

**OWNING THE ISSUE AGENDA:  
PARTY STRATEGIES IN THE 2001 AND 2005 BRITISH ELECTION  
CAMPAIGNS.**

JANE GREEN

Nuffield College  
University of Oxford  
jane.green@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

SARA BINZER HOBOLT

Department of Politics and International Relations  
University of Oxford  
sara.hobolt@politics.ox.ac.uk

*Draft paper.  
Please do not cite without permission from the authors.  
Comments very welcome.*

Paper prepared for presentation at the  
Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting  
April 20-23, 2006, Chicago

**Abstract** Most explanations of party competition are based on the Downsian view that parties maximize votes by adopting positions on policy dimensions. An alternative ‘issue ownership’ approach suggests that parties compete by emphasizing different issues where they have a relative advantage - they campaign on their ‘owned issues’. This paper proposes a model of party competition which combines elements of both the spatial and the issue ownership model. Unlike previous issue ownership theories of party competition, we build our prediction of party behavior on an explicit model of vote choices. The assumptions of this model are tested in an empirical analysis of voting behavior and party strategies in the 2001 and 2005 British general elections. We examine the strategies employed by the three major parties, using quantitative analysis of speeches, press releases and party election broadcasts. We find that parties campaign on their owned issues and issues where they have a positional advantage to raise the salience of these issues in the minds of voters. Parties with a broader issue appeal can campaign exclusively on ‘owned’ issues, thereby giving incumbents a natural advantage, whereas parties with few or no owned issues are forced to enter into dialogue on issues that may disadvantage them and on issues on which their advantage is positional. We further argue that the dynamic of agenda setting is a reciprocal process where party campaign strategies reflect public issue salience and in turn, public perceptions and vote choices are shaped by these strategies during the campaign itself. The theoretical model is tested in an analysis of the relative importance of issue position, issue ownership and issue salience to the vote in 2005.

The classic spatial approach to party competition is based on a Downsian view of the political world where parties maximize votes by adopting a position on a policy dimension (Downs 1957). On the basis of this theory, we would expect all campaigns to gravitate towards the median voter. An alternative view of party competition posits that parties do not primarily compete by changing ideological positions, but by emphasizing different policy issues during the campaign. There are various incarnations of this approach, such as the ‘dominance principle’ (Riker 1993, 1996), the ‘saliency theory’ (Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge 1993) and ‘issue ownership’ (Petrocik 1996). Common to all is the argument that parties seek to shape campaign agendas by discussing issues that assent their strengths and avoiding issues that provide the opposition with an advantage. Since no issue can work to the advantage of two opposing parties this leads to the general expectation that parties talk past each other during campaigns. This focus on issues rather than ideological position provides a useful framework for analyzing patterns of party competition, especially during periods of ideological convergence, yet the issue ownership theory has recently come under attack for lacking both a sound theoretical foundation and empirical support for its propositions (see Damore 2005; Kaplan et al. 2006; Sigelman and Buell 2004). In contrast to the spatial approach to party competition, the issue ownership theory notably lacks an explicit model of voting behavior and its assumptions about how voters respond to party behavior remain largely untested in the literature.

This paper aims to contribute to this debate by developing a model of issue ownership that explicitly incorporates voter preferences and then by testing both the predictions of this model in an analysis of British general election campaigns and the explanatory power of the model in an analysis of vote choice. Rather than focusing exclusively on party competition, the paper therefore examines the dynamic process of mass-elite interaction in campaigns, from issue salience over party strategies to vote choices, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of party competition and its effects on election outcomes.

In the first part of the paper we present a utility model of voting behavior that combines elements from both the spatial model of voting and the issue ownership theory. We show that by extending the classic Downsian unidimensional model of voting to a multidimensional setting the economic model of vote choice is consistent with the issue ownership theory. On the basis of this model, we would expect parties to seek to influence the relative salience of issue in voters’ utility calculus, depending on how competent and ‘mainstream’ they are perceived to be on different dimensions. In the second part of the

paper we analyze the issue ownership and issue salience ratings of voters in relation to evaluations of the three main British political parties in two General Election campaigns, 2001 and 2005. Rather than treating ‘issue ownership’ as a dichotomous construct, we analyze it as a continuum of relative advantage/disadvantage, using public opinion data. Next, our model of party competition is tested empirically by examining party issue emphasis strategies in the last two British general election campaigns using quantitative content analysis of campaign speeches, press releases and party broadcasts. Finally, we test the underlying assumptions of the model by evaluating the relative importance of the issue ownership and issue position models to the vote. We show that an issue ownership advantage favored Labour more than ideological position on the left-right dimension in 2005. We also find that an owned issue is more important to the vote when it is salient than when it is not. Thus, we show that a strategy aimed at raising the salience of owned issues is consistent with our voter utility model.

### **The issue ownership theory of party competition**

In campaigns parties seek to influence their voting support by manipulating campaign agendas. As Aldrich and Griffin (2003:240) note, the ‘strategies the candidates choose in an election campaign – what they emphasize and what they ignore – have important effects on vote choices and therefore on outcomes’. But why do candidates choose to emphasize certain issue agendas and ignore others? Scholars focusing on agenda setting argue that parties shape agendas by campaigning on issues on which they have a particular advantage. Riker (1993) has labeled this the Dominance/Dispersion principle, stating that the purpose of campaign messages is not to engage the opposition in debate or dialogue, but to increase the saliency of issues over which the party or candidate is perceived to be credible. In a European context, Budge and Farlie (1983) have developed a ‘saliency theory’ of party competition arguing that most political parties do not seek direct confrontation on issues, but engage in selective emphasis of certain issues (see also Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001; van der Brug 2004; Clarke et al. 2005). This view of party competition is supported by the valence model of voting, which posits that voters primarily opt for the party that has the means to achieve commonly agreed goals rather than choosing between parties on the basis of different ends (Stokes 1963). In other words, voters choose the party most capable of delivering what everybody wants. A similar theory of ‘issue

ownership' has been advanced by Petrocik (1996) who argues that parties compete by emphasizing issues where they have a stable reputation for greater competence (i.e. parties "own" certain issues) rather than shifting positions on one issue dimension. This theory has been formalized by Simon (2002) who deduces that 'as no themes can work to the advantage of both candidates, they will never allocate resources to the same theme' (64). The common expectation of all of these approaches (which we henceforth refer to as the 'issue ownership theory') is that during campaigns parties tend to promote issues on which they hold a long-standing reputation of competence.

The issue ownership theory is appealing because it provides an intuitive explanation for why parties campaign on different issues and how parties distinguish themselves in times of ideological convergence. But there are also several problems – theoretical as well as empirical. First, the issue ownership theory has recently been challenged on empirical grounds by scholars demonstrating high levels of dialogue, or 'issue convergence', in American election campaigns (Sigelman and Buell 2004; Kaplan et al. 2006). These studies show a high degree of similarity in the issue emphasis of competing candidates, contradicting the 'issue divergence' premise of the issue ownership theory. Issue ownership scholars do acknowledge that some campaign dialogue will take place. By dividing issues into two categories, owned issues (or constituency-based) and performance issues, they allow for dialogue on performance issues, such as foreign relations and government record, since 'such issues are not permanently owned by any party, but may be annexed temporarily...hence, most direct argument and confrontation will be focused in this areas' (Budge and Farlie 1983:42, see also Petrocik 1996). But the theory does not convincingly account for those instances where parties converge on issues such as education, health care or social security, which are clearly regarded as owned issues rather than performance issues. Part of the problem stems from the dichotomous view of 'owned issues' espoused in the literature: an issue is either owned or not owned by a party, and this is generally *assumed* rather than evaluated using public opinion data. The Petrocik et al. (2003) study is based on the untested assumption that Republicans always 'own' issues such as low taxes and national security, whereas Democrats 'own' issues related to the elderly, unemployment and social security. But this approach raises several problems, particularly in multi-party systems, where it is not clear that an issue is either permanently owned or not owned by a party. We might find cases of issues first owned by one party and then another, overlapping ownership of certain issues or minor parties that do not own any issues exclusively. To account for such a reality, it is preferable to treat ownership as a continuum (rather than a dichotomy), where

parties have incentives to campaign on issues where they have a *relative* advantage over their main competitors in a given electoral competition. This is the approach adopted in the empirical part of this paper, where the relative ‘ownership’ of an issue is based on an analysis of the public’s evaluation of candidates’ or parties’ performance on a range policy issues.

A second criticism of the issue ownership theory relates to the absence of voter preferences. As Damore (2005) points out, the literature is largely silent on the political context within which campaigns are fought. Some issues are likely to be highly salient to voters even before the campaign begins, and such issues are then likely to influence vote choices regardless of whether a single party ignores them (Belanger and Meguid 2004). A party may suffer more greatly from ignoring a highly salient issue than from contributing to the salience of that issue if owned by an opponent. Following this, one would expect that in order to maximize votes, parties would not only emphasize issues on which they have a strong reputation (issue ownership), but also emphasize issues that are very important to the public (issue saliency). This may give incumbents a natural advantage, since they tend to ‘own’ issues that are already highly salient. Conversely, small parties that are always in opposition may own no or few issues and may be forced to campaign on salient issues where they have no particular advantage. In this case, we would not necessarily expect campaigns to be characterized by perfect issue divergence, as suggested elsewhere (see Simon 2002), but rather foresee a transaction process of agenda-setting, where parties and voters converge on a set of highly salient issues (Dalton et al.1998). Only parties with a broad issue appeal can then afford to campaign exclusively on owned issues. Moreover, given that parties are expected to base their strategies on expectations of how voters respond, it is important to be explicit about how voters react to party behavior (see Aldrich and Griffin 2004).

The aim of this paper is to incorporate voter preferences explicitly into the issue ownership model of party competition in order to develop a more comprehensive framework. The paper thereby makes a theoretical and empirical contribution by elaborating and testing the issue ownership theory and examining its underpinnings in the British context.

## Modeling voting behavior and party competition

Building on the issue ownership theory, but seeking to overcome its shortfalls, we present a model of party competition which explicitly takes its starting point in voter preferences. We assume that parties are rational actors who want to win elections, and we thus expect them to act in ways that maximize their vote share (Strøm 1990). Most models of voting behavior build on the classic spatial theory of voting, originally popularized by Downs: individuals vote for the party holding policy positions most similar to their own positions (Downs 1957; Davis, Hinich and Ordeshook 1970; Enelow and Hinich 1984). In the proximity model, a voter's utility on each dimension for party  $p$  is a declining function of policy distance from voter to candidate:

$$U_{ijp} = -(P_{jp} - P_{ji})^2 + C_{jp} \quad (1)$$

where voter  $i$ 's overall evaluation of party  $p$ 's utility on dimension  $j$  ( $U_{ijp}$ ) depends upon the squared distance between party's position ( $P_{jp}$ ) and the voter  $i$ 's own preferred position or ideal point on this issue ( $P_{ji}$ ). Since the utility declines with distance, a negative sign defines this utility function. The model presented above also includes the term  $C_{jp}$ , which captures the *competence* of a party on a particular issue dimension. Competence (or credibility) captures a "handling" notion at the heart of the issue ownership theory: 'a reputation... which leads voters to believe that one of the parties is more sincere and committed to doing something about [the issue]' (Petrocik 1996:826). Several authors have introduced non-policy considerations, such as issue competence and likelihood of delivery into the spatial voter calculus, showing that these factors can give one party an advantage with important implications for party differentiation (see Enelow and Hinich 1982; Enelow and Munger 1993; Heath et al, 2001). Introducing non-policy factors can thus be seen as a logical extension of the Downsian model (see Grofman 2004). According to the simple Downsian median voter theorem, parties will converge around the median voter (in a unidimensional space). Consequently, rational parties eliminate distances between each other, and voters can no longer choose between them on spatial grounds. Therefore, when policy distances between parties are modest, we would expect vote choice to be largely determined on the basis of which party is best trusted to deliver on the particular issue dimension. Hence, the above model merges the policy proximity considerations of the classic spatial model of voting with the 'competence' considerations inherent in the valence model of voting (Stokes

1963). Whilst these two models of voting are often presented as competing models (see for example Clarke et al. 2005), they can equally be presented as a unified model, as illustrated in equation 1. In that case, we expect issue competence (or valence) considerations to be more important to voter's relative utility when parties take very similar positions on an issue, whereas we expect proximity to matter more when parties are polarized.

In any campaign there will be a range of issues and themes. To understand the behavior of parties, we thus need to go beyond the one-dimensional model. The basic Downsian model locates policy parties along a single (left-right) dimension, but an obvious extension is to consider multiple dimensions of issue competition. For simplicity's sake, we can present a campaign with two issue dimensions  $j$  (indexed by  $j= 1,2$ ). In this simple model, voter  $i$ 's overall utility from electing a particular party  $U_{ip}$  depends on the utility derived from each dimension  $j$ , weighted by the salience of that dimension to the voter. We depict salience as a weight  $w_j$  on each dimension (bounded between 0 and 1):

$$U_{ip} = w_{i1}U_{i1p} + w_{i2}U_{i2p} \quad (2)$$

The overall utility of voting for a party thus depends on the salience of that issue to the individual voter ( $w_{ij}$ ) and the voter's utility on each dimension  $U_{ijp}$ , described in equation 1 as depending on proximity and issue trust considerations.

Following the one-dimensional model (equation 1), the main strategy options for a party are either to change position closer to the median voter and/or improve reputation on that issue. Both strategies are difficult to implement in the short-run. Perceptions of issue position and issue credibility are built over long periods of time, and indeed radical changes in the former may harm the latter, whereas parties can manipulate salience more readily in campaigns (Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001). If we turn to the multi-dimensional model of voting behaviour (equation 2), parties therefore have another strategy option available to them, namely to influence the salience of the issues on which they have an advantage. For example, a party that enjoys high competence ratings on issue dimension 1, but is perceived to be less competent on issue dimension 2, may seek to influence the salience associated with issue 1 ( $w_1$ ) by campaigning intensely on this issue, whilst ignoring issue dimension 2. Note that our model also leads us to expect that on 'position issues' (as opposed to 'valence issues'), a party close to the median voter will seek to raise the salience of that issue. In the communications literature this strategy is also referred to as *priming* and pertains to the

weighting of considerations in a given decision (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). If the priming strategy is successful, the ‘primed’ issue dimension will carry a greater weight in voters’ subsequent judgment. This can be formulated as the basic issue ownership hypothesis of party competition:

H1: *When parties converge ideologically, they will seek to maximize votes in election campaigns by emphasizing issues where they have a relative advantage in ‘issue competence’ over other parties.*

As noted above, the issue ownership model leads to an expectation of *issue divergence* in campaigns (Petrocik 1996; Sigelman and Buell 2004; Kaplan et al. 2006). This expectation has been seen to contradict the spatial model, which predicts party convergence to the median voter position (Budge 1994). Yet, as Grofman (2004) has pointed out, some issue divergence is not unlikely when the Downsian model is extended to multiple dimensions of issue competition: ‘a generally neglected aspect of Downs’ (1957) work, highly relevant to party divergence, is the possibility of putting together winning coalitions based on minority groups with intense preferences on particular issue dimensions’ (Grofman 2004:31). Moreover, in a multiparty system, where some parties may own few or no issues, it is far less clear that an expectation of ‘selective emphasis’ would necessarily lead to complete issue divergence (‘no dialogue’) since parties will be forced to campaign on “shared issues”. By reformulating issue ownership as the ‘relative advantage in issue competence’, emphasizing that the notion of ‘ownership’ is relative and continuous, rather than absolute and dichotomous, we expect that while parties with a large number of owned issues will campaign almost exclusively on these issues, other parties in multiparty systems with fewer owned issues will have to enter the ‘issue territory’ of their competitors, and therefore there will be some overlap in campaign messages.

The issue ownership theory assumes that it is easier to influence voter’s issue salience than a party’s issue trust (ownership) during a campaign (see e.g. Petrocik 1996). However, the fact that issue salience is more malleable than ownership does not imply that the importance attached to an issue by voters is purely determined by ‘priming’ strategies. For example, if unemployment is very high in a country, this is likely to be a salient issue regardless of whether parties choose to campaign on it. Equally, terrorism and security is likely to become a salient issue after a serious terrorist attack, regardless of whether the parties actively ‘prime’ the issue. In other words, parties are not only influencing public issue salience, they are also *responding* to it. When an issue is very salient to the public prior

to the campaign, we would expect parties to campaign on the issue(s) almost regardless of their ‘credibility’, because parties will be unable to make the issue ‘go away’ simply by ignoring it. Given the high weight (salience) attached to an issue by voters, this will reduce voters’ utility of voting for such a party. Hence, whilst we generally expect ‘selective issue emphasis’ by parties (as outlined in hypothesis 1), we hypothesize that parties will consider issue salience as well as issue ownership when formulating their campaign strategies:

H2: *Parties are more likely to emphasize issues that are consistently and highly salient to the public before the campaign.*

In sum, we expect parties to base their campaign strategies on a combination of issue ownership and issue salience considerations. When parties move towards the centre, they will seek to maximize votes by campaigning on issue dimensions where they are regarded as more ‘competent’ than their opponents. But certain issue dimensions of high public salience cannot be ignored by political parties altogether, since they will inevitably play a role in the voter calculus of a large part of the electorate. In the next section, we evaluate these propositions empirically in the 2001 and 2005 British general election campaigns.

### **Issue salience and ownership in the British general elections**

We expect parties to campaign on issues on which they have a relative advantage in order to raise their salience. On valence issues we expect parties to adopt issue ownership strategies, and where parties have few owned issues, we expect parties to raise the salience of issues on which they have a positional advantage and to respond to existing high salience issues.

To test these propositions in a multi-party setting, we measure each party’s utility on an issue as a function of its relative advantage to two other parties, weighted by the salience of that issue. MORI issue salience and best party ratings are used. These data represent the only consistent time series for these two questions, and is therefore ideal for comparing two elections. Predictions are based on issue evaluations in the three months prior to the election campaigns. The following table presents the ratings of each issue as important as percentage frequencies in the February 2001 and 2005 MORI surveys.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Health and education remain the two most salient issues in both 2001 and 2005. In 2001 these two issues are the dominant issues in the issue agenda overall – no other issue comes close in ratings of the most important facing the country. In 2005 they are still the most highly rated issues, but other salient issues now include race/immigration and crime. We would thus expect all parties to be more likely to campaign on these issues (see hypothesis 2). However, contrary to a simple extension of the Downsian model, which would predict that parties simply respond to voter preferences in terms of policy position and the issues thought most important to voters, we expect parties to primarily prioritize issue where they also have a ‘competence’ advantages (hypothesis 1). Table 2 presents the relative advantage of each party in relation to the two other parties for the salient issues in each year. These scores are calculated by simply subtracting one party’s ‘best party’ frequency with the ‘best party’ frequency of the party with which it is compared.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In 2001 Labour has a commanding advantage on all issues, except immigration, defense and Europe, in relation to both the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat parties. The advantage over the latter is unsurprising, given that the Liberal Democrat party has no ‘owned’ issues (possibly due to its position as permanent opposition party in post-war British politics). Thus for the Liberal Democrats a utility function on any issue will more conceivably based on issue position and issue salience than relative issue advantage. The Liberal Democrats should be expected to converge towards the median voter (as we expect of the other parties) and to raise the salience of the issues on which it has the optimal issue *position*. However, Labour’s largest advantages, on health, education, the economy and unemployment, represent its best relative advantages and we should therefore expect Labour to attempt to emphasize these issues. However, combined with the issue salience ratings in Table 2, Labour can be expected to gain the most from campaigning on the first three issues, health, education and the economy, since unemployment is a low salience issues, ranked eighth overall. For the Conservatives, predicted issue utilities are best viewed by comparing the advantage with Labour (mainly negative) with the advantage over the Liberal Democrats. In competition with Labour the Conservatives only have a significant advantage over Labour on race/immigration and a very minimal advantage on defense. Moreover, their “least damaging” issues are Europe and crime. However, if we compare the Conservative’s advantage over the Liberal Democrats with their relative scores with Labour we find net

advantages in three party competition on race/immigration (55), defense (22.1), Europe (20.7), Crime (18.3) and taxation (1.5). Weighting these scores by issue salience in 2001 leads to the prediction of Conservative campaign emphasis on race/immigration, crime and Europe as well as possibly education and health, simply due to the high level of public salience. That is, although the Conservatives have a relative advantage on defense the issue is not salient (and the advantage is minimal), and the relative advantage of taxation compared with its low salience are also insufficient to give the Conservatives an overall competitive advantage on this issue.

In 2001, we thus find that Labour has a strong relative advantage on the issues most salient with the public. The Liberal Democrats have no advantages or owned issues overall, and the Conservative's main advantages are on the relatively low salience issues of immigration (ranked fourth most salient issue) and defense (ranked tenth). In 2005, the salience of immigration was far higher than in 2001. The salience of this issue rose from 9.5% to 18.4%, and the salience of defense had also increased to 12.5%. Therefore if the Conservatives had maintained their ownership of these issues, we can expect the party to emphasise them in the 2005 campaign. Table 4 presents the relative advantage for each party in relation to other parties across each issue in 2005.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Labour again has an advantage over the Conservatives on most issues, but now the party's advantage on the two most salient issues, health and education, has diminished. The party's largest relative advantage is on the economy – an issue only rated the most important issue by 5.7% of respondents. On the basis of these figures, we expect that Labour will campaign on health and education as well as the economy. Labour still owns the issue of unemployment but this issue, although not much lower in salience than the economy, can be expected to be far less important to the vote, given the centrality of the economy to vote choices.<sup>1</sup> The Conservatives have remained the party that 'owns' immigration, and its advantage on crime is also higher than in 2001. Furthermore, both these issues have increased in salience. At 18.8% crime is the third most important issue, only marginally less so than education (20%), and immigration is a close fourth (18.4%). The Conservatives can

---

<sup>1</sup> Economic voting theories have shown that voters who are feeling well-off and who are optimistic about the future of the economy are likely to vote for the incumbent government's return (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Dorussen and Taylor, 2002. But see Evans 1999 for a different view).

thus be expected to emphasize race/immigration and crime, which are both ‘owned’ and salient issues. Defense, Europe and taxation are net advantage issues in comparison with their ratings relative to the Liberal Democrats, but Europe and taxation in 2005 are the ninth and tenth lowest salient issues.

Defense is the fifth most salient issue, and therefore the Conservatives may choose to emphasize it, but raising the salience of an issue will only increase the utility to a party on that issue if they are optimally located in proximity to public opinion. Given the controversy over the war in Iraq in the period leading up to the 2005 elections, it is evident that defense had changed from being a valence issue in 2001 to a positional issue after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Given that a majority of the population were against the war (according to the BES, 65% of voters disapproved of the war in Iraq in 2005), but both Labour and the Conservatives were in favor, only the Liberal Democrats were located optimally (close to the median voter) to exploit the defense issue. Therefore whilst the Liberal Democrats do not have a relative issue ownership advantage of that issue (or as in 2001, on any issue), the party has an incentive to emphasize the issue of Iraq in 2005.

In summary, in 2001 the Labour Party has an issue advantage on all issues except race/immigration, which is a Conservative owned issue. However, Labour’s advantages are also on the most salient issues (except its advantage on unemployment, which is particularly low salience in both elections and remains so since the mid 1990s). Following our theory, we expect Labour’s emphasized issues to be health and education in 2001, combined with the economy in 2005. In 2001 the Conservatives derive the highest expected utility from their advantage issues (relative to Labour and the Liberal Democrats) although neither issue – immigration and Europe - is highly salient. Thus a salience raising strategy is clearly the only beneficial strategy to this party in 2001. In 2005 the party benefits from the higher salience of immigration and crime. Therefore in 2005, in addition to health and education, we expect the Conservatives to emphasize immigration and crime. In both elections the Liberal Democrats have no relative issue advantages in competence or trust evaluations, but a positional advantage on Iraq in 2005.

### **Party strategies in the 2001 and 2005 British elections**

In order to evaluate our propositions in the context of British general elections, we need to obtain reliable measures of party issue positioning during the campaigns.

### *Measuring party issue emphasis*

Party policy programs, particularly manifestos, are the most common source for identifying the policy priorities of parties in the literature on campaigns and elections (see Budge 1993; Laver 2001; Pennings 2005). Yet, there are several disadvantages with manifesto data. Party manifestos are designed to give a broad overview of a party's policy platform across all important issue areas and often these documents are the result of a long consultation process, aiming to satisfy internal interests rather than attract voters (Bara 2005). This complicates the precise measurement of the issue priorities that parties are trying to get across to voters in campaigns. Whereas party manifestos are chiefly read by a small group of party members and commentators, parties use other means of communication, such as press conferences, advertisements and press releases, to reach a wider audience. In this paper, we therefore analyze three key forms of campaign communication: campaign speeches, party election broadcasts and press releases. First, our analysis includes the speeches given by each of the three party leaders during the four weeks leading up to the election.<sup>2</sup> Second, we analyze the party election broadcasts (PEBs) of each party. Finally, we analyze the press releases which, like speeches, capture party communication over the course of the campaign. Appendix 1 gives an overview of the length and number of documents used for this analysis. These documents provide an extensive and reliable dataset on the policy issues each party promoted during their campaigns.

We employ computer-aided content analysis<sup>3</sup> of these documents to get reliable estimates of party issue emphases. This quantitative method of content analysis is often used when large amounts of textual data are processed and interest lies primarily in manifest rather than latent content (see, for example, Laver 2001). Studies show that this technique is suitable for generating both valid and reliable estimates of policy positions (Krippendorff 1980; Laver and Garry 2000; Garry 2001; Bara 2001). In our analysis, the parties' issue priorities are obtained by calculating the relative frequency of all coded words and quasi-sentences, corresponding to ten policy categories in a 'dictionary' file.<sup>4</sup> Our issue categories

---

<sup>2</sup> We do not include speeches given by other representatives of the party in the analysis, since the issue emphases in these speeches may reflect the particular portfolio of a minister or spokesperson, rather than the overall strategy of the party.

<sup>3</sup> The software program TEXTPACK 7.5 was used in our content analysis of the speeches.

<sup>4</sup> Computer-aided techniques may also have certain advantages with regard to validity, since the coding process is mechanical and thus unbiased by any prior knowledge or opinions of an expert coder (Laver and Garry, 2000; Garry, 2001). To alleviate potential problems associated with context and homography, keywords in the dictionary have been identified using the keyword-in-context (KWIC) procedure, which highlights keywords

are based on the 10 policy areas that were consistently mentioned in the open-ended responses to the MORI questions in the period prior to both campaigns (see Table 2). These policy areas are health, education, economic policy, defense, pensions, immigration, taxation, European integration, unemployment, and law and order.<sup>5</sup> By coding all the manifest policy terms used in the speeches (e.g. Iraq, police, hospitals, schools, immigrants), this analysis captures the relative weighting given to each category as a percentage of the overall frequency of policy terms.

Table 4 illustrates the issue emphases in the 2001 election campaign. As discussed in the previous section, our expectation is that parties will campaign on the most advantageous issues, and when they own few or no issues they will tend to gravitate towards the most salient issues. We thus expect Labour to campaign on the economy, education and health, where the party has a distinct “competence” advantage, and we expect the Conservatives to campaign on immigration, and to a lesser extent Europe, defense and crime (issues where Labour has no distinct advantage). The Liberal Democrats have no owned issues, so we would expect the party to focus mainly on the salient issues: education and health.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Table 4 shows that as expected, Labour campaign primarily on their ‘owned issue’ of the economy, education and health. The Conservatives campaign on issues where Labour has no or only a small advantage, namely crime, Europe and taxation, but surprisingly they ignore their only truly ‘owned’ issue, namely immigration. As suggested above, this may be because of the relatively low salience of the issue. Europe, however, presented a clear positional advantage to the Conservatives in 2001, thereby underlying their perceived utility advantage on this issue (Evans 2002). Yet the Conservatives may have downplayed the issue of immigration in fear of appearing too far away from the mainstream voter. As William Hague, the then party leader, has noted: ‘I didn’t want it to be a one-issue campaign [on asylum]’. Instead, Mr. Hague confirms that the party strategy was to campaign on the above mentioned issues:

---

within the context in which they are used. Ambiguous words were thereafter ‘disambiguated’ by using word strings and alternative signifiers to aid in contextualisation.

<sup>5</sup> We have also run the analysis with additional policy areas (e.g. the environment, moral issues ) to make sure that we have not overlooked important campaign issues, but none of these additional issues were given any significant emphases in the speeches.

It was meant to be crime, Europe, tax, and then education as a kind of loss leader. There was no way of winning an election on health or education. But to show we weren't just on about Europe, crime and tax. And one day, one in the whole campaign on asylum. Those were the selected issues.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, Hague acknowledges that despite being a 'Labour owned issue', the Conservative Party chose to campaign on education, because of its general public appeal. Challenging the expectation of the classic issue ownership theory, we thus find considerable dialogue between parties on these campaign issues. As discussed above, this is not surprising if we consider that parties take into account issue salience as well as issue ownership when developing their campaign strategy. Labour has the advantage of high issue competence rating, and the party is thus in a position where it can focus solely on the issues where it enjoys the highest rating: education, the economy and health. The Conservative had no real 'owned' issues in 2001, other than possibly immigration, and hence they seek to campaign on issue where Labour enjoy only a small advantage (Europe, crime and taxation) as well as the highly salient issues (education and health). As a party in permanent opposition and lacking a distinct issue-profile, the Liberal Democrats have little advantage in raising the salience of particular issues, and thus campaign on issues that are already salient to the public.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

If we compare the issue emphases in the 2005 election campaign, a similar pattern emerges. Again, Labour campaign on their owned issues, education, the economy and health. In between the two elections, the Conservatives have gained an issue advantage on crime and taxation, in addition to immigration, and they seem to exploit this advantage in a campaign that focuses on crime, immigration and taxation, in addition to the highly salient (but Labour owned) issues of education and health. The Liberal Democrats do not have any 'owned issues', but rather than campaigning exclusively on the two salient issues (education and health), they chose the issue of Iraq (defense) as the second most prominent issue of their campaign, where they – as discussed in the previous section – have a clear positional advantage.

---

<sup>6</sup> Interview by Jane Green with Rt. Hon. William Hague. 16<sup>th</sup> September 2002.

We can also look at each of the three types of party communication separately. Table 6 shows the three top ranked (most mentioned) issues by the three parties in the leaders speeches, the PEBs and the press releases.

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

In Table 6, each party's 'owned issues' are highlighted to make it easier to identify issues that are distinct to individual parties. Issues that are not clearly owned by any of the parties (with an issue advantage of less than 5 percent) have been underlined. This demonstrates that Labour campaigns primarily on its owned issues in both campaigns across all forms of campaign information. Interestingly, Tony Blair also addresses issues on which Labour has no clear "issue ownership", but which are particularly important to the public. In 2001, law and order issues are the third most important issue in his speeches, and in 2005 he addressed the immigration issue more frequently than we would expect, given the Tory-lead on this issue (although only 11% of Blair's speeches emphasized immigration compared with a 46% emphasis on education). However, Labour's press releases and election broadcasts conform with our expectation that Labour campaigns on "owned" issues that are salient to the public. As expected, we find the Conservatives emphasizing issues where ownership is 'up for grabs', namely crime, taxation and Europe (but not immigration) in 2001. In 2005, they have replaced the Europe issue with the issue of immigration, which in the meantime had also become more salient to the public. The messages of the Liberal Democrats are almost perfectly consistent across types of communication, emphasizing the salient issues of education and health in addition to pensions in 2001 and the Iraq war in 2005.

In this analysis of two general election campaigns, we do find support for the hypothesis that parties will tend to campaign on 'owned issues', if they have any. But the findings also challenge the expectations of the traditional issue ownership theory in two important ways. First, they suggest that whilst parties employ "selective issue emphasis", they also gravitate towards the issues that are highly salient to the public. Hence, we find more dialogue in the campaign than might be predicted on the basis of a 'pure' issue ownership approach to party competition. Second, on issues that are clearly 'position issues' (such as Iraq and Europe), parties with a 'positional advantage' (closer to the median voter) appear to exploit this in the campaign, which would lend support to a more traditional spatial view of party competition. But these campaign strategies are also only successful to the

extent we find that issue competence ratings ('issue ownership') and issue salience actually have an effect on vote choices. This question is examined empirically in the next section.

## Testing the voting behavior assumptions

We have argued that issue ownership matters more when parties converge – in the absence of clear ideological differences voters will judge parties on their ability to deliver. For an issue ownership model to gain in significance for our understanding of voters and parties we therefore need to assume that distance ( $P_{jp} - P_{ji}$ ) is reduced (making  $C_{jp}$  relatively more important), thus confirming the valence model of voting (Stokes 1963).

### *Party convergence*

It is often argued that political parties in Britain have converged on the economic left-right dimension during the last two decades.<sup>7</sup> On the domestic left-right dimension Bara and Budge (2001) demonstrate growing similarity between the two major parties using an issue salience score of manifestos, and Sanders (1999) demonstrates diminishing relevance of the left-right dimension to voting behavior. However, to evaluate whether voters *perceive* parties to be close to each other, thus influencing the vote utility calculation, we analyze voter perceptions of party positions using British Election Study (BES) data. Figure 1 presents the differences between the mean perceived location of the Labour Party and Conservative Party on the left-right dimension and also differences between the mean location of Labour party identifiers and Conservative party identifiers. The left-right score is comprised by taking an average of the four highly correlated questions forming the left-right dimension within the BES cross section surveys and panel surveys, between 1987 and 2005 (see Green 2005).<sup>8</sup>

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1 demonstrates that on this dimension of British politics the identifiers of the two main parties have diminished in distance from each other, but more dramatic has been the decline in the perceived distance between the two major parties. By 2005 respondents placed

---

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the left-right dimension, the issue of European integration has remained a polarizing issue albeit demonstrating periods of greater and lesser consensus over time (Evans and Butt 2006).

<sup>8</sup> In 2005 only two questions are available and used, the tax-spend scale and the left-right label scale. Data are weighted and post-election sample scores used throughout.

the two major parties just one point apart on average, on an eleven-point scale. Therefore, since 1987 (from when the BES surveys have contained directly comparable questions) the utility calculation based on the distance between voters and parties should, according to our argument, have become increasingly loaded by competence evaluations, as the proximity component between voters and each party ( $P_{jp} - P_{ji}$ ) is almost identical for the two major parties. Consequently, we expect that issue competence (or ownership) will be more important to the vote calculation in 2005 than issue position on the domestic left-right dimension. Furthermore, we expect to find that the greater the distance between a voter and a party, the less the significance of issue competence, and *visa versa*. These expectations can be examined by simulating the relative effect of issue competence ratings and left-right self-placement on the vote in 2005.

### *Issue Position and Issue Ownership*

We model the probability of voting Labour across different levels of competence evaluations and left-right placements, controlling for age, gender, social class, educational attainment, party identification, and evaluations of Tony Blair (on a ten-point like-dislike scale).<sup>9</sup> The independent variables of interest are health issue handling (from 1 = handles very badly, to 5 = handles very well) and respondent (spatial) locations on the tax-spend scale.<sup>10</sup> The tax-spend scale asks respondents to locate themselves between two options, to increase taxation and increase spending on public services, or to cut taxes and decrease spending on public services. We expect this scale to resemble a valence issue in 2005, as illustrated above, and therefore for competence ratings on public services to be more important than left-right positions. The issue of health is therefore a key issue on which we can compare these two variables on the decision to vote for Labour in 2005. In the models the tax-spend scale is compressed into a five-point scale for comparability with the issue handling scale (0-2 = right, 1; 3-4 = 2; 5 = centre; 6-8 = 4; and 9-10 = left).<sup>11</sup> We calculate the predicted probability of voting Labour for respondents rating the party on health from 1 to 5, and then for respondents positioned from the right to left of the tax-spend scale. Higher values denote a larger effect of these evaluations on the decision to vote Labour, keeping all other variables at their mean.

---

<sup>9</sup> The dependent variable is Labour vote, coded 1 = voted Labour, and 0 = voted for another party or didn't vote. Predicted probabilities have been calculated using the statistical programme *Clarify*. All control variables were set at their mean. See table 9 of the Appendix for full results.

<sup>10</sup> The scale asks voters to position the parties between 0 to 10 where 0 = cut taxes and spend less on public services, and 10 = increase taxes and spend more on public services.

<sup>11</sup> Data is weighted, and the sample is comprised of respondents surveyed in the pre and post election waves.

[TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE]

Table 7 demonstrates that the higher the positive evaluation of Labour on its perceived ability to handle the issue of health, the greater the likelihood that this issue ownership favored the party in the 2005 vote. Also, the more in favor of increasing taxation and spending on public services a respondent was on the tax-spend scale, the more likely it was that the respondent would vote Labour. However, for the highest likelihood of voting Labour on the tax-spend scale, the importance of the perceived ability of Labour to handle the health service well was statistically more significant. The perceived issue ownership of Labour on the issue of health was a more important predictor of voting Labour than was ideological position, although issue position was marginally more important than issue ownership if the party was rated poorly on its ability to handle the health system. We therefore conclude that generally issue ownership is more closely related to the decision to vote Labour in 2005 than is ideological position on the tax-spend scale. Thus on this dimension on which voters converge, we find that issue ownership is a more important factor in the vote calculation than is issue position, consistent with the argument advanced in our theoretical predictions above.

*Issue Ownership and Issue Salience*

Further to this evidence, we can reasonably argue that parties have an incentive to increase the salience of issues on which they have an issue handling or positional advantage, thereby supporting the issue ownership theory. On convergent issues, issue ownership advantages are naturally going to be more significant. But for this argument to be sustained, it is necessary to illustrate that such action is consistent with vote-maximizing behavior, that is, if an issue on which a party has an issue advantage is *salient*, that party will gain votes relative to if it is not salient. To evaluate this empirically, we analyze the relative impact of issue handling scores for respondents rating issues salient or not on a Labour ‘owned’ and a Conservative ‘owned’ issue dimension: the economy and immigration. As above, we compare the predicted probabilities in the same logit vote model but for issue handling scores where a respondent rated that issue the ‘most important facing the country today’ and where a respondent did not rate the issue the most important. Furthermore, we calculate the same vote model for voting Conservative. The issues considered in each model are the economy in the Labour vote model and asylum in the Conservative vote model (the issues on which the two parties had their largest advantage in 2005). We predict that issue competence

will matter more to the vote of respondents for whom an issue is salient (holding all other variables in the model to the mean) and matter less to the vote of respondents for whom an issue is not salient.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 2 displays the expected differences for issue competence for salient and non-salient issues. The predicted probability of ratings of Labour's best issue, the economy, is higher when that issue is rated salient, compared with when it is not the most important issue. The higher the positive rating, the greater the likelihood of voting Labour, but this relationship is heightened when the issue is salient. The same pattern is evident for the relationship between ratings of the Conservatives on the issue of asylum/immigration, although this issue is more weakly related to the Conservative vote than is the economy to voting Labour. This may be due to a further consideration in the vote calculation – it is more likely that Labour can deliver on an issue given its incumbency than the Conservative Party in opposition. Nevertheless, consistent with the theory advanced in the issue ownership literature, we find that parties do have an incentive to increase the salience of issues on which they have positive competence ratings.

In sum, this section has tested the three core assumptions of our vote choice model. We have demonstrated that parties have converged ideologically over time in Britain and that consequently, the proximity component ( $P_{jp}-P_{ji}$ ) of the utility calculus is less important than competence (issue ownership) concerns to vote decisions (at least on traditional left-right issues). We have also shown that owned issues favor parties more significantly when they are salient than when they are not. This evidence from the British general election campaigns thus suggests that not only do issue ownership considerations influence the campaign strategies of parties, voters also respond by rewarding the parties that they perceive to be competent on salient issues.

## **Conclusion**

*Agendas foreshadow outcomes: the shape of an agenda influences the choices made from it.*

- Riker (1993:1)

Agendas do not come about accidentally. In any campaign, there are a wide range of issues on which communication can occur. The campaign strategies of parties are well-researched and carefully executed attempts to influence the public agenda in order to shape election outcomes. In this paper, we have sought to explain why parties choose to emphasize particular policy issues during election campaigns and de-emphasize others.

Our theoretical model builds on both traditional spatial theories of party competition (Downs, 1957) and the issue ownership tradition, espoused as the dominance principle (Riker 1993, 1996), issue saliency theory (Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge 1993) or issue ownership theory (Petrocik 1996). We argue that by introducing multiple dimensions, we can incorporate both theories to explain the positional and ownership based utilities to be gained by parties in raising the salience of issues in campaigns. Contrary to the existing literature, we explicitly test these underlying assumptions about vote choices in an analysis of the British 2005 general election. This paper therefore makes three main contributions. Firstly, we bring together the positional and competence models of vote choice to explain party strategies on positional issues and on valence issues. By combining proximity and issue ownership components, this theoretical framework acknowledges that when there is a large degree of party polarization on an issue dimension, questions of ideological positioning are likely to be more important than party competence and credibility. Secondly, we take as our starting point in predicting party strategies the relative party issue competence strengths and issue salience perceived by voters, rather than simply making assumptions about issues owned by one party or another. By explicitly incorporating voter preferences, we take into account that parties not only shape agendas, but also respond *to* existing public agendas. Also, by evaluating party strategies from voter salience and relative competence ratings in three party competition, our model can be applied beyond simple two party competition to incorporate important temporal and cross-party change. It can also account for the strategies of parties that have few owned issues or none. This may lead to considerable more dialogue in campaigns than is foreseen by most applications of the issue ownership model. Lastly, we test the empirical assumptions of the issue ownership theory, therefore basing our predictions in a substantiated model of vote choice, rather than in post-hoc theorisation based on retrospective party agendas.

To what extent do we find that the evidence supports are theoretical propositions? The 2001 General Election campaign fulfils the issue ownership model well. The Labour Party has dominance over the issue agenda, and in this case is able to campaign on the most salient issues. The Liberal Democrats have no owned issues, and the party therefore

responds to the salient issues, as we predicted, though contrary to the classic issue ownership expectations of agenda divergence. The rationale of the Conservative Party is again broadly consistent – this party adopts an agenda on its limited owned issues. On immigration we expected a stronger emphasis, but the issue was much less salient than in 2005, bearing out the importance of pre-election voter agendas in determining party strategies, rather than a simple issue salience agenda shaping course of action. That is, parties respond to voter agendas as well as their own issue advantages. In 2005, the model is also broadly consistent. The Labour Party has a reduced advantage across its owned issues, and these issues correspondingly diminish in focus (albeit remaining very high). With increased ownership over the economy, the party places the issue at the heart of its campaign. Likewise, the Conservatives focus on their main strength, now also salient, with immigration in 2005 featuring highly, whilst still adopting a broad issue agenda, responding again to the most salient issues to voters. The Liberal Democrats expose the importance of positional strategies for parties with no owned issues – in 2005 the party again has no relative net advantage, but on this positional issue, attempts to raise the salience of the dimension to the vote choice calculation.

Empirically, these claims find support in our analysis of voting behavior in 2005. We demonstrate that valence calculations on the consensual left-right dimension are consistent with perceived party convergence over time, and we then examine the relative impact of this diminished positional variable in relation to issue ownership evaluations. Not only do we find that competence evaluations are more important to the Labour vote than traditional issue position on in the domestic domain in 2005, but we also find that increasing the salience of such an issue brings a commensurate vote gain. A party competition model based on issue competence, position and salience is thus compatible with vote choices in this election.

With only two election campaigns and three parties, it is not possible to reach any further firm conclusions on the basis of the evidence presented here. However, by analyzing a wide range of data on public attitudes as well as party behavior, our findings are suggestive. The paper not only tells a plausible and novel story about party competition in the 2001 and 2005 British General Elections, but it also offers a theoretical framework for understanding party competition that can be tested more rigorously in future research both in a cross-national and cross-temporal analyses.

## References

- Aldrich, John and John D Griffin. (2003) 'The presidency and the campaign: creating voter priorities in the 2000 election'. In: M. Nelson (ed.) *The Presidency and the Political System* pp.239-256. Washington D.C. Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Bara, Judith (2001) 'Tracking estimates of public opinion and party policy intentions in Britain and the USA' in M. Laver (ed), *Estimating the Policy Positions of Political Actors*, London: Routledge.
- Bara, Judith (2005) 'The 2005 Manifestos: A sense of déjà vu?'. Paper presented at the 2005 annual EPOP conference, University of Essex.
- Bélanger, Éric and Bonnie Meguid (2004) 'Issue salience, issue ownership and issue based vote choice: Evidence from Canada'. Paper presented at the Annual Political Science Association Meeting, Chicago, September 2004.
- Budge, Ian (1993) 'Issues, Dimensions, and Agenda Change in Postwar Democracies: Long-term Trends in Party Election Programs and Newspaper Reports in Twenty-three Democracies' in W.H. Riker (ed), *Agenda Formation*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Budge, Ian (1994) 'A New Spatial Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally'. *British Journal of Political Science* 24(4):443-467.
- Budge, Ian and Farlie, Dennis (1983). *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*, London: Georg Allen and Urwin.
- Budge, Ian, H-D Klingemann, A. Volkens, J. Bara and E. Tannenbaum (eds.) (2001) *Mapping Policy Preferences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, Harold, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, Paul Whiteley (2005) 'Taking the Bloom off New Labour's Rose: Party Choice and Voter Turnout in Britain, 2005. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol. 16 (1): 3 – 36.
- Dalton, Russell, Paul Allen Beck, Robert Huckfeldt and William Koetzle (1998) 'A Test of Media-Centered Agenda Setting: Newspaper Content and Public Interests in a Presidential Election'. *Political Communication* 15: 463-481.
- Damore, David F. (2005). 'Issue Convergence in Presidential Campaign'. *Political Behavior*, 27(1): 71-97.
- Davis, Otto A., Melvin J. Hinich, and Peter Ordeshook (1970) 'An Expository Development of a Mathematical Model of the Electoral Process', *American Political Science Review* 64: 426-448.
- Dorussen, Han and Michael Taylor (2002) *Economic Voting* (eds.) New York: Routledge.
- Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy* New York, Harper Collins

Enelow, James and Melvin J. Hinich (1984) *The Spatial Theory of Voting*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Enelow, James M & Munger, Michael C. (1993) 'The Elements of Candidate Reputation: The Effect of Record and Credibility on Optimal Spatial Location,' *Public Choice*. 77(4): 757-72.

Evans , Geoffrey (1999) Economics and politics revisited: exploring the decline in Conservative support, 1992-1995. *Political Studies* 47, 139-151.

Evans, Geoffrey (2002). European Integration, Party Politics and Voting in the 2001 Election. *British Elections and Parties Review*, 12:95-110.

Evans, Geoffrey, and Sarah Butt (2005) Leaders or Followers? Parties and Public Opinion on the European Union. In Park, A and National Centre for Social Research (Great Britain) *British Social Attitudes: Two Terms of New Labour, the public's reaction; the 22nd report*. London, SAGE in association with the National Centre for Social Research.

Green, Jane (2005) Valence Issues and Party Competition. Paper Presented to the Annual American Political Science Association Conference, September 2005.

Grofman, Bernard (2004) 'Downs and two-party convergence', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7:25-46

Heath, Anthony. F, Roger M. Jowell, and John K. Curtice (2001) *The Rise of New Labour: party policies and voter choices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder (1987) *News that Matters: Television and American Public Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Kaplan, Noah, David K. Park, and Travis D. Ridout (2006) 'Dialogue in American Political Campaigns: An Examination of Issue Engagement in Candidate Television Advertising'. *American Journal of Political Science*. Forthcoming

Klingemann, H.D, Richard I. Hofferbert and Ian Budge (1994) *Parties, Policies and Democracy*, Westview Press: Boulder.

Laver, Michael (ed) (2001) *Estimating the Policy Positions of Political Actors*, London: Routledge.

Norris, Pippa and Christopher Wlezien (eds) (2005) *Britain Votes 2005*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Petrocik, John R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections. *American Journal of Science Review*. 58 (4): 825-850.

Petrocik, John R., William L. Benoit, and Glenn J. Hansen (2003) 'Issue Ownership and Presidential Campaigning, 1952-2000.' *Political Science Quarterly* 118:599-626.

Riker, William H. (1982) *Liberalism Against Populism. A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co.

Riker, William H. (1986) *The Art of Political Manipulation*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Riker, William H. (1990) "Heresthetics and Rhetoric in the Spatial Model." In: James M. Enelow and Melvin J. Hinich (eds.), *Advances in the Spatial Theory of Voting*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Riker, William H. (1993) "Rhetorical Interaction in the Ratification Campaigns", in: William H. Riker (ed.), *Agenda Formation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press

Sanders, David. (1999) The Impact of Left-Right Ideology, in Evans, G. and Norris, P. eds. *Critical Elections: British parties and voters in long-term perspective*. London: Sage Publications.

Sigelman, Lee and Buell, Emmett H. (2004). 'Avoidance or Engagement? Issue convergence in US presidential Campaign, 1960-2000'. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(4): 650-661.

Simon, Adam F. (2002) *The Winning Message – Candidate Behavior, Campaign Discourse and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Soroka, Stuart N and Christopher Wlezien (2004) Degrees of Democracy. Public Preferences and Policy in a Comparative Perspective. Manuscript.

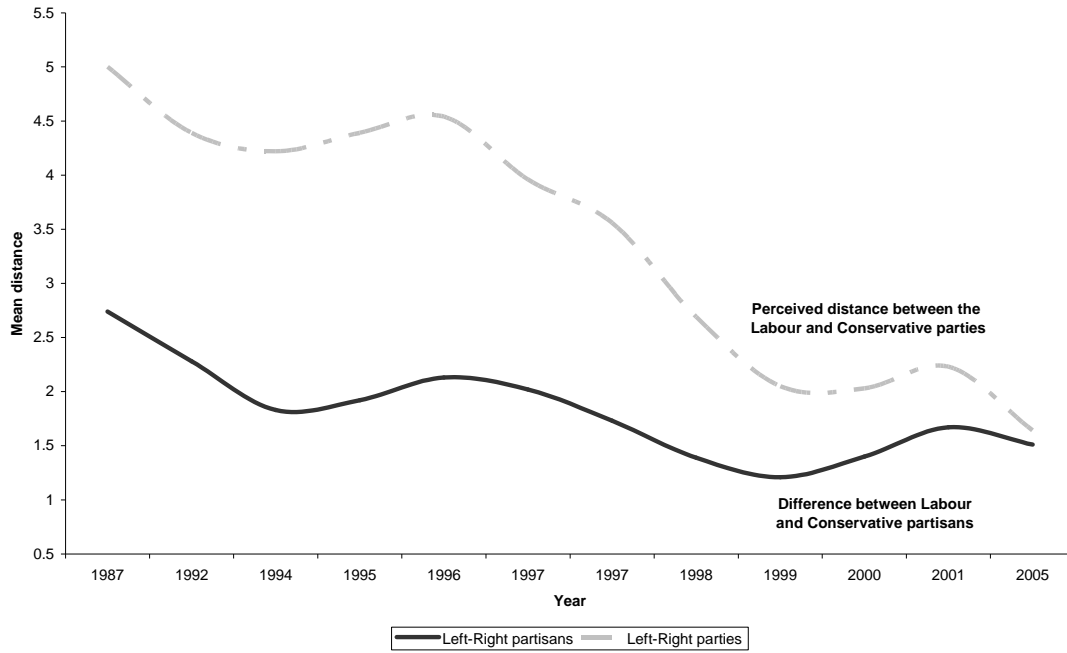
Stokes, Donald (1963) Spatial Models of Party Competition', *57 American Political Science Review* 368-377.

Strøm, Kaare (1990). 'A behavioral theory of political parties'. *American Journal of Political Science* 34(2): 565-598.

Van der Brug, Wouter (2004). 'Issue Ownership and Party Choice'. *Electoral Studies*, 23:2, 209-233.

## Figures

*Figure 1: Perceived distance between the Labour and Conservative Parties and self-placement distance between Labour and Conservative identifiers on the left-right dimension (BES cross sections, 1987 – 2005)*



*Figure 2: Probability of voting Conservative and Labour across issue competence ratings for salient and non-salient issues (BES 2005 data)*

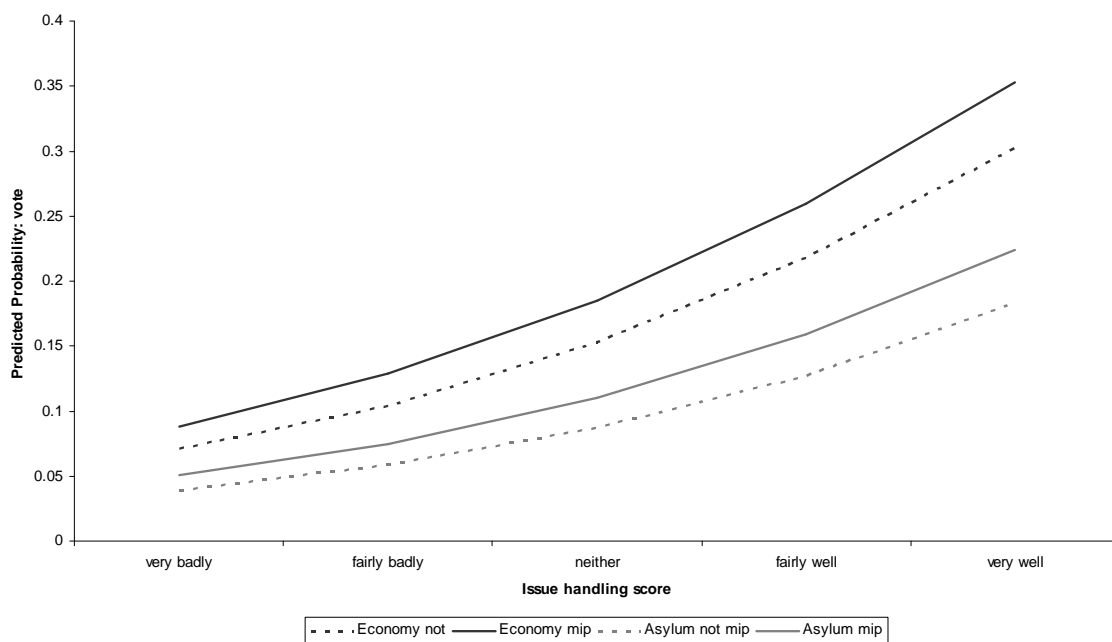
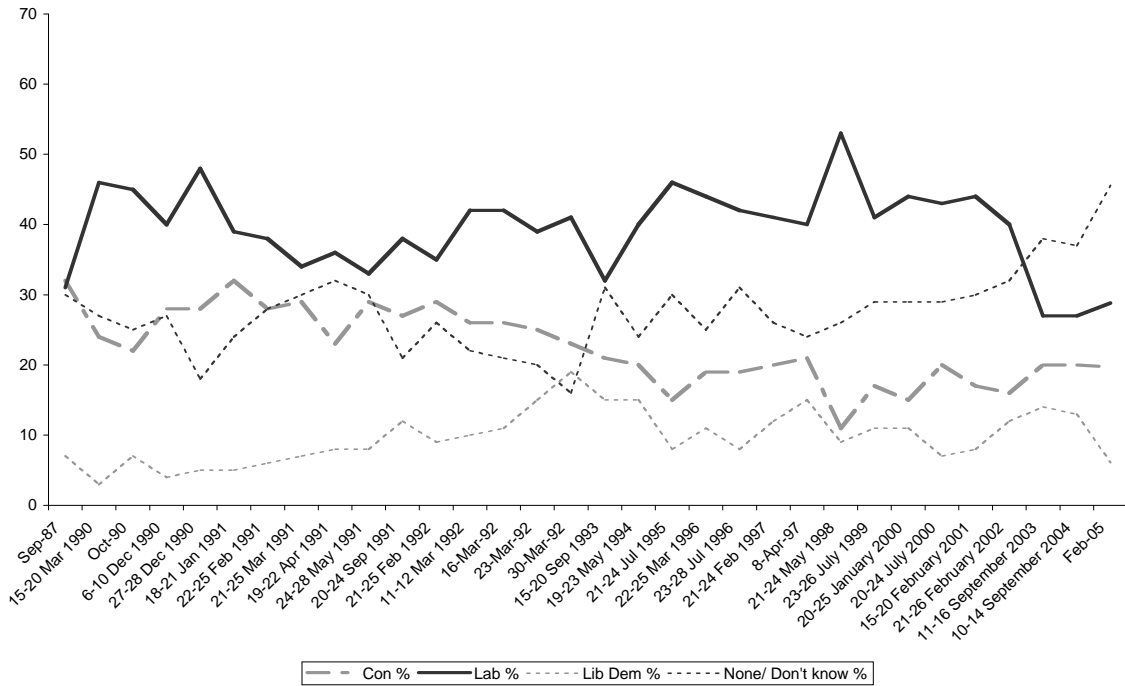


Figure 3: Best Party on Education Ratings, 1987-2005, MORI



## Tables

*Table 1: MORI Most Important Issue, 2001 and 2005*

	Health	Education	Economy	Defence	Pensions	Race	Taxation	Europe	Unempl.	Crime	<i>N</i>
<b>2001</b>	26.5	26.9	8.7	4.3	9.0	9.5	5.6	8.4	6.1	14.6	1019
<b>2005</b>	25.7	20.0	5.7	12.5	11.1	18.4	4.5	3.8	5.1	18.8	1074

*Table 2: MORI relative issue advantages, February 2001*

	Health	Education	Economy	Defence	Pensions	Asylum May 01	Taxation	Europe	Unempl.	Crime
<b>Labour Advantage</b>										
Conservatives	27.0	26.5	26.0	-0.3	15.1	-22	11.9	0.5	35.3	3.2
Lib Dems	34.5	35.5	39.4	21.5	25.2	11	25.3	21.7	44.7	24.7
<b>Conservative Advantage</b>										
Labour	-27.0	-26.5	-26.0	0.3	-15.1	22	-11.9	-0.5	-35.3	-3.2
Lib Dems	7.6	9.0	14.1	21.8	10.1	33	13.4	21.2	9.4	21.5
<b>Lib Dem Advantage</b>										
Labour	-34.5	-35.5	-39.4	-21.5	-25.2	-11	-25.3	-21.7	-44.7	-24.7
Conservatives	-7.6	-9.0	-14.1	-21.8	-10.1	-33	-13.4	-21.2	-9.4	-21.5
<b>N = 1019</b>										

Table 3: MORI relative issue advantages, February 2005

	Health	Education	Economy	Defence	Pensions	Asylum	Taxation	Europe	Unempl.	Crime
<b>Labour Advantage</b>										
Conservatives	14.1	9.1	18.3	0.7	1.3	-17.5	-0.9	0.4	26.7	-4.2
Lib Dems	24.2	19.3	33.1	17.7	14.3	9.9	13.9	15.3	35.4	18.2
<b>Conservative Advantage</b>										
Labour	-14.1	-9.1	-18.3	-0.7	-1.3	17.5	0.9	-0.4	-26.7	4.2
Lib Dems	10.1	10.2	14.8	17.0	13.0	27.4	14.8	15.3	8.7	22.4
<b>Lib Dem Advantage</b>										
Labour	-24.2	-19.3	-33.1	-17.7	-14.3	-9.9	-13.9	-15.3	-35.4	-18.2
Conservatives	-10.1	-10.2	-14.8	-17.0	-13.0	-27.4	-14.8	-15.3	-8.7	-22.4
<b>N = 1074</b>										

Table 4: Party issue priorities in the 2001 election campaign

%	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats	Mean issue emphases (S.D.)
<b>Education</b>	25	17	30	24 (5)
<b>Health</b>	19	13	28	20 (6)
<b>Crime</b>	12	20	11	14 (4)
<b>Immigration</b>	0	2	0	1 (1)
<b>Pensions</b>	5	3	13	7 (4)
<b>Economy</b>	26	11	8	15 (8)
<b>Europe</b>	3	15	2	7 (6)
<b>Unemployment</b>	4	1	1	2 (2)
<b>Taxation</b>	3	15	5	8 (5)
<b>Defence</b>	1	3	1	2 (1)

Source: party leader speeches, party election broadcasts and party press releases

Table 5: Party issue priorities in the 2005 election campaign

%	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats	Mean issue emphases (S.D.)
<b>Health</b>	16	14	13	15 (1)
<b>Education</b>	31	17	33	27 (7)
<b>Crime</b>	9	25	5	13 (9)
<b>Immigration</b>	5	14	1	6 (6)
<b>Defence</b>	2	3	22	9 (9)
<b>Pensions</b>	1	4	9	5 (3)
<b>Economy</b>	28	6	5	13 (11)
<b>Unemployment</b>	3	1	0	2 (1)
<b>Taxation</b>	3	14	10	9 (5)
<b>Europe</b>	1	1	1	1 (0)

Source: party leader speeches, party election broadcasts and party press releases

Table 6: Top 3 ranked issues across types of communication

<b>2001 campaign</b>	<b>Leader speeches</b>	<b>PEBs</b>	<b>Press releases</b>
Labour	<i>Education, economy, <u>crime</u></i>	<i>Health, education, economy</i>	<i>Health, economy, education</i>
Conservatives	<i><u>Crime</u>, taxation, <u>Europe</u></i>	<i>Education, <u>crime</u>, <u>Europe</u></i>	<i>Taxation, <u>Europe</u>, education</i>
Liberal Democrats	<i>Education, health, pensions</i>	<i>Education, health, pensions</i>	<i>Health, education, pensions</i>
<b>2005 campaign</b>			
Labour	<i>Education, economy, immigration</i>	<i>Economy, education, health</i>	<i>Economy, education, health</i>
Conservatives	<i>Education, <u>crime</u>, immigration</i>	<i><u>Crime</u>, education, immigration</i>	<i><u>Crime</u>, taxation, education</i>
Liberal Democrats	<i>Education, <u>Iraq</u>, health</i>	<i>Education, <u>Iraq</u>, health</i>	<i>Education, health, <u>Iraq</u></i>

Source: party leader speeches, party election broadcasts and party press releases

Table 7: Predicted probability of voting Labour across Health Competence Ratings and Tax-Spend Issue Position

<b>Health Handling scores</b>	<b>Predicted Probabilities (95% confidence intervals)</b>	<b>Left-Right position (tax-spend scale)</b>	<b>Predicted Probabilities (95% confidence intervals)</b>
<b>1 (very badly)</b>	0.11 (0.08 – 0.14)	<b>1 (right, 0 – 2)</b>	0.13 (0.09 – 0.17)
<b>2 (fairly badly)</b>	0.15 (0.13 – 0.17)	<b>2 (right, 3 – 4)</b>	0.15 (0.12 – 0.19)
<b>3 (neither)</b>	0.20 (0.17 – 0.22)	<b>3 (centre, 5)</b>	0.18 (0.15 – 0.20)
<b>4 (fairly well)</b>	0.26 (0.22 – 0.29)	<b>4 (left, 6 – 7)</b>	0.20 (0.18 – 0.23)
<b>5 (very well)</b>	0.33 (0.27 – 0.39)	<b>5 (left, 8 – 10)</b>	0.23 (0.20 – 0.27)

Note: BES 2005 data, N = 2568. Full model coefficients in Appendix, Table 9.

## Appendix

Table 8: Descriptive overview of party documents

	2001 campaign		2005 campaign	
	Words	No.	Words	No.
<b><i>Party election broadcasts</i></b>				
Labour	2095	4	3167	4
Conservatives	1378	3	2469	5
Liberal Democrats	1278	4	1881	4
<b><i>Leader speeches</i></b>				
Labour	35711	21	22754	18
Conservatives	48739	45	31068	21
Liberal Democrats	13000	16	11492	13
<b><i>Press releases</i></b>				
Labour	17603	36	54218	127
Conservatives	71970	119	37427	69
Liberal Democrats	50396	214	36975	124

Table 9: Logistic Regression Model of Labour Vote in 2005

	Logit coeff.	Std. Error
Model Constant	-0.49	0.39
<i>Demographic controls (pre-election)</i>		
Age 2	0.00	0.00
Gender (female)	0.30*	0.12
Educational attainment		
GCSE and equivalent	0.07	0.24
Vocational	0.06	0.22
A Level	0.28	0.28
Degree	-0.32	0.24
Post-graduate	-0.00	0.31
No formal qualifications	-0.30	0.22
Other	.	.
Social Class		
Routine non-manual	-0.17	0.18
Petty bourgeoisie	-0.28	0.19
Foremen and technicians	0.07	0.21
Working class	-0.24	0.19
Salaried	.	.
Party identification		
Conservative	-2.50***	0.19
Liberal Democrat	-1.99***	0.19
None / don't know	-1.50***	0.17
Labour	.	.
<i>Post-election variables</i>		
Feelings towards Tony Blair	0.33***	0.03
Tax-spend self placement	-0.17**	0.06
Labour party handling of health	-0.34***	0.06
Chi <sup>2</sup>	1151.5***	
Log Likelihood	-1012.43	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.36	
N	2568	

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.005; \*\*\* p < 0.001