

Issue Voting and the Representation of Policy Preferences

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September 9, 2018

Abstract

Recent research suggests that policy preferences have little if any impact on citizens' vote choices and that elections fail to produce responsive government. However, previous research has overlooked one crucial question: does voting on the basis of issue opinions increase the influence of citizens' policy preferences on the implementation of related policies? We develop a theoretical framework which classifies different forms of issue voting and formulate expectations regarding the impact of each form on policy representation. Using Swedish data going back to 1960, we find that issues often do influence vote choice. By combining election study data with an original dataset on policy implementation, we show that, when issue voting that benefits governing parties occurs, the correspondence between public opinion and government policy is higher. The results thus indicate that voters often do vote on the basis of their policy preferences and that governments are more responsive when this gives them the strongest incentive to listen to people's preferences.

Two recent books argue that representative democracy does not work as well as it should. Lenz (2012) showed that citizens' policy preferences rarely influence their vote choice. Instead, he suggests that voters develop their party preferences on the basis of non-policy considerations and shows that they adopt their preferred candidate or party's position as their own. According to the subtitle of another influential book arguing that citizens' voting behavior is flawed, "elections do not produce responsive government" (Achen and Bartels, 2016). These conclusions conflict with an influential strand of democratic theory, according to which governments are supposed to represent citizens' policy preferences (e.g. Dahl, 1989).

While leading scholars in the field assert that citizens' insufficiently-sophisticated voting behavior is driving a democratic deficit, no one has yet empirically demonstrated the connection between issue voting by citizens and the policies governments implement.¹ This is the first study to evaluate the link between issue voting and responsiveness. We first assess how often issues do influence vote choice. We then seek to determine whether issue voting matters for the likelihood that policies addressing these issues are implemented.²

We develop a theoretical framework which classifies different forms of issue voting and formulate expectations regarding the impact of each form on policy representation. We argue that issue voting should influence the extent to which governments represent citizens' preferences when it gives governing parties an incentive to do so. It should give them an incentive to act on the public's preferences when those preferences line up with the government party's program (or parties' programs) or at least voters' perceptions of it (or them). When governing parties win votes among supporters of an issue because of that issue, they can both avoid losing votes from those voters and implement their policy program by putting that policy proposal into effect. However, when they lose votes among supporters

¹Although previous studies do not look at the connection between *issue voting* and representation, there is considerable evidence that governments represent citizens' policy preferences (e.g. Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson, 2002; Gilens, 2012; Monroe, 1979; Page and Shapiro, 1983; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). Note that, while Gilens finds that government is unequally responsive to different income groups, government is responsive to overall public opinion. Thus, it is far from clear that the flaw in citizens' voting behavior mentioned above is actually leading to poor policy representation.

²Indeed, some recently-published articles show that issue attitudes sometimes do influence vote choice. Matthews (2017), Mullinix (2016), Tesler (2015), and even Lenz (2012) find some evidence for issue voting.

of an issue proposal, implementing that policy would force them to be inconsistent with voters' perceptions of their position on that issue. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias in government policy (Gilens, 2012), issue voting should have a greater impact on the implementation of popular policies than on the lack of implementation of policies that are unpopular. We thus expect issue voting to matter most when supporters of a policy shift their vote choice towards parties winning an election. In such a situation, governments should be more likely to implement popular policies.

It is not hard to understand why scholars have failed to investigate this important topic. The data necessary to conduct such an investigation are considerable. First, distinguishing the influence of policy preferences on vote choice from the influence of party preferences on opinions requires at least two waves of panel data (Lenz, 2012). Second, determining whether a policy position was implemented requires a massive dataset of the kind created by Gilens (2012) for his work on the representation of rich and poor Americans. This is the first study to combine two such data sources.

The data necessary to assess the relationship between issue voting and policy representation are available in Sweden. We use panel data from the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) going back to 1960 to assess the extent to which issues influence vote choice. We then use an original dataset on policy implementation to determine whether issue voting increases the influence of issue opinions on government policy. We show that, when governments gain votes from supporters of a policy change, that change is more likely to be made if it has strong support from the public.

The results suggest that representative democracy can often work well. When citizens care enough about an issue for it to influence their vote choice and they shift their vote choice in a way that gives government parties an incentive to represent citizens' preferences, governments act on their preferences. While far from an ideal of a democracy in which governments care how citizens feel about issues and *systematically* adapt government policies to citizens' preferences, the image of representative democracy suggested by our study relies

on citizens' interest in issues as well as parties' interest in winning votes.

Issue Voting and Representation

How do citizens get governments to do what they want them to do? Two major mechanisms have been proposed in the literature (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson, 1995; Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999) First, people can get the policy they want by electing representatives who share their preferences. Second, elites can follow citizens' preferences in order to win re-election. We focus on the second mechanism. We argue though that the pursuit of votes by government parties is most effective as a mechanism of representation when it allows them to follow their own issue positions or at least those citizens perceive them to have.

The second mechanism has been most clearly formulated in the rational-choice spatial-modeling approach to politics. According to proponents of that view, parties adapt their policy programs and governments adapt their policies to citizens' preferences, in order to maximize their vote share (Downs, 1957). Typically, scholars present such issue voting as occurring along a single left-right ideological dimension (Davis, Hinich and Ordeshook, 1970). In this model, parties converge towards the median voter and governments adopt the right level of taxation and government spending to maximize their proximity to that representative voter (Downs, 1957, 57).

There is considerable evidence that parties adapt their positions on the left-right dimension to reflect changes in citizens' policy preferences especially when the public moves away from the parties (Adams et al., 2004, 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Schumacher, De Vries and Vis, 2013). These studies show that parties care about citizens' preferences. However, parties only really have an incentive to care about those preferences if policy preferences influence citizens' vote choices. Issue voting should therefore be a necessary condition for this form of policy representation.

Debates among scholars of issue voting have largely focused on how policy preferences get translated into party preferences (e.g. Blais et al., 2001; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008).³ At the same time, there is a long line of research that has been skeptical that issues actually influence vote choice. Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1968) found that citizens tend to vote on the basis of their demographic characteristics rather than short-term factors like issue opinions. Campbell et al. (1960) found that citizens tend to have a stable orientation towards a party over time, and thus doubted that issues have much if any impact on vote choice (172). A recent study (Lachat, 2015) showed that citizens who identify with a party rely less on their issue opinions when deciding how to vote. There have also been doubts about the nature of citizens' issue preferences. Converse (1964) found that citizens' attitudes on policy issues are unstable "non-attitudes" which are unlikely to influence vote choice.

It is far from clear that voters' positions on individual policy issues have any influence on their voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960, 185-187). As Brody and Page (1972) pointed out, merely finding that policy preferences coincide with vote choice does not mean that the former influence the latter. Such an association may in fact reflect "persuasion" effects, whereby citizens are persuaded by their preferred party to adopt its position (457).

Lenz (2009, 2012) put such a possibility to the test. He assessed the relationship between issue preferences and vote choice using panel data in a large number of cases where prior studies, using cross-sectional data, had concluded that issue preferences influenced vote choice. He found evidence that issues mattered in only one case, defense spending and approval of George W. Bush between 2000 and 2002, a case he replicated from Ladd (2007).⁴

³The most conventional perspective is that citizens support the party with the policy position that is closest to theirs (Davis, Hinich and Ordeshook, 1970; Downs, 1957). According to another perspective, voters care more about supporting a party that is on the same side of the ideological spectrum and vote for the party that best represents that side (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). According to yet another perspective, citizens are aware of the barriers to the implementation of their preferred policies and support a party that is more extreme than them in to ensure that those policies are adopted (Grofman, 1985; Kedar, 2005, 2009).

⁴He also found evidence that the center-right governing parties in the Netherlands adapted their position on nuclear power to reflect changing preferences by citizens following Chernobyl and that Jimmy Carter adapted his position on defense spending to reflect changes in Americans' preferences in that domain. Crucially, because of these changes in party positions, citizens did not have the opportunity to vote on the basis of these issues.

In the others, instead of policy preferences influencing vote choice, Lenz found that citizens adapt their policy preferences to their vote choice.

Such findings can be explained by the growing literature on party cue effects. Early work on political behaviour argued that citizens' opinions are influenced by the party with which they identify (Belknap and Campbell, 1952; Campbell et al., 1960). More recently, and, beginning with Cohen (2003), scholars have found that, when citizens are exposed to the policy position of the party with which they identify in the context of an experiment, they adapt their opinion on that issue to make it more reflective of their party's position. Recent research has argued that people's tendency to follow their party's positions results from partisan motivated reasoning (Bolsen, Druckman and Cook, 2014; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014). In other words, citizens seek to show support for their party by adopting its position.⁵

While numerous studies have found evidence for party cue effects (Bullock, 2011), there is no reason to expect the direction of causality between issues and party preference to always go from party to issues. The authors of *The American Voter*, in spite of their belief in the influence of party identification, argued that voters can change their party if they hold a position that is inconsistent with that of their party on an issue that matters to them (169). Even if citizens are biased reasoners, their issue attitudes may matter to their vote choice and there is no reason why the attitudes citizens seek to support should always be their party preferences. Mullinix (2016) shows that, when citizens are induced to consider an issue important to them, they are more likely to engage in motivated reasoning to support their policy preferences. Relatedly, Tesler (2015) showed that policy-relevant attitudes influence vote choice when they are crystallized. Also, as mentioned previously, Lenz (2012) found evidence that opinions on one of the issues he considered influenced vote choice. Furthermore, Matthews (2017) showed that, when including small parties, undecided

⁵Citizens' tendency to adopt party positions is strongest when parties engage in conflict over policy (Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013; Guntermann, 2017; Mullinix, 2016). There is also evidence that in the presence of inter-party conflict, citizens' adopt the positions of their preferred party even if they lack an identification with it (Guntermann, 2017).

voters, and non-voters in analyses, issue voting occurs on some of the issues on which Lenz found no issue voting. Thus, even if issues do not matter most of the time, this does not imply that they never matter.

The fact that citizens sometimes vote on the basis of issues may help account for one of the recurring findings in studies of policy representation. A considerable body of research has considered the relationship between the public's policy preferences and government policy. Most of these studies have found a strong overall relationship (Burstein, 2003; Wlezien and Soroka, 2016).

In the United States, Monroe (1979) and Page and Shapiro (1983) found that, most of the time, when a majority of Americans favor a policy, the government implements that policy. Evidence from other countries suggests similar levels of policy representation as in the US (e.g. Petry et al., 1999; Petry and Mendelsohn, 2004). Moreover, Gilens (2012) found that the probability of a policy's implementation in the US increases monotonically with the proportion of the population that favors it. He did identify two limitations to policy representation. One is that the preferences of better-off citizens have more influence on government policy. The second is that there is a status quo bias. In other words, most policy changes do not get adopted and change only occurs if a large proportion of citizens want one to occur. In addition, Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson (2002) and Soroka and Wlezien (2010) have found that government policy tracks public preferences over time.⁶ However, none of these studies consider whether issue voting influences representation. The closest to assessing that link is the finding by Soroka and Wlezien (2010) that responsiveness by citizens to changes in government policy conditions government responsiveness to their preferences and the finding that policy representation is higher on high-salience issues (Burstein, 2003; Wlezien and Soroka, 2016). However, it is unclear why salience in general should matter to representation. If parties in government care about their re-election, shouldn't they care

⁶The exception is Brooks (1985, 1987, 1990), who found a weaker relationship between public opinion and policy. There is also evidence that parties have ignored certain aspects of citizens' policy preferences. Thomassen (2012) notably showed that parties in the Netherlands have ignored citizens' preferences on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension.

most about whether an issue influences citizens' vote choice?⁷

Types of Issue Voting and Incentives for Representation

The relationship between citizens' vote choice and government policy was most clearly formulated by Downs (1957). However, given Downs' reliance on citizens' policy preferences as summarized by the single left-right ideological scale, his work does not provide clear expectations about when and how issue voting induces parties to act on the public's preferences. We, therefore, propose a theory of when issue voting should matter.

We rely on the key assumption in the model developed by Downs (1957) that parties seek to maximize their votes. However, we neither assume that citizens have preferences that can easily be summarized by the left-right scale nor that their policy preferences necessarily influence their vote choice. Instead, we simply assume that citizens consider issues that are important to them when deciding how to vote.

As Lenz (2012) argues, it is difficult to study issue voting because associations between issue positions and vote choice found in a cross-sectional survey can result from citizens changing their policy preferences to reflect their vote choice as much as changing their vote choice to reflect their issue positions. We share his concern and, following him, analyze changes in vote choice using panel data.

We adopt the broadest definition of issue voting as it relates to government parties. We define issue voting as any decision to shift one's vote choice in the direction of, or away from, a government party that is associated with policy preferences. Thus, it includes both shifting from a party that opposes a policy change to one that supports it, the reverse shift, a shift from a party that supports a change to one that supports it even more, a shift from a party

⁷One important question is how parties know about the importance of issues to voters. If scholars have a hard time assessing issue voting, as Lenz (2012) has shown, how can we expect parties to do any better? The answer is that parties have developed sophisticated methods to study citizens' attitudes in order to identify the most effective political strategies. The field of political marketing has documented the methods parties have come up with. These are both quantitative and qualitative and include surveys conducted at various points before, during, and after election campaigns, focus groups, comments from voters, newspapers, and the analysis of big data (Lees-Marshment, 2014, Chapter 3).

that opposes a change to one that opposes it even more and even a shift from a party with a particular position to another with the same position. All that matters is that citizens' issue preferences influence the change in vote choice. Given findings by Grofman (1985) and Kedar (2005, 2009) that citizens can consider their policy preferences when voting without voting for a party that shares their position, it is important to consider a range of vote changes that correspond to issue positions.

We focus on issue voting during election campaigns. They are an important time to consider issue voting, because it is during campaigns that citizens are exposed to the greatest amount of information about party positions. There is considerable evidence that citizens learn about party positions during campaigns (e.g. Alvarez, 1997; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954; Brians and Wattenberg, 1996). Gelman and King (1993) argue that, by learning party positions during a campaign, citizens learn to connect their political attitudes to vote choice. Election campaigns as well as their coverage in the media also raise the salience of issues to vote choice (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Miller and Krosnick, 2000). Thus, acquiring information about party positions and exposure to campaigns which focus on particular issues may lead citizens to adjust their votes to their policy preferences.⁸

We expect issue voting in general to matter most for the implementation of popular policies. As Gilens (2012) found in the US, there is a strong status quo bias in policy change. Only a fraction of potential policies actually are implemented. Thus, unpopular policies remain unimplemented due to inertia. Issue voting should matter most when it comes to implementing policies that large proportions of the population support.

We consider issue voting to occur when issue preferences are associated with changes in support for governing parties during a campaign. We consider three forms. *Absolute issue*

⁸There are two caveats to our focus on election campaigns as a point in time when issue voting occurs. Issue voting can very well occur at other points in time. A government may adopt an unpopular policy while in office thus leading voters to abandon the parties that are in government. They might also adopt a popular policy and thus attract votes. Moreover, as Lenz (2012) argues, campaigns are times when voters are just as likely to adjust their attitudes to reflect their party positions (16). While the data we have do not allow us to assess issue voting that takes place outside of campaigns, we ensure that policy preferences influence vote choice, by using panel data, as Lenz does.

voting is the total change in support for government parties that is related to an issue. It is the absolute difference between changes in support for government parties during the campaign among citizens who support a policy and among citizens who oppose it. *Opposition-to-government issue voting* is how much more support for government parties increases among policy supporters than among opponents. Finally, issue voting can occur when government parties lose more support among those who favor a policy than among policy opponents. We call *government-to-opposition issue voting* the negative difference between changes in votes for government parties among supporters and opponents of a policy.

We expect the specific form of issue voting to make a key difference. As Downs (1957) argued, parties care about being reliable and responsible. Reliability is the ability to predict a party's behavior following an election by its statements during the campaign. Responsibility is the consistency of a party's actions and statements over time. According to Downs, both reliability and responsibility are key to rational vote choice, because they allow people to make predictions of the future. Parties care about being reliable and responsible, because these traits are what allow them to win the confidence of voters (105-108). Tavits (2007) showed that parties can be punished for changing their positions, particularly on matters of principle. Work on the fulfillment of parties' election pledges has shown that parties fulfill most of their pledges, suggesting that parties do what they promise (Thomson et al., 2017).

If citizens decide to support a government party because of an issue proposal they believe it supports, the party can implement that policy and remain consistent with its position, at least as perceived by voters. Conversely, if people shift their votes away from a party because they believe it opposes a policy, implementing it would mean sacrificing its reliability and responsibility.

Opposition-to-government issue voting should give governing parties more of an incentive to implement a popular policy than government-to-opposition issue voting. Both should lead parties to care about public opinion in order to seek to gain votes or avoid losing votes. However, the incentive to cater to public opinion in the case of the latter should be countered

by the incentive to remain consistent over time. Thus, the effect of government-to-opposition issue voting on policy representation should be weak. We thus have two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 *Issue voting increases the likelihood that popular policies are implemented during the subsequent government mandate.*

Hypothesis 2 *Opposition-to-government issue voting more strongly increases the likelihood of implementation of popular policies than government-to-opposition issue voting.*

Data and Methods

We rely on election panel survey data from the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) in combination with an original dataset on the implementation of policy proposals asked about in the surveys. We use all (pre- and post-election) panel studies from 1960 to 2010, except for the 1970 study, which only consisted of a single wave.⁹

We consider issue voting to occur when citizens with a given policy preference adjust their party choice to reflect that policy preference. Since other voters may move in the same direction, we consider issue voting to occur to the extent that changes in support for a party are greater among supporters of a policy change than among opponents. If those who support a policy proposal move their votes in a particular direction more than those who oppose the change, the difference between these changes can be seen as reflecting the effect of an issue on vote choice. Prior studies of issue voting control for a predisposition allowing them to determine whether changes in vote choice are due to a particular policy and not simply to voters' general political orientations. Typically, scholars control for party identification (Lenz, 2012; Matthews, 2017). However, the concept of party identification has been much more controversial in Europe than in the US. The classic critique of the

⁹We exclude the 1956 study, because it did not include any question on overall policy orientations that could be used as a control. It also only asked about one policy issue. We also exclude the election studies conducted for the national referendums and European Parliament elections. We do not include the most recent election study (from 2014) since the current government's mandate has not yet come to an end, making it impossible to determine whether policy was implemented during the mandate following the election.

concept was by Thomassen (1976), who found that party identification is less stable than vote choice in the Netherlands and is thus clearly not a predisposition (77). In Sweden, Holmberg (1994) found that party identification is essentially indistinguishable from vote choice (96). It is thus far from clear that party identification is a predisposition in Sweden. The models reported in this paper, therefore, control for citizens' self-placements on the left-right ideological scale, which has conventionally been seen as a summary measure of citizens' policy preferences (e.g. Dalton, 2017). This control allows us to ensure that changes in vote choice are due to policy preferences and not to more general policy attitudes.

To reassure readers who are convinced that party identification is a predisposition in Sweden, in other models, we control for both ideology and party identification. We were able to run these models for a reduced set of elections (from 1968 to 2010) in which election studies asked about partisanship. Results are in the Online Appendix.

Following Lenz (2012) and Matthews (2017), we run linear probability models of models of vote choice.¹⁰ Like Lenz (2012), we use election study panels to assess issue voting. We run simpler models though in which we regress post-election vote choice on pre-election vote choice and the other right-hand-side variables. In addition to being simpler than the models with stacked data that Lenz uses, they have the added advantage of controlling for regression to the mean (Finkel, 1995).

While policy preference questions were asked in different ways in different studies, we standardize the coding across studies so that respondents who oppose a proposal are coded 0 and those who support it are coded 1, regardless of the strength of those positions. Respondents who assert that they neither support nor oppose a change are coded 0.5. Those who answer that they do not know or who refuse to answer were dropped. We adopted this coding scheme due to variations in response options across issues. There were two major variations across issue questions. Some included a neutral ambivalent category, while others did not and some issue questions assessed the intensity of support and opposition.

¹⁰We also run logistic regression models of vote choice, these can be found in the Online Appendix.

We recoded ideology from 0 to 1, where 0 is the lowest observed value and 1 is the highest observed value.¹¹ Respondents with missing values on ideology were given a score of 0.5 to avoid losing observations.

For each issue, we regressed post-election vote choice on pre-election vote choice, policy preferences, and ideological self-placement. As explained above, in models presented in the Online Appendix, we added party identification to these models. Here is the regression equation we ran for each issue proposal:

$$\text{Vote Choice}_{post} = \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{Vote Choice}_{pre} + \beta_2 * \text{Opinion}_{pre} + \beta_3 * \text{Ideology}_{pre} + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

We assess the level of issue voting by taking the coefficient on the pre-election opinion variable from each of these models. It represents the difference in the change in the probability of voting for a governing party between a respondent who opposes an issue proposal and one who supports it. We test the significance of the opinion coefficient for each issue using two-tailed t-tests.

The second approach we use for the first stage analysis is a logistic regression with the same model as in equation (1) but with a logistic link function. We then calculate the difference between the change in the probability of voting for a government party (between the pre- and post-election studies) among policy supporters and policy opponents and retain this as our measure of issue voting. Equation (2) shows the formula.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Issue Voting} = & (P(\text{Government party})_{post,supporter} - P(\text{Government party})_{pre,supporter} \\ & - (P(\text{Government party})_{post,opponent} - P(\text{Government party})_{pre,opponent}) \quad (2) \end{aligned}$$

For both approaches, we obtain three measures of issue voting. Absolute issue voting is

¹¹We subtracted the minimum value of ideology from each respondent's ideology score and divided this difference by the range of ideological self-placements.

simply a dummy indicating that the coefficient on the opinion variable is significant (and thus either positive or negative), opposition-to-government issue voting is assessed by a dummy indicating that the coefficient is significantly different from 0 and positive (significantly negative values are considered missing), government-to-opposition issue voting is measured by a dummy indicating that the coefficient is significant and negative (significant positive values are excluded). All these significance tests are based on two-tailed t-tests using a 0.05 significance level.

At the second stage, we assess the impact of issue voting on the link between public opinion and policy implementation. We create a binary variable indicating that a policy proposal was implemented during the term following an election. We then run a logistic regression of that variable on the interaction between the percentage of survey respondents who support a policy change and the measure of issue voting. We also include an interaction with overall changes in the proportion supporting government parties between the pre- and post-election survey waves. This second variable allows us to ensure that the coefficients on our measures of issue voting are not merely picking up the impact of overall changes in votes during the campaigns. Equation 3 shows the model. Note that we show in the Online Appendix that results are similar when we replace the logistic model with a linear model.

$$\ln\left(\frac{P(Policy_p)}{1 - P(Policy_p)}\right) = \alpha + \beta_1 * \text{Public Support} + \beta_2 * \text{Issue Voting} \\ + \beta_5 * \text{Total Changes} + \beta_6 * \text{Issue Voting} * \text{Public Support} (\%) \\ + \beta_8 * \text{Total Changes} * \text{Public Support} (\%) \quad (3)$$

We include all issues that were asked about in the pre-election studies. We limit first-stage analyses to responses from respondents who answered both the pre- and post- studies. In total, we have 202 observations on 81 unique issue proposals. Table A1 in the Appendix lists all the issues we have included as well as the years of the elections in which the pre-election

studies asked about them. Note that our measures of public support include non-responses so that they show the proportion of all Swedes who want a new policy rather than only the proportion of Swedes with an opinion who want to change government policy.

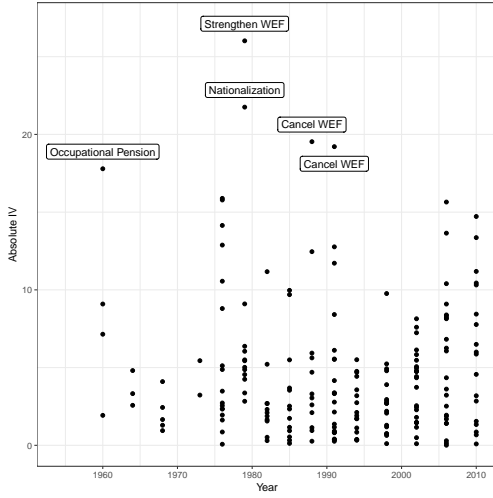
One important consideration is the sample of issues we focus on. We assess issue voting on all issues that were included in the SNES. Clearly, that sample is not representative of the universe of issues that could be asked about. Instead, the SNES asked about issues that are salient in each election. Limiting our analyses to issues that are considered salient to election scholars allows us to control for salience. If we find an effect of issue voting on policy representation on salient issues, we can safely conclude that issue voting and not salience is what matters.

How Much Issue Voting Occurred?

Figure 1(a) shows the amount of absolute issue voting on each issue that has been asked about in Swedish National Election Studies going back to 1960. It labels the five issues with the greatest amount of issue voting. The issues for which we find most issue voting are politically heated issues that were clearly very salient issues at the time. A good example is the issue about whether to introduce wage earner funds, which was a policy proposal by the Social Democrats which would gradually introduce collective employee ownership of private companies. Figure 1(b) shows the relationship between percentage-point change in votes associated with each issue (i.e. the raw coefficient on the opinion variable). The correlation between the two is 0.19 ($p=0.01$). There is thus a weak tendency for there to be a greater shift in votes towards government parties due to issue proposals when more citizens support that policy change.

Figure 1: Amount of Issue Voting

(a) Absolute Issue Voting Over Time



(b) Public Support for Proposals and Issue Voting

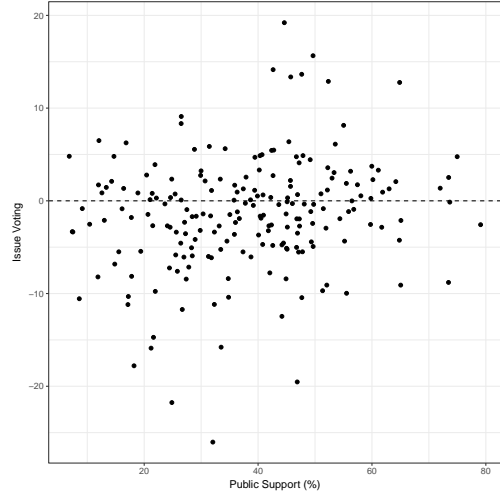


Table 1 shows descriptive statistics on the amount of issue voting as assessed using the linear-model approach. For each type of issue voting, we present the percentage of issues with significant issue voting as well as the minimum, median, maximum, and mean values of significant values.

Table 1: Amount of issue voting

Type	% $p < 0.05$	Min	Median	Max	Mean
Absolute	37.1	3.54	7.60	26.02	8.81
Opposition-to-Government	11.9	4.10	5.99	19.21	8.35
Government-to-Opposition	25.2	3.54	8.14	26.02	9.02

Thus, while most issues do not influence vote choice, we estimate that over a third do matter to voters. Support for proposals is associated with losses of support by government parties about twice as often as it is associated with gains by them.¹² This does not mean that issues overall hurt government parties, because, as we saw above, there is a positive

¹²We estimated a precision-weighted average of issue-voting estimates similar to those estimated by Lenz (2012). It is -1.25 and its confidence interval does not overlap 0. See Online Appendix.

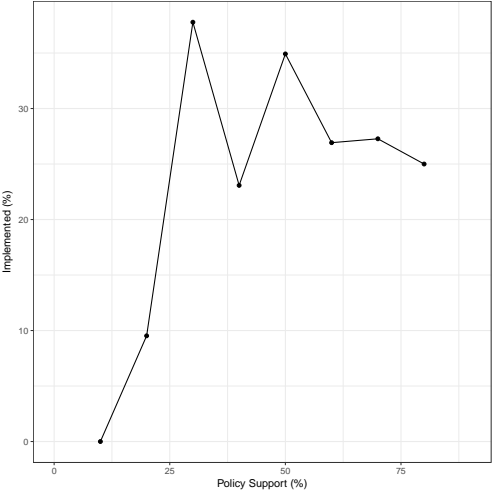
(albeit weak) association between support for policy proposals and the estimated change in votes that is due to an issue. In other words, the issues whose support are associated with losses by government parties tend to be issues with lower public support than those that are associated with gains. Consequently, parties could gain votes by opposing the former issue proposals and supporting the latter.

Does Issue Voting Influence the Representation of Preferences?

We first describe the relationship between public support for the policy proposals we consider and their implementation. Figure 2a shows the relationship between the percentage of the Swedish population that wants a new policy to be implemented and the implementation of each policy. We calculate the percentage of policies that are implemented in various ranges of ten percentage points of public support. As we can see, the probability of implementation jumps dramatically when public support increases from low values (i.e. below 30%) to moderate (at and above 30%). Above 30% support, however, the probability of implementation does not increase as support goes up. In fact, it actually declines slightly.

Figure 2: Public Support For Policy Proposals and their Implementation

(a) Overall Public Opinion



(b) Supporters of Government Party(ies)

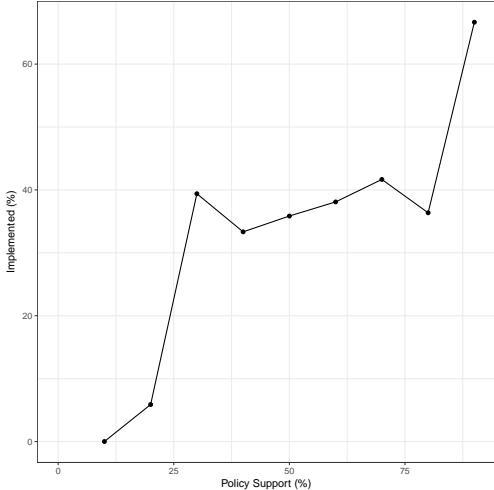


Figure 2b considers the relationship between support for a change among survey respondents who voted for the government parties and implementation. It allows us to determine whether governments were simply doing what their supporters wanted them to do. Some existing studies show that some parties care most about the preferences of their supporters (Ezrow et al., 2011; Schumacher, De Vries and Vis, 2013). As we can see, there is some evidence for that. There is a similar jump in the proportion of policies that are implemented from low to moderate values of support. The difference among supporters of government parties is that the likelihood of implementation jumps again as support moves to very high values. This reflects only three issues though with very high (over 80 per cent) support among government party voters. Two of those were implemented. Moreover, note that support for policy proposals is higher among government party supporters than in the public overall. Thus, the increase in implementation at high values of support might just reflect a process of rationalization whereby supporters of government parties express higher support for policies that were promised by the party they voted for.¹³ In short, there is little evidence that public opinion or the preferences of supporters of government parties influence policy implementation when support increases beyond a low level.

Does issue voting make a difference to policy representation? We begin with a simple test. We compare the proportion of policies with majority (i.e. 50% + 1) support that were adopted in the presence of each type of issue voting and the proportion that were adopted when there was no issue voting.¹⁴ Forty-four percent of popular issue proposals were implemented when there is evidence for absolute issue voting compared to 19 % when there was no absolute issue voting. Seventy-five percent of proposals with majority support were implemented when there was opposition-to-government issue voting. That is the case of a mere 19% when there was no opposition-to-government issue voting (recall that we exclude government-to-opposition issue voting here). Government-to-opposition issue voting

¹³We produced analogous graphs for a broader sample of issues including those asked about in SOM surveys in addition to the Swedish Election Studies. The patterns are very similar. See Online Appendix.

¹⁴Note that the 50 per cent threshold is somewhat arbitrary. Using other thresholds for high support leads to similar results.

essentially makes no difference to policy implementation. When there was that form of issue voting, 20% of popular policies were adopted. When there was none, 19% were adopted. This lack of influence likely reflects government parties' interest in remaining consistent with the positions that voters at least perceived them as having.

Figure 3(a) shows the relationship between public support for policy changes and their implementation by type of issue voting. It calculates the proportion of policies in 20 percentage-point intervals of public support. We can see that the proportion of implemented policies increases with public support on issues with significant opposition-to-government issue voting (note that there was no significant issue voting on proposals with public support of 20 per cent or lower). When government-to-opposition issue voting is significant, on the other hand, implementation only increases with public support when it goes above 60 per cent.

Figure 3: Issue Voting, Public Support, and Policy Implementation

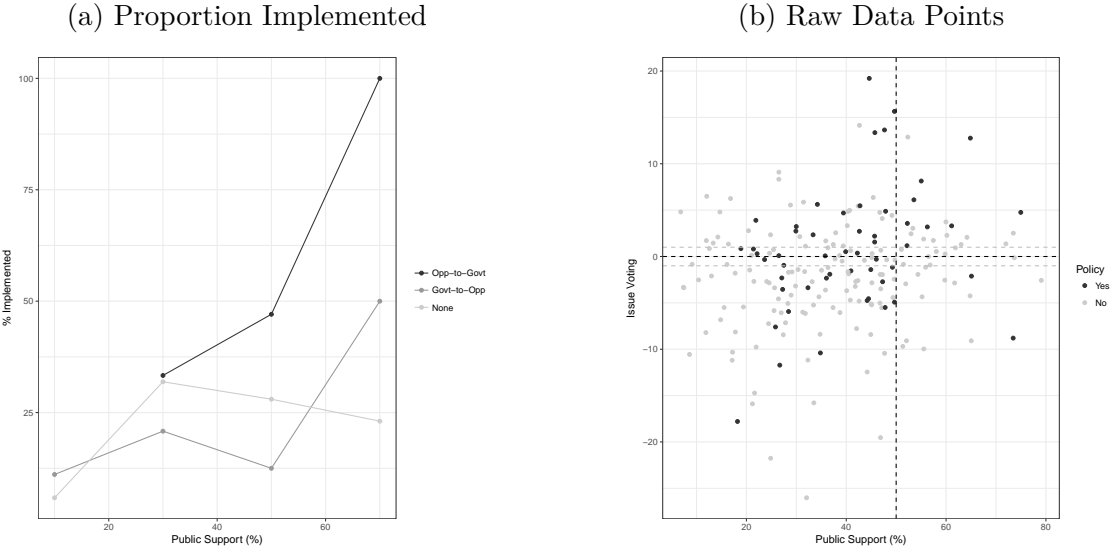


Figure 3(b) shows the same data points as in Figure 1(b). However, it now shows whether policy proposals were implemented or not. It also shows a vertical dashed line at 50 per cent public support to distinguish policies with majority support from those lacking such support. It also includes a horizontal dashed line at 0 issue voting (in black), allowing us to distinguish opposition-to-government from government-to-opposition issue voting. It also

includes lighter dashed lines at -1 and 1 issue voting, allowing us to identify issues with at least that much issue voting. We can see clearly that, while eight popular proposals that were implemented had opposition-to-government issue voting, only two proposals with majority support that were implemented had government-to-opposition issue voting. None of the popular issues that were implemented led to changes in support for government parties of less than one point in absolute value. Implementation of popular proposals was thus clearly associated with gains by governing parties that were associated with issue opinions.

We then adopted a more rigorous test. We ran logistic regressions of the binary policy implementation variable on public support for the policy change, the measure of issue voting, the total change in vote shares, and interaction terms between public support and each of the latter two variables. Table 2 shows the results. The coefficients of interest are those on the interactions between each form of issue voting and public support. The results from Model 1 show that the coefficient on the interaction between absolute issue voting and the proportion of public support is positive, which supports Hypothesis 1. However, it is far from conventional significance levels. Model 2 shows that opposition-to-government increases the weight of public opinion on policy adoption nearly twice as much as absolute issue voting and the interaction term coefficient is significant at the 0.10 level. In the third column, we can see that government-to-opposition issue voting clearly has no effect on the influence of public opinion on policy change. These findings support Hypothesis 2 that opposition-to-government issue voting matters more to policy implementation.

Table 2: Models of Issue Voting and Policy Representation

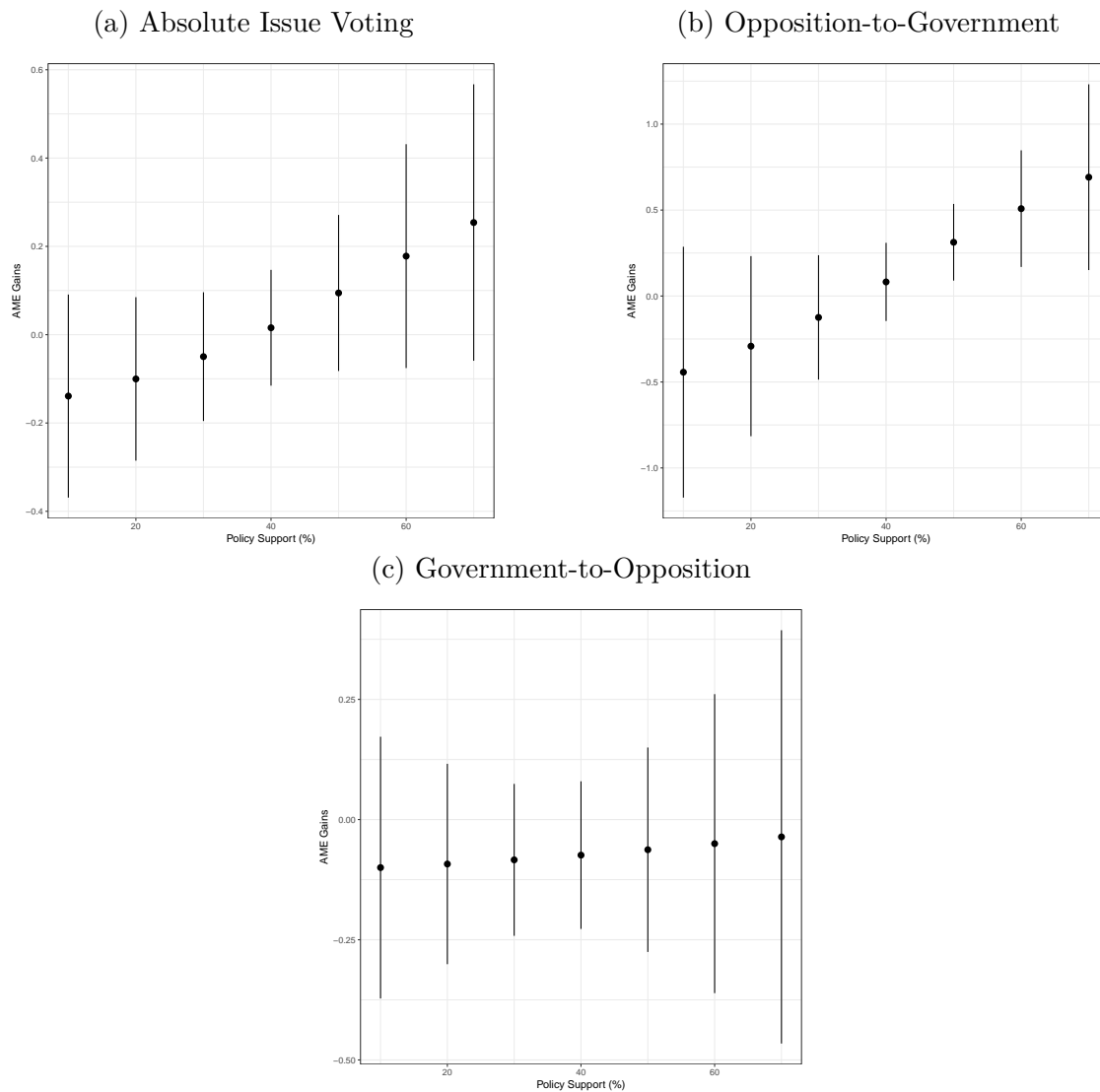
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	-0.52 (0.85)	-0.90 (0.90)	-0.68 (0.84)
Public Support (%)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Absolute IV	-1.38 (1.08)		
Opp-to-Govt IV		-4.07 (3.01)	
Govt-to-Opp IV			-0.72 (1.16)
Total Changes	-12.65 (11.21)	-5.70 (12.28)	-9.70 (11.10)
Absolute IV*Public Support (%)	0.04 (0.03)		
Opp-to-Govt IV*Public Support(%)		0.11 [†] (0.07)	
Govt-to-Opp IV*Public Support(%)			0.01 (0.03)
Total Changes*Public Support(%)	0.33 (0.26)	0.10 (0.27)	0.20 (0.25)
<i>N</i>	202	151	178
AIC	237.24	185.33	203.72
BIC	316.64	257.74	280.08
log <i>L</i>	-94.62	-68.66	-77.86

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Since the models in Table 2 are nonlinear, the interaction coefficients show the effect of the interaction on the linear predictor and not on the probability of adoption (Ai and Norton, 2003; Berry, DeMeritt and Esarey, 2010). Thus, in Figure 4, we consider the marginal effects of each form of issue voting at various levels of public support for policy changes. If issue voting improves policy representation, we should find that, at high levels of public support for a policy, issue voting increases the probability of policy adoption. As we can see in panel (a), absolute issue voting does not significantly influence the probability of implementation at any level of public support. Opposition-to-government issue voting, as shown in panel (b), has an effect on policy implementation that is significant for levels of support of 50% and higher. Government-to-opposition issue voting, as panel (c) shows, has no effect on policy representation. These marginal effects provide further support for our two hypotheses.

Figure 4: Types of Issue Voting and the Probability of Policy Implementation



As an illustration, Table 3 shows an example of an issue that has been asked about repeatedly in Swedish election studies: lowering taxes. Three of the six times Swedes were asked about the issue, majorities supported tax cuts. In all but one case, over 45 per cent of Swedes wanted a tax cut. Here, we lower the somewhat arbitrary threshold for high support to 45 percent to reflect actual support for a tax cut in Sweden. In the two cases in which there was opposition-to-government issue voting and strong support for tax cut, taxes were reduced. In only one case (2002) out of three without opposition-to-government issue voting and with high support for tax cuts, were taxes actually lowered.

Table 3: Issue Voting and Tax Cuts

Year	Support for Tax Cut (%)	Opp-to-Govt IV	Tax Cut?
1964	79.08	No	No
1968	36.32	No	No
1998	61.72	No	No
2002	49.26	No	Yes
2006	55.02	Yes	Yes
2010	45.73	Yes	Yes

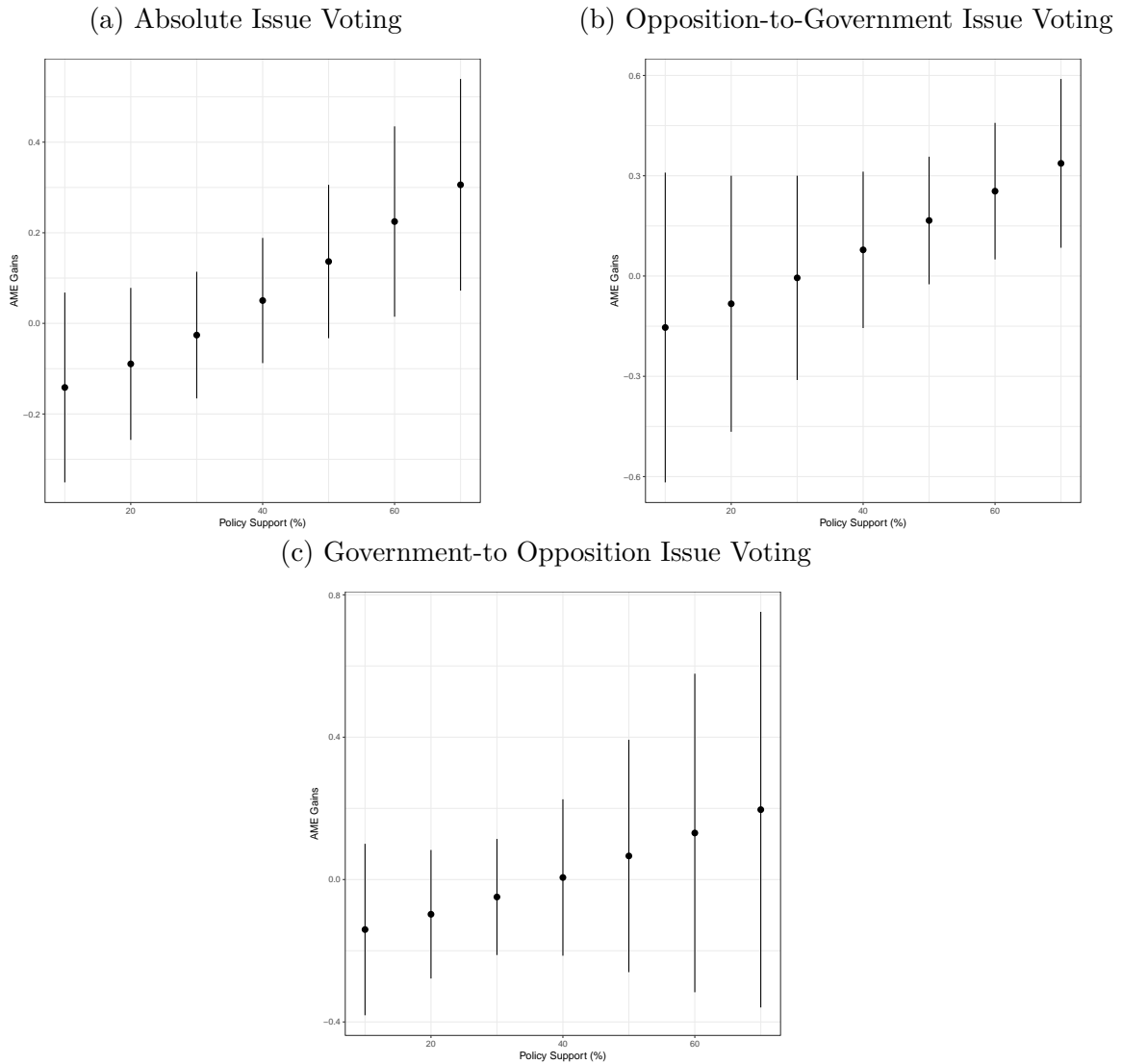
Are Government Parties just Representing their Supporters?

One possibility is that parties in government are not responding to issue voting but instead are representing the preferences of their supporters. To test this possibility, we repeated our analysis of the impact of opposition-to-government issue voting on the representation of the preferences of supporters of parties that made it into government.

Figure 5 shows the marginal effects of issue voting at various levels of support among government-party voters. We can see evidence that absolute issue voting and opposition-to-government issue voting mattered to policy representation. The marginal effect of both types of issue voting is significant when 60% or more of government supporters favor a change.

Readers may also be thinking that issue voting only matters for the representation of government-party supporters because governments represent the preferences of people who ended up voting for them after the election. To reassure such readers, we have run similar models with support for policy change among government-party supporters after the election and results are similar.

Figure 5: Types of Issue Voting and the Representation of the Preferences of Government Party Supporters



Considering Other Possible Explanations

An important alternative explanation to consider is that issue voting matters for representation but only because it allows citizens to get governments that represent their preferences. Rather than governing parties caring about implementing policies that won them votes in the previous election, they may simply implement popular policies because governments supporting popular positions replace governments with unpopular positions. This is the

electoral turnover (Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson, 1995) or mandate (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999) mechanism of policy representation, discussed in the literature.

Government turnover is clearly associated with the implementation of popular policies. While a mere four per cent of policies with majority support were implemented by re-elected incumbents, half of the popular policies were implemented by new governments. However, that does not mean that issue voting is any less important. When a new government was formed, seventy-five per cent of popular policies with significant opposition-to-government issue voting were implemented. Conversely, under a new government, only 42 per cent of issue proposals with majority support but no opposition-to-government issue voting were implemented. There was no evidence of that type of issue voting on proposals with majority support when the incumbent returned to power, suggesting that re-elected governments are able to avoid the kind of issue voting that would give them a major incentive to act on citizens' preferences. Thus, while government turnover does contribute to overcoming policy-making inertia, new governments implement issue proposals that led them to gain votes. These results suggest that the mandate and accountability perspectives on elections are complementary. Government parties carry out their mandates because they fear being held accountable for not doing so.

There is some evidence though that issue voting matters to policy representation even in the absence of government turnover. If we consider issues with support above 45 percent, we find evidence that opposition-to-government issue voting matters. Forty-six per cent of such issue proposals were implemented when there was significant opposition-to-government issue voting, compared to 26 per cent when there was no such significant issue voting (Chi-square p value=0.09). Issue voting also helps prevent the implementation of unpopular policies. When there is no government turnover, none of the policies with public support in the lowest quartile and significant opposition-to-government issue voting were implemented. However, 12 per cent were implemented when there was no such issue voting (Chi-square p value=0.09). Admittedly, this evidence that issue voting matters under such circumstances

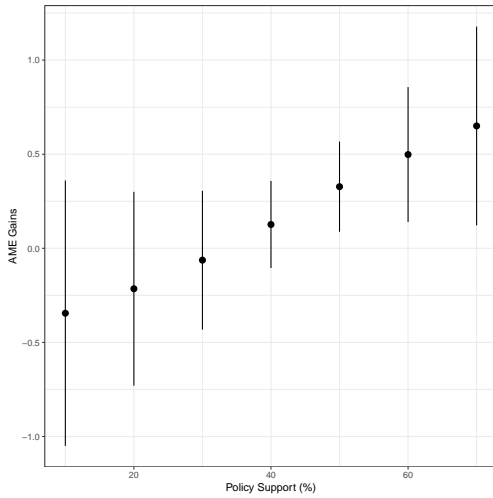
is weak, but it does suggest that it, nonetheless, makes a difference.

Another possible explanation is that what matters for representation is not the existence of issue voting but instead the intensity of preferences. Issue voting may be more common when citizens have more strongly-held preferences and governments may care more about public opinion when preferences are more strongly held. For most of the issues for which we have data, the questions that were asked allowed citizens to express their degree of support or opposition to a policy change. We create an aggregate measure of the intensity of preferences for each issue and include it as a control variable in models of policy implementation.

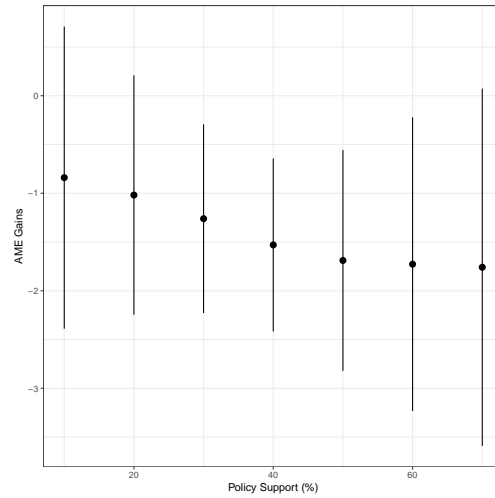
For all issues for which respondents could indicate the intensity of their preferences, we calculate the mean absolute value of preferences across all respondents. Higher values thus indicate a stronger intensity of preferences on average. We then replicate the model of policy implementation testing the conditioning effect of opposition-to-government issue voting on the influence of public opinion on policy. However, we add the measure of preference intensity as well as an interaction between that variable and the public opinion variable. The first panel of Figure 5 shows marginal effects of opposition-to-government issue voting at various levels of public support for policy changes. We can see that marginal effects are similar to those in Figure 4(b), which shows analogous effects without controlling for intensity. The second panel shows the marginal effects of preference intensity on the implementation of policy proposals. As we can see, preference intensity actually has a negative marginal effect on implementation controlling for opposition-to-government issue voting at most levels of public support. Thus, the increasing responsiveness to public opinion that results from opposition-to-government issue voting is not due to a greater intensity of preferences.

Figure 6: Model of Policy Implementation Including Preference Intensity

(a) Opposition-to-Government Issue Voting



(b) Intensity



Conclusion

We have seen that, in spite of recent research showing that citizens rarely if ever vote on the basis of their issue opinions (Lenz, 2009, 2012), issue voting does occur during election campaigns in Sweden. However, it is extremely variable. Some issues matter a great deal to vote choice, while others have little influence. Thus, we propose that scholars should focus on identifying issues that matter enough to voters that they influence their votes.

We also saw that issue voting influences policy representation. When citizens shift their vote choice as a result of their issue preferences towards parties that end up in government, those parties take notice and are more likely to implement popular policies than when citizens do not engage in that form of issue voting. These findings show that it is not enough for the public simply to support a policy change for that change to be implemented. Enough people have to consider an issue sufficiently important to shift their votes towards a governing party.

When citizens consider an issue important enough to vote on the basis of it, governments are more likely to implement the policies citizens want. When thinking about the functioning of democracy, we should consider how citizens behave politically and we should also consider

the incentives citizens' behavior creates for political elites. Even if people engage in biased information processing, they are sometimes biased in favor of their policy preferences rather than in favor of a party (Mullinix, 2016). When that is the case and when such biased policy-oriented reasoning leads voters to shift their votes towards parties that enter government, those parties have an incentive to implement those preferences. Consequently, we believe there are grounds for optimism about the functioning of democracy.

Obviously, many scholars would prefer that governments represent all citizens' preferences. However, given that citizens are biased in their processing of political information and that they cannot simultaneously consider all issues, it may be too much to ask of voters. Moreover, there is no reason for citizens to expect governments to represent issues they do not consider important enough to influence their votes.

We also found a connection between the mandate and accountability conceptions of democracy. Opposition-to-government issue voting matters most when a new government is formed. These findings suggest that the two perspectives on representation interact. Parties have a greater incentive to implement the policies they were elected to implement when they fear being held accountable for not doing so.

It is important to point to a limitation of the research reported here. We consider issue voting and policy implementation in Sweden. Swedish voters may care more about issues than voters elsewhere. Moreover, Swedish National Election Studies may have been exceptionally successful at identifying issues that matter to voters. To our knowledge, this is the first study to conduct a systematic analysis of the impact of all issues on vote choice. Future work should consider the impact of policy preferences on vote choice in other contexts. It should also assess the extent to which issue voting conditions the relationship between popular preferences and government policy.

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