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Markus Wagner & Thomas M. Meyer


To cite this article: Markus Wagner & Thomas M. Meyer (2014) Which Issues do Parties Emphasise? Salience Strategies and Party Organisation in Multiparty Systems, West European Politics, 37:5, 1019-1045, DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2014.911483](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.911483)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.911483>



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Which Issues do Parties Emphasise? Salience Strategies and Party Organisation in Multiparty Systems

MARKUS WAGNER and THOMAS M. MEYER

Party system issue agendas are formed by the topics that individual parties decide to address, and these salience decisions are likely to be strategic. Two key strategies are commonly discussed in the literature: parties' focus on (1) issues that they have ownership over and (2) issues that currently concern voters. Yet it is not known what explains the extent to which parties pursue each of these strategies. This paper argues that aspects of party organisation influence which salience strategy is pursued. Parties that have more resources will be able to 'ride the wave' of current concerns while parties with fewer resources are more likely to focus on their best issues. Furthermore, policy-seeking parties with strong activist influence will be less likely to 'ride the wave' and more likely to follow issue ownership strategies. An analysis of 105 election manifestos from 27 elections in 17 countries shows that aspects of party organisation are indeed strong and robust moderators of issue ownership strategies. Limited, albeit mixed, evidence is also found that party organisation affects the use of 'riding the wave' strategies. These results have important implications for our understanding of electoral campaigns, party competition and voter representation.

One of the most important decisions by political parties in election campaigns is to determine which topics to talk about and which ones to treat with comparative neglect. For political parties, issue salience is therefore just as much a strategic decision as issue positioning (Carmines and Stimson 1993; Green 2011; Green-Pedersen 2007; Meguid 2005, 2008; Meyer and Wagner 2013). These decisions are important not just because they can help to explain electoral success or defeat, but also because they determine the party system issue agenda and the topics that dominate political debate in general. However, compared to the voluminous literature on spatial models, less attention has been paid to understanding the salience decisions that parties take. In this paper, we show how and why parties differ in their use of two key salience strategies: issue ownership and 'riding the wave'.

The first strategy is that a party aims to talk as much as possible about the issues it owns. These are those policy areas where it has a long-standing reputation for handling the issue well and prioritising the resolution of key challenges (Budge and Farlie 1983; Green 2011; Green-Pedersen 2007; Petrocik 1996; Sides 2006; Vavreck 2009). If the campaign focuses on such issues, then that party should be more successful at the polls than otherwise. In contrast, the 'riding the wave' approach (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994) argues that a party will try to talk about those issues that are currently debated and discussed by voters and in the media (Sides 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Spoon and Klüver *forthcoming*). By doing so, a party can show that it is responsive to public concerns. Both strategies may result in electoral success, and to a certain extent a party may be able to pursue both. Yet we know little about the reasons behind the extent to which parties choose each strategy.

In this paper, we argue that parties choose salience strategies in part because of aspects of party organisation, which affect the availability of resources as well as the nature of internal decisions regarding these resources. First, parties that have more resources, be they personnel, money or media attention, are better able to maintain a broad issue profile and address those issues that are of public concern (Greene 2002; Meguid 2005). So, we expect parties with greater resources to engage more in 'riding the wave' strategies while the focus on owned issues should be higher for parties with fewer resources. Second, we expect that parties with a stronger policy focus, be it due to an intrinsic policy motivation of the party elite or due to the constraining role of powerful, policy-seeking activists, are more likely to pursue an issue ownership strategy and less likely to 'ride the wave'. These parties are driven by the policy issues that made up their initial *raison d'être*. Thus, they will stick to those issues that motivate party members to be in politics, and as a result ownership-based salience strategies will be more likely.

Understanding how party organisation influences parties' choice of salience strategy is important for two reasons. First, this will provide us with insight into how parties approach issue competition. Parties using the 'riding the wave' approach allow the political agenda to be shaped by voter concerns, while those emphasising their best issues may primarily focus on increasing the prominence of those concerns that are most important to their own activists and supporters. The extent to which parties engage in each salience strategy therefore tells us about the role parties play in representing voters in democratic politics. Second, understanding party differences in salience strategies provides us with a more nuanced understanding of campaign agendas and electoral politics in general. Many studies compare the use of issue ownership and 'riding the wave' strategies in the American two-party system context (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Damore 2004, 2005; Holian 2004; Kaplan *et al.* 2006; Sides 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004). However, in multiparty systems issue competition is likely to be more complex as some parties may emphasise the most important issues while others follow the issue ownership

approach. Our study provides important insight into the systematic patterns underlying this variation.

We test our hypotheses using information from 27 elections in 17 countries. Information on issue emphasis is taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP; now MARPOR) and information on voter salience from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). We assign issue ownership to parties based on their party family and the existing academic literature. Party organisation covariates come from Laver and Hunt's (1992) expert survey and the most recent comparative data on party membership (Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen *et al.* 2012). In general, our findings confirm our hypotheses, although the evidence that party organisation moderates the use of 'riding the wave' strategies is mixed. These findings are robust to rival explanations for party issue emphasis and various specifications of our model.

This paper is structured as follows. We begin by presenting the two key salience strategies, namely issue ownership and 'riding the wave'. We then describe why differences in party organisation should explain the extent to which parties pursue each strategy. After presenting our data and model, we discuss our empirical results before concluding by outlining the implications of our findings and potential future research.

Issue Ownership and 'Riding the Wave'

The first approach to explaining party issue emphasis is based on issue ownership (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik *et al.* 2003), which is a long-term reputation for handling an issue well. In Petrocik's (1996: 826) words, ownership is 'a history of attention, initiative and innovation toward these problems, which leads voters to believe that one of the parties (and its candidates) is more sincere and committed to doing something about them'. The issues a party owns are thus its best issues, i.e. those policy areas in which its handling ability is particularly highly rated by voters.¹ Since various parties may be seen as particularly competent and engaged in one policy area, more than one party may own an issue (Geys 2012). For example, various left-wing parties may be seen as good at dealing with welfare issues.² Moreover, parties may also own more than one issue: for instance, a Christian Democratic party could be seen as particularly competent on macroeconomic matters as well as on European integration.³ Parties should aim to increase the overall salience of the issues they own as it will be to a party's electoral advantage if the election centres on those issues (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Sides 2006; Vavreck 2009). The more the election is 'about' these topics, the more positively citizens will view the party, which will in turn make them more likely to vote for it (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Krosnick 1988). For parties, there is therefore an incentive to talk about their owned issues so as to increase their overall salience (Iyengar 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Sides 2006).

Party issue emphasis may also reflect the strategic attempt to 'ride the wave' (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994) of public concerns. So, parties may

want to talk about those issues that are at the forefront of voters' minds. There are important incentives for parties to follow such a salience strategy. For one thing, if a party ignores public concerns, voters may see it as out of touch with the electorate or indifferent to their worries (Sides 2006; Spoon and Klüver *forthcoming*). This also means that parties can improve their image if they address those issues that currently dominate the public debate. As Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994: 337) note, 'By advertising on the major issues of the day, candidates are more likely to be seen as concerned, responsive, and informed'. Sometimes the decision to address these issues may be taken reluctantly by parties. They may be forced to talk about issues they would rather ignore when other parties or the mass media turn them into important campaign topics (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Hopmann *et al.* 2012; Steenbergen and Scott 2004). Moreover, ignoring such issues can be a risky strategy as doing so can mean losing influence over how the issue is framed in the public debate (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Jerit 2008; Nadeau *et al.* 2010).

Party Organisation and Salience Strategies

While there are good reasons for parties to pursue each of these two salience strategies, we so far lack an explanation of the extent to which parties engage in each approach. In this article, we argue that the incentives for parties to pursue an issue ownership or a 'riding the wave' strategy vary systematically based on aspects of party organisation, in particular the amount of resources available and how internal decisions regarding the allocation of these resources are reached.

Party Resources

Party salience strategies should depend on the resources parties have at their disposal. These resources can be understood in terms of money, personnel or media attention, and they allow parties to address a broader range of issues (Greene 2002; Meguid 2005; Wagner 2012). Thus, it is easier to campaign on many issues if advertising dollars are abundant (Kaplan *et al.* 2006). Moreover, parties with more personnel, for example in party headquarters and in parliament, can have specialists on different topics who can then address these in public forums. Parties with more media attention can address both their 'core' issues as well as any issues that may currently dominate the voter agenda. For many parties, it makes electoral sense to address the issues that are currently of concern to voters; however, only parties with enough resources may in fact be able to do so without sacrificing emphasis on their 'core' issues.

Our first interactive hypotheses are therefore:

H1a: The fewer the resources of a party, the more it will emphasise issues that it owns.

H1b: The greater the resources of a party, the more it will emphasise issues that are of importance to voters.

Organisational Goals

Parties also vary in the extent they in fact *want* to ‘ride the wave’ of current concerns. The motivation to ‘ride the wave’ assumes that parties are primarily driven by a vote-seeking, and ultimately an office-seeking, incentive. If this is the case, then parties will pursue catch-all strategies and aim to represent as large a portion of the population as possible to increase their bargaining power and chances to enter government. Such parties will naturally have an incentive to address those issues that currently dominate public debates.

Yet the extent to which parties focus on vote and office benefits varies. Many parties also value policy-seeking goals highly, and this can result in a trade-off between conflicting goals (Müller and Strøm 1999; Pedersen 2012; Strøm 1990). A policy-seeking party will campaign mostly on those issues that are of central concern to them, often stemming from the circumstances of the party’s formation (Panbianco 1988). For Green parties, for example, environmental issues are fundamental to party identity. This may also apply to immigration issues and radical-right parties. It is also on these issues that parties develop their strongest reputations for competence. As a result, we should expect policy-seeking parties to emphasise such issues, while office-seeking parties will be more likely to emphasise issues of current voter concern.

Why are some parties more office-seeking and others more policy-seeking? One reason may lie with party elites, which themselves differ in the extent they value policy and office benefits. Despite the plausible assumption that party elites will value office more than policy (Strøm 1990), party leaders in fact differ in how they tackle the trade-off between office spoils and policy goals (Laver and Hunt 1992; Müller and Strøm 1999; Pedersen 2012). Even if party leaders preferred to abandon certain policy objectives, they might be forced to maintain them if they face a powerful, policy-seeking rank-and-file. Because party leaders aim first and foremost to remain party leaders (Luebbert 1986), they aim to satisfy the policy demands of their party activists, especially if they are powerful. Thus, the internal organisation of a party will influence the extent to which the party leadership is able to determine the party’s policy programme (Kitschelt 1989; Robertson 1976; Schumacher *et al.* 2013; Strøm 1990). Parties dominated by activists will find it harder to orient the party towards currently salient policy concerns and will also be under pressure to maintain the party’s focus on its key traditional areas of strength.

Our second interactive hypotheses are therefore:

H2a: The stronger a party's policy-seeking motivation, the more it will emphasise issues that it owns.

H2b: The stronger a party's policy-seeking motivation, the less it will emphasise issues that are of importance to voters.

In sum, party salience strategies will depend in part on features of the party's organisation: how many resources it has and what its organisational goals are. In the next section, we present the data we use to test our hypotheses.

Data

Our list of issues that parties may decide to emphasise is based on the range of topics that voters see as important. To assess this, we grouped the responses to the 'most important issue' question⁴ coded by the CSES teams into 10 policy areas: economic liberalism, social welfare, foreign and defence policy, immigration and law and order, education, agriculture, environment, moral issues, decentralisation and European integration.⁵ This list of issues is similar to that used in related studies of campaign and parliamentary agendas (e.g. Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010: 669), of portfolio allocation (e.g. Bäck *et al.* 2011), and of party salience strategies (e.g. Wagner 2012).

Party Issue Salience

We measure parties' issue emphasis using information from the CMP/MARPOR (Volkens *et al.* 2011, 2013). The CMP/MARPOR hand-codes parties' election manifestos by matching quasi-sentences with 56 issue categories. We assigned as many of these issue categories as possible to our 10 issues.⁶ The CMP/MARPOR coding scheme is explicitly based on saliency theory (Budge and Farlie 1983) and is thus particularly suitable for our analysis. We should note that party manifestos are only one data source for indicators of party issue emphasis. In fact, in these documents parties may be more likely to pursue issue ownership strategies than deal with issues of central concern to voters.⁷ If parties do indeed tend to focus on owned issues in manifestos, this would work against our hypotheses as decreasing differences across parties make it less likely to observe differences in party strategies. We are thus confident that our findings represent a conservative test for the hypotheses stated above and discuss more general implications in the conclusion.

Voter Issue Salience

We measure the salience of issues among voters using information provided in CSES election studies. We matched the country-specific issue codes with our

list of 10 policy areas.⁸ The voters' issue concerns are measured using the proportion of respondents naming that issue as the most important problem facing the country, while responses are weighted using the survey or design weight recommended in the CSES documentation. The 10 policy areas, the most frequent CSES issue labels in each category and the corresponding CMP/MARPOR codes are listed in the Appendix.⁹

Issue Ownership

Measuring issue ownership is not straightforward as there is no established way of determining which issues are owned by which party (Green and Jennings 2012a; Walgrave and De Swert 2007). In the UK and the US, there are detailed surveys that ask respondents which party is most competent at dealing with each of a series of issues (Green 2011; Sides 2006). In a cross-national setting, such data is not available.¹⁰ Moreover, an added difficulty is that issue ownership, while relatively stable, may change over time (Green and Jennings 2012b, 2012c; also Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Tresch *et al.* 2013; Walgrave *et al.* 2009).

We assign issues to parties using two sources of information: party families and single-country studies (for a similar approach see Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder 1998). First, we assigned party families to the issues they typically own. This approach is commonly used to measure issue ownership (Budge and Farlie 1983). For example, Green parties can be expected to own the environment issue, Social democrats the welfare issue and radical-right parties law and order issues (Smith 2010). This provides us with a first picture of party issue ownership. Supplemental sources of information were single-country case studies of issue ownership (Albright 2008; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2011; Green 2011; Green and Hobolt 2008; Hayes 2008; Petrocik *et al.* 2003; Smith 2010). We used these to modify our assignment of parties to issues in these countries. A drawback of this approach is that it does not allow us to distinguish varying degrees of party issue ownership (Geys 2012; Walgrave and de Swert 2007). In particular in multiparty party systems, a particular policy area could be associated with two (or even more) parties with varying levels of issue ownership. In a comparative setting, we cannot capture these nuanced differences but we can test the robustness of our coding approach by excluding individual issue areas from the analysis. Our results are robust to this model specification (see supplemental data).

Party Resources

Measures of party resources are also difficult to come by in a cross-national setting. We make use of two separate measures closely related to party resources. First, we use party size as a proxy. Larger parties tend to have more of all three kinds of resources we mention above: media attention, money and personnel (Greene 2002; Katz and Mair 1995; Mair and van Biezen 2001;

Scarrow 2006). In particular, public party funding is in part tied to the electoral success of a party (Nassmacher 2001), while larger parties also generally receive more coverage in the media (Brandenburg 2002). We measure party size using the vote share information included in the CMP/MARPOR dataset. We use the lagged value of party size because our dependent variable (taken from manifestos) is measured before the election takes place.

However, party size is only a rough proxy for the availability of resources and may in fact result from salience strategies rather than vice versa. Because of these concerns, we also test the robustness of this result using party membership as a proxy for a party's personnel resources (Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen *et al.* 2012). A party with more members will have more funding and be able to campaign more broadly. They will also have a greater variety of policy specialists. Specifically, we use the share of party members in the electorate as our estimate of a party's organisational strength. This (logged) variable correlates quite strongly with party size ($r = 0.72$; $N = 86$). Note that we do not have data on party membership for all parties in our sample.

Organisational Goals

To measure a party's focus on policies, we also employ two measures: policy-seeking by the party's leadership and the presence of powerful activists. To measure party leaders' policy focus, we use the mean scores in Laver and Hunt's (1992) expert survey (see also Pedersen 2012). This asked respondents the following question: 'Forced to make a choice, would party leaders give up policy objectives in order to get into government or would they sacrifice a place in government in order to maintain policy objectives?' Second, we use two additional Laver and Hunt (1992) question items to measure a party's internal distribution of power (see also Schumacher *et al.* 2013). Respondents are asked to 'assess the influence that party leaders, party legislators and party activists have over the formation of party policy'. To assess leader-centredness, we subtract the experts' assessment of the power of party activists (1 = 'have no influence at all'; 20 = 'have a very great influence') from the perceived power of party leaders.¹¹ A concern in using the Laver–Hunt survey data is that its data collection dates back to the late 1980s while we study elections in the 2000s. While being an imperfect measure, we nevertheless believe that the Laver–Hunt expert data provides us with reasonable estimates for the parties' organisational goals. The reason is that while party organisations may change, they do so rather rarely and slowly (Bille 2001; Lundell 2004). Thus, with some notable exceptions of major intra-party reforms, we believe that the Laver–Hunt estimates serve as reasonable proxies for party organisational goals even 15 years after these data were collected (see also Schumacher *et al.* 2013).

Note that, as with the party resources measures, there is a positive correlation between the two measures of parties' policy focus ($r = 0.43$; $N = 105$).

This is what we would expect given that party leaders are more likely to focus on the party's policy goals if party activists have more power at their disposal.

Combining information from the various data sources means that we have data on 105 party manifestos in 27 elections in 17 countries. A full list of parties, the issues they own and the elections covered in our analysis is included in the supplemental data.¹²

Model

Our outcome variable is party issue emphasis, measured as the percentage of the manifesto covering each issue area. Each case in our dataset is a party-issue unit, so there are 10 observations for each party at each election (or nine outside Europe, where European integration is not included).

The observations in this stacked dataset are not independent of each other: if a party focuses on one policy area, this reduces its emphasis on other policy areas (Jackson 2002; Katz and King 1999; Tomz *et al.* 2002). To account for this, we use a linear regression model with panel-corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995, 1996). This model accounts for the covariance of party issue emphasis in various issue areas. It is also robust against heteroscedasticity across manifestos (i.e. party-election observations). To account for potential differences across countries and issue areas, we also include country and issue area fixed effects in all models.¹³

We also control for three potentially confounding factors that may influence issue emphasis. First, we control for relative party popularity. Green (2011) argues that unpopular parties doing badly in opinion polls will pursue issue ownership strategies because their 'core issues' are the only ones they will be seen as competent on. In contrast, popular parties make use of their popularity and emphasise voters' most salient issue concerns. We therefore include interactions between issue importance and issue ownership on the one hand and relative party popularity on the other. We measure relative party popularity using information from the CSES surveys. Here, we make use of the question asking respondents to assess a series of parties on a 0–10 like–dislike scale. We use the deviation of mean party sympathy and party size (i.e. the residuals from a linear regression of size on popularity) as an indicator for a party's popularity relative to its size. Values larger than zero indicate that a party is popular (relative to its size) and values smaller than zero that it is unpopular (relative to its size).

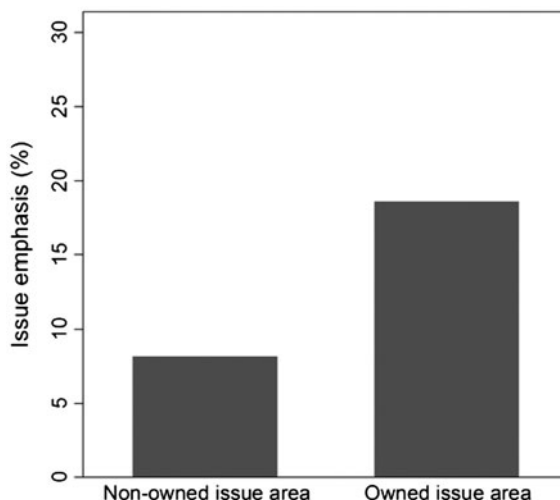
We also control for potential effects of government participation as parties may be more likely to address issue areas if they hold that ministerial portfolio. We collected data on cabinet ministers in the last non-caretaker government from the annual reviews of the *European Journal of Political Research*, with supplementary information from Keesing's Archive of World Events (see Appendix). The resulting variable is coded 1 if the party held one or more portfolios related to the issue area, 0 if not.

Finally, we control for systemic salience (Steenbergen and Scott 2004), the extent to which other parties talk about the issue area in their manifestos. This variable indicates whether parties react to the agenda set by other parties (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Hopmann *et al.* 2012; Sides 2007) as well as for common external influences on all parties. We measure systemic salience as the mean issue emphasis on the issue area among all other parties, excluding the party itself.

Results

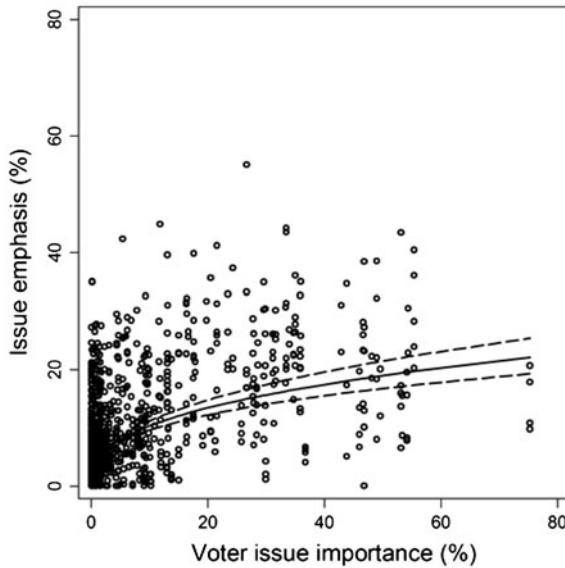
We begin with an analysis of the parties' general incentives to emphasise owned issues and those that are particularly important to voters. Figures 1 and 2 show that both issue ownership and 'riding the wave' play a role in determining parties' issue emphasis. On average, a party devotes about 8 per cent of its manifesto to an issue area that it does not own and 19 per cent to an issue area it owns (Figure 1). Parties stress their owned issues about twice as much as other issues. This difference is highly statistically significant (one-tailed t-test, $df = 1034$; p -value < 0.001). There is also evidence that party issue emphasis is related to issue importance among voters (Figure 2). Most issues are of rather low relevance for both parties and voters, indicated by the clustering of dots in the lower left corner in Figure 2. This is why we log-transform both variables in the multivariate regressions below. The solid line represents the fitted curve for a bivariate log-log regression. The regression

FIGURE 1
AVERAGE PARTY ISSUE EMPHASIS BY ISSUE OWNERSHIP



Notes: The bars indicate the average party issue emphasis (in per cent) on issue areas not owned by the party ($N = 869$) and those it owns ($N = 167$).

FIGURE 2
PARTY ISSUE EMPHASIS AND VOTER ISSUE IMPORTANCE



Notes: Circles indicate the party manifesto issue emphasis (in per cent) in the 10 policy areas (y-axis) by the voter issue importance (x-axis). The solid line indicates the predicted values of a log-log regression with 95 per cent confidence intervals (dashed lines; $N = 1,036$).

coefficient is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Yet the general ‘riding the wave’ effect appears to be rather small. The regression coefficient in a log-log regression (0.377) is substantially smaller than 1, indicating that parties ‘discount’ the voters’ issue agenda.

We can corroborate these findings in multivariate regression models where we control for party popularity and systemic salience to gain further insights on the effects of issue ownership and voter issue importance on party issue emphasis (Table 1). The results in Model 1 support the conclusion that parties address their owned issues more. The effect is positive and statistically significant, indicating that parties put more emphasis on issues they own. In contrast, there is no empirical support that party manifestos in general reflect the voters’ issue concerns. While the regression coefficient is positive, indicating that parties tend to address the voters’ most important concerns more, the effect is not statistically significant at conventional levels.

Our main focus, however, is to test for conditional effects as hypothesised above. While the results in Model 1 tell us something about party issue emphasis in general, we suggest that party issue emphasis differs systematically across parties. To test our hypothesised effects, we include interactions between the parties’ key objectives and different party types. Models 2 and 3 include two alternative measures for party resources (Hypotheses 1a and 1b) while Models 4 and 5 employ different measures for the parties’ organisational

TABLE 1
EXPLAINING PARTY ISSUE EMPHASIS: ISSUE IMPORTANCE AND OWNERSHIP

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Issue ownership	0.496*** (0.048)	0.732*** (0.088)	-0.258 (0.234)	1.349*** (0.185)	0.714*** (0.077)
Issue importance (<i>ln</i>)	0.024 (0.021)	-0.006 (0.028)	0.171** (0.063)	-0.002 (0.047)	0.022 (0.025)
Party size (<i>t</i> -1)		-0.005* (0.002)			
Issue ownership × Party size (<i>t</i> -1)		-0.012*** (0.003)			
Issue importance × Party size (<i>t</i> -1)		0.002 (0.001)			
Member resources (<i>ln</i>)			-0.045* (0.022)		
Issue ownership × Member resources (<i>ln</i>)			-0.139*** (0.042)		
Issue importance × Member resources (<i>ln</i>)			0.025* (0.011)		
Office-oriented				0.004 (0.007)	
Issue ownership × Office-oriented				-0.071*** (0.015)	
Issue importance × Office-oriented				0.002 (0.004)	
Leader-centred					-0.008 (0.005)
Issue ownership × Leader-centred					-0.037*** (0.011)
Issue importance × Leader-centred					0.001 (0.003)
Relative party popularity	-0.030 (0.039)	-0.033 (0.038)	-0.002 (0.040)	-0.032 (0.039)	-0.043 (0.038)

(Continued)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Issue ownership \times Relative party popularity	-0.058 (0.070)	-0.064 (0.069)	-0.094 (0.072)	0.025 (0.069)	-0.091 (0.069)
Issue importance \times Relative party popularity	0.046* (0.020)	0.048* (0.020)	0.049* (0.021)	0.040* (0.020)	0.051* (0.020)
Systemic salience	0.065*** (0.005)	0.064*** (0.005)	0.062*** (0.006)	0.066*** (0.005)	0.067*** (0.005)
Holding portfolio ($t-1$)	0.119* (0.054)	0.175** (0.060)	0.117 (0.064)	0.123* (0.055)	0.138* (0.053)
Constant	0.536*** (0.161)	0.640*** (0.162)	0.307 (0.192)	0.235 (0.188)	0.561*** (0.154)
RMSE	0.618	0.613	0.589	0.613	0.613
Observations	1,036	1,036	860	1,036	1,036

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$.** $p < 0.01$.*** $p < 0.001$.

Country and policy area fixed effects not reported.

goals (Hypotheses 2a and 2b). Regarding the direction of the effects, we expect negative coefficients for interactions including issue ownership, while the coefficients of interaction terms including voter issue salience should have positive signs.

Due to the log transformations, the regression coefficients are difficult to interpret directly, so we follow common practice and describe effect sizes as percentage changes in the dependent variable. A further complication results from the fact that we control for relative party popularity and its effect on issue ownership and 'riding the wave' strategies. Below, we report marginal effects for parties with average levels of popularity.

Before turning to the marginal effect plots, however, we report that the control variables have a significant impact on party issue emphasis. There is a clear moderating effect of relative party popularity, as indicated by its positive interaction with issue importance: only relatively popular parties take up issues that are important for voters (see Green 2011).¹⁴ Moreover, we also find evidence that parties with incumbent ministers put higher emphasis on policy areas for which they are accountable and that systemic salience has a positive effect on party issue emphasis.

Party Resources

The tests for a moderating effect of party resources measured using party size (Model 2) indicate that smaller parties put a higher emphasis on their owned issues than larger parties (H1a). This is indicated by the negative and statistically significant interaction effect between issue ownership and party size. Specifically, if a party has 6 per cent of the vote (i.e. one standard deviation below the mean), issue ownership almost doubles the emphasis the party places on the issue; the precise marginal effect is 93 per cent (Figure 3, top panel). For a party with 35 per cent of the vote (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean), issue ownership only increases issue emphasis by 35 per cent. The moderating effect of party resources hypothesised in H1a is rather large.

Yet there is no empirical support for our claim that larger parties with more resources put higher emphasis on issues of public concern than smaller parties (H1b). In Model 2, the interaction effect is positive but not statistically significant. Only very large parties with a vote share above 33 per cent are predicted to 'ride the wave' (Figure 3, bottom panel). Yet even for these parties the marginal effect of issue importance remains small.¹⁵ Most importantly, the differences between small and large parties are not statistically significant at conventional levels.

Using our alternative measure of party resources, membership numbers, we find support for both Hypotheses 1a and 1b (Model 3). Parties with fewer members put higher emphasis on their owned issues than parties with more members (Figure 4, top panel). Note that the party membership–electorate ratio tends to be very low: it is smaller than 0.5 per cent for the majority of all

parties. For a party with that level of membership resources, issue ownership increases issue emphasis by about 62 per cent. In contrast, if a party's membership–electorate ratio is high (2 per cent), the effect reduces to 32 per cent.

In contrast to the results in Model 2, we find limited support that higher resources increase the likelihood to 'ride the wave' (Figure 4, bottom panel). For parties with relatively few members, the voters' perceived issue importance has no effect. Only once the member/electorate ratio exceeds 0.8 per cent is the effect positive and statistically significant. Yet the large confidence intervals indicate that party differences are rather small. Thus, we conclude that member resources do not in general affect 'riding the wave' strategies.

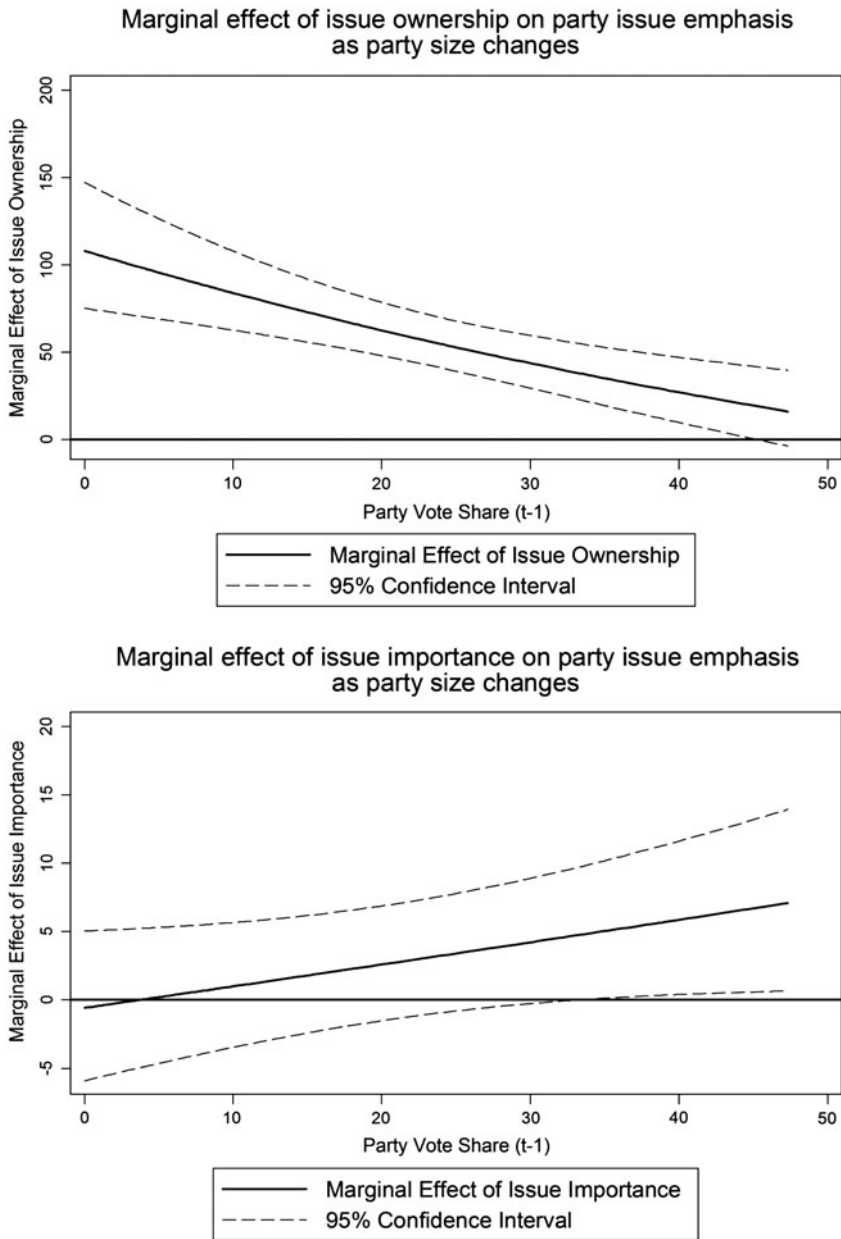
Organisational Goals

Parties with office-oriented leaders put less emphasis on their owned issues than those with policy-oriented leaders (H2a). This is indicated by the statistically significant, negative interaction effects of leaders' office orientation and leader-centredness with issue ownership (Models 4 and 5, Table 1). For a party with an average office orientation, emphasis on owned issues is about 67 per cent higher than that on issues which are not owned by the party (Figure 5, top panel). For a party with an office orientation that is one standard deviation (3.6) above the mean, this effect reduces to 30 per cent. More leader-centred parties are also less likely to address owned issues than parties that are dominated by their rank-and-file (Figure 6, top panel). For a party with an average level of leader-centredness (5.0), emphasis on owned issues is about 68 per cent higher than that of issues on which the party is not particularly competent. Increasing the influence of the party leader vis-à-vis the activists by one standard deviation (5.0 points) reduces this effect to 40 per cent.

However, how much parties address issues that are important to voters does not depend on the parties' policy focus (H2b): the relevant interaction terms including issue importance are not statistically significant. There is no empirical evidence that a party leader's office orientation affects the pursuit of a 'riding the wave' strategy (Figure 5, bottom panel). The slope of the curve and the large standard errors show that differences in parties' focus on office vs. policies do not affect the parties' emphasis on voter issue concerns. There is also no significant difference between activist- and party leader-centred parties with regard to 'riding the wave' strategies. The marginal effect is small, insignificant and does not reveal differences across parties (Figure 6, bottom panel).

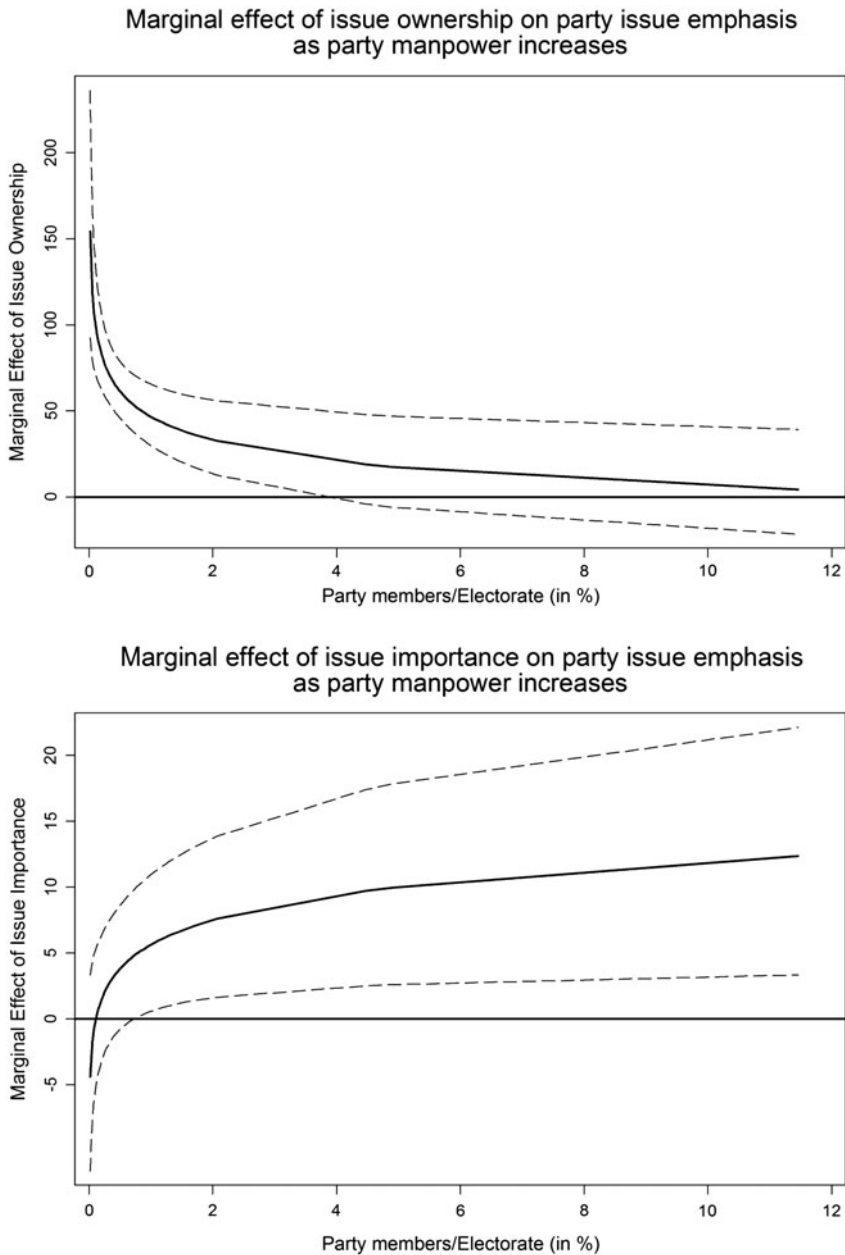
Taken together, we find strong and consistent empirical evidence that a party's emphasis of owned issues depends on party resources and organisational goals (Hypotheses 1a and 2a). These results (shown in the top panels of Figures 3–6) are robust across model specifications and the moderating effects are also large in substantive terms. In contrast, we find no or only very limited evidence that party organisation affects the parties' incentives to address voter issue concerns in their manifestos (Hypotheses 1b and 2b). These moderating

FIGURE 3
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF ISSUE OWNERSHIP AND ISSUE IMPORTANCE DEPENDING
ON PARTY SIZE



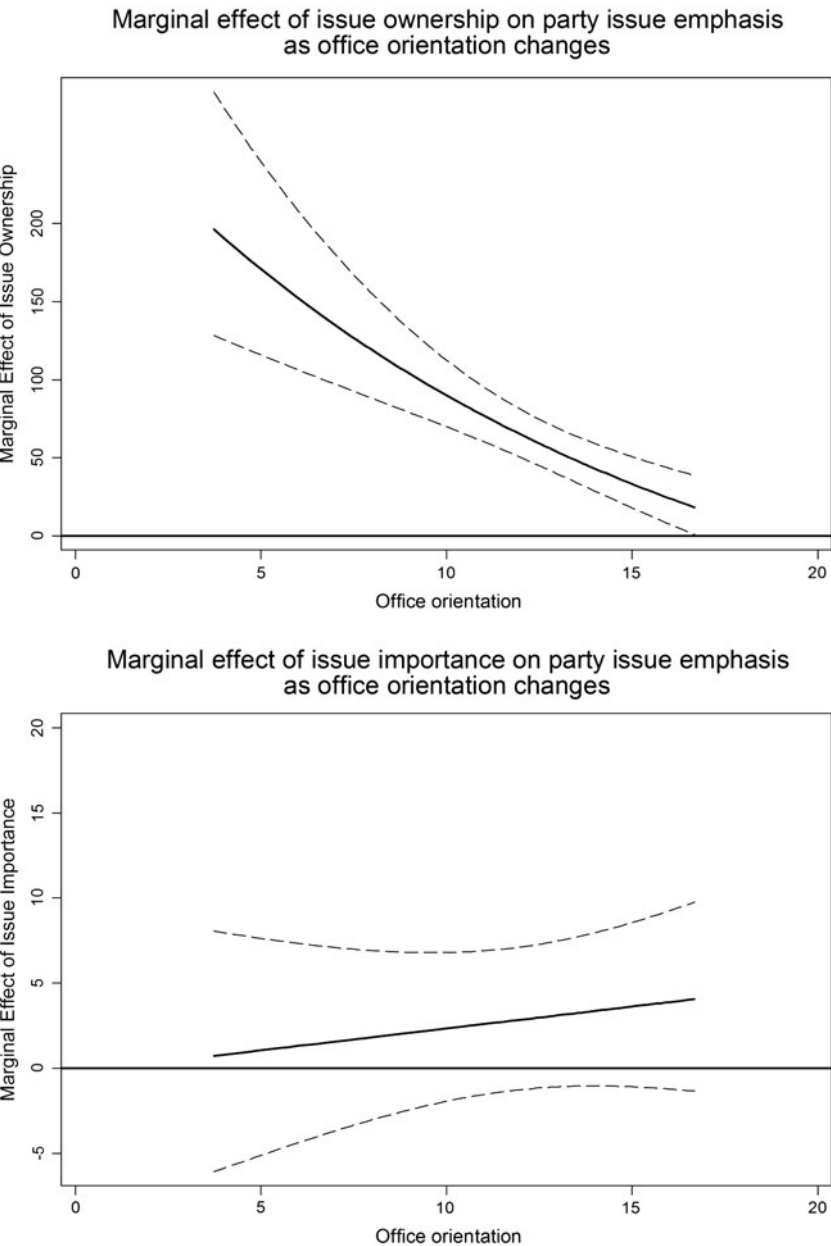
Notes: Marginal effects based on Model 2, Table 1. The y-axis reports the percentage increase in the dependent variable. The x-axis shows party vote shares in the previous election ($t-1$). Marginal effects for issue importance are reported for an increase by one standard deviation (14 per cent) from the mean (8 per cent).

FIGURE 4
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF ISSUE OWNERSHIP AND ISSUE IMPORTANCE DEPENDING
ON MEMBER RESOURCES



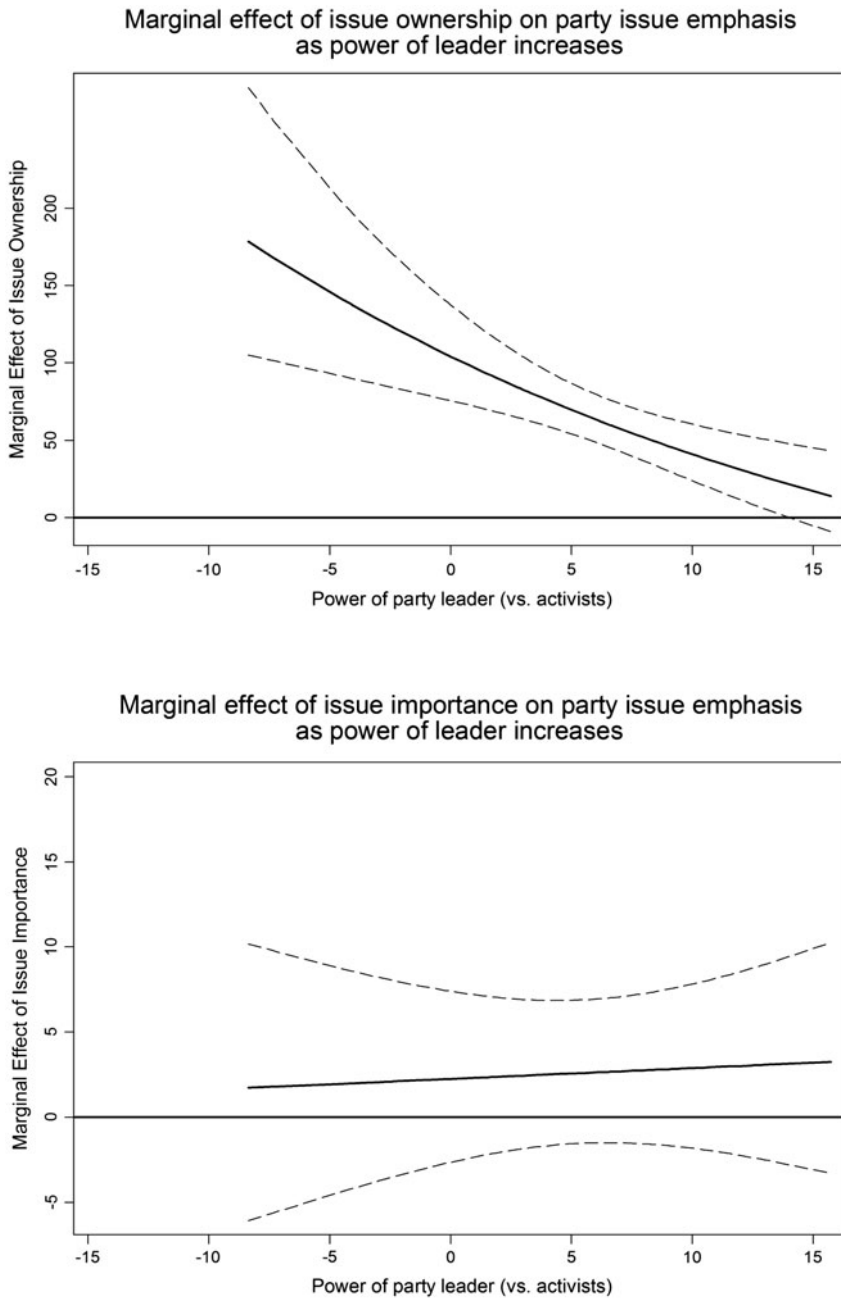
Notes: Marginal effects based on Model 3 in Table 1. The y-axis reports the percentage increase in the dependent variable. The x-axis shows the share of party members relative to the total electorate (in per cent). Marginal effects for issue importance are reported for an increase by one standard deviation (14 per cent) from the mean (8 per cent).

FIGURE 5
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF ISSUE OWNERSHIP AND ISSUE IMPORTANCE DEPENDING
ON LEADERS' POLICY FOCUS



Notes: Marginal effects based on Model 4 in Table 1. The y-axis reports the percentage increase in the dependent variable. The x-axis shows the party leaders' office orientation (1–20). Marginal effects for issue importance are reported for an increase by one standard deviation (14 per cent) from the mean (8 per cent).

FIGURE 6
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF ISSUE OWNERSHIP AND ISSUE IMPORTANCE DEPENDING
ON PARTIES' FOCUS ON PARTY LEADERS



Notes: Marginal effects based on Model 5 in Table 1. The y-axis reports the percentage increase in the dependent variable. The x-axis shows the party leaders' influence relative that of the party activists (range: -19 to +19). Marginal effects for issue importance are reported for an increase by one standard deviation (14 per cent) from the mean (8 per cent).

effects (shown in the bottom panels of Figures 3–6) are rather small and in most cases insignificant.

Conclusion

How parties engage in issue competition depends on their internal organisation. Those parties with fewer resources and a policy orientation tend to focus on those concerns that are most important to their own activists and supporters while parties with greater resources and an office orientation are less likely to do so. The overall organisational characteristics of a party therefore moderate the use of issue ownership strategies. However, resources and policy focus do not in general moderate the use of ‘riding the wave’ strategies in party manifestos: where we find significant differences, the effect is weak (Model 3), and the effect is insignificant if we use another measurement approach (Model 2). Our results for ‘riding the wave’ strategies and party organisation are therefore mixed. However, we do consistently find that ‘riding the wave’ strategies are moderated by the relative popularity of parties, a control variable in our regression models. While in general most party manifestos do not reflect the issue priorities of the electorate, relatively popular parties do indeed ‘ride the wave’ of popular concerns (see also Green 2011).

Our results have important implications for the study of party competition and electoral campaigns. We have found that the role parties play in electoral campaigns is related to their overall organisational characteristics. One consequence of such differences in issue emphasis is on whether parties talk about the same issues in the campaign (‘issue engagement’) or instead focus on different topics (‘issue avoidance’) (Sigelman and Buell 2004). If parties ‘ride the wave’ of voter priorities, issue engagement is more likely; if they focus on owned issues, issue avoidance is the probable end result. So, our findings show that whether parties address the same issues depends on aspects of party organisation. Specifically, parties with fewer resources and where activists are influential will talk about their ‘best’ issues and thus have a narrower profile. This also means that within one party system some parties may engage over issues while others will concentrate on topics other parties ignore. This has broader implications for the types of issues that characterise campaigns and for what voters can learn about party programmes before elections.

Our conception and measurement of issue ownership was straightforward: while more than one party can own an issue, we treated ownership as a binary feature of parties. Future research should go beyond this simple approach. For example, parties may vary in the strength of their issue ownership (Geys 2012; Walgrave and de Swert 2007), and this could influence issue emphasis decisions. Moreover, parties can engage in issue trespassing, which occurs when parties decide to emphasise those policy areas that other parties own (Damore 2004; Norpoth and Buchanan 1992; Sides 2007). It may be that organisational features affect whether parties try to ‘steal’ other parties’ issues. There is

therefore much scope for future research on when and why parties vary in their use of specific salience strategies.

Future research should also analyse whether our findings hold for other forms of party communication. We have focused on party manifestos, a very specific form of party communication in election campaigns, and the findings suggest that parties address voters' issue concerns only to a very limited extent. If this finding held in general, then this would have important negative consequences for voter representation by parties, of which agenda congruence is one aspect (Jennings and John 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2004). Yet we have mentioned above that manifestos are probably the means of party communication where issue ownership strategies are most likely to be used (see also Krouwel and van Elkfrinkhof 2013). Other means of party campaign communication, such as party press releases and TV advertisements, may more closely reflect voters' issue concerns. If this is the case, we may also observe party differences in the use of 'riding the wave' strategies in these means of communication. In light of our arguments, we are most likely to find differences in party communication that is labour- or capital-intensive (e.g. party advertisements on TV or in newspapers), as only parties with many resources may be able to respond to public issue concerns in such venues.¹⁶ In any case, more research is needed about how party strategies may differ across different means of communication and the implications of this for understanding party campaigns and agenda congruence.

Acknowledgements

Research on this project was financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) under the project 'Austrian National Election Study' (AUTNES, S10902-G11 and S10903-G11). We would like to thank our reviewers and the conference participants at the MPSA Annual Conference 2012, the EPSA General Conference 2012 and the CES Annual Conference 2012 for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. We would also like to thank Roman Senninger for research assistance. All errors remain our own.

Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.911483>

Notes

1. In Walgrave *et al.*'s (2012) approach, this is called 'competence issue ownership', so whether a party is seen as being able to deal with an issue effectively.
2. Note that this means that the term 'ownership' is in fact a little misleading as ownership need not be exclusive.
3. Issue ownership may also change over time: a long-term reputation does not equal an unchangeable reputation (Tresch *et al.* 2013).

4. The question wording has changed from CSES Module 2 ('most important issue') to Module 3 ('the most important problem'). Jennings and Wlezien (2011) show these changes do not affect the aggregate issue importance scores. Moreover, Bartle and Laycock (2012) show that aggregate responses to 'most important issue' questions reflect the issue concerns of a typical voter. While individual responses most likely reflect the issue concerns of fellow citizens rather than personal preferences, averaging individual responses provides reasonable estimates for issue concerns in the electorate.
5. European integration is not considered for the countries outside Europe (i.e. Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA). We include it for non-EU countries in Europe (i.e. Norway and Switzerland) as the relationship with the EU is a matter of political debate in these countries.
6. For the CMP/MARPOR data we use here, existing research (Mikhaylov *et al.* 2012; Pennings 2011; Volkens *et al.* 2013) shows that some of 56 issue categories are not reliable and should not be used in isolation. We address the problem somewhat by aggregating the issue categories into 10 issue areas.
7. These documents, often carefully negotiated within parties, serve many purposes, not least to please party activists. Thus, they are more likely to focus on a party's owned issues and less likely to incorporate current voter concerns than other forms of party communication such as press releases and media appearances.
8. The authors coded this list independently, with conflicting decisions reconciled through joint discussion. The full list matching CSES codes to the 10 issues is available from the authors.
9. Although we can only measure voter salience after the election took place, we believe that the post-election issue agenda should be a good proxy for the pre-election period on which manifestos were based. This is because the time span between the publication of a party's manifesto and the election itself is usually short, often just a couple of weeks (Dolezal *et al.* 2012), and the public issue agenda is rather stable over a single election campaign (Page 1978: chapter 5; Clarke *et al.* 2009: chapter 3 and 152–6).
10. Party competence assessments for the most important issues are only included in Module 3 (but not in Module 2) of the CSES. Furthermore, even the available data is not suitable for our purposes because the number of respondents evaluating the parties' issue competence is very small for the less salient issues.
11. Intuitively, one may expect parties' resources and their policy focus to be related. Yet smaller parties with fewer resources are not necessarily activist-centred and policy-seeking. The difference is perhaps most apparent with regard to Green and small radical right parties (Burchell 2001; Mudde 2007).
12. We also excluded manifestos from the analysis if their salience coding was 'estimated' (i.e. not measured but interpolated from adjacent observations).
13. We also tested alternative model specifications that take characteristics of our data structure into account. The results for these models are very similar to the ones presented below (see supplemental data). We also assessed the robustness of our findings by excluding niche parties, accounting for the effect of government participation, and by excluding one issue at a time. Our substantive results do not change as a result of these re-specifications (see supplemental data).
14. Due to space constraints, we do not discuss these interaction effects of our control variables in greater detail. Marginal effect graphs are available upon request.
15. If issue importance increases by one standard deviation from 8 to 22 per cent, party issue emphasis increases by about 6 percentage points (e.g. from 10 to 10.6 per cent of the manifesto).
16. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this argument.

Notes on Contributors

Thomas M. Meyer is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Government, University of Vienna, Austria and a post-doctoral researcher in the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES). His research focuses on electoral politics, political parties, party competition and government coalitions. His research has been published in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Electoral Studies*, *Journal of Elections*, *Public Opinion and Parties*, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, *Party Politics* and *West European Politics*. [thomas.meyer@univie.ac.at]

Markus Wagner is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Methods in the Social Sciences, University of Vienna, Austria. His research focuses on the role of issues and ideology in voting behaviour and party competition. His research has been published in, among others, the *British Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Electoral Studies*, the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Party Politics*, *Political Studies* and *West European Politics*. [markus.wagner@univie.ac.at]

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APPENDIX
ISSUE CATEGORISATION

Policy area	Voter issue agenda	CMP categories	Ministries
Economic liberalism: Economy, taxes and budget	economy/economic; inflation; taxes; debt; budget; privatisation; prices	per401–per404; per406; per407; per409–per411; per413; per414; per505; per702; per704	Budget, Finance, Economy
Social welfare/ state intervention	social; health care; (un) employment; poverty; elderly; housing; wages; pensions	per405; per412; per415; per502; per504; per701; per706	Health, Social policy, Housing
Foreign affairs and defence	foreign affairs; defence; Iraq; war; national security; international relations	per101–per107 per109	Foreign affairs, Defence, Development
European integration	Europe; European integration/enlargement; Euro	per108; per110	European integration, EU
Immigration and law and order	crime; immigration; law and order; inner security; integration; terrorism	per201–per204 per303–per305; per605; per607; per608	Interior
Education	education; educational system; schools and universities	per506; per507	Education, Schools, Higher education
Agriculture	agriculture; fisheries; rural issues	per703	Agriculture, Fisheries, Rural issues
Environment	environment; environmental protection; climate change; nuclear power	per416; per501	Environment, Energy, Natural resources
Moral issues	abortion; moral issues; homosexuality; tolerance; civil rights of homosexuals; (lack of) values and norms	per503; per601–per604; per606; per705	
Decentralisation	decentralisation; regional policies; power of the federal government	per301; per302	Regions, Local government

Note: Issues listed in column 2 are based on pre-coded issue labels by the CSES.