not (0)
Positive	In Austria many people feel close to a political party although	Variable is 1 if the dependent variable party (ÖVP, SPÖ,

partisanship	<p>they sometimes vote for another party. What about you? Generally speaking, do you feel close to a particular party?</p> <p>[If yes] Which party is that?</p>	FPÖ, BZÖ, or Grüne) is the party the respondent feels closest to, 0 otherwise
Negative partisanship	<p>How much do you like the political parties in Austria? Please rate each party on a scale from 0 to 10. 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. You can use the values in between to give a more precise answer.</p> <p>How about [Party]?</p>	Negative partisanship is 1 if like-dislike score is 2 or lower, 0 otherwise.
Policy distance	<p>In politics people often talk of ‘left’ and ‘right’. Now, thinking of the political parties in Austria: Where would you place each of the political parties in Austria on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘left’ and 10 ‘right’? You can use the values in between to give a more precise answer.</p> <p>Where would you place [Party]?</p> <p>And where would you place yourself on this scale?</p>	For each party choice, the absolute distance (from 0 to 10) between a voter’s policy position and the perceived party platform indicated the ideological distance
Issue importance	<p>Now, to another question: Please tell me, which of these parties has said most on a specific topic since the last national election. Which party has said most about [Item] since the last national elections?</p> <p>[items randomized]</p> <p>Item 1 to manage the financial and Euro crisis</p>	Variable is 1 if party is identified as the one that ‘said most’, 0 otherwise

	<p>Item 2 in the area of schools</p> <p>Item 3 to reduce unemployment</p> <p>Item 4 in the field of immigration policy</p> <p>Item 5 to fight corruption</p>	
<p>Government performance</p>	<p>What would you say: Has the economic situation in Austria over the past twelve months got a lot better, got a little better, stayed the same, got a little worse or got a lot worse?</p> <p>What do you think the economic situation will be like in twelve months' time? A lot better, a little better, the same, a little worse or a lot worse?</p> <p>What do you think: Do you think how well Austrians and immigrants live together has changed in the last three years? Has the situation got a lot better, a little better, stayed the same, got a little worse or a lot worse?</p>	<p>5-point issue scales rescaled so that higher values indicate better performance (1 = 'a lot worse'; 5 = 'a lot better').</p> <p>Correlations between these items vary from 0.36 to 0.57. Using an exploratory factor analysis, we use the predict factor scores of a one-factor solution as the indicator of government performance. Larger values indicate a positive performance evaluation.</p> <p>In the model, this is entered as an alternative-specific variable, i.e. it affects the probability to choose the ÖVP, FPÖ, BZÖ or Greens (SPÖ: reference category) differently.</p>

Table A.2: Negative issue ownership for five issues

	Financial crisis		School		Unemployment		Immigration		Corruption	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Owner identified,	1,854	57%	1,727	53%	1,832	56%	2,379	73%	1,751	54%
of which										
SPÖ	295	16%	338	20%	253	14%	230	10%	323	18%
ÖVP	322	17%	506	29%	302	17%	186	8%	524	30%
FPÖ	573	31%	339	20%	551	30%	938	39%	408	23%
BZÖ	262	14%	246	14%	263	14%	204	9%	232	13%
Greens	383	21%	281	16%	444	24%	809	34%	235	13%
other party	20	1%	17	1%	19	1%	12	1%	29	2%
No owner identified,	1,412	43%	1,539	47%	1,434	44%	887	27%	1,515	46%
of which										
no party	370	26%	318	21%	374	26%	220	25%	431	28%
don't know	1,018	72%	1,196	78%	1,040	73%	654	74%	1,043	69%
refused	24	2%	25	2%	20	1%	14	2%	41	3%
N	3,266		3,266		3,266		3,266		3,266	

Note: Data weighted using a post-stratification weight to account for differences in sample selection probabilities and response rates. The Ns are based on weighted results and not on the unweighted survey data. Due to rounding errors for both counts and percentages, counts and percentages do not always add up to 3,266 and 100 per cent, respectively.

Table A.3: Positive issue ownership for five issues

	Financial crisis		School		Unemployment		Immigration		Corruption	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Owner identified,	1,970	60%	2,220	68%	2,236	68%	2,424	74%	2,075	64%
of which										
SPÖ	598	30%	1,181	53%	1,189	53%	464	19%	351	17%
ÖVP	864	44%	583	26%	637	28%	591	24%	404	19%
FPÖ	239	12%	122	5%	205	9%	832	34%	334	16%
BZÖ	50	3%	21	1%	45	2%	70	3%	59	3%
Greens	153	8%	293	13%	123	6%	447	18%	882	43%
other party	65	3%	20	1%	38	2%	22	1%	45	2%
No owner identified,	1,296	40%	1,046	32%	1,030	32%	842	26%	1,191	36%
of which										
no party	643	50%	357	34%	469	46%	302	36%	537	45%
don't know	631	49%	680	65%	547	53%	518	62%	631	53%
refused	22	2%	9	1%	13	1%	22	3%	249	2%
N	3,266		3,266		3,266		3,266		3,266	

Note: Data weighted using a post-stratification weight to account for differences in sample selection probabilities and response rates. The Ns are based on weighted results and not on the unweighted survey data. Due to rounding errors for both counts and percentages, counts and percentages do not always add up to 3,266 and 100 per cent, respectively.

Table A.4: Conditional logistic regression: negative issue owner identified

	(1) Financial crisis	(2) School	(3) Unemploy- ment	(4) Immigration	(5) Corruption
Positive partisanship	-1.068*** (0.171)	-1.032*** (0.148)	-0.894*** (0.166)	-0.689*** (0.155)	-0.588*** (0.133)
Negative partisanship	1.097*** (0.0805)	0.834*** (0.0835)	0.920*** (0.0799)	1.067*** (0.0797)	0.895*** (0.0844)
L-R distance	0.111*** (0.0183)	0.104*** (0.0189)	0.146*** (0.0183)	0.222*** (0.0185)	0.101*** (0.0193)
Most salient issue (party)	0.0305 (0.0932)	-0.126 (0.0911)	-0.276* (0.109)	0.216** (0.0770)	-0.642*** (0.104)
<i>Government performance (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	-0.0273 (0.110)	-0.0179 (0.0959)	-0.00353 (0.113)	0.604*** (0.146)	0.182 (0.0951)
FPÖ	0.280** (0.104)	0.223* (0.110)	0.259* (0.107)	0.567*** (0.111)	0.450*** (0.107)
BZÖ	0.193 (0.119)	0.135 (0.118)	0.342** (0.120)	0.488*** (0.143)	0.344** (0.123)
Greens	0.252* (0.102)	-0.135 (0.103)	0.191 (0.102)	0.131 (0.102)	0.154 (0.111)
<i>Constant (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	0.139 (0.101)	0.361*** (0.0877)	0.135 (0.106)	-0.370** (0.124)	0.580*** (0.0852)
FPÖ	0.139 (0.0974)	-0.678*** (0.108)	0.0439 (0.105)	0.480*** (0.109)	-0.344*** (0.102)
BZÖ	-0.694*** (0.109)	-1.024*** (0.113)	-0.672*** (0.116)	-0.949*** (0.124)	-1.040*** (0.112)
Greens	-0.0922 (0.0989)	-0.525*** (0.102)	-0.00877 (0.104)	0.733*** (0.0958)	-0.571*** (0.108)
Log Likelihood	-1976.458	-1918.086	-1958.283	-1954.257	-1888.619
AIC	3976.9	3860.2	3940.6	3932.5	3801.2
BIC	4059.7	3942.0	4023.1	4017.7	3883.3
Observations	7330	6765	7175	8910	6880

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.5: Conditional logistic regression: positive issue owner identified

	(1) Financial crisis	(2) School	(3) Unemploye nt	(4) Immigration	(5) Corruption
Positive partisanship	1.398*** (0.0928)	1.056*** (0.0832)	1.474*** (0.0938)	1.173*** (0.0764)	1.096*** (0.0918)
Negative partisanship	-1.396*** (0.158)	-1.237*** (0.146)	-1.387*** (0.169)	-1.630*** (0.122)	-1.156*** (0.121)
L-R distance	-0.157*** (0.0270)	-0.183*** (0.0254)	-0.150*** (0.0271)	-0.254*** (0.0224)	-0.0927*** (0.0230)
Most salient issue (party)	1.204*** (0.0765)	1.285*** (0.0694)	1.229*** (0.0771)	1.385*** (0.0756)	1.651*** (0.0666)
<i>Government performance (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	0.124 (0.107)	0.148 (0.0965)	0.182 (0.104)	-0.103 (0.116)	-0.438** (0.134)
FPÖ	-0.357* (0.149)	-0.0178 (0.152)	-0.183 (0.147)	-0.566*** (0.119)	-0.371** (0.140)
BZÖ	-0.0149 (0.236)	-0.654* (0.315)	-0.414 (0.253)	-0.371 (0.195)	-0.339 (0.201)
Greens	0.170 (0.173)	-0.0873 (0.117)	-0.102 (0.172)	-0.292* (0.126)	-0.397*** (0.116)
<i>Constant (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	0.413*** (0.0882)	-0.363*** (0.0796)	-0.509*** (0.0878)	0.496*** (0.0929)	0.212 (0.110)
FPÖ	-0.337** (0.127)	-1.330*** (0.140)	-1.149*** (0.128)	1.133*** (0.110)	0.443*** (0.120)
BZÖ	-1.374*** (0.207)	-2.840*** (0.337)	-2.109*** (0.227)	-0.319 (0.166)	-0.532** (0.181)
Greens	-0.933*** (0.135)	-0.529*** (0.0932)	-1.692*** (0.141)	0.419*** (0.0953)	1.272*** (0.102)
Log Likelihood	-1078.693	-1287.992	-1086.697	-1614.029	-1333.833
AIC	2181.4	2600.0	2197.4	3252.1	2691.7
BIC	2264.1	2684.1	2281.5	3337.3	2775.3
Observations	7270	8190	8195	9015	7850

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Tables B.1 and B.2 show additional results of conditional logit regression models for negative (Table B.1) and positive (Table B.2) issue ownership. They resemble the model specifications of the regression models (Tables A.4 and A.5) in the manuscript, but the sample is restricted to voters without party attachment. As mentioned in footnote 11 of the manuscript, partisanship is related to various voter perceptions of politics, including government performance evaluations and perceptions of party issue emphasis. To test whether our results are driven by partisanship, we thus ran regression models excluding partisan identifiers (about 60 per cent of all respondents). The results in Tables B.1 and B.2 are very similar to those presented in the paper, and our substantial conclusions for the remaining variables are substantially the same as those reported in Figures 3 and 4 of the manuscript.

Table B.1: Conditional logistic regression: negative issue owner identified (non-partisans)

	(1) Financial crisis	(2) School	(3) Unemployme nt	(4) Immigration	(5) Corruption
Negative partisanship	1.164*** (0.136)	1.004*** (0.143)	0.875*** (0.137)	1.098*** (0.131)	1.023*** (0.147)
L-R distance	0.107*** (0.0320)	0.0440 (0.0336)	0.139*** (0.0325)	0.261*** (0.0332)	0.0900** (0.0344)
Most salient issue (party)	-0.0952 (0.152)	-0.173 (0.151)	-0.382* (0.178)	0.242 (0.128)	-0.768*** (0.181)
<i>Government performance (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	0.0209 (0.166)	-0.188 (0.154)	0.0661 (0.176)	0.431* (0.210)	0.0986 (0.151)
FPÖ	0.203 (0.173)	0.483* (0.192)	0.321 (0.171)	0.350* (0.167)	0.246 (0.186)
BZÖ	0.319 (0.189)	0.173 (0.183)	0.376* (0.190)	0.382 (0.215)	0.170 (0.202)
Greens	0.404* (0.167)	0.108 (0.176)	0.238 (0.166)	-0.114 (0.157)	0.470* (0.185)
<i>Constant (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	0.360* (0.166)	0.315* (0.149)	0.0844 (0.177)	-0.379* (0.190)	0.624*** (0.145)
FPÖ	-0.0278 (0.171)	-0.748*** (0.192)	-0.0693 (0.180)	0.153 (0.176)	-0.512** (0.182)
BZÖ	-0.502** (0.184)	-0.660*** (0.183)	-0.591** (0.195)	-0.980*** (0.198)	-0.946*** (0.193)
Greens	0.0375 (0.170)	-0.515** (0.179)	-0.0822 (0.181)	0.507** (0.154)	-0.446* (0.184)
Log Likelihood	-686.078	-630.596	-651.939	-684.552	-614.911
AIC	1394.156	1283.191	1325.877	1391.104	1251.821
BIC	1457.633	1345.698	1388.684	1456.474	1314.53
Observations (choices)	2370	2170	2230	2815	2210

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table B.2: Conditional logistic regression: positive issue owner identified (non-partisans)

	(1) Financial crisis	(2) School	(3) Unemployment	(4) Immigration	(5) Corruption
Negative partisanship	-1.342*** (0.262)	-1.319*** (0.242)	-1.524*** (0.301)	-1.848*** (0.203)	-1.010*** (0.195)
L-R distance	-0.173*** (0.0465)	-0.178*** (0.0419)	-0.192*** (0.0473)	-0.265*** (0.0359)	-0.123** (0.0378)
Most salient issue (party)	1.145*** (0.126)	1.253*** (0.115)	1.372*** (0.139)	1.318*** (0.122)	1.550*** (0.110)
<i>Government performance (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	-0.0526 (0.168)	0.127 (0.150)	0.0608 (0.163)	-0.117 (0.193)	-0.362 (0.217)
FPÖ	-0.636** (0.229)	-0.265 (0.240)	-0.293 (0.231)	-0.567** (0.189)	-0.309 (0.218)
BZÖ	0.312 (0.373)	-0.984* (0.500)	-1.018* (0.436)	-0.150 (0.267)	-0.323 (0.312)
Greens	-0.325 (0.331)	-0.385* (0.190)	-0.00866 (0.379)	-0.548** (0.207)	-0.500* (0.196)
<i>Constant (reference: SPÖ)</i>					
ÖVP	0.370* (0.144)	-0.323* (0.132)	-0.311* (0.147)	0.425** (0.164)	0.396* (0.193)
FPÖ	-0.246 (0.207)	-1.245*** (0.235)	-0.845*** (0.213)	1.059*** (0.176)	0.597** (0.204)
BZÖ	-1.595*** (0.358)	-2.973*** (0.589)	-2.293*** (0.445)	-0.166 (0.241)	-0.560 (0.297)
Greens	-1.226*** (0.271)	-0.593*** (0.157)	-2.087*** (0.326)	0.489** (0.161)	1.212*** (0.178)
Log Likelihood	-370.746	-457.924	-351.687	-581.109	-467.766