

Abstract (English)

Political competition, at least to some extent, means competition between political actors regarding different political issues. However, the connection between parties and issues follows specific patterns. Some parties are more likely to be associated with an issue or perceived as more competent in dealing with it than their competitors. These patterns are described by the concept of ‘issue ownership’.

This master thesis examines whether and under which circumstances ‘issue ownership’ perceptions are ‘biased’ by a person’s news media consumption. In this context ‘media bias’ is defined as a *deviation of an equal treatment of parties in political coverage, that is neither a pure reflection of structural differences between parties, nor a reflection of parties’ own communication activities*. Such ‘bias’ is expected when susceptible recipients (e.g., people with no preexisting issue ownership perceptions or a high level of media trust) are exposed to an issue-specific coverage in which some parties are more visible and better evaluated than their competitors.

To empirically investigate this expectation, I combine content analyses of newspaper coverage and party communication activities with survey data, in context of the 2017 Austrian election campaign (AUTNES 2017). Conditional logistic regression models with a lagged dependent variable are used to estimate the likelihood of a party (SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, The Greens, Liste Pilz) to be perceived as associative or competence issue owner of seven different issues (‘Job Market and Employment’, ‘Immigration’, ‘European Integration’, ‘Economy’, ‘Environment’, ‘Corruption’, ‘Pensions’).

The results show that newspapers differed in how they have reported about parties in their coverage of specific issues, so that respondents were exposed to different information about the connection between parties and issues. However, a significant effect of this coverage in terms of ‘media bias’ is not found across the board, but only among specific groups. Attitudinal predispositions like preexisting issue ownership perceptions, party ambivalence, media trust or political sophistication enhance or limit a person’s susceptibility to ‘media bias’. But which kind of predispositions are important in this matter and how differs between issues and for different types of ‘media bias’ (visibility and tonality).

Keywords: issue ownership; election campaigns; media coverage; media consumption