**Issue ownership attack: How a political party can counteract a rival’s issue ownership**

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**Abstract**. A central part of representative democracy is that voters evaluate political parties based on how competently they handle problems and issues, so-called ‘issue ownership’. Since issue ownership is a central ingredient in the vote choice, rival parties often try to influence how voters evaluate a competing party. This is an issue ownership attack. However, despite intense scholarly interest in issue ownership, the understanding of how parties shape issue ownership is very limited. I therefore test a new theoretical model to understand issue ownership attack. Using several survey experiments, the analysis shows that a mainstream party can counteract another mainstream party’s issue ownership by reframing the issue and by blaming the party for its performance, but not by changing its own position on the issue. Hence, the study not only advances the understanding of issue ownership stability and change but also brings important insights on how parties influence voters.

**Key words**: Political parties; issue ownership; voters; party competition.

*Accepted for publication in West European Politics (May 2019)*

Representative democracy rests on voters’ abilities to elect and reject politicians. Through the replacement of politicians that disappoint, elections encourage politicians to handle problems and represent voters’ policy preferences. An important aspect of this mechanism is that voters evaluate political parties on how competently they handle problems – their so-called ‘issue ownership’ (Lefevere et al. 2015). A growing literature on political parties’ issue ownership shows that issue ownership is central to the vote choice because voters increasingly vote for the party that they consider best at handling the issues they are concerned about (Meguid and Belanger 2008; Petrocik 1996). However, despite case studies showing serious electoral consequences when a rival non-issue-owning party takes over ownership of an issue (Jennings and Green 2017; Holian 2004; Egan 2013), extant work tells very little about what a party without issue ownership can do to counteract a rival party’s ownership. Hence, despite intense scholarly interest in issue ownership (Lefevere et al. 2015), this leaves a limited understanding of how parties shape voters’ party performance evaluations, i.e. issue ownership.

To address this limitation, I make two contributions to the literature. (1) I study how a mainstream party can counteract an opposing mainstream party’s issue ownership rather than just studying how the party can maintain its own issue ownership (unlike previous literature, see Egan 2013; Stubager and Seeberg 2016; Dahlberg and Martinsson 2015), or how a mainstream party can counteract an opposing niche party’s issue ownership (Meguid 2008). (2) Unlike previous literature on parties and issue ownership (e.g., Dahlberg and Martinsson 2015; Tresch et al. 2013), I do not just focus on the effect of a party emphasizing an issue. Rather, I test the influence of the diverse content of this communication. This contribution reflects that parties rarely talk about an issue using empty words – they aim to communicate something. I focus on three distinct communication strategies and show that a mainstream party can use a blame strategy and a frame strategy, but not a position strategy. From this perspective, it is impossible to study issue emphasis as such because it confuses diverse types of communication that work (frame and blame) with those that do not work (position). This could explain the mixed findings in the literature on the effect of issue emphasis on issue ownership (Dahlberg and Martinsson 2015; Stubager and Seeberg 2016; Tresch et al. 2013; Walgrave et al. 2009). To make these contributions, I analyse survey experiments on the issue of agriculture in Denmark and the issues of business and climate change in the United States.

Studying how a non-issue-owning party counteracts a rival party’s issue ownership is important not only to gain a better understanding of issue ownership but also to address a longstanding puzzle on party campaigning: why is issue trespassing, i.e. a party’s emphasis of an issue on which the rival party has issue ownership, so common (Sigelman and Buell 2004)? By raising voters’ attention to such an issue, the party invites voters to vote for the rival party according to saliency theory (Budge and Farlie 1983). Rather, the party should stick to its own issues. According to the predominant focus in the literature (see, e.g., Sides 2006), such issue trespassing mostly takes place in competitive races. This study holds that trespassing might also occur because a party needs to address an issue on which the rival party has issue ownership in order to counteract that issue ownership.

**The three dimensions of issue ownership attack**

A party has issue ownership when voters perceive it to be ‘much more dependable in carrying out the desired objective than others’, according to the topic’s ‘founding fathers’, Budge and Farlie (1983: 287). Hence, issue ownership is about a party’s commitment to an issue – the party is ‘dependable’ – and its performance on the issue – ‘in carrying out’ – but it is also about actually delivering on the ‘desired objectives’ – the policy position that voters want. Petrocik (1996: 826) later elaborated on the concept and defined it as a ‘reputation for policy and program interest, produced by a history of attention, initiative, and innovation toward problems, which leads voters to believe that one of the parties is more sincere and committed to do something’. In other words, Petrocik underlines commitment and competence more and position less than Budge and Farlie (1983): a party can establish a reputation on an issue through its commitment to confronting problems on this issue and through its competence to handle such problems.

From this point of view, issue ownership is much more about a party’s reputation for actually handling problems competently on an issue than merely about a ‘spontaneous association’ between a party and an issue (Tresch et al. 2013). In this sense, this paper follows Stubager (2017) and hesitates to adopt the alternative ‘associative issue ownership’ introduced by Tresch et al. (2013). In their analysis, Stubager and Slothuus (2013) confirm that (competence-based) issue ownership in the eyes of the voters is a multi-dimensional concept formed in large part by the components mentioned by Budge and Farlie and Petrocik, namely a party’s issue commitment, issue position, and issue performance (or competence).

Hence, with these issue ownership ingredients, a party should be able to maintain ownership of an issue not only by showing its commitment to the issue but also by performing well on the issue and by taking a popular position on it. While research on position taking and issue ownership is limited (but see Stubager and Seeberg 2016), the literature finds support for performance (Jennings and Green 2017; Stubager and Seeberg 2016) and to some extent also commitment (Dahlberg and Martinsson 2015; Stubager and Seeberg 2016; Walgrave et al. 2009). Taking this logic one step further, a party should be able to counteract a rival party’s issue ownership by targeting the same elements; namely, by questioning the rival party’s issue performance and by shifting its own position towards the popular position of the rival. Moreover, Holian (2004), in his classic case study of Clinton’s attack on the Republicans’ issue ownership of crime in the 1992 US presidential election, also emphasizes issue framing as a strategy. In contrast, Tresch et al. (2013) find commitment to be a somewhat poor strategy to counteract a rival’s issue ownership. Hence, given previous work, I will focus on performance, position, and framing as strategies to counteract another party’s issue ownership, and leave a comparison to commitment for future research.

The theoretical model focuses on the electoral competition between the two largest mainstream parties – the ‘prime minister parties’ – on the centre-left and centre-right and leaves other party dyads to future research. This limited focus is important because the impact of a mainstream party’s attack on, for instance, a niche party in a multiparty system might be different (cf. below).

*Strategy I: Blame*

If a party’s performance on an issue is central to issue ownership, then blame for bad performance supposedly matters. By blaming a rival party for a poor result, such as high unemployment, a party can encourage voters to conclude that the rival party is not competent to handle the issue. This focus on blame for understanding party support has a long history (Weaver 1986). When a party is deemed guilty by the electorate for a bad development on an issue, the electorate is far more likely to evaluate the party’s performance on the issue poorly (Marsh and Tilley 2009). In the domain of the economy, economic voting studies also document that blame attribution has an impact on a party’s vote share (Pardos-Prado and Sagarzazu 2016). Building on this work, the blame strategy probably works better against large mainstream parties. They typically take turns in office, unlike niche parties, and therefore are expected by voters to solve policy problems. Against this backdrop, a mainstream party can counteract a rival mainstream party’s issue ownership by blaming it for bad performance. This leads to the blame strategy for counteracting issue ownership:

*H1: If Party B has issue ownership and Party A blames Party B for bad performance on the issue, Party B’s issue ownership weakens.*

*Strategy II: Position*

According to early work on issue ownership (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996), the party with issue ownership holds the popular position on the issue and thereby represents a majority of voters (Slothuus and Stubager 2013). Hence, an opposing party should – adhering to a classic Downsian logic (Downs 1957) – be able to counteract the issue ownership by moving closer to the other party in order to be a more attractive alternative for voters. This would also be the conclusion from Meguid’s work (2008) on mainstream parties’ policy positions and niche party success: a mainstream party’s accommodation to the niche party’s position lowers the latter’s success.

Accommodation might work this way vis-à-vis niche parties because the mainstream party qua its government record offers voters a greater chance to see its policy implemented (Meguid 2008). Yet, this may not be the case against a rival mainstream party that has the same to offer (van Spanje and Graaf 2018). Another challenge to a mainstream party’s attack is that its shift needs to be credible before the voters to offer them a real alternative to the party with issue ownership. Assuming that it takes more than just a marginal move to reach the vicinity of the rival party’s position (i.e. more than a moderation – cf. Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), the attack party’s shift may quickly be seen by voters as a rather large turn that contradicts the party’s values and historic roots. This easily makes the shift non-credible. In addition, internal conflicts can erupt when a large mainstream party with various fractions among its members embarks on such a leap (Budge 1994; De Sio and Weber 2014).

Such voter suspicion is particularly likely on the issues on which mainstream parties attack each other’s issue ownership. These issues – welfare, tax, crime, the economy – are old in the sense that the parties have long-held positions which would have to be abandoned. On these issues, voters have a quite rooted picture of the political landscape and are hesitant to update their perceptions. They ‘do not listen’ according to recent work by Adams et al. (2011). In a similar vein, Feld and Grofman (1991) argue that if the attack party locates just about as close to the median voter as the attacked party, voters are status quo oriented and inclined to give the latter ‘the benefit of the doubt’ and continue to support it.

A mainstream party’s accommodation to another mainstream party might not only be difficult, it might also boost the other mainstream party’s issue ownership. This is because the former surrenders on its policy position to embrace and therefore cement the success of the latter’s position. For these reasons, De Sio and Weber (2014) argue that a party’s accommodation to a rival party’s popular position would never even take place. Their argument is that it would always be more electorally advantageous for the attack party to shift attention to another issue instead where it is more proximate to the median voter. Hence, for several reasons, a mainstream party’s accommodation to another mainstream party’s popular position most likely increases rather than decreases the latter’s issue ownership:

*H2: If Party B has issue ownership and Party A moves its policy position on the issue closer to that of Party B, Party B’s issue ownership improves.*

*Strategy III: Framing*

A third strategy to counteract the issue ownership of a competing party is to use framing in terms of how to handle problems on the issue. Framing is ‘the act of emphasizing certain aspects or dimensions of an issue’ (Sides 2006: 426) in order to influence the terms on which an issue is discussed and how voters perceive ‘the essence of the issue’ (Slothuus and Vreese 2010: 631). The literature shows that parties frame issues (Lefevere et al. 2017) and in this way influence public opinion (Slothuus and Vreese 2010). The basic idea is that a party selectively ‘highlights some feature of the issue on which it is likely to be regarded as more competent’ (Petrocik 1996: 829). This means that the party highlights a way to tackle problems on the issue that connects to its own ideology, policy priorities, or issues of which it has ownership. By making these links to its existing strengths, the party adds credibility to the frame. At the same time, it avoids a presentation of the issue that highlights the opponent’s strengths (Sides 2006: 427; Lefevere et al. 2017). Hence, an ‘own frame’ is distinguishable from an ‘opponent frame’. The expectation would be that if a party uses the latter, it reminds voters of reasons that the rival party has issue ownership. In contrast, if the party uses the former, it gives voters reasons to reject the rival party and instead prefer the attack party to handle the issue.

Holian (2004) provides a classic example of such issue-handling framing (see also Egan 2013; Green and Jennings 2017). In the 1992 US presidential election, Clinton counteracted the Republicans’ longstanding issue ownership on crime by making the solution to crime a question of prevention – that is, a social issue – as much as punishment – that is, a law and order issue, which was the dominant frame previously. With the Democrats’ well-established reputation for handling social issues, they would be the natural choice to competently handle crime if prevention came to be considered more important than punishment (Holian 2004; Sides 2006). With framing, voters come to evaluate which party has issue ownership on a new dimension, even though the framing is recycling the attacking party’s existing strengths much more than presenting a completely new understanding of the issue. The size of the effect will probably depend on how well the frame resonates with the public. The opportunities to use this type of attack in the first place probably depend on the number of available frames on an issue (cf. below). To summarize the frame strategy:

*H3: If Party B has issue ownership and Party A frames the issue to highlight its own advantages (uses an ‘own frame’), Party B’s issue ownership weakens.*

***Impact on target party supporters***

The three strategies to counteract issue ownership implicitly build on the assumption that not only voters of the attack party but also voters of the target party are influenced by the attack and lower their issue ownership evaluations of the target party. If the attack only has traction among the attack party’s own supporters and makes them even more sceptical of the target party, the attack party merely kicks in an open door. Hence, it does not breed a real issue ownership change. This would be the expectation from research on so-called partisan motivated reasoning (Druckman et al. 2013). This research suggests that partisan identity biases public opinion formation in the sense that target party supporters resist and reject any invitation from the attack party to turn against their own party. This implies that the impact of the three counteraction strategies on target party supporters will be limited, and the impact will be larger on attack party supporters:

*H4: If Party B has issue ownership and Party A counteracts its issue ownership through the position, frame, or blame strategies, the attack does impact supporters of Party B, but less so than supporters of Party A.*

Ultimately, the attack party may neutralize the target party’s issue ownership through the counteraction strategies by leaving the two parties neck-and-neck on the issue, or the attack party might even be able to steal the issue ownership. The fourth hypothesis implies that this probably takes place by lowering evaluations of the target party more than by improving evaluations of the attack party.

The theorizing on the three main hypotheses (H1–H3) on position, framing, and blaming strategies might suggest that a party attacks a rival party’s issue ownership in a vacuum. This is obviously not the case. For instance, the party with issue ownership will most likely defend its issue ownership by rhetorically questioning the credibility of the attack party’s accommodating position, reaffirming its own frame questioning the frame introduced by the rival, and deflecting any blame for its responsibility for a bad performance. This will decrease the net effect. Yet, if the attack is repeated over a longer period and maybe also coincides with a policy failure such as a jump in hospital waiting lists on the issue of health, it may increase its effect. Hence, the current analysis probably only shows an average effect that masks some variation in the effects of the strategies depending on the context.

**Experimental design**

The hypotheses are tested in a survey experiment conducted on the issue of agriculture in Denmark and the issues of business and climate in the United States. In this way, the design provides a very diverse setting in which to test the hypotheses. If the findings from the empirical analysis are consistent across issues and countries, this offers a base for evaluating the strategies. The conclusions then apply for two very different political systems, namely, the US presidential two-party system and the Danish parliamentarian multiparty system. At the time of data collection, Denmark had a three-party coalition government consisting of the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Alliance. Consistent with the theorizing, the analysis in Denmark focuses entirely on the Prime Minister’s (PM) party, the Liberals, and the conclusions therefore also only pertain to an attack on a mainstream party with issue ownership on the issue under attack. Moreover, despite interesting recent research on how junior parties and the larger PM party often share blame and credit unequally in a coalition government (Fisher and Hobolt 2013), the analysis does not venture into this, and cannot tell whether junior partners benefit or suffer when the PM party is attacked. Even if this limits the analysis of multiparty dynamics, the inclusion of a multiparty system in the analysis in addition to a two-party system is important for the generalizability of the results: the analysis of the multiparty system reveals whether an attack by the large centre-left mainstream party impacts voters’ evaluations of the large centre-right mainstream party. This is important because a lack of clarity of responsibility in multiparty systems makes it harder for voters to identify which (governing) party is to blame (Hobolt et al. 2013).

There is also considerable variation at the issue level. The analysis focuses on two issues, agriculture and business, on which the main centre-right party, the Liberals in Denmark and the Republicans in the United States, have issue ownership,[[1]](#endnote-2) and one issue, climate, on which the Democrats in the United States have issue ownership (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996; Seeberg 2017). Due to the risk of pre-treatment, the analysis relies on issues that have been relevant for a long time and still are important without being as salient as, e.g., the economy or immigration. Moreover, the three issues are classic in the sense that issue ownership is well-established – right-wing parties were formed to represent land and capital owners, and hence, have issue ownership on agriculture and business, including in the two cases of analysis. Left-wing parties took up the environment in the early 1970s and later climate change, and have issue ownership on this third issue in the analysis. This is at least the case in the United States (Seeberg 2017). Hence, on the environment, the argument most likely generalizes to other countries beyond the United States and Denmark, where socialist or social democratic parties have issue ownership. In countries where Green parties have successfully formed and acquired issue ownership on the environment, such as Sweden and Germany, the argument should be adjusted to a situation where a niche party has issue ownership. The attack party is the party in opposition on two out of three issues (agriculture and business) but the party in government on one issue (climate) in order to rule out the possibility that the strategies only work for parties in particular situations. In terms of ensuring a diverse setting in which to test the argument, the public saliency of the issues also varies, with agriculture being the most salient issue at the time of the study and climate the least (see Table A2 in the appendix).

The Danish survey uses a nationally representative sample (*N* 1522) collected through a web survey by a Danish polling company, Epinion, in the period 27 March to 7 April 2017 (see Section III in the appendix). The study focuses on the two dominant parties in parliament: for each of the three strategies, the Social Democrats (‘the attack party’) in opposition attack the Liberals (‘the target party’) in government to counteract the Liberals’ longstanding issue ownership on agriculture (Seeberg 2017).

The US survey was collected on the web using Amazon MTurk (*N* 2553), 22 November to 3 December 2017.[[2]](#endnote-3) The data are unweighted. As Clifford et al. (2015) demonstrate, an MTurk sample can, despite its non-representative nature, be used to study public opinion formation through experiments. In this period, the Republicans had the presidency and a majority in both chambers of the US Congress. In the survey, the Democrats (‘the attack party’) attack the Republicans (‘the target party’) on the issue of business, which the Republicans own, and vice versa on the issue of climate, where the Democrats have issue ownership (Seeberg 2017). Respondents participated in a random order in the US experiment on both business and climate (see Figure 1 for an overview).

*Stimuli Material*

The three counteraction hypotheses can be tested on agriculture in Denmark and business and climate in the United States because the debates on these issues have been rather diverse in these countries recently. The attack parties – the Social Democrats on agriculture, the Democrats on business, and the Republicans on climate – have used a varied set of arguments with regard to blame, position, and framing (see Section IV in the appendix). The experiment exploits this natural variation in the variables of theoretical interest. In this way, the experiment stays close to the actual debate. The mock news items used in the experiment reflect true statements made by MPs from the Social Democrats in Denmark and representatives in the US Congress (see the questionnaires in Sections V and VI in the appendix).

 The hypotheses were tested through an identical set-up on each of the three issues, as visualized in Figure 1. Each hypothesis was tested by contrasting two groups in the experiment. One group received stimuli material that communicated what the hypothesis proposes, while another group received the opposite. This results in six groups for each issue, and each respondent is only a member of one group per issue (see the distribution of respondents in Table A1 in the appendix). A hypothesis is tested by comparing average evaluations in two groups through OLS regression analyses with a group dummy.

[Figure 1 about here]

To test the blame strategy (H1), a group received stimuli material in line with the hypothesis in which the attack party blames the target party for bad performance. Another group received opposite stimuli material in which the attack party blames international markets/the international community for the same problems, i.e. diverts blame away from the target party. In the stimuli material, each group received both types of arguments, but only one was sponsored by the attack party. To exemplify, I report the blame stimuli material on business in the United States, where the brackets show the words that are exchanged to form the blame diversion material:

*(Title) Democrats: [Do not] Blame Republicans for slow growth in American business.*

*After the financial crisis in 2007, the number of bankruptcies in America is still high and the number of new enterprises low. Even if many would not hold [hold] the Republicans to account, a leading figure from the Democrats blames [does not blame] the Republicans:*

*‘The Republicans are incompetent [competent] and they are not doing enough [doing what they can] to handle the huge problem of slow growth in American business.*

*International markets are still affected by the 2007 financial crisis, and this automatically hurts American businesses that rely on global demand to sell their products.*

*Yet, this does not change the fact that the Republicans do not take the problem of American business seriously [There is not much the Republicans can do to change this], and they have not [have] competently done their best to handle the problem.’*

This set-up, with a balanced stimuli text in which each stimuli group receives opposing arguments for each counteraction strategy, brings the hypothesis testing closer to reflecting a true debate in which an argument rarely comes without a counterargument. However, for these reasons, the stimuli are also rather weak. This makes the test of the argument more realistic, if not also more conservative. Importantly for the results of the experiment, the respondents did appear to receive and understand the stimuli – participants’ responses to the stimuli varied as expected, although not a great deal (see Tables A5–A7 in the appendix). This again reflects that the stimuli are not artificially strong.

The tests of the position strategy and the frame strategy used an identical setup. To test the position strategy (H2), a group received stimuli material in line with the hypothesis in which the attack party takes a position in agreement with the target party. Another group received opposite stimuli material in which the attack party takes a position in disagreement with the target party. To each group, the stimuli text also presented the position opposing what the attack party promotes. Hence, each group received the exact same information – an ‘agree position’ and a ‘disagree position’. Only the position that the attack party sponsors varied. To exemplify, I report the stimuli material for the agree position on agriculture in Denmark, where the brackets show the words that are exchanged to form the disagree position:

*(Title) ‘Hard to distinguish [Differences increase]: The Social Democrats adopt [reject] the Liberals’ agricultural policy’*

*Environmental concern in agriculture is often debated. On this question, the Social Democrats increasingly adopt [reject] the Liberals’ position on agriculture and underline that economic [environmental] concerns are more important than environmental [economic] concerns.*

*As a leading figure from the Social Democrats explains:*

*‘We need to ensure a profitable business in agriculture in order for farmers to be able to meet high environmental demands.’ [‘A profitable business in agriculture is important for Danish farmers, but it becomes a problem as soon as it compromises on the environment.’]*

*‘Although environmental concerns [the economy in agriculture] are very important to us, the economy is [environmental concerns are] just a top priority’.*

To test the frame strategy (H3), a group received stimuli material in line with the hypothesis in which the attack party promotes a frame that connects to its own strengths (‘own frame’). Another group received opposite stimuli material in which the attack party promoted a frame that connects to the target party’s strengths (‘opponent frame’). Each group received a stimuli text that also presented the opposite frame of what the attack party promotes. To exemplify, I report the ‘own frame’ stimuli material on climate in the United States, where the brackets show the words that are exchanged to form the ‘opponent frame’ text:

*(Title) Republicans: Tackle climate change through more regulation [market innovation]*

*Climate change is often debated. While some claim that climate change can be tackled only through (1) [(2)], a leading figure from the Republicans rejects this idea and says that ‘[Un]Like the Democrats, we believe that climate change can only be tackled through (2) [(1)].*

*Where,*

1. *tax cuts and deregulation that encourage market innovation and a switch to green technology.*
2. *more demanding regulation of emissions from vehicles and factories, where the government sets higher standards in order to make business adjust.*

Similarly on agriculture in Denmark, the Social Democrats reframe the issue by advocating a move towards more organic agricultural production (i.e. an environmental frame) in order to compete on quality rather than price through deregulation (i.e. a business frame). The US Democrats reframe business similarly, focusing on high-quality products through more regulation rather than deregulation and price competition.

Insofar as the Social Democrats or Democrats have issue ownership on the environment and health, they are likely to be able to similarly reframe several other issues such as pesticides, energy, and tobacco (Baumgartner and Jones 2009) or biotechnology (Daviter 2009) by emphasizing environmental and human hazards. Moreover, as Holian (2004) demonstrates, the Democrats reframed crime to be a matter of social policy. Similarly, bourgeois parties can reframe many issues as being in need of the competition and innovation that the market breeds or in terms of export potential, i.e. a question of business. For instance, the Conservatives in Britain visibly reframed health and education this way after the 1997 election (Norris and Wlezien 2005), as did the bourgeois parties in Denmark on labour market policy (Arndt 2014; see also Rose and Baumgartner 2013 on poverty).

Yet, reframing probably has limits. For instance, it has arguably been difficult for the Social Democrats to make border control, defence, and foreign affairs (including the EU) a matter of social policy or the environment in order to counteract bourgeois parties’ issue ownership in these areas. Moreover, some moral issues – which Christian democratic parties typically own – can be framed in terms of either health risks or business opportunities (or threats to law and order, which bourgeois parties also own), such as GMOs, biotechnology, gambling, drugs, and pornography. However, it seems harder to use such reframing (especially business or law and order) on abortion, gay marriage, euthanasia, and organ donation (Engeli et al. 2014; Euchner et al. 2013).

Hence, reframing seems to be a feasible strategy on many if not most issues, but there are limits, especially pertaining to national security issues for Social Democrats and moral issues for bourgeois parties. This corresponds with the analysis of party statements in Belgium by Lefevere et al. (2017: 7), who show that parties reframe issues 42 per cent of the time to 1 to 3 other issues. Finally, environmental parties and radical right (niche) parties can probably only reframe insofar as the issue can be presented in environmental terms or with reference to immigration. Without the opportunity to use health and social policy or business to reframe, the reframing options for niche parties are inevitably fewer.

*Measures*

Each stimuli text ends with the same set of questions on the dependent variable. Respondents evaluated on a ten-point scale (recoded 0–1 where 1 is positive) the attack party and the target party (Social Democrats and Liberals in Denmark, Republicans and Democrats in the United States), respectively, using the following question: ‘How do you think [party] handle problems on [issue] in [country]?’ (1 very poorly, 10 very well, 0 don’t know). The measure reflects the classic issue ownership measure by focusing on a party’s ability to handle problems on an issue (Petrocik 1996). However, it departs from the prevalent question format by not asking respondents to choose a preferred party from among the alternatives. Instead, and as in other survey analyses, a continuous measure is adopted to offer more analytical leverage (e.g., Stubager and Seeberg 2016).[[3]](#endnote-4), [[4]](#endnote-5) Research shows that this question taps into the three counteraction strategies, i.e. voters’ evaluations of the party’s competence on the issue, position on the issue, and concern with the issue, without any explicit mention in the question of these different dimensions (Stubager and Slothuus 2013; Stubager 2017). Yet, to bolster the analysis, the appendix provides results for three questions that directly tap into each of the three dimensions of issue ownership which the counteraction strategies focus on (see Figures A3–A5 and Tables A21–A23 in the appendix).

**Findings**

The test of the three strategies is shown in Figure 2. It shows the difference in the issue ownership score of the target party for each of the three strategies across the three issues in Denmark and the United States. Each square represents a standard OLS regression coefficient with a 95 per cent confidence interval. The coefficient estimates the difference in the mean issue ownership score (measured 0–1) for the two groups of respondents.[[5]](#endnote-6) If a square is to the right of the vertical (no-effect) zero-line, and the horizontal line escapes this vertical line, the evaluation has improved in a statistically significant way.

The takeaway is that a party – in line with the expectations – can counteract a rival party’s issue ownership by using its own frame or by blaming the rival’s performance, but not by moving its policy position closer to the rival party’s position. This result does not change substantively when adding control variables or when using alternative measures of issue ownership.[[6]](#endnote-7)

 [Figure 2 about here]

To take the position strategy (II) first, the group of respondents that received a news item communicating that the attack party agrees with the target party’s position (instead of a news item showing that it disagrees) scored the target party systematically and substantively higher on the issue of agriculture in Denmark. The hollow square in the left panel of Figure 2 is to the right of the vertical line. This effect is statistically significant, and hence, in agreement with Hypothesis 2. Yet, in the United States on business (centre panel) and climate (right panel), the white squares are close to the vertical line, and the horizontal lines intersect the vertical line. Hence, on two out of three issues, the results do not support Hypothesis 2, and the conclusion is therefore that in the short run, policy shifts are more unproductive than counterproductive. This corresponds with results from a previous issue ownership study (see, e.g., Stubager and Seeberg 2016).

One explanation for this null finding is that it could be that voters simply do not believe the fully accommodative position and therefore do not change their issue ownership evaluations of the attack party. Hence, a more modest and therefore also more trustworthy move might be more influential. It could also be that the position change only undermines the rival party’s issue ownership when the attack party combines the position attack with a blame attack.

In correspondence with Hypotheses 1 and 3, the opposite is true for the blaming and framing strategies, where the black and grey squares and the horizontal lines are consistently to the left of the vertical line across issues and countries. Hence, if the attack party uses its own frame instead of the opponent’s frame, the issue ownership score of the target party systematically declines about seven percentage points on the issue of agriculture in Denmark and on business and climate in the United States. If the attack party blames the target party with issue ownership instead of diverting blame away from the target party, the effect is similarly consistent across cases and a little stronger. A seven percentage point change is about a fourth of a standard deviation (which is .29–.32) on the target party’s issue ownership score. Hence, this is not a great deal but may still – as demonstrated below – change the balance on the ownership of an issue if voter evaluations of the two parties are very close. As a sign of the robustness of this finding, the same conclusion can be drawn by using strategy-specific measures of voters’ evaluations of the target party.[[7]](#endnote-8)

[Figure 3 about here]

To go further into the null finding for the position strategy (H2), Figure 3 plots the marginal effect of accommodation (receiving the agree news item instead of the disagree item) on voters’ evaluations of the two parties on agriculture in Denmark conditional on voters’ own position on agriculture.[[8]](#endnote-9) To the left in Figure 3 is the Liberals, who have issue ownership. To the right is the Social Democrats. Those voters who put environmental concerns above farmers’ economic concerns (the left-wing position) increased their evaluations of the Liberals when exposed to information that the Social Democrats agree with the Liberals rather than disagree. In contrast, voters who put farmers’ economic concerns above environmental concerns (the right-wing position) decreases their evaluation of the Liberals when exposed to information that the Social Democrats agree with the Liberals rather than disagree. The opposite applies to the Social Democrats. Thus, the graph indicates a Downsian logic: by moving towards the Liberals, the Social Democrats attract voters that agree with their new position and lose voters that no longer agree. In fact, these latter voters improved their evaluations of the Liberals, probably because the party they previously agreed (and most likely also identified) with now endorsed the rival party’s position. This only confirms the expectations in H2 that it is difficult if not counterproductive for a party to successfully change position. Importantly, the total effect in Figure 2 reveals that this latter group to the left is larger than the former group to the right, leaving a net improvement for the Liberals.

[Figures 4–5 about here]

An additional, important question for the test of the three counteraction strategies is whether the attack party is able to make supporters of the target party lower their issue ownership evaluations of the target party, and not just make supporters of the attack party even more sceptical towards the target party. Research on partisan motivated reasoning (e.g., Druckman et al. 2013) suggests that such an impact will be limited, as stipulated in Hypothesis 4. Figure 4 breaks down the analysis from Figure 2 on the supporters of the attack party, the target party, and other parties in Denmark. Importantly, all squares for the blame and frame strategies in the first and third panels in Figure 4 remain to the left of the vertical line, like in Figure 2. Moreover, among these squares, the black one (Liberal voters) is a little more to the left than the hollow one (Social Democratic voters). Hence, contrary to Hypothesis 4, the Social Democrats influence voters of the Liberal as much as or even more than their own voters when they use a blame strategy or a frame strategy to counteract the Liberal party’s issue ownership. With the much smaller group of respondents in this part of the analysis, it is no surprise that the effects are no longer statistically significant.

The pattern in the United States (Figure 5) corresponds to the Danish pattern. The frame strategy by the Democrats on business makes Republican voters lower their issue ownership evaluations of the Republicans on business. This is visible from the black square to the left of the vertical line in the bottom left part of Figure 5.[[9]](#endnote-10) The same is true for climate in the right part of Figure 5. Here, the frame and blame strategies by the Republicans make Democratic voters lower their issue ownership evaluations of the Democrats on climate (the hollow squares). Yet, unlike the Danish results, the impact in the United States is greater on the attack party’s own supporters compared to the supporters of the target party. This result in the United States is in line with Hypothesis 4. This difference between Denmark and the United States makes sense insofar as US politics has become more polarized in recent years (Druckman et al. 2013). Voters who support the target party appear to be less likely to turn to the rival attack party in a highly polarized US context compared to a less polarized Danish context (Druckman et al. 2013). This is a finding that merits more attention in future research. The most important point from the test of Hypothesis 4 is that the target party’s supporters are also affected across the three issues in Denmark and the United States.

[Figure 6 about here]

Against this background, the final step is to look at which party actually has issue ownership after the voters have been exposed to the stimuli material. The pattern in Figure 6 indicates that the blaming and framing strategies might change parties’ issue ownership. Despite the lack of improvement for the evaluations of Social Democrats on agriculture in Denmark (see Figure A4 in the appendix), the depreciation in the voters’ evaluations of the Liberals because of the blaming or reframing by the Social Democrats in itself translates into a change of issue ownership according to Figure 6.[[10]](#endnote-11) If the Social Democrats divert blame away from the Liberals, the issue ownership is shared closely between the two parties, as shown by the black and hollow squares (Liberals and Social Democrats, respectively) being close to each other and close to the dotted halfway line (halfway to a full Social Democratic or Liberal issue ownership). However, if the Social Democrats instead blame the Liberals for bad performance, the rating of the Liberals weakens so much (the black squares drop below the dotted line) that the Social Democrats leave the Liberals far behind. The same split takes place with the reframing strategy.

The parties’ issue ownership also changes visibly on the issue of business in the United States. If the Democrats divert blame away from the Republicans or use the Republicans’ frame in particular, the issue ownership scores of the Republicans and Democrats are almost indistinguishable, and the black and hollow squares (Republicans and Democrats, respectively) cluster at the dotted halfway line. However, if the Democrats blame the Republicans or use their own frame, the black and hollow squares move apart on each side of the dotted line, with the black square (Republicans) dropping below .4 and the white square (Democrats) rising to almost .6 on the 0–1 scale.[[11]](#endnote-12)

In sum, and based on the systematic findings across three issues in two countries, the frame and blame strategies appear to be promising ways to counteract a rival party’s issue ownership – more than the position strategy, which might be counterproductive.

**Conclusion**

This paper contributes to the proliferating literature on issue ownership by not only studying a mainstream party’s opportunities to counteract a rival mainstream party’s issue ownership but also by examining which type of strategies a party can use. It is the first systematic analysis of issue ownership attack and extends on previous case studies. In this way, the paper adds to the intense scholarly interest in issue ownership and how parties may influence it.

The analysis shows that two out of three strategies work. A rival mainstream party’s issue ownership weakens if the attacking mainstream party uses its own frame on an issue, or if it blames the rival party for bad performance. In contrast, the analysis cannot confirm whether the target party’s issue ownership improves as hypothesized if the attack party takes up the rival party’s policy position. The weakening of the target party’s issue ownership from the blaming and framing strategies is not dramatic, but definitely not simply trivial either. This speaks directly to previous literature on issue ownership, which finds that issue ownership is mostly stable over time but not always constant (Seeberg 2017; Petrocik 1996). This study points to a source of instability but, at the same time, also to how relatively resilient issue ownership is.

The finding that a party cannot change position to influence a rival’s issue ownership should be interpreted with care. The experiment only tests short-term effects, and here, position changes may be perceived by voters to be insincere or unreliable. The analysis does not rule out that a party can counteract a rival party’s issue ownership over a longer period of time by slowly changing its position in a way that voters buy. Several Social Democratic parties have done so on immigration in recent decades. At the same time, the counteracting effects from the blame or frame strategies could quickly vanish if the party with issue ownership improves its performance record or counter-frames the frame-based attack from the party without issue ownership.

The consistent findings across three diverse issues and two very different countries open up opportunities to generalize. Most importantly, the frame and blame strategies appear to apply in a presidential two-party system as well as a parliamentarian multi-party system. That said, variation across context deserves more attention. For instance on an issue with a less settled ownership on an issue such as the economy (Seeberg 2017) than the ones included in the analysis, ownership of the issue is probably more up for grabs, and the counteraction strategies may therefore have stronger effects.

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**Ackowledgements**

The author would like to thank reviewers and the editor of this journal for valuable comments on earlier versions of the manuscript, along with colleagues in the Department of Political Science and participants in panels at the annual meetings of the Comparative Agendas Project (2017) and the MPSA (2018). The study in the United States was supported by a grant from the Independent Research Fund Denmark (no. 1317-00005).

**Figure 1.** Set-up of the survey experiments in Denmark and the US.

*Randomization*

*Stimuli text: Issue 1*

*Randomization*

*Stimuli text: Issue 2*

Blame I: Attacker blames target

*H1*

Blame II: Attacker does not blame target

Position I: attacker agrees w/ target

*H2*

Background questions

Dependent variable

Dependent variable

Position II: attacker disagrees w/ target

Frame I: attacker uses own frame

*H3*

Frame II: attacker uses opponent frame

Note: The two issues in the US are business and climate. In the experiment, the order of Issue 1 and Issue 2 is randomized. For issue two, the empty boxes have the same setup as the boxes for issue one. On business, the attacker is the Democrats and the target is the Republicans. On climate, the attacker is the Republicans and the target is the Democrats. The survey experiment in Denmark has the same setup, but only contain one issue (agriculture).

**Figure 2.** Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals (DK), the Republicans, and the Democrats (US).

*Issue ownership score*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **(A) Soc. Dem. attack Liberals on agriculture (DK)** | **(B) Dem. attack Rep. on business (US)** | **(C) Rep. attack Dem. on climate (US)** |
| *Voters’ evaluations of..**..the Liberals on agriculture* | *…the Republicans on business* | *…the Democrats on climate* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

 |  | *Improvement* |

Note: The figure is based on Tables A9-A17 (appendix).

**Figure 3.** The marginal effect of a position change by the Social democrats on voters’ evaluations of the Social democrats and the Liberals on agriculture in Denmark conditional on the voters’ positions on agriculture.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals* | *Voters’ evaluations of the Social democrats* |
| *Environment > Agri.econ.* | *Agri.econ. > environment* |

Note: The figure is based on Table A8 (appendix).

**Figure 4**. Three groups of voters’ evaluations of the Liberals on agriculture in Denmark when the Social Democrats counteract the Liberals.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame* | *(II) Agree instead of disagree* | *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Liberal voters* |
| *(II) Social Democratic voters* |
| *(III) Other parties’ voters* |

 | *Issue ownership score* | *Improvement* |

Note: The figure is based on Table A18. (appendix).

**Figure 5**. Republican and Democratic voters’ evaluations of the Republicans and the Democrats on business and climate in the US.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **(B) Dem. attack Rep. on business (US)**

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

 | **(C) Rep. attack Dem. on climate (US)** |
| *Voters’ evaluations of…**…the Republicans on business* | *…the Democrats on climate* |
| *Issue ownership score* | *Improvement* |

Note: The figure is based on Tables A19-A20 (appendix). Black (hollow) squares are Republican (Democratic) voters’ evaluations.

**Figure 6**.Voters’ issue-handling evaluations of the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Republicans, and the Democrats in Denmark and the US.

*Issue ownership score*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **(A) Soc. Dem. attack Liberals on agriculture (DK)** | **(B) Dem. attack Rep. on business (US)** | **(C) Rep. attack Dem. on climate (US)** |
| *Voters’ evaluations of..**..the Liberals & the Social Democrats* | *…the Republicans and the Democrats* | *… the Republicans and the Democrats* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Non-blame* |
| *(I) Blame* |
| *(III) Opp. frame* |
| *(III) Own frame* |
| *(II) Disagree* |
| *(II) Agree* |

 |

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Non-blame* |
| *(I) Blame* |
| *(III) Opp. frame* |
| *(III) Own frame* |
| *(II) Disagree* |
| *(II) Agree* |

 |

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Non-blame* |
| *(I) Blame* |
| *(III) Opp. frame* |
| *(III) Own frame* |
| *(II) Disagree* |
| *(II) Agree* |

 |
| Note: The Liberals (black squares), the Social Democrats (white squares) | Note: The Republicans (black squares), the Democrats (white squares) |

Note: The figure is based on Tables A9-A17 and Tables A24-A26 (appendix).

**APPENDIX**

**SECTION I**

Table A1. Distribution of respondents in the survey experiment

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Agriculture (DK)** | **Business (US)** | **Climate (US)** |
| Blame | 242 (15.9) | 197 (7.2) | 190 (6.9) |
| Non-blame | 294 (19) | 187 (6.8) | 190 (6.9) |
| Agree | 247 (16.2) | 191 (7) | 193 (7) |
| Disagree | 253 (16.6) | 196 (7.2) | 199 (7.3) |
| Own frame | 237 (15.6) | 199 (7.3) | 191 (7) |
| Opponent frame | 249 (16.4) | 195 (7.1) | 186 (6.8) |

Note: Each cell reports the absolute number and the percentage in brackets. The percent distribution for business and climate in the US does not sum up to 100 because half of the respondents received stimuli with the opposite attack party (e.g. Democrats on the issue of climate) for each issue.

Table A2. Background variables

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Denmark** | **The US** |
|  | Sample | Pop. (18+ years) | Sample | Pop. (18+ years) |
| *Gender (pct. men)* | 51.8 | 49.7 | 45.9 | 49 |
| *Age (mean)1* | 50.8 | 48.9 | 41 pct. [25-34] 23 pct. [35-44] 12 pct. [45-54] | 18 pct. [25-34] 17 pct. [35-44] 18 pct. [45-54] |
| *Saliency* |  |  |  |  |
| *Agriculture2* | .49 (.26) |  |  |  |
| *Business3* |  |  | .35 (.22) |  |
| *Climate3* |  |  | .34 (.30) |  |
| *Voter position on… (1 is right)* |  |  |  |  |
| *Agriculture4* | .35 (.26) |  |  |  |
| *Business5* |  |  | .42 (.28) |  |
| *Climate5* |  |  | .37 (.29) |  |
|  | Lib. | SD | Lib. | SD | Dem. | Rep. | Dem. | Rep. |
| *Vote choice3 (pct.)* | 16.7 | 24.8 | 19.5 | 26.3 | 58 | 31 | 48.5 | 46.4 |

Note: *1* Population measure in Denmark from the 2015 Danish general election. In the US, the population measure is from the 2016 US presidential election. *1*The brackets for the US indicate age intervals. *2*See question 3 in Table A3. *3*See question 2 in Table A4. *4*See question 1 in Table A3. *5*See question 1 in Table A4.

Table A3. Pre-treatment questions in the Danish survey

|  |
| --- |
| **(1) Position on the issue** |
| “Where would you put yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is “farming should adjust to environmental concerns even at the expense of economy of farming” and 10 is “the economy of farming is the most important concern even if it compromises on environmental concerns”. |
| **(2) The preferable solution to solve the problem on the issue** |
| Among these two alternatives, which of them do you agree the most with: (A) “More regulation to encourage organic and sustainable production is the way to growth”, (B) “Less regulation and rules to farmers is the way to growth”. (1-5: completely agree with B”). |
| **(3) The importance of the issue (salience)** |
| “If a general election took place tomorrow, how important would the issue of agriculture in Denmark be for your vote?” (0-1: very important). |
| **(4) The responsible for problems on the issue** |
| “Agriculture in Denmark has suffered since the financial crisis, and it is an ongoing debate who to blame. To what extent do you assign the blame for the crisis to … The Liberals/the Social Democrats/international markets?” (0 not at all, 1 a lot, don’t know). |
| **(5) The attributes of importance for the preferred party on the issue** |
| “Many voters have one party that they prefer to handle problems on an issue such as agriculture, immigration, or elderly care. When you think about the party or parties that you might prefer on various issues, how important is it that the parties “have the right policy on the issue” (0-1: very important), “approach the problem from many perspectives” (0-1: very important), “are good at solving problems on the issue” (0-1: very important). |
| **(6) Education** |
| What is your highest level of completed education? Primary and secondary school, High school, vocational training, 1-year degree, 2-3 years degree, Bachelor, Master, (1-7; “other” category included but not coded). |

Note: The pre-treatment questions also include gender and age. “Don’t know” is included in all questions.

Table A4. Pre-treatment questions in the US survey

|  |
| --- |
| **(1) Position on the issue** |
| (Business) “Business regulation is often discussed. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “American business is too strongly regulated and there should be fewer limits to what business can do”? (0-1: strongly agree)(Climate) “To what extent are you for or against policies to tackle climate changes, even if it comes at the expense of economic growth?” (0-1: definitely against) |
| **(2) The importance of the issue (salience)** |
| If an election took place today, how important would these issues be for your vote? Business, climate (0-1: extremely important) |
| **(3) The attributes of importance for the preferred party on the issue** |
| Most people have a party that they prefer to handle problems on an issue such as the environment, immigration, or unemployment. When you think about the parties that you prefer across different issues, how important is it that the parties... “...promote the right policy position on the issue?” (0-1: very important), “...are good at handling problems on the issue?” (0-1: very important), “...prioritize the issue?” (0-1: very important). |
| **(4) Education** |
| What is your highest level of completed education? Less than high school, High school graduate, Some college, 2-year degree, 4-year degree, Professional degree, Doctorate (1-7; “other” category included but not coded). |

Note: The pre-treatment questions also include gender and age. “Don’t know” included in all questions.

Table A5. Stimuli check on the issue of agriculture in Denmark

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Blame strategy** | **Position strategy** | **Frame strategy** |
| Stimuli text: | Blame | Non-blame | *Diff*. | Agree | Disagree | *Diff*. | Own frame | Opponent frame | *Diff*. |
| (I) Blame strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Do SD attribute blame? (1: very much)1* | .70 (.22) | .54 (.32) | -.16\*\*\* (.02) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| (II) Position strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Difference between SD and Lib. (1: large)2* |  |  |  | .59 (.30) | .66 (.22) | .07\*\* (.02) |  |  |  |
| (III) Frame strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Do SD ask for more regulation? (1: very much)3* |  |  |  |  |  |  | .68 (.23) | .58 (.28) | -.10\*\*\* (.02) |

Note: 1 “To what extent do you think that the Social Democrats attribute blame for the crisis in agriculture to the Liberals” “0: Not at all” to “1: Very much””. 2 “In the discussion on the agriculture, the disagreement often concerns to what extent agriculture should take environmental concerns into account, even if it affects the production. How would you judge the distance between the Social Democrats and the Liberals? “0: Completely agree” to “1: Completely disagree”. 3 “To what extent do you think that the Social Democrats ask for more demands to introduce organic and sustainable farming to solve the problems with slow growth? “0: Not at all” to “1: Very much”.

Table A6. Stimuli check on the issue of business in US

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Blame strategy** | **Position strategy** | **Frame strategy** |
| Stimuli text: | Blame | Non-blame | *Diff*. | Agree | Disagree | *Diff*. | Own frame | Opponent frame | *Diff*. |
| (I) Blame strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Do Dem. attribute blame? (1: Not at all)1* | .20 (.02) | .53 (.02) | .33\*\*\* (.03) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| (II) Position strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Difference between Dem. and Rep. (1: little)2* |  |  |  | .46 (.02) | .21 (.02) | .25\*\*\* (.02) |  |  |  |
| (III) Frame strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Do Dem. ask for more regulation? (1: Not at all)3* |  |  |  |  |  |  | .21 (.02) | .47 (.02) | .25\*\*\* (.03) |

Note: 1 “To what extent do you think that the Democrats blame the Republicans for the slow growth in American business? “…to a very large extent” – “...to a very limited extent”; 2“How do you compare the policy on business regulation of the Republicans and the Democrats? “similar” to “different”. 3“To what extent do the Democrats promote less business regulation? “…to a very large extent” – “...to a very limited extent”.

Table A7. Stimuli check on the issue of climate in the US

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Blame strategy** | **Position strategy** | **Frame strategy** |
| Stimuli text: | Blame | Non-blame | *Diff*. | Agree | Disagree | *Diff*. | Own frame | Opponent frame | *Diff*. |
| (I) Blame strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Do Dem. attribute blame (1: Not at all)1* | .31 (.02) | .64 (.02) | .33\*\*\* (.03) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| (II) Position strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Difference between Dem. and Rep. (1: little)2* |  |  |  | .31 (.01) | .19 (.01) | -.12\*\*\* (.02) |  |  |  |
| (III) frame strategy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Do Dem. ask for more regulation (1: Not at all)3* |  |  |  |  |  |  | .21 (.02) | .44 (.02) | .23\*\*\* (.03) |

Note: 1“To what extent do you think that the Republicans criticize the Democrats for not taking the problem of climate changes seriously? “...to a very large extent” – “...to a very limited extent”; 2“How do you compare the policy on climate changes of the Republicans and the Democrats? “similar” – “different”; 3“To what extent do the Republicans call for the government to set high standards and regulation more to tackle climate changes? “...to a very large extent” – “...to a very limited extent”.

Table A8. The marginal effect of position change on voters’ evaluations of the Liberals (1) and Social democrats (2) on agriculture in Denmark conditional on the voters’ positions on agriculture.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) |
| (A) Agree instead of disagree | 0.21\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.02(0.04) |
| (B) Voters’ positions on agriculture | 0.50\*\*\*(0.07) | -0.10(0.07) |
|  A x B | -0.34\*\*\*(0.10) | 0.14b(0.09) |
| Stimuli checka | 0.33\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.38\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.07(0.05) | 0.34\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Observations | 487 | 487 |
| R2 | .17 | .13 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure 3 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A5 in the appendix. b p < .135.

Table A9. Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals on the issue of agriculture in Denmark

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Agree instead of disagree | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Age |  | -0.00\*\*(0.00) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.00(0.00) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.02(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.03(0.03) |
| Education |  |  |  | -0.02(0.01) |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.34\*\*\*(0.05) |  |  | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | -0.08(0.05) |  | -0.09\*(0.05) |
| Vote choice |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.09\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Stimuli check | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.34\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.31\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.30\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.28\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.24\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.34\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.24\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.30\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.15\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.31\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.26\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.31\*\*\*(0.08) |
| Observations | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 487 | 472 | 500 | 465 |
| R2 | .09 | .10 | .09 | .09 | .15 | .08 | .11 | .17 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A3 and A5. Vote choice is a dummy with 1 = voted on the Liberals.

Table A10. Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals on the issue of agriculture in Denmark

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.05\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.05\*\*(0.03) |
| Age |  | -0.00\*\*\*(0.00) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.00\*\*(0.00) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Education |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.26\*\*\*(0.05) |  |  | 0.28\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | -0.03(0.05) |  | -0.08(0.05) |
| Vote choice |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.20\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.18\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Stimuli check | 0.47\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.46\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.46\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.46\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.42\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.43\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.49\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.24\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.39\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.21\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.28\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.16\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.27\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.27\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.33\*\*\*(0.07) |
| Observations | 486 | 486 | 486 | 486 | 470 | 463 | 486 | 454 |
| R2 | .14 | .16 | .16 | .14 | .16 | .12 | .21 | .27 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A3 and A5. Vote choice is a dummy with 1 = voted on the Liberals.

Table A11. Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals on the issue of agriculture in Denmark

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Blame instead of non-blame | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) |
| Age |  | -0.00\*\*\*(0.00) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.00\*\*(0.00) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.04(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.05\*(0.03) |
| Education |  |  |  | -0.02(0.01) |  |  |  | -0.02(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.26\*\*\*(0.05) |  |  | 0.31\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | -0.08(0.05) |  | -0.12\*\*(0.05) |
| Vote choice |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.08\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.08\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Stimuli check | 0.37\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.38\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.37\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.37\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.32\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.33\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.36\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.29\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.30\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.44\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.29\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.36\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.24\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.36\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.33\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.43\*\*\*(0.07) |
| Observations | 536 | 536 | 536 | 536 | 519 | 510 | 536 | 502 |
| R2 | .11 | .12 | .11 | .11 | .13 | .08 | .12 | .17 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A3 and A5. Vote choice is a dummy with 1 = voted on the Liberals.

Table A12. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans on the issue of business in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Agree instead of disagree | 0.01(0.03) | 0.01(0.03) | 0.01(0.03) | 0.01(0.03) | 0.02(0.03) | 0.02(0.03) | -0.02(0.03) | -0.004a(0.03) |
| Age |  | 0.01(0.01) |  |  |  |  |  | 0.00(0.01) |
| Gender |  |  | -0.00(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.02(0.03) |
| Education |  |  |  | -0.00(0.01) |  |  |  | 0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.38\*\*\*(0.05) |  |  | -0.22\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | 0.19\*\*\*(0.07) |  | 0.17\*\*\*(0.06) |
| Vote choice (Ref. = Rep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  (1 = Dem.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.36\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.31\*\*\*(0.03) |
|  (1 = Indep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.20\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.19\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Stimuli check | 0.16\*\*(0.06) | 0.16\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.16\*\*(0.06) | 0.16\*\*(0.06) | 0.15\*\*(0.06) | 0.15\*\*(0.06) | 0.17\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.17\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.40\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.23\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.34\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.64\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.58\*\*\*(0.08) |
| Observations | 385 | 385 | 385 | 385 | 381 | 373 | 367 | 352 |
| R2 | .02 | .03 | .02 | .02 | .17 | .04 | .33 | .40 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A4 and A6. a p < .15 if the stimuli check is excluded.

Table A13. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans on the issue of business in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame | -0.08\*\*(0.03) | -0.08\*\*(0.03) | -0.08\*\*(0.03) | -0.08\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.03a(0.03) | -0.03b(0.03) |
| Age |  | -0.01(0.01) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.03\*\*\*(0.01) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.01(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.02(0.03) |
| Education |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.33\*\*\*(0.05) |  |  | -0.21\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | 0.17\*\*(0.07) |  | 0.11\*(0.06) |
| Vote choice (Ref. = Rep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  (1 = Dem.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.33\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.30\*\*\*(0.03) |
|  (1 = Indep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.22\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.23\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Stimuli check | -0.03(0.05) | -0.03(0.05) | -0.03(0.05) | -0.04(0.05) | -0.02(0.05) | -0.02(0.05) | 0.04(0.05) | 0.03(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.47\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.52\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.45\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.50\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.31\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.40\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.62\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.82\*\*\*(0.08) |
| Observations | 387 | 387 | 387 | 387 | 385 | 383 | 367 | 361 |
| R2 | .02 | .02 | .02 | .02 | .11 | .03 | .25 | .32 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A4 and A6. a The coefficient becomes statistically significant again (p > .1) when controlling for the background variables (age, gender, and education) and taking out the stimuli check. b p < .18 if the stimuli check is excluded.

Table A14. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans on the issue of business in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Blame instead of non-blame | -0.08\*\*(0.04) | -0.08\*\*(0.04) | -0.08\*\*(0.04) | -0.08\*\*(0.04) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*(0.04) | -0.05\*(0.03) | -0.04 a(0.03) |
| Age |  | 0.00(0.01) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.00(0.01) |
| Gender |  |  | -0.00(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.03(0.03) |
| Education |  |  |  | -0.02\*(0.01) |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.44\*\*\*(0.05) |  |  | -0.31\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | 0.18\*\*(0.07) |  | 0.13\*\*(0.06) |
| Vote choice (Ref. = Rep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  (1 = Dem.) |  |  |  |  |   |  | -0.33\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.28\*\*\*(0.03) |
|  (1 = Indep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.23\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.18\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Stimuli check | 0.03(0.06) | 0.03(0.06) | 0.03(0.06) | 0.03(0.06) | 0.04(0.05) | 0.03(0.06) | 0.08(0.05) | 0.08\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.41\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.40\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.42\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.50\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.23\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.60\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.72\*\*\*(0.08) |
| Observations | 381 | 381 | 381 | 381 | 379 | 374 | 365 | 357 |
| R2 | .02 | .02 | .02 | .03 | .19 | .04 | .27 | .38 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A4 and A6. a p < .16; the coefficient becomes statistically significant again if the stimuli check is excluded.

Table A15. Voters’ evaluations of the Democrats on the issue of climate in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Agree instead of disagree | -0.01(0.03) | -0.01(0.03) | -0.01(0.03) | -0.01(0.03) | -0.01(0.02) | 0.02(0.02) | -0.00(0.03) | 0.00(0.02) |
| Age |  | -0.02\*\*(0.01) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.04(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.02(0.02) |
| Education |  |  |  | 0.00(0.01) |  |  |  | 0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.58\*\*\*(0.04) |  |  | -0.30\*\*\*(0.06) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | -0.52\*\*\*(0.04) |  | -0.21\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Vote choice (Ref. = Rep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  (1 = Dem.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.34\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.16\*\*\*(0.03) |
|  (1 = Indep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.16\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.05(0.04) |
| Stimuli check | -0.10(0.07) | -0.12\*(0.07) | -0.11(0.07) | -0.10(0.07) | 0.00(0.06) | -0.06(0.06) | -0.01(0.06) | 0.01(0.06) |
| Constant | 0.65\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.75\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.59\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.63\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.26\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.80\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.42\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.67\*\*\*(0.07) |
| Observations | 390 | 390 | 390 | 390 | 389 | 388 | 367 | 364 |
| R2 | .01 | .02 | .01 | .01 | .37 | .31 | .30 | .47 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A4 and A6.

Table A16. Voters’ evaluations of the Democrats on the issue of climate in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*(0.03) | -0.05\*(0.03) | -0.041(0.03) | -0.04\*(0.03) | -0.04\*(0.02) |
| Age |  | -0.04\*\*\*(0.01) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.00(0.01) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.07\*\*(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.05\*\*(0.02) |
| Education |  |  |  | 0.00(0.01) |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.58\*\*\*(0.04) |  |  | -0.24\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | -0.51\*\*\*(0.04) |  | -0.21\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Vote choice (Ref. = Rep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  (1 = Dem.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.37\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.21\*\*\*(0.03) |
|  (1 = Indep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.18\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.11\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Stimuli check | -0.15\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.15\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.15\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.15\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.11\*\*(0.04) | -0.11\*\*(0.05) | -0.09\*\*(0.05) | -0.09\*\*(0.04) |
| Constant | 0.71\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.85\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.60\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.70\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.32\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.86\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.44\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.68\*\*\*(0.07) |
| Observations | 374 | 374 | 374 | 374 | 372 | 371 | 353 | 348 |
| R2 | .02 | .05 | .04 | .02 | .36 | .32 | .36 | .50 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. 1p is 0.11. The control variables are explained in Tables A4 and A6.

Table A17. Voters’ evaluations of the Democrats on the issue of climate in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Blame instead of non-blame | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) | -0.06\*\*(0.03) |
| Age |  | -0.01(0.01) |  |  |  |  |  | -0.01(0.01) |
| Gender |  |  | 0.04(0.03) |  |  |  |  | 0.02(0.02) |
| Education |  |  |  | 0.02\*(0.01) |  |  |  | 0.01(0.01) |
| Opinion |  |  |  |  | 0.46\*\*\*(0.04) |  |  | -0.16\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Importance of issue |  |  |  |  |  | -0.46\*\*\*(0.04) |  | -0.21\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Vote choice (Ref. = Rep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  (1 = Dem.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.34\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.21\*\*\*(0.03) |
|  (1 = Indep.) |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.21\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.13\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Stimuli check | -0.06(0.05) | -0.05(0.05) | -0.05(0.05) | -0.06(0.05) | -0.00(0.04) | 0.01(0.04) | -0.02(0.04) | 0.01(0.04) |
| Constant | 0.68\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.72\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.62\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.60\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.36\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.79\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.45\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.60\*\*\*(0.08) |
| Observations | 378 | 378 | 378 | 378 | 377 | 375 | 352 | 350 |
| R2 | .02 | .02 | .03 | .03 | .26 | .27 | .31 | .40 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The control variables are explained in Tables A4 and A6.

Table A18. Three voter groups’ evaluations of the Liberals on the issue of agriculture in Denmark

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) |
| Group of voters | Liberals | SD | Others | Liberals | SD | Others | Liberals | SD | Others |
| Agree instead of disagree | 0.01(0.04) | 0.11\*(0.06) | 0.11\*\*\*(0.04) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  |  |  | -0.07(0.05) | -0.04(0.06) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) |  |  |  |
| Blame instead of non-blame |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.06(0.04) | -0.05(0.05) | -0.07\*\*(0.03) |
| Stimuli checka | 0.30\*\*\*(0.10) | 0.17(0.12) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.21\*\*(0.10) | 0.29\*\*(0.13) | 0.59\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.13(0.08) | 0.15(0.10) | 0.46\*\*\*(0.06) |
| Constant | 0.45\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.27\*\*\*(0.09) | 0.19\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.54\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.18\*\*(0.09) | 0.19\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.63\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.36\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.23\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Observations | 80 | 104 | 316 | 75 | 105 | 306 | 71 | 127 | 338 |
| R2 | .12 | .04 | .13 | .08 | .05 | .23 | .06 | .02 | .16 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure 5 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A6 in the appendix. “SD” refers to the Social Democrats. The “Group of voters” refer to those individuals that would vote for the Liberals, the Social Democrats, or other parties, respectively, at the next election.

Table A19. Two voter groups’ evaluations of the Republicans on business in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Group of voters | Dem. | Rep. | Dem. | Rep. | Dem. | Rep. |
| Agree instead of disagree | -0.04(0.04) | -0.01(0.04) |  |  |  |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  |  | -0.06(0.05) | -0.01(0.04) |  |  |
| Blame instead of non-blame |  |  |  |  | 0.02(0.06) | -0.10\*\*(0.04) |
| Stimuli checka | 0.01(0.08) | 0.25\*\*\*(0.07) | -0.19\*\*(0.09) | 0.12\*\*(0.06) | 0.11(0.10) | 0.06(0.07) |
| Constant | 0.70\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.25\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.71\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.26\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.55\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.30\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Observations | 123 | 208 | 118 | 206 | 122 | 203 |
| R2 | .01 | .07 | .04 | .03 | .01 | .06 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure 6 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A6 in the appendix. The “Group of voters” refer to those individuals that would vote for the Democrats and the Republicans, respectively, at the next election.

Table A20. Voters’ evaluations of the Democrats on climate in the US

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Group of voters | Dem. | Rep. | Dem. | Rep. | Dem. | Rep. |
| Agree instead of disagree | -0.08(0.06) | -0.07\*\*(0.04) |  |  |  |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  |  | -0.08(0.05) | 0.04(0.03) |  |  |
| Blame instead of non-blame |  |  |  |  | -0.10\*(0.06) | -0.02(0.03) |
| Stimuli checka | -0.07(0.09) | 0.00(0.05) | 0.30\*\*(0.12) | -0.20\*\*\*(0.07) | 0.03(0.10) | -0.18\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.47\*\*\*(0.07) | 0.78\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.37\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.78\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.43\*\*\*(0.06) | 0.83\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Observations | 116 | 197 | 117 | 211 | 99 | 220 |
| R2 | .02 | .03 | .06 | .04 | .04 | .07 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure 6 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A6 in the appendix. The “Group of voters” refer to those individuals that would vote for the Democrats and the Republicans, respectively, at the next election.

Figure A1.Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Republicans, and the Democrats in Denmark and the US

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **(A) Soc. Dem. attack Liberals on agriculture (DK)** | **(B) Dem. attack Rep. on business (US)** | **(C) Rep. attack Dem. on climate (US)** |
| *Voters prefer..**..the Liberals more than the Social Democrats* | *…the Republicans more than the Democrats* | *…the Democrats more than the Republicans* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

 |  |  |

Note: The measures are based on the questions: “To what extent do you think that the Liberals are better than the Social Democrats at handling problems in agriculture?” 0-1 (to a large extent); “Which party is better at handling [business regulation/climate changes]?” 0-1 (Democrats-Republicans).

Figure A2.Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Republicans, and the Democrats in Denmark and the US

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **(B) Dem. attack Rep. on business (US)** | **(C) Rep. attack Dem. on climate (US)** |
| *Voters associate…* *…the Republicans with business* | *… the Democrats with climate* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

 |  |
| *…the Democrats with business* | *…the Republicans with climate* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

 |  |

Note: The question used to analysis associative issue ownership is: “To what extent do you associate [Republicans/Democrats] with the issue of […]?” 0-1 (very much).

Figure A3. Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals on agriculture in Denmark using dimension-specific measures.

 

*Issue ownership score*

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

Note. The figure is based on Table A21.

Table A21. Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals on agriculture in Denmark using dimension-specific measures.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Blame instead of non-blame | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) |  |  |
| Agree instead of disagree |  | 0.11\*\*\*(0.03) |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  |  | -0.06\*\*\*(0.02) |
| Stimuli check\* | 0.37\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.34\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.40\*\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.30\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.24\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.38\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Observations | 536 | 500 | 486 |
| *R*2 | 0.110 | 0.092 | 0.127 |

Note. Standard errors in parentheses \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure A3 is based on this table. \* For the question wording, see Table A5 in the appendix. For the position strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Liberals have a good policy on agriculture?”. For the frame strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Liberals are concerned with agriculture?”. For the blame strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Liberals handle problems in agriculture?”.

Figure A4. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans on business in the US using dimension-specific measures.



*Issue ownership score*

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

Note. The figure is based on Table A22.

Table A22. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans on business in the US using dimension-specific measures.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Blame instead of non-blame | -0.08\*\*(0.04) |  |  |
| Agree instead of disagree |  | 0.04(0.03) |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  |  | -0.11\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Stimuli check\* | 0.03(0.06) | 0.13\*\*(0.06) | -0.10\*(0.06) |
| Constant | 0.41\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.40\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.59\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Observations | 381 | 385 | 391 |
| *R*2 | 0.021 | 0.026 | 0.024 |

Note. Standard errors in parentheses \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure A4 is based on this table. \* For the question wording, see Table A5 in the appendix. For the position strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Republicans have a good policy on business regulation?”. For the frame strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Republicans care about business regulation?”. For the blame strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Republicans are good at handling business regulation?”.

Figure A5. Voters’ evaluations of the Democrats on climate in the US using dimension-specific measures.



*Issue ownership score*

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

Note. The figure is based on Table A23.

Table A23. Voters’ evaluations of the Democrats on climate in the US using dimension-specific measures.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Blame instead of non-blame | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) |  |  |
| Agree instead of disagree |  | -0.02(0.03) |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  |  | -0.03+(0.03) |
| Stimuli check\* | -0.06(0.05) | -0.12\*(0.07) | -0.12\*\*(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.68\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.67\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.81\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Observations | 378 | 388 | 376 |
| *R*2 | 0.023 | 0.012 | 0.018 |

Note. Standard errors in parentheses \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01, + *p* < 0.19. Figure A5 is based on this table. \* For the question wording, see Table A5 in the appendix. For the position strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Democrats have a good policy on climate changes?”. For the frame strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Democrats care about climate changes?”. For the blame strategy, the measure is “To what extent do you think that the Democrats are good at handling climate changes?”.

**Section II:** *Spill-over effects*

Implicit in the three counteract strategies is the expectation that the attack party not only lower voters’ issue ownership evaluations of the target party, but also make them improve their issue ownership evaluations of the attack party. Except perhaps for the blame strategy, the counteract strategies carry little risk for the attack party of being perceived by the voters as vile or inappropriate. Hence, direct “backlash effect” are unlikely (Roese & Sande 1993). Yet, this does not mean that the decrease in the target party’s issue ownership evaluations automatically translates into an increase in the attack party’s issue ownership evaluations. On a practical level, in the counteract strategies, the attack party provides more direct reason to dislike the target party than to like the attack party. Hence, the attack party does not directly encourage voters to increase its own ratings. Moreover, voters may turn away not only from the target party but also from the attack party in response to the counteract strategies because the voters do not like the shared position, the new frame, or get disappointed with both parties when the attack party in the blame strategy reminds voters of the negative policy development. Partisan motivated reasoning might also operate in this process and keep voters from embracing the attack party even if they decrease their evaluations of the target party. From this perspective, the former is a much larger step than the latter. Hence, even in a two-party context, a one-to-one transfer is unlikely. We can therefore expect that *If party B has issue ownership and party A counteracts its issue ownership through a position, frame, or blame strategy, party A lowers voters’ evaluations of party B more than it improves on its own evaluations.*

[Figure A4]

Figure A4 tests if the attack party’s own issue ownership score overall improves when it counteracts the target party’s issue ownership score. The expectation is that a counteract strategy lowers voters’ evaluations of the target party more than it improves on the evaluations of the attack party.This is tested in Figure A4, which has a setup identical to Figure 2 but now displays how voters evaluate the attack party. Here, the black and grey squares (showing the blame and frame strategies) are to the right of the vertical line in the center and right panels of Figure A4 for the US, which indicates an improvement in voter evaluations of the attack party. For Denmark in the left panel, the black and grey squares are basically at the vertical line. Hence, the attack party benefits directly on both business and climate in the US if it uses its own frame or blames the performance of the target party (the difference is just outside standard levels of statistical significance for the blaming strategy). However, neither of these strategies improves voter evaluations of the attack party on agriculture in Denmark.

This difference between the US and Denmark might come from the party systems. In the US, voters who come to dislike the target party have fewer places to go and are therefore probably more likely to express a preference for the attack party. In Denmark, these voters have several other nearby rightwing parties to go to instead of expressing a preference for the attack party. Hence, in a multiparty context such as the Danish, an attack party less easily attracts the voters that turn away from the target party.

**Figure A4.** Voters’ issue-handling evaluations of the Social Democrats, the Democrats, and the Republicans.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **(A) Soc. Dem. attack Liberals on agriculture (DK)** | **(B) Dem. attack Rep. on business (US)** | **(C) Rep. attack Dem. on climate (US)** |
| *Voters’ evaluation of..**..the Soc. Dem. on agriculture* | *..the Democrats on business* | *..the Republicans on climate* |
|  |  | *Improvement* |
|

|  |
| --- |
| *(I) Blame instead of non-blame*  |
| *(II) Agree instead of disagree*  |
| *(III) Own frame instead of opponent frame* |

 | *Issue ownership score* |  |

Note: The figure is based on Tables A24-A26 in the appendix.

Table A24. Voters’ evaluations of the Liberals and the Social Democrats on the issue of agriculture in Denmark

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | The Liberals | The Social Democrats |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Agree instead of disagree | 0.09\*\*\*(0.03) |  |  | 0.04\*(0.02) |  |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  | -0.06\*\*(0.03) |  |  | -0.02(0.02) |  |
| Blame instead of non-blame |  |  | -0.07\*\*\*(0.03) |  |  | -0.01(0.02) |
| Stimuli checka | 0.35\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.47\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.37\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.49\*\*\*(0.05) | 0.25\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Constant | 0.24\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.24\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.30\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.29\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.27\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.39\*\*\*(0.03) |
| Observations | 500 | 486 | 536 | 500 | 486 | 536 |
| R2 | .09 | .14 | .11 | .14 | .19 | .06 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure A4 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A5 in the appendix.

Table A25. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans and the Democrats on the issue of business in the US

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Republicans | Democrats |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Agree instead of disagree | 0.01(0.03) |  |  | -0.02(0.03) |  |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  | -0.08\*\*(0.03) |  |  | 0.11\*\*\*(0.03) |  |
| Blame instead of non-blame |  |  | -0.08\*\*(0.04) |  |  | 0.06\*(0.03) |
| Stimuli checka | 0.16\*\*(0.06) | -0.03(0.05) | 0.03(0.06) | 0.01(0.06) | 0.05(0.05) | 0.09(0.06) |
| Constant | 0.40\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.47\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.55\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.47\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.49\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Observations | 385 | 387 | 381 | 387 | 388 | 378 |
| R2 | .02 | .02 | .02 | .002 | .03 | .01 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure A4 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A6 in the appendix.

Table A26. Voters’ evaluations of the Republicans and the Democrats on the issue of climate in the US

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Democrats | Republicans |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Agree instead of disagree | -0.01(0.03) |  |  | 0.03(0.03) |  |  |
| Own frame instead of opponent frame |  | -0.06\*\*(0.03) |  |  | 0.06\*\*(0.03) |  |
| Blame instead of non-blame |  |  | -0.10\*\*\*(0.03) |  |  | 0.05(0.03) |
| Stimuli checka | -0.10(0.07) | -0.15\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.06(0.05) | 0.44\*\*\*(0.07) | 0.41\*\*\*(0.05) | -0.04(0.05) |
| Constant | 0.65\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.71\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.68\*\*\*(0.04) | 0.21\*\*\*(0.02) | 0.17\*\*\*(0.03) | 0.33\*\*\*(0.04) |
| Observations | 390 | 374 | 378 | 389 | 375 | 376 |
| R2 | .01 | .02 | .02 | .12 | .15 | .01 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. Figure A4 is based on this table. a For the question wording, see Table A6 in the appendix.

**SECTION III: The collection of the Danish survey**

The respondents in the Danish survey were randomly selected from *Epinion’s* online “Panel on Denmark”, which contains 170,000 active users. From this pool, a representative sample of the Danish population on gender, age, region, and education was drawn. The data is unweighted. Respondents for the “Panel on Denmark” are recruited from 150-200 different homepages. The homepages change over time, and until now, Epinion has used more than 1,700 homepages. All Danish visitors to these homepages are asked to complete a survey to evaluate this homepage, and some of these visitors are subsequently invited to join the “Panel on Denmark”. The diversity of these recruitment homepages helps to ensure that a representative sample can always be extracted from the “Panel on Denmark”. Respondents in this “Panel on Denmark” are unpaid but take part in a ballot every time they complete a survey. Panel users can only receive a survey every 11th day. As a standard, Epinion sends out two reminders to ensure participation in a survey. Respondents spent nine minutes on average to complete the survey. Much previous research on Danish voters uses Epinion’s “Panel on Denmark” (see, e.g., Stubager and Seeberg 2016).

**SECTION IV: The stimuli material in the Danish and US surveys**

In the following, I explain the stimuli material in detail. The full-length questionnaire is also included in the appendix (sections V and VI).

Regarding the test of the blame hypothesis (I), the three issues have developed negatively in recent years. After the financial crisis, agriculture as a central part of the Danish economy has witnessed slow growth in export. The parties have debated whether one of the parties is to blame or simply the sluggish international markets and weak demand from Russia in particular. Business in the US has been characterized by a large number of bankruptcies and a low number of new startups since the financial crisis (OECD, 2017), and parties have discussed whether one of them is to blame or the lack of overseas demand for US products. As for climate in the US, it is also debated if enough is done to address climate changes (as well as how severe or real such changes are), and parties have disagreed on whether the lack of action is due to resistance from the parties or a failure of the international community to reach the right international treaties. This variation can be used to test the difference between the attack party blaming the target party or the international markets/the international community.

Regarding the test of the position hypothesis (II), the Social Democrats have in recent years been ambiguous in its position on agriculture. Whereas the Social Democrats generally go much further than the Liberals in stressing environmental concerns over business/economic concerns, some parts of the Social Democrats have to a large extent taken the position of the Liberals by stressing that in the midst of the financial crisis and the huge debt among farmers in Denmark, economic concerns for farmers are more important than environmental standards. Other parts clearly advocate the opposite priority (DR 2013, Politiken 2012). As for climate, Republicans disagree on whether climate changes are real, and one part of the party denies it and points to the costs of, for example, CO2 emission regulation for economic growth and American jobs. Another part acknowledges the threat of climate changes and call for action, such as curbing emissions in a business-friendly way (see, e.g., CBS News 2015). As for business, a part of the Democrats to a large extent advocate a more classic Republican policy position that too many administrative burdens on business hamper economic growth and job creation. Another part takes the opposite and more customary Democratic standpoint that strong business regulation is important in order to set limits to what business can do and prevent fraudulence and hazards (see, e.g., New York Times, 2009, 2018; Democrats, 2018; Business Insider, 2017). This enables us to create a piece of text on each issue according to which the attack party respectively largely agrees and disagrees with the target party.

Regarding the test of the frame hypothesis (III), the issues are multidimensional, which allows for the use of different frames. As for agriculture in Denmark, problems with a weak export of agricultural products have been framed as a matter of “going green” and pushing organic and sustainable production as a way to export more high-quality and high-priced products. Oppositely, the problems have been framed as a matter of improving the business environment through deregulation. In recent years, the Social Democratic MP and former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Dan Jørgensen, has vocally pushed the former environmental frame (see, e.g. Berlingske, 2015, Politiken, 2014a, 2014b), while the Social Democratic MP and spokesperson on agriculture, Simon Kollerup, has persistently advocated for the latter business frame (see, e.g., Landbrugsavisen, 2015, Maskinbladet, 2016). The latter frame is largely the traditional Liberal frame, that is, the opponent frame in the experiment, and the former the Social Democrats’ own frame.

Problems on the issue of US business with bankruptcies and a lack of entrepreneurship have been framed as a matter of low regulation, where economic growth comes when business is set free from demanding regulation to do what it does best, or, the problems have been framed as a matter of more control and higher standards set by the government, which can encourage the industry to develop better and more attractive products for export (Time, 2017a). The former would be the usual Republican frame (“the opponent frame”), while the latter would be the Democrats frame (“the own frame”).

Problems with climate changes can be framed as a matter of tax incentives and business deregulation that encourage market innovation and a switch to green technology, or they have been framed as a matter of more regulation of emission from vehicles and factories, where the government sets high standards in order to make business and individuals adjust. The former would be considered the usual Republican frame (“the own frame”), while the latter would be the Democrats frame (“the opponent frame”). As mentioned, these two frames reflect communication from very climate-skeptical Republican congress members and some wanting to address climate changes (see, e.g., Time, 2017b, 2017c).

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**SECTION V: The questionnaire for the Danish survey**

Background questions: gender, age, district, education.

Environmental concerns in agriculture is often debated. Where would you place yourself on this question if 0 means “Agriculture needs to take its environmental impact into account, even if it affects the economy of agriculture” and 10 means “The economy of agriculture is more important than potential environmental consequences of agriculture”.

The opportunities to create growth in agriculture is often debated. Which of the following two alternatives do you prefer? A: More regulation and pressure, for instance, to convert to organic and sustainable farming, create growth in agriculture. B: Less regulation and rules on farmers create growth in agriculture.

Since the financial crisis, agriculture in Denmark has been economically challenged, and who is to blame is often debated. To what extent do you think that the economic crisis in agriculture can be ascribed to the Liberals, the Social Democrats, and international markets?

Many voters prefer a particular party to handle problems on an issue area such as agriculture, immigration, or elderly care. When you think about the parties you prefer on various issue areas, how important is it that the party has the right policy position, addresses the problem from many different perspectives, and is good at handling problems?

How often do you read the newspaper or watch the TV news?

If a national election took place tomorrow, how important would agriculture be to your vote?

If a national election took place tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

Experiment (respondents are randomly allocated to one of groups 1-6)

Below, you see part of a news item in one of the national newspapers. I would like you to read it carefully in order to answer a couple of questions on the subsequent pages:

**Group 1**

This is a recent news item in one of the national newspapers, which we would like you to read before answering a few questions on the next couple of pages:

**“Hard to distinguish: The Social Democrats adopt the Liberals’ agricultural policy”**

Environmental concern in agriculture is often debated. On this question, the Social Democrats increasingly adopt the Liberals’ position on agriculture and underline that economic concerns are more important than environmental concerns. As a leading figure from the Social Democrats explains: “We need to ensure a profitable business in agriculture in order for farmers to be able to meet high environmental demands. Even if environmental concerns are very important to us, the economy is just a top-priority”.

**SECTION A**

To what extent do you think the Social Democrats handle problems in agriculture?

To what extent do you think the Liberals handle problems in agriculture?

To what extent do you think the Liberals are better at handling problems in agriculture than the Social Democrats?

**SECTION B**

Environmental concerns are central in the debate about agriculture: How much should farmers take the environment into account at the potential detriment of economic concerns? How large do you see the distance between the Social Democrats and the Liberals on this question on a scale from 0 to 10?

Where would you place the Social Democrats on the issue of agriculture if 0 is “Farmers should show concern with the environment even if it compromise on the production” and 10 is “Agricultural production is the most important issue, even if it harms the environment”.

Where would you place the Liberals on this same scale?

How likely do you think it is that the Social Democrats put farmers’ economy before concerns with the environment? 1 very likely; 10 very unlikely; don’t know.

How likely do you think it is that the Liberals put farmers’ economy before concerns with the environment? 1 very likely; 10 very unlikely; don’t know.

**GROUP 2**

This is a recent news item in one of the national newspapers, which we would like you to read before answering a few questions on the next couple of pages:

**“Differences increase: The Social Democrats reject the Liberals’ agricultural policy”**

Environmental concern in agriculture is often debated. On this question, the Social Democrats increasing reject the Liberals’ position on agriculture and underline that environmental concerns are more important than economic concerns. As a leading figure from the Social Democrats explains: “A profitable business in agriculture is of course important for Danish farmers. But it becomes a problem as soon as it compromises on the environment. Even if the economy in agriculture is important to us, environmental concerns are just our top priority”.

**SECTION A**

**SECTION B**

**GROUP 3**

This is a recent news item in one of the national newspapers, which we would like you to read before answering a few questions on the next couple of pages:

**“Social Democrats: Organic farming is the way to generate growth in Danish agriculture”.**

The way to generate growth in Danish agriculture is often debated. While some argue that the problem with a lack of growth is caused by too many requirements and rules put on farmers, according to the Social Democrats, the problem is that Danish agriculture does not do enough to export expensive high-quality products to the international market by increasing the share of organic and sustainably produced products in agriculture. As a leading figure from the Social Democrats says: “Yes, we need to avoid unnecessary requirements and rules put on farmers, but foreign customer buys agricultural products from Denmark because of its high quality. This is the way to go. It is very important that we go further in organic and sustainable agricultural production. In that sense, there is not conflict between putting high demands on agriculture and generating growth.”

**SECTION A**

## SECTION C

To what extent do you think that the Social Democrats want to increase the demands to convert farming from conventional to organic and sustainable? 1 not at all; 10 to a high degree; don’t know.

To what extent do you think that the Social Democrats want fewer demands and rules put on Danish farmers in order to tackle the lack of growth in agriculture? 1 not at all; 10 to a high degree; don’t know.

How likely is it that the Social Democrats call for increases in the demands to convert farming from conventional to organic and sustainable? 1 very likely; 10 very unlikely; don’t know.

How likely is it that the Liberals call for increases in the demands to convert farming from conventional to organic and sustainable? 1 very likely; 10 very unlikely; don’t know.

**GROUP 4**

This is a recent news item in one of the national newspapers, which we would like you to read before answering a few questions on the next couple of pages:

**“Social Democrats: Improved business regulation of the Danish agriculture is the way to generate growth”.**

The way to generate growth in Danish agriculture is often debated. While some argue that the problem with a lack of growth is caused by a lack of willingness to convert conventional farming to organic farming, according to the Social Democrats, the problem is that too many requirements and rules are being put on Danish farmers. As a leading figure from the Social Democrats says: “Yes, organically and sustainably produced agriculture products are important, but the growth comes through supportive business regulation of agriculture. To generate growth, we need to create more flexibility and more opportunities for agricultural production and minimize unnecessary administrative and regulatory burdens on farming”.

**SECTION A**

**SECTION C**

**GROUP 5**

This is a recent news item in one of the national newspapers, which we would like you to read before answering a few questions on the next couple of pages:

**“Social Democrats: The crisis in agriculture is caused by the Liberals bad handling of the problem”**

Since the financial crisis, Danish agriculture has been challenged, and who is to blame is often debated. While some blame the international market, according to the Social Democrats, the lack of progress can be attributed to the Liberals’ bad handling of the problem during their time in office. The weak export of Danish pork, the falling prices for Danish cow milk, the many farmers with great debt, and the surge in bankruptcies among Danish farmers are great concerns to the Social Democrats. As a leading figure from the Social Democrats puts it, “the crisis in Danish agriculture is currently very severe”. The response by the incumbents, the Liberals, to tackle the problem is far from satisfying, and their more recent initiative to assist indebted Danish farmers is simply unambitious according to the Social Democrats: “This weak initiative confirms that the Liberals do not take the problems in Danish agriculture seriously”.

**SECTION A**

## SECTION D

To what extent do you think that the Social Democrats make the Liberals responsible for the crisis? 1 not at all; 10 to a high degree; don’t know.

To what extent do you think that the Social Democrats blame international markets for the current problems in Danish agriculture? 1 not at all; 10 to a high degree; don’t know.

How likely is it that the Social Democrats make the Liberals responsible for the crisis? 1 not at all; 10 to a high degree; don’t know.

**GROUP 6**

This is a recent news item in one of the national newspapers, which we would like you to read before answering a few questions on the next couple of pages:

**“The Social Democrats on the crisis in Danish agriculture: Dramatic drop in Russian demand makes it difficult.”**

Since the financial crisis, Danish agriculture has been challenged, and who is to blame is often debated. While some blame the incumbent party, the Liberals, according to the Social Democrats, the lack of progress can be attributed in particular to international market conditions, especially the weak demand from the Russian market. The weak export of Danish pork, the falling prices for Danish cow milk, the many farmers with great debt, and the surge in bankruptcies among Danish farmers are great concerns to the Social Democrats. As a leading figure from the Social Democrats puts it, “the crisis in Danish agriculture is currently very severe”. “Russia is our most important export market for Danish pork, and when this market stalls, little can be done to change the situation”, a leading figure from the Social Democrats explains, and he adds that the incumbents, the Liberals, are doing as much as they possibly can to tackle the problem.

**SECTION A**

**SECTION D**

**SECTION VI: The US questionnaire**

Dear Mturk participant,

Thank you for participating in this survey. We need your answer for an important research project on what voters think about important policy issues and the political parties. The survey should take no more than five minutes of your time. Before we begin, it is important that you understand the following information concerning your rights as a participant: All the information that you provide us will only be used for research purposes. Your answers will be anonymized. We will never report individual respondents’ answers: Data will only be used in an aggregated fashion. If you wish to receive more information about the research, you can contact XXX, the principal investigator of the study.

Thank you for your participation.

With kind regards, XXX

Please check the box below to signal informed consent and knowledge of the information above, then click on the “>>” button to start the questionnaire. You cannot return to previously answered questions.

**Background questions (“B\_”)**

B\_party. Before we begin, please indicate which party would you vote for if an election for public office were to be held today and you would have to make a choice? Republican, Democrat, Independent, Don’t know.

B\_gender. What is your gender?

B\_age. How old are you?

B\_edu. What is your highest level of completed education? Less than high school, High school graduate, Some college, 2-year degree, 4-year degree, Professional degree, Doctorate, Other.

B\_state Which state do you live in?

B\_lr. In politics, people sometimes use “liberal” or “conservative” to describe their political views. How would you describe your political views? “very liberal” – “very conservative”

B\_mip. If an election took place today, how important would these issues be for your vote? “not at all” – “very”

B\_business. Business regulation is often discussed. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “American business is too strongly regulated, and there should be fewer limits to what business can do”. “strongly agree” – “strongly disagree”.

B\_climate. To what extent are you for or against policies to tackle climate changes, even if it comes at the expense of economic growth? “for” – “against”.

B\_climate\_manmade. Are climate changes real and man-made? “yes” – “no”

B\_IOpref. Most people have a party that they prefer to handle problems on issues such as the environment, immigration, or unemployment. When you think about the parties that you prefer across different issues, how important is it that the parties... “important” – “not important”

...promote the right policy position on the issue?

...are good at handling problems on the issue?

...prioritize the issue?

B\_interest. How often do you pay attention to what is going on in government and politics? “often” – never”

B\_know1. How many members are there in the House of Representatives? (Please enter your answer in the box)

B\_know2. Which party currently has a majority in the House of Representatives? Republicans, Democrats, don’t know.

B\_know3. What is the name of the Speaker of the House? Nancy Pelosi, Paul Ryan, John Boehner, Mike Pence, don’t know.

B\_know4. What is the name of the Vice President? Joe Biden, John Kasich, Mike Pence, Paul Ryan, don’t know.

On the next page, you will receive a text with statements from leading figures of the Republican or Democratic parties.

Because of the nature of the questionnaire, it is essential that you take the time to carefully read the text and the questions. Otherwise, you will not be able to answer the questions, and the participation reward will not be awarded. The time to read the questions carefully was factored in when we estimated the length of the questionnaire.

Please make sure that you have fully understood the information that is presented to you, and if needed, read the instructions twice. We automatically check responses in order to make sure that people have read the instructions for the task and responded carefully.

Thank you!

**Experiment**. Respondents take part in experiments 1 and 2 in random order. In experiment 1, respondents are randomly allocated into stimuli groups E1\_S1-E1\_S6. In experiment 2, respondents are randomly allocated into stimuli groups E2\_S1-E2\_S6.

**E1\_S1**.

**Democrats agree with Republicans: Remove regulatory burden on American business.**On the issue of business regulation, a leading figure from the Democratic Party recently said that “While the Democrats generally find that strong business regulation is important in order to set limits to what business can do and prevent fraudulence and hazards, we agree with the Republicans that right now, unnecessary administrative burdens on American business hamper economic growth and job creation. We need to remove this burden. When it comes to the current level of business regulation, the Democrats are close to the Republicans”.

DV1. Considering this information, please indicate which party you prefer on these four different dimensions: “Democrats” – “Republicans”

Which party has a better policy on business regulation?

Which party cares more about business regulation?

Which party is better at handling business regulation?

Which party do you associate with business regulation?

DV2. And to what extent do you...  “yes” – “no”

...think that the Democrats have a good policy on business regulation?

...think that the Democrats care about business regulation?

...think that the Democrats are good at handling business regulation?

...associate the Democrats with business regulation?

DV3. And to what extent do you... “yes” – “no”

...think that the Republicans have a good policy on business regulation?

...think that the Republicans care about business regulation?

...think that the Republicans are good at handling business regulation?

...associate the Republicans with business regulation?

E1\_ S1\_D1. Again, thinking about the information just provided, how likely is it that each of the parties promotes business deregulation? Democrats, Republicans. “likely” – “unlikely”.

E1\_ S1\_D2 And how do you compare the policy on business regulation of the Republicans and the Democrats? “similar” – “different”.

E1\_ S1\_D3 And where would you place each of the parties with regard to the following statement: “American business is too strongly regulated and there should be fewer limits to what business can do”? Democrats, Republicans. “agree” – “disagree”.

**E1\_S2**.

**Democrats disagree with Republicans: Strong business regulation is necessary**
 On the issue of business regulation, a leading figure from the Democratic Party recently said that “While the Democrats generally find that unnecessary administrative burdens on American business hamper economic growth and job creation, in direct contrast to the Republicans, we find that right now, stronger business regulation is important in order to set limits to what business can do and prevent fraudulence and hazards. We need to uphold high standards. When it comes to the current level of business regulation, the Democrats are far away from the Republicans”.
DV1, DV2, DV3.

E1\_S1\_D1, E1\_ S1\_D2, E1\_ S1\_D3.

**E1\_S3**.

**Democrats: Economic growth comes through more business deregulation**
The role of business regulation for economic growth and job creation in America is often debated. While some claim that more control and higher standards set by the government encourage the industry to develop better and more attractive products for export, a leading figure from the Democrats says that “Like the Republicans, we believe that economic growth comes when business is set free to do what it is best at – right now, demanding regulation should not come in the way, and deregulation is the only way forward to spur economic growth and job creation”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E1\_S3\_D1. Again, thinking about the information just provided, to what extent do the Democrats promote less business regulation? “to a very large extent” – “to a very limited extent”.

E1\_S3\_D2 And how likely is it that the Democrats promote less business regulation? “likely” – “unlikely”.

**E1\_S4**.

**Democrats: Economic growth comes through more business regulation**
The role of business regulation for economic growth and job creation in America is often debated. While some claim that economic growth comes when business is set free from demanding regulation to do what it is best at, a leading figure from the Democrats says that “Unlike the Republicans, we believe that more control and higher standards set by the government encourage the industry to develop better and more attractive products for export. Right now, regulation is the only way forward to spur economic growth and job creation”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E1\_S3\_D1. E1\_S3\_D2.

**E1\_S5.**

**Democrats: Blame Republicans for slow growth in American business**
After the financial crisis in 2007, the number of bankruptcies in America is still high and the number of new enterprises low. Even if many would not hold the Republicans to account, a leading figure from the Democrats blames the Republicans: “The Republicans are incompetent and they are not doing enough to handle the huge problem of slow growth in American business. International markets are still affected by the 2007 financial crisis, and this automatically hurts American businesses that rely on global demand to sell their products. Yet, this does not change the fact that the Republicans do not take the problem of American business seriously, and they have not competently done their best to handle the problem”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E1\_S5\_D1 Again, thinking about the information just provided, to what extent do you think that the Democrats blame the Republicans for the slow growth in American business? “to a very large extent” – “to a very limited extent”.

E1\_S5\_D2 And how likely is it that the Democrats blame the Republicans for not handling the slow growth in American business? “likely” – “unlikely”.

**E1\_S6.**

**Democrats: Slow growth in American business is not the Republicans’ fault**
After the financial crisis in 2007, the number of bankruptcies in America is still high and the number of new enterprises low. Even if many would hold the Republicans to account, a leading figure from the Democrats does not blame the Republicans: “The Republicans are competent and they are doing what they can to handle the huge problem of slow growth in American business. American business rely on global demand to sell their products, and when international markets are still affected by the 2007 financial crisis, it automatically hurts American business. Although there is not much the Republicans can do to change this, they have competently done their best to handle the problem”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E1\_S5\_D1, E1\_S5\_D2.

**E1\_S1**.

**Republicans agree with Democrats: Need for action against global warming**
On the issue of climate changes, a leading figure from the Republicans recently said that “While the Republicans generally find that climate change policy can easily destroy economic growth and come at the cost of American jobs, we agree with the Democrats that it is our responsibility for future generations to take action against global warming. Together with the Democrats we want to curb emissions in a business-friendly way”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E2\_S1\_D1 Again, thinking about the information just provided, how likely is it that each of the parties promotes climate changes? “likely” – “unlikely”.

E2\_S1\_D2 And how do you compare the policy on climate changes of the Republicans and the Democrats? “similar” – “different”.

E2\_S1\_D3 And to what extent do you think that each of the parties are for or against policies to tackle climate changes, even if it comes at the expense of economic growth? Democrats, Republicans “for” – “against”.

**E1\_S2**.

**Republicans disagree with Democrats: Climate change policy destroys economic growth**
On the issue of climate changes, a leading figure from the Republicans recently said that “While the Republicans generally find that it is our responsibility for future generations to take action against global warming, we disagree with the Democrats that climate change policy does not destroy economic growth and does not come at the costs of American jobs. In contrast to the Democrats, we only want to curb emissions insofar as it does not hurt American business.”

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E2\_S1\_D1. E2\_S1\_D2. E2\_S1\_D3.

**E1\_S3**.

**Republicans: Tackle climate changes through more regulation**
Climate changes are often debated. While some claim that tackling climate changes is only possible through tax cuts and deregulation that encourage market innovation and a switch to green technology, a leading figure from the Republicans rejects this idea and says that “Like the Democrats, we believe that climate changes can only be tackled through more demanding regulation of emission from vehicles and factories, where the government sets higher standards in order to make business and individuals adjust”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E2\_S3\_D1 Again, thinking about the information just provided, to what extent do the Republicans call for the government to set higher standards and regulate more to tackle climate changes? “to a very large extent” – “to a very limited extent”.

E2\_S3\_D2 And how likely is it that the Republicans call for the government to set higher standards and regulate more to tackle climate changes? “likely” – “unlikely”.

**E1\_S4**.

**Republicans: Tackle climate changes through market innovation**
Climate changes are often debated. While some claim that climate changes can be tackled only through more demanding regulation of emission from vehicles and factories, where the government sets higher standards in order to make business and individuals adjust, a leading figure from the Republicans rejects this idea and says that “Unlike the Democrats, we believe that tackling climate changes is only possible through tax cuts and deregulation that encourage market innovation and a switch to green technology”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E2\_S3\_D1. E2\_S3\_D2

**E1\_S5**.

**Republicans: Blame the Democrats for lack of action against global warming**
Climate changes are an increasing concern. Even if many would not hold the Democrats to account, a leading figure from the Republicans recently blamed the Democrats: “The Democrats are incompetent, and they are not doing enough to handle the problem of climate changes. Although climate changes go far beyond national borders and have so many causes that are inherently hard to fight, it does not change the fact that the Democrats do not take the problem of climate changes seriously and competently do their best to handle the problem in a business-friendly way”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E2\_S5\_D1 Again, thinking about the information just provided, to what extent do you think that the Republicans criticize the Democrats for not taking the problem of climate changes seriously? “to a very large extent” – “to a very limited extent”.

E2\_S5\_D2 And how likely is it that the Republicans criticize the Democrats for not taking the problem of climate changes seriously? “likely” – “unlikely”.

**E1\_S6**.

**Republicans: Do not blame the Democrats for lack of action against global warming**
Climate changes are an increasing concern. Even if many would hold the Democrats to account, a leading figure from the Republicans recently asked not to blame the Democrats: “The Democrats are doing what they can to competently handle the problem of climate changes. Since climate changes go far beyond national borders and have so many causes that are inherently hard to fight, there is not much the Democrats can do to change this, and they have competently done their best to handle the problem”.

DV1, DV2, DV3.

E2\_S5\_D1. E2\_S5\_D2.

Thank you for your participation! It will help us to better understand what voters think about parties and politics. The texts you have received about leading figures from the Republican and Democratic Parties are fictitious but generally reflect communication from the parties in recent years.

1. Because of an overrepresentation of Democratic voters in the sample, this is not the case in the survey sample, which shows Democratic issue ownership on business. The Democrats are on average rated .54, while the Republicans are rated .42. Among the Democrats, the scores are .67 vs. .30. Among Republicans, the scores are .35 vs. .63. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. The median time spent on the survey is nine minutes. The completion rate is 77 per cent. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the parties relative to each other, and the analysis reports results on this version of the question. Moreover, results are provided on a version measuring associate issue ownership. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Before the experimental assignment, each respondent was asked a number of pre-treatment questions (reported in Tables A3–A4 in the appendix). Controlling for these variables does not change the results substantively (see Tables A9–A17 in the appendix). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Each model also contains a measure of heterogeneity in the respondents’ perceptions of the stimuli text to reduce the error term of the issue ownership measure. These measures are presented in Tables A5–A6 in the appendix. This is preferable to excluding respondents that did not receive the stimuli text correctly because this excludes observations from the analysis. Moreover, the measure is continuous, which makes the exclusion an arbitrary exercise. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. In the appendix, Tables A9–A17 report the hypothesis test with a number of controls. Moreover, Figure A1 in the appendix indicates that the results also apply if a relative measure is used that asks respondents to choose between the attack party and the target party. In addition, based on the US data, Figure A3 in the appendix suggests that the results apply almost equally to associative issue ownership (Tresch et al. 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. An example is how voters specifically evaluate the position of the target party. Question wording and results are in Figures A3–A5 and Tables A21–A23 in the appendix. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. The interaction between each of the three strategies and salience is not statistically significant. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Unexpectedly, this is not the case for the blame strategy by the Democrats on business, which does not make Republican voters lower their issue ownership evaluation of the Republicans on this issue. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Strictly speaking, the separate measures of issue ownership of the two parties do not allow for reaching any conclusions on the issue ownership – only a measure that asks voters to choose between the parties would. Results from an analysis using such a measure in Figure A1 in the appendix points in the same direction. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Because of an overrepresentation of Democratic voters in the US sample (see Table A2 in the appendix), the Democrats not only have overwhelming issue ownership on the issue of climate, which the Republicans are unable to substantively change through the counteraction strategies according to Figure 6, but also a slight issue ownership on business even when the counteraction strategies are not employed. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)