



# What is issue ownership? Political parties' position, priority, and performance

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Scholarly interest in issue ownership is rapidly growing. Yet, while recent research brings lots of valuable empirical evidence on the ingredients of issue ownership, it does not bring it together to offer a unifying conceptualization of issue ownership to take the next step. A major part of the shortcoming is that existing work overlooks one central ingredient, namely a party's issue position. Analyzing unprecedented data on issue ownership, parties' policy position, and parties issue emphasis across countries and issues, this study brings important clarity to the concept of issue ownership: Echoing the founding fathers of the concept of issue ownership, the analysis shows that the party with issue ownership side with the median voter. Moreover, a party's issue emphasis only improves issue ownership insofar as the party promotes a position close to the median voter. Yet, in substantial terms, party position primarily matters if the party actively emphasizes its position to the voters. Hence, party position is crucial to issue ownership – and more important than party issue emphasis – but issue ownership is more than just policy representation.

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*Kaat Smets is Senior Lecturer in Politics (Quantitative Methods) and co-editor-in-chief of Electoral Studies. Her research focuses on why people participate in politics and she is particularly interested in how patterns of political participation change over time.*

*Since the political behaviour of young people seems to be most affected by new patterns of political participation that have emerged over the last decades, a lot of Kaat's research focuses on young people's politics.*

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