Issue news and electoral volatility

A comparative analysis of media effects during the 1994 election campaigns in Germany and the Netherlands

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Abstract. This article shows that issue coverage in the media partly explains both the political landslide at the 1994 elections in the Netherlands and the political continuity in the 1994 elections in Germany. Theories of issue voting guided the research. Issue ownership theory maintains that voters will remember which party has the best record of solving problems in emphasized issue areas. Proximity models and directional models suggest that voters' own issue positions will be compared to the perceived issue positions of parties. A longitudinal content analysis of ten newspapers and five television news programmes was performed to ascertain selective issue emphasis and the issue positions attributed to parties. Election outcomes and weekly opinion polls were used to measure the volatility of the vote.

Introduction

In 1994 national elections were held both in Germany (16 October) and in the Netherlands (3 May). Opinion polls in 1993 had predicted a crushing defeat for the German CDU/CSU of more than 10% of the total number of votes cast as compared to the 1990 elections. As it turned out, however, the Christian Democrats lead by Chancellor Helmut Kohl lost only 2%. The major opposition party (Social Democrats, SPD) gained only 3%. The 1994 elections in the Netherlands produced the strongest political landslide ever. The coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA) and Social Democrats (PvdA) lost its majority in Parliament. The Christian Democrats (CDA) lost 13% of the total number of votes cast as compared to the 1989 elections. The Social Democrats lost 8% as compared to the 1989 elections, but were a remarkable 8% ahead of the 1993 polls. The libertarian liberals (D66) won 7%, thus doubling their share of the vote, but were 3% down on their 1993 polls. The right-wing liberals (VVD) won another 5%. The result was the first-ever coalition government which did not include Christian Democrats.

These strikingly different electoral outcomes in Germany and the Netherlands in 1994 are interesting cases for explanations of vote volatility, since the two countries are most similar both with respect to the parties available

for voters and with respect to voter considerations. Religion and class are
still considered to be the dominant cleavage dimensions in both countries
(Schmidt 1996; Keman 1996). The same party families dominate the political
scene: Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Liberals, with a minor role
for the Greens and an outside role for the Extreme Right. The structure of
individual vote preference formation is also strikingly similar to other Euro-
pean countries. In both countries the influence of social cleavages (religion,
class) on the vote is overarched by a subjective left-right orientation. In both
countries party preference is also influenced, to practically the same degree,
by party size, the evaluation of government performance and by the perceived
issue competences of parties (Oppenhuis 1995: 145–146).

This article investigates whether the nature of the information provided
by newspapers and television news in Germany and the Netherlands during
the election campaigns of 1994 might have been a contributing factor both
to the political stability in Germany as well as to the political landslide in
the Netherlands. The principal reason for studying the role of issue portrayal
in the media in depth is that they play a relatively autonomous role in the
transmission of a party's issue profile. The news reflects party programmes,
but it is not their mirror image (see Kleinnijenhuis & Rietberg 1995). The
daily news is primarily shaped by campaign tactics, unfolding campaign dy-
namics and journalistic criteria of newsworthiness.The environmental policy
proposals of the Christian Democrats in the Netherlands, for example, at-
tracted almost no media attention, although the word 'environment' was in
the title of their programme. The policy of the right-wing liberals (VVD)
on asylum seekers created a media furore, although only a few sentences in
the VVD programme were devoted to asylum seekers. The enormous media
attention in 1994 in Germany for alternative coalition governments with the
former East German communist PDS could not have been predicted on the
basis of party programmes.

Political observers are inclined to attribute short-term voting shifts to pre-
vailing conditions or long-term trends, e.g., to the personal characteristics of
party leaders (see Ansolabehere et al. 1991) or to the economic tide (Mueller
1989: 289–294). Certainly, the Germans could demonstrate their loyalty to
Helmut Kohl, who had already served for twelve years and had led the coun-
try towards reunification. The Dutch had to choose between challengers only,
since Ruud Lubbers (CDA), who had also served as prime minister for twelve
years, had decided to retire from active politics. When the German elections
were held in the autumn of 1994, there were abundant signs of economic
growth. In the spring of 1994, by contrast, Dutch unemployment figures were
still not showing the effect of economic recovery. Prevailing conditions do
not automatically decide an election, however, let alone the weekly shifts

in party preferences. The precise transposition of prevailing conditions into votes might well be swayed by the media (see Petrocik 1996). This article gives evidence that issue portrayal in the media does indeed sway the vote.

Theory of effects of the media coverage of issues: towards hypotheses

Many aspects of the news reportedly have an effect on the vote, such as personality portrayal, attributions of party successes or failures (the 'horse race') and media evaluations of parties (e.g., Ansolabehere, Behr & Iyengar 1991; Fan & Tims 1990; Kepplinger et al. 1994; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 1995). The effects on the public of the issue agenda in the media have become a central theme in media effects research, due to exciting research results with respect to *agenda setting* (McCombs & Shaw 1972; Rogers & Dearing 1988; Kosicki 1993) and *priming* (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Krosnick & Kinder 1990). Agenda setting by the media entails that the media determine what issues voters think about, whereas priming entails that the issue addressed prominently in the latest prime time news shuts out any other criteria for evaluating parties and politicians which voters might have had. Communication scholars study the agenda-setting effects and priming effects on the *perceptions* of individual voters. By contrast, this study presumes agenda-setting and priming effects on individual voters, and focuses instead on the *aggregate effect* of issue coverage by the media on the percentage of *votes* for a party.

Theories of *issue voting* link issue perceptions and attitudes to the vote. Two types of theories on issue voting will be discussed here. *Issue ownership theory* stresses the role of selective issue emphasis (Budge & Farlie 1983; Budge, Robertson & Hearl 1987; Petrocik 1996). *Issue positions theories* like the *proximity theory* (or smallest distance theory; Downs, 1957) and *directional theory* (Rabinowitz & McDonald 1989) stress the role of the issue positions attributed to parties.

Table 1 gives an overview of the hypotheses to be developed in this section. The two types of theory appear as the rows of Table 1. The first column represents hypotheses on the effects of perceptions of the issue profile of a party (which is assumed to be influenced by media coverage) on the *individual* vote (hypotheses I1, I2). This article focuses on the *aggregate vote*, however. Testable hypotheses with respect to media effects on the aggregate vote, which are listed in the next column of Table 1 (hypotheses H1, H2), might be induced from the hypotheses with respect to the individual vote. The last column of Table 1 lists the preconditions which must be met by the media so as to enable issue voting to occur (preconditions P1, P2). Whether the media meet these preconditions will also be empirically tested.

Table 1. Overview of hypotheses to be tested

	I: effects of media coverage on the individual vote (not tested here)	H: effects of media coverage on aggregate vote (tested here)	P: preconditions which the media must meet to enable voters to vote according to the theory (tested here)
0: null hypothesis	I0: no media effects	H0: no media effects	P0: – no relationship between issue attention and party – no relationship between issue position and party
1: issue ownership theory (issue salience theory)	I1: a party is preferred when the media attention for the issues it owns is maximal	H1: parties win when they receive media *attention* with respect to the *issues owned* by them	P1: media attribute attention to specific issues to specific parties
2: proximity theory and directional theory	I2: a party is preferred when a voter's issue position resembles the issue position attributed to that party in the media	H2 parties win when the media attribute *extreme issue positions* to them (within the boundaries of acceptability) NB: not derivable from proximity theory in the case of strictly normal or ∩-shaped distributions of issue preferences of voters.	P2: media attribute specific issue positions to specific parties

Issue ownership theory

The theory of *issue ownership* presumes that voters will vote for the party which generates most attention for its *own issues* in the media (hypothesis I1). A party is said to 'own' an issue when the general public believes that it emphasizes this issue. Citizens are believed to see *differential issue competences* of parties in various issue areas that correspond with the *traditional issue emphasis* of these parties. The theory of *issue ownership* or *selective issue emphasis* derives from the comparative research of party manifestos which has revealed close ties between party families and issue groups (Budge & Farlie 1983; Budge et al. 1987). Expert surveys in 24 democracies by Laver & Hunt (1992) reveal clear-cut evidence for selective emphasis. 'Respondents were asked to rate the salience of each policy dimension for each party . . . If the reader runs an eye down these figures, it will immediately be clear that there are major differences between different parties in the same country over the perceived salience of the main policy dimensions' (Laver & Hunt 1992: 46–47).

Historical cleavages (e.g., class, religion) are often at the heart of issue ownership. An issue such as the leveling of incomes reflects the interests of the lower classes and is owned by parties from the social-democratic party family. The public will not link each issue with a fixed party, however. Valence issues such as economic growth and employment are not connected with any particular party. Governing parties are said to 'lean' on valence issues such as economic growth and employment when the economy grows and employment rises, whereas opposition parties lean on these issues when the economy has a set-back and unemployment rises (Petrocik 1996). A second category of issues not owned by a party are new issues. A party may try to 'capture' new issues (e.g., asylum seekers, drug abuse) by stressing them during a campaign.

Daily news is an important, although somewhat implicit link in the theory of issue ownership theory. The news may influence the rank order of issue importance in the mind of the voter. Voters are often uncertain about what represents a serious problem and are apt to believe that prime time news reflects the rank order of issue seriousness. This idea is central to the *priming* theory of Iyengar & Kinder (1987). Voters will prefer the party that is perceived to be the most competent at solving the issues that dominate the news. According to the *primacy* principle of information processing, the voter will remember that the traditional owner of the news issues has the best record. Owning issues that are not in the news does not furnish votes. The *recency* principle suggests that news also may play an important part in 'capturing' a new issue. The belief that a party will be able to fix problems in a new issue

area might depend primarily on the successes of the party's campaign efforts to set the media agenda with respect to that issue area.

The induction from the individual level hypothesis I1, that voters will vote for the owner of the issues that dominate the news, into a testable hypothesis at the aggregate level is straightforward. A party will win when the media stress the issues owned by that party (hypothesis H1). To enable citizens to vote according to issue ownership theory, the media must selectively emphasize the issue positions of parties on specific issues (precondition P1).

Issue position theories

In the second type of issue voting theories, it is presumed that voters compare the current issue positions of parties with their own issue position. If the issue positions of a party resemble those of the voter, then that party will be preferred (hypothesis I2). Voters can select 'one best party' only if the media attribute different issue positions to different parties (precondition P2).

According to *proximity theory*, for example, rational voters will vote for the party having issue positions with the smallest distance from their own (see Downs 1957). *Directional theory* (Rabinowitz & MacDonald, 1989) entails that voters will simply choose the party which takes their side most vehemently. Voters will prefer parties with strong, extreme points of view to parties with moderate positions. If a person is a little concerned about crime, he or she will prefer a party which promises a strong police force and severe punishments to a party which merely proposes setting up a committee to study the problem. Directional theory presumes that issue positions have a meaningful neutral point. Party utility at the individual level is then simply the sum of issues of products of personal issue preferences and the perceived issue positions of parties (Rabinowitz & MacDonald 1989).

Induction to the aggregate level is fairly straightforward in the case of directional theory. Parties with extreme issue positions attributed to them by the media will win (hypothesis H2), provided they are keen enough to bet on the voters' side of the neutral point and provided their issue positions remain within the 'boundaries of acceptability'. In this article it will be assumed that these two assumptions are met. Induction from the individual level (hypothesis I2) to the aggregate level is not straightforward in the case of proximity theory, however, since it depends on the precise shapes of the distributions of issue positions of voters on various issues.[1] Comparable data on the distribution of issue preferences of voters for all issues both in Germany and the Netherlands were not available to us. Since the effects predicted by directional theory and proximity theory are conflated at the aggregate level, it is not possible to unravel them in this article. Therefore hypothesis H2, which

is compatible with directional theory and partly with proximity theory, will be taken as the point of departure for all issues in both countries.

Data, operationalization and method

Testing the hypotheses H1 and H2 requires content analysis of media coverage as well as data with respect to election outcomes and weekly polls (aggregate data). The content analysis data will also be used to test whether the presumptions P1 and P2 hold.

Content analysis data

The German news climate was assessed by examining political news from six national newspapers in Germany (Bild, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Die Welt, Süddeutsche Zeitung) and from three prime time television news bulletins (ARD, ZDF, RTL) during the period 1 August 1994 until 16 October 1994 (election day). Political news from five national newspapers in the Netherlands (De Telegraaf, Algemeen Dagblad, de Volkskrant, NRC/Handelsblad, Trouw) and from two prime time television news bulletins (NOS, RTL4) from 24 January until 3 May (election day) will also be reported.[2]

The selected newspapers and television news bulletins are intended as a general representation of the national news climate. Although (with the exception of Bild) national newspapers in Germany have a relatively lower circulation than those in the Netherlands, the selected newspapers set the standards for news coverage in regional newspapers. During the Dutch election campaign of 1994 the news bulletins broadcasted by NOS and RTL4 were by far the most widely viewed. Although ZDF, ARD and RTL broadcast the most widely-viewed news bulletins in Germany, SAT-I, often accused of having strong ties with the Christian Democrats, would ideally have been included to arrive at an equally good representation of German television news. The selection of newspapers is also biased against former East Germany; Neues Deutschland, the former mouthpiece of the communist SED, and linked with the PDS in 1994, was not easily available.

Since political news items usually contain a variety of (types of) assertions, the headlines and the introductory paragraph of newspaper stories and entire political items in television news were coded *sentence by sentence* using the CETA2-program (De Ridder 1994b), which supports Network Analysis of Evaluative Texts (Van Cuilenburg et al. 1986; De Ridder 1994a). Each sentence was split up into nuclear sentences linking one subject to one object

Table 2. Number of nuclear sentences devoted to issue positions of parties

	Germany	Netherlands
Parties	83%	77%
Issues	44%	46%
Issue positions of parties	26% (n = 1372)	24% (n = 1805)
Total	n = 5348	n = 7518

by a predicate. Table 2 gives an overview of the subset of nuclear sentences relevant for further analysis.

Although parties are somewhat less prominent in the Netherlands than in Germany, in both countries roughly a quarter of the original nuclear sentences deal with the issue positions of parties (n = 3177; 1372 from the German data and 1805 from the Dutch data). These nuclear sentences build up the database used in the remainder of this article. For nuclear sentences representing the issue positions of parties, the general subject/predicate/object-syntax of a nuclear sentence reduces to the syntax:

PARTY / ISSUE POSITION / ISSUE

The issue position according to a nuclear sentence might be quantified on a pro-con scale with a number ranging from +1 (pro) down to and including −1 (contra). Four examples of the nuclear sentences found are presented below. Subjects and objects were coded at a fine-grained level (e.g., Scharping, Abtreibung (abortion)) so as to enable various analyses afterwards, but were recoded for the purpose of this article to a limited set of party families and issue groups (see Tables 3 and 4 below). The square brackets contain the recoded nuclear sentences which are at the heart of the analyses carried out for this article. Recoding the subjects and objects within nuclear sentences might have an effect on the sign of the issue position (to disapprove (−1) abortion is equivalent to approve (+1) orthodox Christian ethics).

CDU	/ Gesetz zum Schutz menschlichen Lebens (−1.00)	/ Abtreibung	[CDU /+1/ Christian ethics]
Scharping	/ Arbeitsforderungs- massnahmen (−1.00)	/ Arbeitslosigkeit	[SPD /+1/ valence issues]
Scharping	/ fordert ganzjährige Tempolimit (+1.00)	/ Umweltschutz	[SPD /+1/ environment]
CDU	/ Kürzungen für jüngere Empfanger (−1.00)	/ Arbeitslosen	[CDU /−1/ leftist issues]

Operationalization of predicted changes in aggregate vote preferences

The theory of issue ownership (hypothesis H1) predicts the percentage change in vote preferences for a party from the sum of percentages of nuclear sentences devoted to issues owned by that party.[3] Which party owns which issues will be discussed below. Directional theory (hypothesis H2) predicts these changes on the basis of the extremity of issue positions (absolute value of issue positions). To account for the importance of a party's issue position on a particular issue during the election campaign, the absolute value of the directions of an issue position will be weighted by (i.e., multiplied by) the frequency of being reported upon.[4] On the basis of the four nuclear sentences above, the issue ownership indicator for the CDU/CSU would amount to 25% (due to the first sentence on Christian ethics) as compared to 0% for the Social Democrats whereas the directional indicator would amount to 2 for both parties (addition of the absolute issue positions of the separate parties).

Operationalization of changes in aggregate vote preferences

The data with respect to media coverage of parties' issue positions will be compared to aggregate election outcomes and weekly opinion polls. The polls will be used to perform elementary (pooled) time series analysis, with features of media coverage as dependent variables, and the percentage of votes for parties as dependent variables. Since comparable data for the Netherlands and Germany on individual media consumption, individual issue preferences, and the perceived issue competences of parties are unavailable for all the issues investigated here, we will focus here on weekly changes in aggregate media coverage and weekly changes in aggregate vote preference in both countries. Weekly poll percentages were kindly made available to us by IfDA (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 1994) and NIPO (NIPO 1994). To compute cumulative changes in vote preferences during the complete campaign period, a '1993 percentage of votes' was computed for each party from the average poll results for three weeks in the autumn of 1993.

Party families and issue ownership

Parties belong to party families (see Table 3). Both Germany and the Netherlands have green parties, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Liberal parties and racist parties. Of course, some differences can also be noted. The ecologists of Bündnis 90/die Grünen have no red roots, whereas the former Dutch communist party came to join the Groen Links coalition. The Netherlands does not have a national party such as the PDS with a strong regional appeal and communist roots (in the SED, the former communist party of the

Table 3. The party families involved in the analysis

	Germany	The Netherlands
Green parties	Bündnis 90 – die Grünen	Groen Links
Social Democrats	SPD	PvdA
Christian Democrats	CDU/CSU	CDA, GPV, SGP, RPF
Economic Liberals	FDP	VVD
Extreme Right (racists)	Republikaner, DVU, NPD	CD, CP86
Others 1	PDS	–
Others 2	–	D66

GDR). The Dutch liberals are distributed between two parties, the VVD and D66. According to expert judgements the VVD and the FDP are fairly similar (Laver & Hunt 1992: 197–198, 262–265). Since D66 is a libertarian party (pro-choice, pro euthanasia, soft on drugs) with leftist viewpoints, we will not accord it a position in the family of economic liberals.

During the coding phase a great variety of politicians and issues were distinguished. Eleven issue groups were assembled inductively which sufficed to capture this variety. Issues were assembled in one group whenever they could be used almost interchangeably within the news discourse in both countries (e.g., immigrants, asylum seekers). The construction of the groups of leftist issues and rightist issues was based on the original theory of issue ownership (Budge & Farlie 1983). Table 4 presents the operationalization of ownership over the issue groups. Ideally, Table 4 would be based on survey questions of the type 'which party has, in your opinion, the best record of dealing with this problem?' (Petrocik 1996), but no comparable data on issue ownership for the eleven issues for both countries were available. The expert data on issue emphasis gathered by Laver & Hunt (1992) present comparable information on some issues for most parties, however (though not for the PDS and not for racist parties from the Netherlands). The dichotomous ownership assumptions of Table 4 were inspired as far as possible by these data.[5]

Leftist issues traditionally belong to the social democrats and the communists, rightist ones to the Christian Democrats and to the economic Liberals. Green issues are owned by the Green parties. Christian ethics are owned by the Christian Democrats. Immigration and asylum issues are owned by the Extreme Right. The integration of Western Europe is still owned by the Christian Democrats. From 1966 onwards, the D66 owned state reforms such as the elected mayor and popular referenda. D66 also competes with the Greens for the Green vote. Some issue groups are not clearly owned by any one party.

Table 4. Issue groups and ownership

Issue group	Examples	'Owner'
Environment	Car speed limits, (no) infrastructural projects in green areas	Green parties, D66*
Leftist issues	Social security, (no) cuts in) pensions for the elderly, minimum wages, purchasing power	Social Democrats, Groen Links, PDS
Rightist issues	(no) crime, (no) finance deficit, (no) inflation, (no) taxes	Economic liberals, Christian Democrats
Valence issues	Employment, economic growth	–
Christian ethics	(no) abortion, (no) euthanasia, (no) DNA experiments on higher life forms	Christian Democrats
Asylum seekers	(no) immigrants, (no) multicultural society, (no) asylum seekers, identity card	racists, VVD*
Current coalition	CDU/CSU & FDP; CDA & PvdA	–
New coalition	PDS, SPD & B90/die Grünen; D66, VVD & PvdA	–
Western Europe	Maastricht, Schengen, Ecu, monetary union	Christian parties
Internationalism	Rapprochement with Eastern Europe (Germany), military intervention in former Yugoslavia (the Netherlands)	CDU/CSU*
State reforms	Elected mayor, plebiscite, decentralization	D66

*Attribution to party (family) based on recent news; data analyses have been performed for two variants of issue ownership (exclusion/inclusion of parties with asterisk).

Obviously, issue-capturing policies also contribute to issue ownership. Kohl might be said to own rapprochement towards Eastern Europe because of his 'uncompromising pro-unification policy stance' (see Schmidt 1996: 70). One might also argue that the VVD is identified with asylum seekers because its electoral leader, Bolkestein, was the only politician of a party with a respectable party size (see Oppenhuis 1995: 163) to hold outspoken views on the issue. The 'issue ownership extra' model presented in Table 6 incorporates these recently captured issues.

Results

Tables 5a and 5b present the data needed to ascertain the media coverage of issues in Germany and the Netherlands respectively. First the setup and the contents of these tables will be discussed. Next formal tests of hypotheses and their presumptions will be presented.

Each table presents the total amount of media attention for various issues, that is to say, the issue positions attributed to parties as well as the amount of media attention for these issue positions. The first column of each table

Table 5a. Issue coverage and electoral volatility in Germany (n = 1372 nuclear sentences; range issue position scale [−1 ⋯ + 1])

	Total media coverage		Green parties		Social democrats SPD		Christian democrats CDU/CSU		Economic liberals FDP		Racists Republikaner, DVU		Others PDS	
	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1	% attention	Direction −1 ⋯ + 1
Environment	10	+0.64	2	+1.00	5	+0.72	3	+0.31	0	+0.10			0	+1.00
Leftist issues	7	+0.11	0	+1.00	3	+0.84	4	−0.40	0	−0.17				
Rightist issues	25	+0.46	0	−0.60	9	+0.23	13	+0.70	3	+0.46	0	−1.00	0	−1.00
Valence issues	6	+0.48	0	+1.00	3	+0.79	3	+0.21	0	−1.00			0	+1.00
Christian ethics	1	+0.14			0	−1.00	0	+1.00	0	−1.00				
Asylum seekers	4	−0.09	0	+0.83	0	+0.40	2	−0.08	0	+0.10	1	−1.00	0	0.00
Current coalition	12	−0.30	1	−1.00	7	−0.81	2	+0.96	1	+0.89			1	−1.00
Other coalitions	14	−0.38	2	−0.11	6	−0.19	3	−0.70	2	−0.94			1	+0.94
Western Eur, BC		+0.67	0	−0.25	1	+0.72	3	+0.79	1	+0.25				
Internationalism	10	+0.55	0	0.00	1	+0.86	6	+0.67	1	+0.07	0	−1.00	2	+0.59
State reforms	7	+0.87	0	+1.00	2	+0.87	4	+0.88	0	+0.33				
Percentage of votes 1990 elections			5.0		33.5		43.8		11.0		2.1		2.4	
Percentage of votes 1994 election			7.3		36.4		41.5		6.9		1.9		4.4	
Difference 1994 elections with 1993-polls			−4.30		−0.20		+8.70		−3.00		−2.30		+0.70	

Reading examples:

– about 10% of the issue news deals with environmental issues. All parties adopt a pro-environmental issue position (mean position weighted by news frequency: +0.64).

– about 5% of the issue news concerned the position of the SPD with respect to environmental issues. The media attribute a pro-environmental issue position to the SPD (on the average +0.72).

– as compared to the 1993 polls the SPD lost 0.2% at the 1994 elections (nevertheless the SPD won as compared to the 1990 elections).

– blanks indicate the absence of media attention.

– Table percentages do not add up precisely to table column percentages in the first column due to rounding off.

Table 5b. Issue coverage and electoral volatility in Netherlands (n = 1805 nuclear sentences; range issue position scale [−1 · · · + 1])

	Total media coverage		Green parties Groen Links		Social democrats PvdA		Christian democrats CDA		Economic liberals VVD		Racists CD, CP86		Others D66	
	% attention	Direction −1···+1	% attention	Direction −1···+1	% attention	Direction −1···+1	% attention	Direction −1···+1	% attention	Direction −1···+1	% attention	Direction −1···+1	% attention	Direction −1···+1
Environment	7	+0.22	1	+0.93	2	+0.12	2	−0.28	1	+0.08			2	+0.54
Leftist issues	30	+0.04	0	+0.75	9	+0.34	14	−0.06	4	−0.48			3	+0.19
Rightist issues	22	+0.35	1	−0.31	7	+0.24	8	−0.41	3	+0.54	0	+0.25	3	+0.51
Valence issues	11	+0.41	0	+0.50	4	+0.48	4	+0.22	2	+0.53			1	+0.51
Christian ethics	2	+0.14					1	+0.14	0	+0.50			0	−0.30
Asylurn seekers	13	−0.26	0	+0.88	5	−0.06	4	−0.27	3	−0.52	0	−0.86	0	−0.25
Current coalition	6	−0.28	0	+0.20	3	−0.33	1	−0.01	1	−0.57			0	−0.38
Other coalitions	3	−0.09			1	−0.10	1	−0.97	1	+0.04			1	+0.77
Western Fur, EC	1	+0.36				+0.13	0	+1.00	0	0.00			0	−0.75
Internationalism	3	+0.69			2	+0.83	1	+0.53	0	0.00				
State reforms	2	+0.92	0	+0.50	1	+0.88			0	+1.00	0	+0.50	1	+1.00
Percentage of votes 1989 elections			4.1		31.9		35.3		14.7		0.9		8.00	
Percentage of votes 1994 election			3.5		24.0		22.2		20.2		2.9		15.50	
Difference 1994 elections with 1993-polls			−4.65		7.81		−3.77		3.55		−1.00		−2.69	

Reading example:
– about 7% of the issue news deals with the environment. All parties adopt a moderate pro-environmental issue position (mean position weighted by news frequency: +0.22).
– about 2% of the issue news concerned the position of the PvdA with respect to environmental issues. The media attribute an almost neutral position to the PvdA (+0.12).
– as compared to the 1993 polls the PvdA won 7.81%. at the 1994 elections (nevertheless the PvdA lost enormously as compared to the 1989 elections).
– blanks indicate the absence of media attention.
– Table percentages of attention do not add up precisely to table column percentages in the first column due to rounding off.

represents the total amount of media attention for an issue as a percentage of total media attention for issue positions of parties. The percentages in the first column of Tables 5a and 5b total 100%. In the subsequent columns the percentage of total media attention for an issue is split up in percentages of media attention devoted to the issue positions of the various parties. For each party a second column is added to represent the mean issue position attributed to the party by the media (value range [−1 (contra) · · · +1(pro)]). According to the hypotheses developed in this article, the issue positions attributed to a party, and the percentages of attention for these positions can explain the percentage of votes gained or lost in 1994 as compared to 1993. To enable intuitive tests of the hypotheses the last rows of Tables 5a and 5b represent the percentages of votes in Germany and the Netherlands in the national elections of 1994, the percentage of votes gained or lost as compared to polls in the autumn of 1993, and the percentage of votes in the previous national elections (1990 and 1989).

We should not be surprised to find that the left-right dimension, which is the foremost important political dimension in party programmes as well as in voter beliefs both in Germany and the Netherlands (see Budge et al. 1987; Oppenhuis 1995: 132, 141; Schmidt 1996; Keman 1996) is also an important topic in political news. *Rightist issues* – taxes, the finance deficit, crime – received much attention in both countries (Germany 25.1%, the Netherlands 22.4%). The predominant mood in Germany was even more rightist than in the Netherlands. The German Christian Democrats, who traditionally 'own' rightist issues, captured them once again with pointedly rightist viewpoints (13%, +0.70). Rudolf Scharping's poor knowledge of taxation was helpful for the Christian Democrats. In March 1994 Scharping confused the pay levels at which a newly proposed solidarity tax to pay for unification would begin. During the last months of the campaign the Social Democrats came to favour rightist policies on rightist issues, but less markedly than their opponents, thereby contributing to the media emphasis on rightist issues (9%, +0.23). The liberal FDP was attributed a less outspoken position than the CDU/CSU (3%, +0.46). In the Netherlands the most determined issue position with re-spect to rightist issues was attributed to the liberal VVD (3%, +0.54). Only the Green parties in both countries and the German PDS clearly resisted the right-wing mood, but the media paid little attention to their viewpoints.

Leftist issues – social security, the poor, pensions for the elderly – attracted much concern in the Dutch media (30.0%) as compared to German media (7.0%). Dutch parties did not foresee a central role for leftist issues in the media when they launched drafts of their programmes in the autumn of 1993 since rightist themes had dominated Dutch politics since the early 1980s (Kleinnijenhuis & Rietberg 1995). Even the Social Democrats who came

to join the third coalition government under Ruud Lubbers (CDA) in 1989 supported contested cuts in social security benefits for the handicapped in 1991. With even the Social Democrats shifting to the right, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals shifted to the right even more. The Dutch Christian Democrats were the first to launch a draft of their rightist party programme in August 1993, and journalists therefore questioned why the programme devoted so few words to the achievements of Christian social policy. Journalists started to put leftist questions to CDA politicians, and wondered whether the newly-elected electoral leader, Elco Brinkman, would even be more rightist than Ruud Lubbers. On 27 January, Prof. A. Kolnaar, the politically inexperienced author of the economic sections of the party programme, announced to TV cameras that the CDA most definitely also intended reducing pensions for the elderly. These pensions, however, far from being perceived as ordinary social security benefits for the workshy, were rather seen as personal savings for which decent people had worked hard throughout their lives. From that moment on, contradictory and ambiguous statements by Brinkman and competing CDA politicians with respect to welfare state provisions (pensions, housing subsidies, minimum wages) were front page news (14% of total media attention, averaged position CDA -0.06 only). This also elicited a wave of media attention for the position of the right-wing VVD (4%, position -0.48) and the left-wing PvdA (9%, $+0.34$). A relatively leftist image ($+0.34$) devolved upon the social democrats who had lost their credibility as a leftist party following the debate on the handicapped in 1991. The German Christian Democrats lead by Helmut Kohl made no comparable political blunders. Consequently, the German Social Democrats received only one-third of the media attention for leftist viewpoints (3%) as did their PvdA comrades (9%). On leftist issues, the German SPD was opposed most vehemently by the CDU/CSU (-0.40) and not by the liberal FDP (-0.17), whereas the Dutch PvdA was opposed most vehemently by the liberal VVD (-0.48) and not by the CDA (-0.06).

The religious/moral dimension (or 'authoritarian/libertarian' dimension) of politics in Germany (Schmidt 1996: 65) and the Netherlands (Keman 1996: 218) was virtually absent in the media discourse of 1994. Issues on which orthodox authoritarian *Christian ethics* clash with libertarian views, such as abortion, euthanasia, amniocentesis, or DNA experiments, were virtually absent in the media compared with earlier election campaigns, especially in the Netherlands. Delayed attempts by some Christian Democrats to initiate a public debate on severe social pressures within the liberal Dutch society to abort Down's syndrome foetuses were either ignored or covered as news on relations between parties (Meurs, Van Praag & Brants 1995: 141). By and

large, the 1994 campaign was the first campaign without Christian ethics on the media agenda.

The toughest position on traditional *valence issues* (employment, economic growth) is attributed to the largest opposition party, i.e. to the VVD in the Netherlands (2%, +0.53) and to the SPD in Germany (3%, +0.79).

Environmental issues attracted far more concern in Germany (10.1%) than in the Netherlands (6.8%). Joschka Fischer, the 'Realo' party leader of Bündnis 90/die Grunen, hit the headlines on issues which embarrassed German society, such as the spread of plutonium, atomic energy and speed limits on highways. In the 1989 elections Dutch voters had regarded the environment as the most important topic, but widespread cynicism prevailed in 1994. The Dutch Social Democrats produced voluminous environmental plans while holding the environmental portfolio, whereas their party leader Kok consistently abandoned environmental plans in favour of infrastructural interests (expansion of the national airport, a new Rotterdam airport, a high speed train route through the remaining green parts of Holland). The PvdA attracted 2% media attention for its middle of the road position (+0.12) on environmental issues, whereas the SPD received 5% for its ecological (+0.72) SPD position. The SPD even surpassed Bündnis 90/die Grünen (2% attention).

The major German parties barely addressed the issue of immigrants in the election campaign (3.8%), probably because Germany's past had been uncomfortably revived by the international press when neo-nazi youths carried out arson attacks on centres for *asylum seekers*. In the Netherlands Frits Bolkestein, the electoral leader of the conservative liberals (VVD), advocated the maintenance of existing official policies towards immigrants and asylum seekers while using a tough, aggressive tone, so as to remain in a position refute accusations of racism while at the same time tuning in to parochial sentiment in the Netherlands: asylum seekers from outside Europe should stay in neighbouring countries; the children of illegal immigrants should be dismissed from schools (3%, −0.52). As a result of Bolkestein's statements the immigrant issue attracted a great deal of media attention in the Netherlands (12.9%). Only the Greens clearly resisted the mood towards tough policies on immigrants (+0.88), but their point of view received scant attention (less than 0.5%).

Internationalism remained relatively unimportant during the Dutch election campaign (2.8%). Dutch involvement in the UN peace corps in Bosnia, which was not perceived as engagement in a war but (somewhat optimistically) as the export of justice, rested on a consensus ranging from Groen Links to the Christian Democrats; other issues were virtually absent. Because the end of communism turned Germany's ancient, geostrategic Eastern European policy into a topical issue, foreign policy received a great deal of

positive media coverage in Germany (10%). The CDU/CSU received the lion's share (6%), probably due to its uncompromising pro-unification policy stance (Schmidt 1996: 70). German media also covered relations with the other countries of *Western Europe* (4.3%) more intensely than did the Dutch media (0.8%), attributing the lion's share once more to the CDU/CSU.

Compared to the media in the Netherlands, German media emphasized the choice of future *coalition governments* (Germany 26%, the Netherlands 9%). Helmut Kohl framed the political alternatives as a binary choice between the CDU/CSU and the communist PDS. The CDU/CSU could easily accuse the SPD of being ready to govern with the communist PDS, thus tuning in both to anti-communist resentment in East Germany and, probably more importantly, to resentment against 'Ossis's' in West Germany. After the state elections in Saxony-Anhalt in June 1994 the SPD formed a minority administration with Bündnis90/die Grünen that could survive only as long as it was tolerated by the PDS. The media hype on the SPD-PDS connection brought about a situation in which the alternatives to the CDU-FDP coalition which were discussed in the media during the last months of the national election campaign had to be denounced by the SPD (6%, −0.19) and even by Bündnis 90/die Grünen (2%, −0.11). The German coalition partners strongly defended the *current coalition* (CDU/CSU 2%, +0.96, FDP 1%, +0.89). By contrast, the Dutch coalition partners PvdA and CDA did not defend their current coalition (CDA 1%, −0.01, PvdA 3%, −0.33). Brinkman, the new CDA leader, wanted to dissociate his new CDA from the economic recession that had plagued the last years of the CDA-PvdA government. The PvdA reckoned that the economic recession would be attributed to the party of CDA prime minister Lubbers. Neither party proposed convincing alternatives (CDA 1%, −0.97; PvdA 1% −0.10). D66 was presented in the media as the most vehement solicitor for a new coalition (1%, +0.77).

The German discussion of *state reforms* (7% media attention) centres around various non-conflictual modes of autonomy for the already relatively autonomous Länder (see Colomer 1996: 12; Schmidt 1996). The Dutch discussion (2% media attention) centres around the D66 proposals for constitutional amendments to have local mayors elected and referenda by popular initiative.

Tests of preconditions for issue voting

It is impossible to recognize issue owners if all parties address all issues equally often. Issue voting presumes that parties emphasize different issues (presumption P1, issue ownership). A simple χ^2-test of association on the cross-tables of the (frequencies underlying the) percentages of party attention for various issues displayed in the Tables 5a and 5b suffices to test the

presumption (null hypothesis P0: no relationship between party and issue). With 11 issues and 6 parties, the degrees of freedom for the test amount to 10 $\times$ 5 = 50. The media do indeed associate parties with specific issues in the Netherlands (χ^2 = 311, df = 50, $p < 0.001$, ϕ = 0.42, Cramèr's V = 0.19). In Germany, selective emphasis is even more apparent than in the Netherlands (χ^2 = 442, df = 50, $p < 0.001$, ϕ = 0.57, Cramèr's V = 0.25).

Directional theory and proximity theory presume that parties have different positions on issues (presumption P2). An analysis of variance with the issue position attributed to a party as the dependent variable suffices to test this presumption. The null presumption P0 maintains that the main parties will have almost identical positions on a given issue. This null presumption allows for the possibility that the (identical) issue positions of all parties vary from one issue to another, i.e., for a main effect of the issue at hand on the issue positions of parties (e.g., all parties for valence issues, but against asylum seekers). The presumption that parties take different issue positions comes down to a party-issue interaction. Party-issue interaction effects differ significantly from 0 in both models (Germany: $F_{37,1319}$ = 13.6; $p < 0.001$; the Netherlands: $F_{35,1754}$ = 6.35, $p < 0.001$). For the German case, a model with the interaction of party and issue included shows an adjusted R^2 of 0.41 (as compared to an adjusted R^2 of 0.19 without interaction). For the Netherlands, the assumption that issue positions vary from party to party amounts to an adjusted R^2 of 0.23 (as compared to an adjusted R^2 of 0.12 without interaction). Thus, media coverage allows for proximity voting and directional voting, both in Germany and the Netherlands. However, in Germany the interaction effect is stronger than in the Netherlands. The variance *between* the mean issue positions as compared to the variance *within* issue positions of parties is larger in Germany than in the Netherlands. In other words: the issue positions of parties in 1994 showed fewer overlaps in Germany than they did in the Netherlands.

Issue news effects per party family

The basic question of this paper is whether the issue positions attributed to parties and the amount of attention to them displayed in Tables 5a and 5b account for the change in the percentage of votes in 1994 as compared to 1993. For each party family (see Table 3) a qualitative answer will be given first. A formal test of hypotheses H1 and H2 will then be provided.

The German *Christian Democrats* won 8.7% whereas their Dutch comrades lost 3.8%. The German media emphasized the issues owned by the CDU/CSU, e.g. rightist issues (22%), internationalism (10%) and relations with other Western European countries (4%). German media rather neglected the strong issues of other parties, especially leftist issues (7%). The Dutch

media, on the other hand, paid much attention to issues not owned by the CDA, especially to leftist issues (30%). Directional theory predicts the same pattern as issue ownership theory. CDA positions with respect to leftist issues (−0.06), rightist issues (+0.41) and the quality of the current coalition (−0.01) were less outspoken and less consistent than corresponding CDU/CSU positions (−0.40, +0.70 and +0.96 respectively).

The German *Social Democrats* lost narrowly (−0.2%) whereas their Dutch comrades won as compared to 1993 (+7.8%). Attention for leftist issues was much higher in the Netherlands (30%) than in Germany (7%). Although the Greens expressed PvdA opinions more vehemently than the PvdA itself, the PvdA received much more attention.

The relative gains of the *economic liberals* (VVD) in the Netherlands (+3.5%) and the relative losses of the FDP (−3.0%) are also easily explained by directional theory. As compared to other Dutch parties, the VVD (led by Frits Bolkestein) was the most outspoken party. This holds for VVD-owned issues, i.e. rightist issues (+0.54) and asylum seekers (−0.52), but also for other issues such as leftist issues (−0.48) and the current coalition (−0.57). According to the German media, the FDP was less outspoken than the CDU/CSU on almost every issue.

The losses of the Greens and the Extreme Right as compared to 1993 are easily explained by a shortage of media attention during the last months of the campaign. As compared to the 1990 election the German Greens performed well, however, possibly because of the 10% media attention for Green issues (the environment). In the Netherlands, where Green issues were less emphasized in 1994 (7%), the Greens also lost in comparison with the 1989 elections.

D66 and the PDS do not belong to comparable party families. Directional theory predicts the losses of D66 as compared to 1993. The party managed to express firm beliefs only with respect to environmental issues (+0.54) and the desirability of another coalition (+0.77), but these issues received less attention in the Netherlands than they did in Germany. The news in the investigated (West German) media does not account for the victory of the PDS at all.

Formal tests of issue news effects

Table 6 summarizes the predictions of the change in numbers of votes for a party based on the two theories. The theories are tested for all parties in both countries (n = 12), for the parties in the Netherlands (n = 6) and for the parties in Germany (n = 6) for the campaign as a whole (table columns with 'campaign shifts'). The theories were tested on a weekly basis. On the basis of weekly issue coverage, the difference between a party's electoral support according to opinion polls in the subsequent week and the party's

Table 6. Influence of issue coverage on electoral volatility

	Both countries		Germany		The Netherlands	
	Campaign shifts	Weekly shifts	Campaign shifts	Weekly shifts	Difference campaign	Weekly shifts
Theory	(n = 12)	(n = 116)	(n = 6)	(n = 43)	(n = 6)	(n = 73)
Issue ownership	0.64*	0.09	0.91*	0.11	0.30	0.09
Issue ownership extra (hypothesis H1)	0.71**	0.07	0.92**	0.05	0.46	0.12
Proximity, directional (hypothesis H2)	0.63*	0.16*	0.81*	0.24	0.62	0.14
Attention	0.59*	0.14	0.74	0.22	0.43	0.09

*Significant $p < 0.05$ (one-sided test); **Significant $p < 0.01$ (one-sided test).

electoral support during the foregoing week were predicted (n = 116 party-week-combinations). Simple correlation coefficients will be used as a measure of the effect of issue news, since both the independent indicators of media coverage and the dependent shifts in party preference were measured on an interval level of measurement. The columns of the table refer to the theories being tested: issue ownership theory (hypothesis H1) and proximity theory and directional theory (hypothesis H2). Two variants of issue ownership are included (with and without issues raised during recent campaigns). The total number of nuclear sentences devoted to issue positions of a party ('attention') is added as a basic predictor of the volatility. This simple predictor reflects the basic idea that the more news a party generates the more it will win at elections.

A glance at Table 6 reveals that *all* correlations are positive, although not all correlation coefficients are significant from a statistical point of view. Nevertheless, the absence of negative correlation coefficients supports the general thesis that media coverage influences the aggregate vote.

Campaign shifts in party preference correspond reasonably well with the predictions made by issue ownership theory and directional theory (correlation coefficients ranging from 0.46 to 0.92). Issue voting theories are superior to the simple attention model in both countries. Both theories perform better in Germany (0.92, 0.81) than they do in the Netherlands (0.46, 0.62). This result is consistent with the tests of the preconditions for issue voting which indicated that in 1994 voters in Germany were more enabled to vote on the basis of issues than were Dutch voters. The changes in electoral support in the year preceding the elections are best predicted by directional theory in the case of the Netherlands and by issue ownership theory in the case of

Germany. This difference between the Netherlands and Germany suggests that if an incumbent prime minister runs again for office, issue ownership might be exploited simply by bringing old issues to the fore (i.e., Germany's policy towards Eastern Europe, possible coalitions with former communists concealed in the PDS). In the case of an open race, on the other hand, as in the Netherlands, relatively outspoken parties have an advantage, especially on new issues (e.g., asylum seekers). Here directional theory (+0.62) outperforms issue ownership theory (+0.30). This view is supported by the fact that the coefficient for the issue ownership model in the Netherlands increases from +0.30 to +0.46 only by adding the issue of asylum seekers, which was addressed primarily by the VVD in the last months of the campaign, to the list of issues 'owned' by the VVD (the 'issue ownership extra' model).

Weekly shifts in party preferences according to opinion polls are less easily explained. Of course, this is consistent with the statistical insight that observed weekly shifts in polls are partly due to sampling variance. Nevertheless weekly predictions on the basis of issue voting theories correlate positively with observed weekly changes in party preferences (correlations ranging from 0.05 to 0.24). Directional theory provides the best explanation for weekly shifts in electoral support ($r = 0.16$ for both countries (significant)). Certainly, correlations between 0.05 and 0.24 are less than impressive. For campaigning purposes, more refined lag distribution models as well as additional data on issue preferences, perceived issue competences and media use within various segments of voters should be used to increase the predictive power of the weekly news.

Discussion

The media appear to play an important role in the modern publicity process which links parties to voters. Studies on the effects of media on voters have pointed at personalization and attention for 'the horse race' (Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Groebel et al. 1994, but see Kaase 1994), as well as on the effects of negative and positive media evaluations of parties and politicians (see Fan & Tims 1990). This article reports further evidence that the media also play a non-trivial role in the transmission of issue emphasis and the issue positions of parties.

Germany and the Netherlands, the two countries compared in this article, might be considered as being most similar in terms of voter considerations and the parties available for voters. Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Economic Liberals dominate the scene in both countries, with the Greens and the Extreme Right in minor roles. Individual voting behaviour is steered similarly in both countries by a left-right ideological scheme, party size, class

and religion, the perceived performance of the current government and issue orientation (Oppenhuis 1995: 146). Nevertheless, the 1994 elections in the Netherlands resulted in the heaviest political landslide this century, whereas elections in Germany in the same year resulted only in minor changes.

Two theories of issue voting were applied to the media coverage of issues so as to explain these extremely different outcomes in otherwise similar cases. Issue ownership theory (Budge & Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996) predicts that a party will win at elections whenever the issues it owns dominate the news. A leftist party will therefore win when the news deals primarily with social security issues. Proximity theory and directional theory (Downs 1957; Rabinowitz & McDonald 1989) take into account the issue positions attributed to parties in the news. In this view, a leftist party will win when clear-cut issue positions of the leftists dominate the news. In order to test the theories a content analysis method (Van Cuilenburg et al. 1986; De Ridder 1994a) was applied to code, at the level of sentences the issue emphasis and issue positions of parties reported by national newspapers and television news magazines. Data on election outcomes and weekly opinion polls were also obtained.

The two theories do indeed enable an explanation of the election outcomes in Germany and the Netherlands. The CDU/CSU could win since the German media emphasized the issues it owned (rightist issues, relations with Eastern Europe). Outspoken positions were attributed to the party (e.g., no future coalitions tolerated by the PDS). The Dutch Christian Democrats, however, were bound to lose since the media were dominated by issues not owned by them. On no single issue were clear-cut viewpoints attributed to them. The major emphasis on leftist issues in the Dutch media constituted the major difference between the situation for the successful Social Democrats (as compared to 1993) and their unsuccessful German comrades. The economic liberals in the Netherlands (VVD) could win, in contrast to their German relatives (FDP), due to the clear-cut positions attributed to them on a large number of issues, especially on the issues it owned (rightist issues) or captured (asylum seekers from the extreme right parties). In Germany, extreme right parties could create almost no news with respect to immigrants and asylum seekers during the decisive phase of the campaign. Green issues were not dominant during the decisive phase of the campaign either. The Social Democrats in Germany and D66 in the Netherlands also competed for the Green vote with clear-cut viewpoints.

Correlations between predictions on the basis of the issue voting theories, on the one hand, and shifts in party preferences during the campaign as a whole and during separate weeks, on the other, indicate that issue ownership is the best theory with which to explain aggregate changes in party

popularity during the campaign in Germany. In Germany the voters could stick to their incumbent chancellor, Helmut Kohl, whereas in the Netherlands an open race took place since Ruud Lubbers, who had been prime minister for twelve years, was to resign. Theories which take into account the issue positions attributed to parties perform slightly better in explaining the weekly shifts in party preferences and the shifts during the campaign period in the Netherlands. This pattern of results is quite plausible, since issue ownership relies on recall of prior political beliefs from long-term memory (primacy effect), while directional theory relies on the immediate availability of recent impressions (recency effect). When no incumbent party leader is available, fewer cues to trigger long-term memory will be present and this will result in relatively poor predictions on the basis of issue ownership. In the case of an 'incumbent' party leader (e.g., Kohl), voters may vote more readily on the basis of issue positions taken by parties in the past.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. If the distribution of the voters' issue preferences is J-shaped (valence issues, almost all voters prefer the same direction) or U-shaped (polarized pro-contra issues: voters prefer either one view or the other) then parties with extreme viewpoints will win (hypothesis H2). Since many voters who do not care much about an issue and will not vote on the basis of that issue are inclined to regard their personal issue preference as being almost neutral, even rectangular and W-shaped distributions might effectively come down to U-shaped distributions (which amount to hypothesis H2). But in the case of strictly normal or ∩-shaped distributions of voter preferences in multi-party, multi-issue system, the optimal party position to attract voters is subject to debate (see Hinich & Ordeshook 1970).

2. Periods of unequal length were chosen because the election campaign in the Netherlands had an early start in January as a result of the media hype following the Christian Democrat proposal of 27–28 January to freeze old-age pensions. The election campaign in Germany started after the summer holidays (at the end of August). Inclusion of the short campaign for the European elections (12 May) would also have been a good choice for

the German case, since this campaign revealed the remarkable revival of the Christian Democrats.

3. The percentage base in the tables in the rest of this article is the total number of nuclear sentences devoted to the issue positions of parties (26%, and 24% respectively of all nuclear sentences, see Table 2). Strictly speaking, for testing issue ownership theory nuclear sentences representing facts, issue evaluations by the media, causal assertions, and so on, also are relevant (44% and 46% respectively of all nuclear sentences, see Table 2). High correlations are to be noted however between the total number of sentences devoted to an issue and the number of issue position sentences devoted to that issue, even on a weekly basis ($r > 0.96$). So the main results with respect to issue ownership (Table 6) are not dependent upon this operational choice to test issue ownership theory on the data specified by rival theories (changes <0.02 in reported correlation coefficients in Table 6).

4. This weighting procedure is equivalent to not taking into account the issue area. The directional predictor is simply a linear function of the sum of the absolute values of the issue positions of that party $\sum_i |POS(party)_i|$, where $POS(party)_i$ refers to the issue position attributed to that party in sentence i. The party-independent absolute sign represents the assumption that parties will always bet on their best side of an issue. When the possible government coalitions are at stake, the operationalization of the 'best side' is obvious. The right side for a governing party is assumed to be to defend the current coalition and to attack alternatives to it. For opposition parties the opposite will be assumed.

5. An analysis using the polytomous issue emphasis indicators of Laver & Hunt (1992) was also carried out. For six of the eleven issues an imperfect match was found (environment – environment vs growth; leftist – public ownership; rightist – cut taxes; Christian ethics – (anti) permissive social policy; internationalism – pro USSR; state reforms – decentralization). For non-available issues in the Laver/Hunt-data the scores of Table 4 were added. The German PDS and racist parties from the Netherlands were excluded from the analysis. Because the match between issues in the media and issues in the Laver/Hunt research was far from perfect, and because the results based on the Laver/Hunt data were highly similar to the results based on 'arbitrary' dichotomous assumptions (cf. Table 4) which will be reported in Table 6, the results based on the Laver/Hunt data with respect to issue ownership will not be reported here.

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