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Issue without Owner? Issue Ownership, Loss of Parliamentary
Representation and Party Issue Strategies

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David Thaler BA

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Abstract

Issue ownership theory is well established in the research on electoral behavior and party competition. However, little attention has been given to its effects in the parliamentary arena. Rising electoral volatility increases the risk for small parties to fail at re-entering parliament. When such a case occurs, it impacts the conditions which the remaining parties base their strategic considerations on, particularly if the missing party holds clear ownership over an issue. But how exactly does the loss of parliamentary representation of the issue owning party impact the remaining parties' parliamentary issue strategies? Drawing from existing literature the main hypothesis of this thesis postulates an increase of parliamentary issue trespassing. Additional hypotheses expect an amplification of that effect by high competition over votes with the issue owning party and high issue salience in the general public. On an individual level, the effect is expected to be stronger for members of the committee responsible for the issue and members of parliament who won their seat in a constituency where the issue owning party is strong. Parliamentary issue trespassing is operationalized as an increase of the probability of parliamentary questions (PQs) being concerned with the owned issue. This thesis investigates the case of the Green party in Austria, which holds clear ownership over the issue *Environment* and had lost representation in the National Council between 2017 and 2019. The hypotheses are tested using logistic regression models ($n=32424$ and $n=9117$) built with data on PQs provided by the Austrian Parliament. The findings show an increase of the probability of a PQ initiated by the remaining parties being concerned with the issue *Environment* by 1.7 percentage points from 4.3% to 6%. This signifies a relative increase in probability of almost 40% and provides great support for the main hypothesis. The results also present evidence for an increase of the main effect by the grade of competition over votes and the strength of the issue owning party in the constituency. No evidence was found supporting the expected effects of committee membership and issue salience. These results imply that the remaining parties do react to the issue owning party losing parliamentary representation with the resulting increase in issue trespassing potentially weakening the established issue ownership.

Zusammenfassung

Issue Ownership (dt.: Themenführerschaft) ist ein weitverbreitetes Konzept zur Analyse von Wahlverhalten und Parteienwettbewerb. Die Auswirkungen von Issue Ownership in der parlamentarischen Arena wurden allerdings bisher wenig erforscht. Der weit verbreitete Anstieg an elektoraler Volatilität erhöht das Risiko für kleinere Parteien, am Wiedereinzug ins Parlament zu scheitern. Tritt so ein Fall ein, verändert sich die Ausgangslage, anhand welcher Parteien ihre strategischen Überlegungen ausrichten, insbesondere wenn die fehlende Partei eine klare Themenführerschaft innehat. Aber wie genau beeinflusst der Verlust parlamentarischer Repräsentation einer die Themenführerschaft innehabenden Partei die parlamentarischen Issue-Strategien der übrigen Parteien? Aufbauend auf bestehender Literatur nimmt die Haupthypothese dieser Arbeit eine Zunahme von parlamentarischem Issue Trespassing an. Zusätzliche Hypothesen gehen davon aus, dass höherer Wettbewerb um Wählerstimmen sowie höhere Salienz des Themas in der Bevölkerung diesen Effekt verstärken. Auf Individualebene wird angenommen, dass der Effekt für Mitglieder des mit dem betreffenden Thema befassten Ausschusses sowie für Abgeordnete, welche ihr Mandat in einem Wahlkreis gewonnen haben, in welchem die Partei mit Themenführerschaft stark ist, zunimmt. Parlamentarisches Issue Trespassing wird als Zunahme der Wahrscheinlichkeit von parlamentarischen Anfragen zum Issue, über welches die fehlende Partei die Themenführerschaft inne hat, operationalisiert. Die vorliegende Arbeit behandelt den Fall der Partei „Die Grünen - Die Grüne Alternative“ in Österreich, welche die Themenführerschaft über das Umweltthema inne hat und zwischen 2017 und 2019 nicht im Nationalrat vertreten war. Um die Hypothesen zu testen werden auf Basis von Daten zu parlamentarischen Anfragen, welche das Österreichische Parlament bereitstellt, mittels logistischer Regression mehrere Modelle ($n = 32424$ bzw. $n = 9117$) erzeugt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen eine Zunahme der Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass die verbliebenen Parteien eine Anfrage zum Umweltthema stellen, für die Zeit, in welcher die Grünen nicht im Nationalrat vertreten waren, um 1,7 Prozentpunkte von 4,3% auf 6%. Diese relative Zunahme um fast 40% bestätigt die Haupthypothese. Außerdem zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass dieser Effekt durch höheren Stimmenwettbewerb und die Stärke der Themenführer-Partei im Wahlkreis verstärkt wird. Die angenommenen Effekte von Ausschussmitgliedschaft bzw. von der Salienz des Themas konnten nicht nachgewiesen werden. Diese Resultate zeigen, dass die übrigen Parteien auf das Ausscheiden der Themenführer-Partei reagieren. Der daraus resultierende Anstieg an Issue Trespassing hat das Potential, die etablierte Themenführerschaft abzuschwächen.

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I Introduction

Issue ownership, understood as the identification of a party with a specific topic based on competence (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996) or automatic association (Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2015; Walgrave, Lefevere, and Nuytemans 2009), is a well-established concept in the research on electoral behavior and party competition (Lefevere, Tresch, and Walgrave 2015). It has its origins in studies on two-party systems, mainly the US, but it has been adopted to explain parties' issue strategies in multi-party systems as well (Enns-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al. 2022; Farkas, Burai, and Bene 2024). As of yet, very little research has investigated the effect of issue ownership on parties' behavior outside the electoral arena, e. g. in parliament. Existing findings indicate that parties' issue ownership does affect their parliamentary behavior. Otjes and Louwerse (2018) report that parties' issue ownership influences the thematic focus of their written parliamentary questions (PQs). Ivanusch (2024) finds an effect of issue ownership on the thematic focus of parliamentary speeches.

Electoral volatility (Bischoff 2013; Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2017) and party system instability (Drummond 2006) have been on the rise in Western democracies. In extreme cases, these factors, combined with entry thresholds, can cause parties to lose parliamentary representation. The resulting changes in the party composition of parliaments alter the conditions which determine parties' strategic considerations and offer opportunities for their adaptation. This effect can be expected to be particularly strong if the missing party exhibits a clear issue focus. The consequences are especially dire for these parties, because following the loss of parliamentary representation they are also at risk of losing their issue ownership status. The case of the Green party in Austria exhibits all these characteristics. The party was not represented in the Austrian National Council between 2017 and 2019 and has a longstanding record of ownership over the issue *Environment* (Meyer and Müller 2013). Another recent example is the German liberal party (*Freie Demokratische Partei*, FDP), which had lost its representation in the German Bundestag between 2013 and 2017 and holds ownership over the issue of *Justice* (Krauss, Praprotnik, and Gross 2025). Following these considerations the question arises: how does the loss of parliamentary representation of the issue owning party impact the remaining parties' parliamentary issue strategies?

The relevance of this question is twofold. Firstly, it sheds light on the consequences of losing parliamentary representation as the issue owning party, which becomes increas-

ingly common due to the changes in electoral behavior outlined above. Secondly, it tests the application of theories on party and candidate behavior in electoral competition in the parliamentary arena, potentially expanding their scope.

This research question is rooted in the field of issue competition, dominated by two theoretical approaches. The aforementioned issue ownership theory proposes that parties emphasize issues in which they are seen as competent by the voters (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). The riding the wave theory offers an alternative explanation. Its proponents argue that parties put their focus on issues which are important to the electorate (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Both concepts mostly focus on electoral campaigns and are commonly used to explain issue strategies.

Issue trespassing is a concept related to issue ownership. It describes a party addressing an issue over which a different party holds ownership with the goal of taking over said issue (Norpoth and Buchanan 1992). Analog to issue ownership it is mainly focused on the electoral arena, but its scope may be extended to the parliamentary arena as well. Parliamentary issue trespassing describes the focus other parties put on the owned issue in their parliamentary work including legislative proposals, PQs and speeches.

The absence of the issue owning party from parliament reduces its public visibility, e. g. in the media and does not allow it to directly counter acts of issue trespassing in parliament. Thus, this situation offers an opportunity for the remaining parties to utilize parliamentary issue trespassing to weaken the ownership, capture some voters and maybe even take over the issue. Therefore, this thesis' main expectation is an increase in parliamentary issue trespassing during the period in which the issue owning party is not represented in parliament. In greater detail, a higher increase of issue trespassing is expected for parties with higher competition over votes with the issue owning party and for times with increased issue salience in the general public. On the level of individual members of parliament (MPs), a higher increase of issue trespassing is proposed for MPs who are members of the committee responsible for the issue in question and for MPs who won their seat in a constituency where the issue owning party is particularly strong.

This thesis investigates the case of the Green party in Austria. It holds clear ownership over the issue *Environment*. Following the 2017 legislative election, the Greens lost their parliamentary representation until they re-entered the National Council after the 2019 legislative elections. Because of limitations in scope, not all forms of parliamentary behavior can be analyzed in this thesis. PQs are used to depict parliamentary behavior,

because they are not constraint by the parliamentary agenda, they allow the analysis of individual behavior of MPs and a large number of observations is available. Parliamentary issue trespassing is operationalized as an increase in the probability of a PQ being concerned with the owned issue. The hypotheses are tested using logistic regression models based on datasets built with data provided by the Austrian Parliament, the Austrian Press Agency (APA) as well as election results.

The results show an increase of the probability of the remaining parties initiating a PQ concerned with the issue *Environment* during the time the Green party was not represented in the National Council by 1.7 percentage points from 4.3% to 6%. This signifies a relative increase of almost 40%. Therefore, the findings show strong support for the main hypothesis. They also provide evidence that this main effect increases with the grade of competition over votes and with the strength of the Greens in the constituency an MP won his or her seat. No effect was found for membership in the committee responsible for the issue in question. Further analysis showed that the effect of committee membership is party specific, but not to a degree which would allow generalization. Opposed to the expectations, high issue salience in the general public decreases the main effect. Implications of these findings beyond the researched case are discussed in the conclusion.

The next section presents the current state of literature concerned with common issue strategies and the effects of issue ownership and subsequently develops the hypotheses. After that follows a section arguing the case selection and describing the peculiarities of the selected case. The subsequent section gives an overview over the data used and specifies the variables. Before the closing remarks in the conclusion the detailed results are presented and discussed.

2 Theory and Hypotheses

2.1 Issue Competition

Before going further it is important to outline the broader theoretical discussion in which this thesis is based. Centrally important is the overarching field of party competition, particularly the area of research focusing on issue competition.

One famous school of thought is the positional theory based on the works of Anthony Downs (1957). The spatial model developed by Downs proposes that parties differentiate themselves from one another by taking distinct positions on different political issues in

the one-dimensional space. In order to express their distinct positions, political parties have to discuss the same topics. This behavior has been called issue convergence (Amorós and Puy 2013; Damore 2005; Sigelman and Buell 2004), issue engagement (Meyer and Wagner 2016; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015; Seeberg 2022) or dialogue (Simon 2002, p. 1).

The salience and valence theories offer alternative perspectives. Valence theory is based on Stokes' (1963) response to Downs' ideas. He distinguished between position issues, which follow Downs' idea of parties offering different positions, and valence issues, where there is one clear stance among the parties and in the electorate but parties are more or less associated with these issues (Stokes 1963, p. 373). According to Stokes, the distinction between these types of issues can only be determined empirically. Additionally, he argued that not only positional shifts bring along electoral changes but also changes in the importance of the issue dimensions to the electorate (Stokes 1963, p. 372).

Salience theory builds on these assumptions. In their works, Budge and Farlie (1983) and Robertson (1976) proposed that parties in electoral competition do not offer different solutions to policy problems but focus on the issues that are advantageous for themselves and try to ignore their competitors' issues. Unlike Stokes' valence theory they argued that almost all issue positions of political parties are valence issues (Dolezal et al. 2014; Budge 2001). This strategy is called selective emphasis (Budge and Farlie 1983). The consequence of these strategic considerations is issue divergence, meaning that different parties or candidates discuss different issues (Amorós and Puy 2013; Damore 2005; Sigelman and Buell 2004).

Empirical findings for the expectations of the aforementioned competing theories are inconclusive. Existing literature has shown that selective emphasis is a widespread strategy (Wagner and Meyer 2014; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015; Seeberg 2022). But at the same time, issue convergence in electoral campaigns is common in two-party systems, as Sigelman and Buell (2004) and Damore (2005) showed for US presidential elections, as well as in multi-party systems, as Dolezal et al. (2014) showed for the case of Austria. Seeberg (2022) proposed that the contradicting findings at least partly stem from the type of data used. He argued that issue convergence is found more in campaign statements, in which parties are forced to react and position themselves on certain issues. Selective emphasis on the other hand is more common in election manifestos, where parties have full control over the exact content.

The literature on agenda-setting tries to bring both perspectives together. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) argue that parties have to respond to the common political agenda, which leads to issue engagement. At the same time they try to shape the agenda according to their interests through selective emphasis.

So while the general existence of selective emphasis is agreed on and can, to a certain extent, be empirically proven, there is further disagreement about which factors determine the issues parties put their emphasis on (Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016, p. 4). The riding the wave approach assumes that parties base their issue emphasis on the importance of the topic to the electorate (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Klüver and Sagarzazu (2016) call this the bottom-up process of issue competition, meaning the change of the political agenda is driven by the voters.

The alternative school of thought is the issue ownership theory based on the works of Budge and Farlie (1983) and Petrocik (1996). They proposed that some parties are seen as more competent in handling specific topics by the electorate and thus mainly focus their attention on these topics. Accordingly, Klüver and Sagarzazu (2016) classify this as the top down process of issue competition. The following section will discuss the concept of issue ownership in detail.

2.2 Issue Ownership

Budge and Farlie (1983) argued that selective emphasis is the predominant form of party competition. Regarding the reason for this behavior, they write: “Parties stress particular issues because they almost always work in their favor - they do, in a real sense, ‘own’ them” (Budge and Farlie 1983, p. 271). Their analysis using election manifestos from Britain and the US indeed showed that selective emphasis is far more common than direct confrontation. They also demonstrated the influence the salience of owned issues has on electoral success or failure of parties using data from 23 diverse democracies.

Petrocik (1996) defined a theory of issue ownership, following the already mentioned assumption of some parties, respectively candidates, being viewed by the electorate as more capable than others at handling specific issues. He differentiated between party constituency issues and performance issues. Party constituency issues are the problems most important to a party’s main constituency and are thus naturally linked to the party. This relationship is seen as long term and relatively stable. Performance issues are concerned with short term developments, mostly international or national crises, and propose the

view that the incumbent is not able to handle these issues well. This benefits the challenging candidate or party.

Using data from the US presidential elections between 1960 and 1992, with a particular focus on the 1980 election, as well as survey data, Petrocik (1996) showed that parties are seen as more capable than their competitors in handling specific issues and that candidates put particular emphasis on issues their party owns. He also demonstrated that the issue focus of voters has an impact on their vote choice which is independent from their party affiliation.

The origins of the concept of issue ownership clearly demonstrate two characteristics. Firstly, the application of the concept focuses on two-party systems, particularly on the case of the US. Secondly, most existing research concentrates on the area of electoral competition, including both electoral behavior and party competition (Lefevere, Tresch, and Walgrave 2015). Therefore it is important to consider if the arguments are fit to be applied to multi-party systems and to be used to explain political behavior outside of campaigns.

There are certain differences in party competition between two-party and multi-party systems. In two-party systems, a party's orientation on majority opinion is the only sensible strategy, while in multi-party systems it can be profitable for some parties to adopt minority positions (Dolezal et al. 2014). In multi-party systems party competition may be less intense between potential coalition partners, a consideration which does not exist in two-party systems (Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016).

One of the main applications of issue ownership theory is explaining party behavior in issue competition during electoral campaigns (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Damore 2004). Another strand of literature applying the concept of issue ownership aims to explain electoral behavior (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Lachat 2014; Petitpas and Sciarini 2018; Petitpas and Sciarini 2022). However, some relatively recent works have used the concept to investigate parties' behavior during the entire electoral cycle (Klüver and Sagarzazu 2016; Peeters, Van Aelst, and Praet 2021). Their findings showed that issue ownership also impacts party behavior outside of direct electoral competition.

Some very recent articles have even diverged from the common theme of using election manifestos and press releases as data and have investigated the effects of issue ownership in the parliamentary area (Otjes and Louwerse 2018; Poljak and Seeberg 2024; Ivanusch 2024). The strict agenda in parliaments constrains the influence (opposition) parties have on issue selection and emphasis surrounding legislation. Other parliamen-

tary instruments offer greater opportunity to express issue focus. The results suggest that it is worth to analyze this area further, which this thesis aims to do.

Why should parties care to attain and keep issue ownership? Davidsson and Marx (2013) used the cases of Germany and Sweden to research the factors leading to a welfare state retrenchment strategy. They argued that high salience of unemployment and great changes in the competence ratings of parties for the economic issue (competence issue ownership), which shifted from Social Democratic to Conservative parties, triggered issue competition and lead to the retrenchment strategy in Germany. For both the Swedish and the German Social Democratic party, the loss and inability to regain their ownership over the issue of *Economy* was the key factor which lead to electoral loss (Davidsson and Marx 2013, pp. 514, 518). This shows that losing issue ownership can have clear electoral consequences, though it is important to consider that multiple factors, like being part of the government, high issue salience and disadvantageous circumstances, like an economic crisis, have to be present for this effect.

The classic understanding of issue ownership outlined above has later been called competence issue ownership. The more recently developed concept of associative issue ownership offers an alternative understanding. It sees issue ownership mainly as the automatic and spontaneous association of an issue with a political party by the voter (Walgrave, Lefevere, and Nuytemans 2009; Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave 2015). The following section will highlight the concept of issue trespassing, which draws from issue ownership theory, and present the hypotheses.

2.3 Issue Trespassing

As with issue ownership theory in general, especially the earlier literature on issue trespassing is highly focused on the US, a two-party presidential system. Norpoth and Buchanan (1992) studied the impact of issue trespassing on the voters' perception and voting behavior in the 1988 US presidential elections. They showed that the acts of issue trespassing had little effect on the candidates positions perceived by the voters and even possibly a negative effect on the election results by making the opponents topics more present. This shows that issue trespassing carries relatively high risks. Holian (2004) presented a more successful case of issue trespassing from the 1996 US presidential election. He showed through content analysis of media coverage, presidential statements and congressional

hearings how the Democrat's candidate Bill Clinton was able to take over the Republican owned issue of *Crime*. This was possible through first gaining credibility on the issue by supporting the death penalty and then re-framing the topic by shifting the focus from punishment to prevention. Both articles focus on electoral campaigns instead of the parliamentary arena, but the high risk of making the issue owning party profit electorally through increased salience of their issue, which is immanent to issue trespassing, can be regarded as universal.

Another strand of literature focuses on the effect party communication in media has on issue ownership. Walgrave, Lefevere, and Nuytemans (2009) conducted experimental research on the effect of media communication on issue ownership surrounding the 2007 general election in Belgium. They base their work on the concept of competence issue ownership. The treatment in the experiment consisted of a short fake media statement on one particular issue by one or two party leaders. Their results showed that party communication can improve the competence issue ownership scores on topics which are in possession of no party and help to keep owned topics in possession. They also stated that issue trespassing can improve the grade of ownership but only if the issue owning party is not present in the discussion. It can be argued that this finding is also applicable to the parliamentary arena, meaning that the absence of the issue owning party makes successful issue trespassing possible. Tresch, Lefevere, and Walgrave (2015) implemented a very similar experimental design, also in Belgium, but utilizing the concept of associative issue ownership. They report a reinforcement effect of party communication on associative issue ownership if the strength of the ownership was previously moderate. This effect persisted in the long term but with a decrease over time. According to their research, issue trespassing has no effect on associative issue ownership.

Seeberg (2020) analyzed different strategies parties can use to influence other parties' issue ownership. He calls this an issue ownership attack. It is similar to the concept of issue trespassing but only focuses on decreasing the opposing parties' ownership without trying to take over the issue. The analysis focused on mainstream parties and was conducted via survey experiments in Denmark and the US. The results showed that re-framing the issue or blaming the opposing party for their performance can be successful strategies while merely trying to adopt the issue by changing the own policy position generally fails.

Abou-Chadi (2016) investigated the differences in policy impact between different niche parties. He compared Green and radical right parties and argued that since *Environment* is a high valence topic and the Green parties are strong issue owners, mainstream parties have no incentive to adopt the issue or trespass on it, because doing so would increase the salience and thus the chance of the Green party gaining support. If the issue owning party is not present in parliament, the consequences of this are lower because the issue owning party currently lacks electoral support. Thus the incentive for other parties to trespass increases.

The literature shows that issue trespassing is relatively risky and successful execution is rather difficult. If the issue owning party is not present in parliament, some of those risks decrease. The issue owning party can not directly counter trespassing in parliament and it also gets less media attention, meaning less chance to enforce the standing issue ownership and defend against attacks. The risk of the issue owning party gaining electoral support by increased salience through issue trespassing is less relevant if the issue owner is not represented. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: If the issue owning party loses parliamentary representation, parliamentary issue trespassing on the owned issue increases.

Still, the question remains which parties are more likely to take over the issue. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2015) used the case of Denmark to investigate the issue engagement behavior of parties. They found that parties respond to the issue attention of all other parties, but particularly to those which are in the same ideological party bloc. Another result showed that mainstream parties are more responsive than niche parties in this regard. Additionally, according to them, parties campaign agendas correlate with their parliamentary agendas, providing a base for argumentation to adapt the findings from one area to the other.

Meyer and Wagner (2016) used party press releases to study issue engagement during the 2008 legislative election in Austria. Their findings show that organizational constraints, meaning the amount of resources available to a party, as well as their issue proximity positively influence the likelihood of issue engagement between parties. Issue proximity is understood as the distance between two parties' positions on one specific issue. They argued that the closer two parties' issue positions are, the higher their competition

over votes. Because of this relationship, competition over votes is a suitable indicator for the likelihood of parties' issue engagement. Accordingly, these findings constitute the base for the following additional hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Higher competition over votes with the issue owning party increases the effect proposed in Hypothesis 1.

Apart from issue ownership the factor of public salience also has a strong impact on the constitution of policy agendas. Sides (2006) researched the factors which influence the composition of the campaign agenda using data from the 1998 House and Senate elections in the US. The results show that public salience has a strong influence on the issues discussed in the campaign and that issue ownership predicted less what topics were talked about by whom but more which rhetorical approach the actors took. As a result, issue trespassing was very common during this campaign.

Poljak and Seeberg (2024) used the previously discussed concept of issue ownership attack and set out to answer the question which issues parties attack each other on. They analyzed the cases of the UK and Belgium and used speech parts from the parliamentary question time as their data source. They were able to show that both possessing issue ownership as well as high issue salience increase the likelihood of an issue ownership attack. The effect is even stronger when both factors appear combined.

Damore (2004) investigated the factors leading to issue trespassing during electoral campaigns with data from the US presidential elections between 1976 and 1996. The findings show that partisanship, the tone of the campaign, the standing of the candidate and the issue salience in the public influence the use of issue trespassing. In detail, democratic candidates and trailing candidates have a higher chance of issue trespassing and appeals with a non-attack tone and high issue salience increase the use of issue trespassing.

As discussed, high issue salience in the public leads to greater issue trespassing in campaigns and increases the likelihood of an issue ownership attack on this issue. These factors lead to the second additional hypothesis, which reads as follows:

Hypothesis 3: High issue salience increases the effect proposed in Hypothesis 1.

The hypotheses proposed so far were based on the unitary actor assumption of parties, which postulates high intra-party cohesion. This understanding is mainly based on the unitary voting behavior of fractions in the legislative body in parliamentary systems (Meyer 2012). But recent literature also shows that it can be worthy to examine the individual behavior of actors at different positions in the party hierarchy (Meyer and Wagner 2021; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al. 2022) and the intra-party dissent (Meyer 2012).

Meyer and Wagner (2021) showed that members of parliament (MPs) react more to the issue attention of other MPs with the same specialization (i. e. committee membership) while party elites engage more with other party elites. They chose Austria as their case and based their analysis on press releases of individual political actors.

Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al. (2022) also analyzed the case of Austria and utilized press releases as well. They found that party leaders are more responsive to voters' concerns, meaning they employ a riding the wave strategy more often. For the use of a strategy based on issue ownership they were not able to show any differences between party leaders and non-leaders.

These findings show that the position of a MP in the party hierarchy influences their strategy of issue engagement. Applying this to the strategy of issue trespassing, it can be assumed that MPs who are members of the committee which is responsible for the issues in question, are more likely to utilize issue trespassing. Firstly, compared to the party as a whole they have more to gain from issue trespassing, both inside the party (strengthening their position) and in the public sphere (distinguishing their issue position and personality). Secondly, due to their specialization they are more knowledgeable on the issue. These arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Being a member of the committee responsible for the issues in question increases the effect proposed in Hypothesis 1 on the level of individual MPs.

To explain the behavior of MPs in parliament, previous research offers two models. Dyadic representation expects MPs to be linked closely to their constituency, meaning they represent the interest of their constituency during votes in parliament and react closely to changes in public opinion there (Masket and Noel 2012).

Partisan representation expects MPs to be very loyal to their party, meaning they will vote along the party's position on the issue rather than the interest of their constituency, leading to homogeneous party blocs (Clinton 2006; Masket and Noel 2012).

The parliamentary behavior of MPs is strongly influenced by the electoral system and the political culture present in a country. More specifically, an electoral system using single-member districts and low party cohesion presumably leads to dyadic representation while an electoral system based on proportionality and high party cohesion is more likely to foster partisan representation (Hanretty, Lauderdale, and Vivyan 2017).

These models focus mostly on the voting behavior of MPs, but the influence on alternative forms of behavior like legislative speeches have also been analyzed (Alemán, Ramírez, and Slapin 2017). It can be argued that the aforementioned mechanisms of dyadic and partisan representation also apply to other parliamentary behavior like the involvement in legislative proposals and PQs. These actions are of less significance than voting behavior and thus may also show a form of dyadic representation in otherwise atypical systems.

Following this argumentation, it can be expected that the particularly high salience of an issue in a constituency leads to higher attention to this issue by MPs who won their seat in said constituency. Applied to issue trespassing, it can be expected that MPs, who won their seat in a constituency where the issue owning party is particularly strong, are more likely to employ issue trespassing.

Following this argumentation, a link between MP behavior and their constituency can be expected. If the issue owning party is particularly strong in a constituency, there are two intertwined reasons why this should influence the behavior of MPs from other parties. Firstly, its strength makes the issue owning party a significant competitor, increasing its importance to the other parties. Secondly, it also offers a measure for the importance of the issue in the constituency, which may impact the other parties priorities and behavior. These considerations lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Having won one's seat in a constituency where the issue owning party is strong increases the effect proposed in Hypothesis 1 on the level of individual MPs.

3 Case Selection

3.1 Political System and Party System

The Austrian governmental system is difficult to classify since it neither matches the ideal type of a parliamentary system nor that of a presidential system. The written constitution exhibits traits of a semi-presidential system leaning towards presidentialism. However, in practice and constitutional reality, the parliament has proven to be the stronger actor, showcasing many characteristics of parliamentarism (Müller 2006, p. 117). Austria uses a proportional electoral system and is characterized by moderate pluralism. It can thus be regarded as a fairly typical Western European democracy (Haselmayer and Jenny 2018). Therefore the case of Austria offers some potential for generalisability.

The Austrian Parliament consists of two chambers with asymmetric power distribution. The lower chamber, the National Council (*Nationalrat*), is the main legislative actor and is comprised of 183 MPs. Normally, legislative elections take place every five years. The upper chamber, the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) secures the representation of the federal states. It consists of 60 representatives which are delegated by the federal state parliaments. The National Council is clearly the stronger chamber, because the Federal Council, with very few exceptions, can only put in a suspensory veto against legislative proposals (Praprotnik 2023). Because of the very limited power and scope of action of the Federal Council, the analysis in this thesis only focuses on the behavior of members of the National Council. Going forward, the term MPs will only refer to the members of the National Council.

The behavior of MPs in the National Council is characterized by very strong party cohesion (Müller and Jenny 2000). Research on party cohesion mainly focuses on the voting behavior of MPs but the concept also encompasses other forms of behavior. This, combined with the electoral system aimed at proportionality, makes Austria a prime example for partisan representation and a least-likely case for any form of dyadic representation.

The observation period covers the 25th, 26th and 27th legislative periods of the Austrian National Council, lasting from October 2013 to October 2024. This time frame includes an accumulation of crises, both national and international. One notable example of a national crisis is the Ibiza affair in 2019. International crises during this time include the effects of the 2008 financial crisis, the 2015 European migrant crisis, the COVID-19

pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war including the ensuing energy crisis. All of these events obviously influence parliamentary behavior, but because of the sheer amount and diversity it is not sensible to control for all of them in the analysis.

Party	2013	2017	2019
Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ)	52	52	40
Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	47	62	71
Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)	40	51	31
The Greens - The Green Alternative (GRÜNE)	24	-	26
NEOS - The New Austria (NEOS)	9	10	15
Team Stronach for Austria (TS)	11	-	-
Liste Peter Pilz / Jetzt - Liste Pilz (LP)	-	8	-

Table 1: Number of seats each party held in the National Council after the respective legislative election

Note: parties which were part of the government formed after the respective election are marked in bold. Parties not represented in the respective legislative period are indicated with a hyphen. Own illustration, data from BMI (2013), BMI (2017), and BMI (2019)

During the observation period seven parties were represented in the National Council in at least one of the legislative periods. Table 1 gives an overview of these parties, the number of seats they held after each election and the constitution of the government. The Christian Democratic Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) was part of all governments during the observation period except for the caretaker government which was in office preceding and following the 2019 snap elections. From 2013 to 2017 they were the junior partner in a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ). Between 2017 and 2019, the ÖVP was senior partner in a coalition with the populist radical right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which was abruptly ended by the Ibiza affair. From 2019 to 2024 the Green party served as the junior partner in a coalition with the ÖVP.

For the established parties the existing literature offers relatively clear insights on issue ownership (Partheymüller and Huber 2023). The SPÖ is seen as competent in the field of *Labor and Employment* while the ÖVP holds ownership over the issue of *Economy*. The FPÖ is regarded as particularly capable in handling the issue of *Immigration* and the Green party is associated with high proficiency in the topic of *Environment*. The Green party's issue ownership will be presented in more detail at a later point (see section 4).

The populist party ‘Team Stronach for Austria’ was relatively short lived. It was founded in 2012 by Frank Stronach and instantly gained parliamentary representation through defection of MPs (Jenny 2023). The party won 5.7% of the votes in the 2013 legislative election (BMI 2013) but did not run for election in 2017 and terminated its political work in the same year.

Towards the end of the 25th legislative period in 2017, the MP Peter Pilz left the Green parliamentary fraction over discontent with his position on the electoral list for the upcoming legislative election. Pilz founded his own party ‘Liste Peter Pilz’ which was later renamed to ‘Jetzt - Liste Pilz’. Its ideology can be characterized as Green and left wing populist (Aichholzer and Ennser-Jedenastik 2018). Going forward this party will be referred to simply as ‘Liste Pilz’.

In the 2017 legislative elections the ‘Liste Pilz’ won 4.4% of the votes while the Green party only received 3.8% of the votes, losing 8.6% compared to the previous election (BMI 2017). Due to the entry threshold to the National Council requiring 4% of the votes the Green party lost its representation in the National Council (Perlot and Filzmaier 2023, p. 360).

From 2018 onward, the ‘Fridays for Future’ protests caused the environmental issue to gain public presence, creating a favorable environment for the Green party’s campaign. In the 2019 snap election following the Ibiza affair the Green party won 13.9% of the votes, re-entering the National Council. The ‘Liste Pilz’ only won 1.9% of the votes, failing to reach the necessary 4% threshold (BMI 2019). In 2020 it terminated its political work and dissolved.

Since the ‘Liste Pilz’ can be seen as a split-off of the Green party and the two parties’ presence in parliament alternated, it is a plausible expectation that the ‘Liste Pilz’ adopted the environmental issue previously owned by the Green party. Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn, et al. (2022) analyzed the thematic focus of parties Facebooks posts around the 2017 legislative election. They show that the thematic focus of the posts is strongly driven by the parties’ issue ownership. The Green party devoted 14% of their postings to the issue of *Energy and Climate* and 7% to the generic issue of *Environment*. All other parties, including the ‘Liste Pilz’, only dedicated 0% to 1% of their posts to these issues. This data also shows that the ‘Liste Pilz’ instead puts its issue focus on corruption as well as democracy and civil society drawing on the reputation of its top candidate (Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn, et al. 2022, pp. 473–474).

The AUTNES Content Analysis of Party Manifestos (Müller, Bodlos, et al. 2023) provides further evidence. According to their data, the Green party dedicated about 11% of their election manifesto for the legislative election in 2017 to the issue *Environment*, the ‘Liste Pilz’ less than 1%. Additionally, the only statement from the manifesto of the ‘Liste Pilz’ categorized as being concerned with the issue *Environment* is about animal welfare. Thus the existing literature and data offer no indications to expect an automatic adoption of the issue *Environment* by the ‘Liste Pilz’.

3.2 Institutional Fundamentals of Parliamentary Behavior

In order to better understand the dependent variable of parliamentary behavior and its operationalization, it is necessary to highlight the instruments available to the members of the National Council. Their rights are regulated by the Federal Constitution Law (*Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz* - B-VG) as well as the Austrian National Council Rules of Procedure Act (*Nationalrat Geschäftsordnungsgesetz* - GOG-NR) from 1975.

Members of the National Council hold the right to initiate legislation. Five or more MPs can propose a private Member’s bill (*Selbständiger Antrag*) which has to include the full wording of the law (§ 26 GOG-NR).

Additionally, MPs have the right to address general proposals to the government, called Motion for a Resolution (*Entschließungsantrag*, Art. 52 Abs. 1 B-VG). Such motions do not have to be elaborated as legal text. There is a further distinction between independent and dependent motions (*selbständige und unselbständige Entschließungsanträge*), the difference being that the latter are introduced during the debate of another item of business. So called urgent motions (*Dringliche Anträge*) have to be discussed in the same plenary session they are initiated (§ 74a GOG-NR). The maximum amount of urgent motions is restricted. Each MP can only support one urgent item per year and parties with *Klubstatus*¹ are granted an additional four demands for urgent items.

An important instrument for the oversight of the government are PQs (*Parlamentarische Anfragen*). They come in the form of written or oral questions (*Schriftliche und mündliche Anfragen*). Equivalent to urgent motions there are also urgent questions

¹A *Klub* in the National Council is a fraction of at least five MPs from the same electoral party. Five or more MPs from different electoral parties can also form a *Klub* if the majority of the National Council approves (§ 7 GOG-NR).

(*Dringliche Anfragen*, § 93 GOG-NR). They have to be discussed in the same plenary session as well and they also count towards the maximum number of urgent items.

Since this thesis is concerned with the thematic focus of the MPs' work, only instruments which display such focus are of interest. Because motions of no confidence (*Misstrauensanträge*), reports to the National and Federal Council (*Berichte*) and the right of citation (*Zitationsrecht*) do not display a concrete thematic focus they are regarded as not relevant. On the other hand, private Member's bills, Motions for a Resolution and PQs are all suitable measures depicting relevant parliamentary behavior.

Due to the limitations in scope, not all forms of relevant parliamentary behavior can be analyzed in this thesis. Written PQs are the most suitable single way to operationalize parliamentary behavior for multiple reasons. Compared to other parliamentary instruments, a high number of observations is available because the number of regular PQs is not limited and they require few resources. They also offer more observations than oral PQs, because unlike oral PQs they are not bound to an institutionalized event such as parliamentary question time (*Fragestunde*). Compared to private Member's bills they are less strongly influenced by the parliamentary agenda and they are less complex to analyze quantitatively than parliamentary speeches. They also enable the analysis of individual MPs behavior, because the main initiating MP is documented. Going further, written PQs will be referred to simply as PQs.

All of the instruments mentioned above are often considered powerless and thus symbolic. Because opposition parties, except for cases of minority governments, are generally not able to obtain a majority in parliament, their legislative initiatives are usually put off. Motions for a resolution and PQs show most of their effect in the public attention they can get. To have any potential impact, they have to be taken up and discussed by the media. Existing research on the Austrian case shows that there is no partisan bias on the thematic focus of the communication of PQs through press releases (Huber et al. 2022). Additionally, a relatively high share of the PQs gets reported in newspapers, without those initiated by MPs with particular properties (e. g. prominence, opposition status, gender) being treated preferentially (Imre 2018). Therefore it can be assumed that the media does not make excessive use of its gatekeeper function and the issue focus displayed through PQs is also perceived by the public. Previous research demonstrates that PQs are used by individual MPs to demonstrate representation of their constituency (Saalfeld 2011) as well as on party level to strengthen issue ownership (Otjes and Louwerse 2018).

A recent example from Austria shows that PQs can also have drastic political consequences. In February of 2025, MPs of the Green party issued a PQ concerned with emails written by René Schimanek, which included national socialist codes and racist remarks. René Schimanek was the office manager of the President of the National Council, Walter Rosenkranz, who dismissed him from this position as a consequence of the ensuing public backlash (Schmid and Schmidt 2025).

4 Data and Method

The necessary data for the analysis was gathered from different sources. The Open Data infrastructure by the Austrian Parliament provided data for all PQs, including the responsible MPs' name, a topic and headword classification, the date of receipt as well as the title of the item (Parlament Österreich 2025). Additionally, data on the committee memberships of MPs and the constituency, where the MPs won their seats, were obtained through this infrastructure. The AUTNES Online Panel study provided data on the propensity of the Austrian electorate to vote for the different parties (Kritzinger et al. 2020; Partheymüller, Aichholzer, et al. 2024).

Finding suitable data depicting the salience of the issue *Environment* in the general population was more complex. Survey data is available through the Eurobarometer surveys, but two problems make it not ideally suited. Firstly, the Eurobarometer surveys are conducted twice a year, offering relatively few observations and thus resulting in low resolution of the data. Secondly, up to 2020 the Eurobarometer response option summarized the topics *Environment*, *Climate* and *Energy* into one, making it impossible to distinguish between them. This is a characteristic and widespread approach but it could be problematic in the context of this thesis. The topic *Energy* likely contains not only content relevant for environmental policy but may also refer to unrelated policy areas, particularly the energy crisis following Russia's attack on Ukraine. Therefore, in this thesis the term *Environment* is used to refer to policies regarding the environment and climate in general, but does not include unrelated energy policies.

To counter the two outlined problems, salience in the general population was approximated by the salience in daily newspapers. Newspaper coverage is influenced by and also influences public salience. It is also used as a measure of public salience by politicians. Since the search terms and temporal classification can be customized, this allowed

for both more accuracy of the topics depicted and a finer gradation of the data. The exact process of data generation is presented in more detail in section 4.2.

4.1 Data on Issue Ownership, Salience and Parliamentary Questions

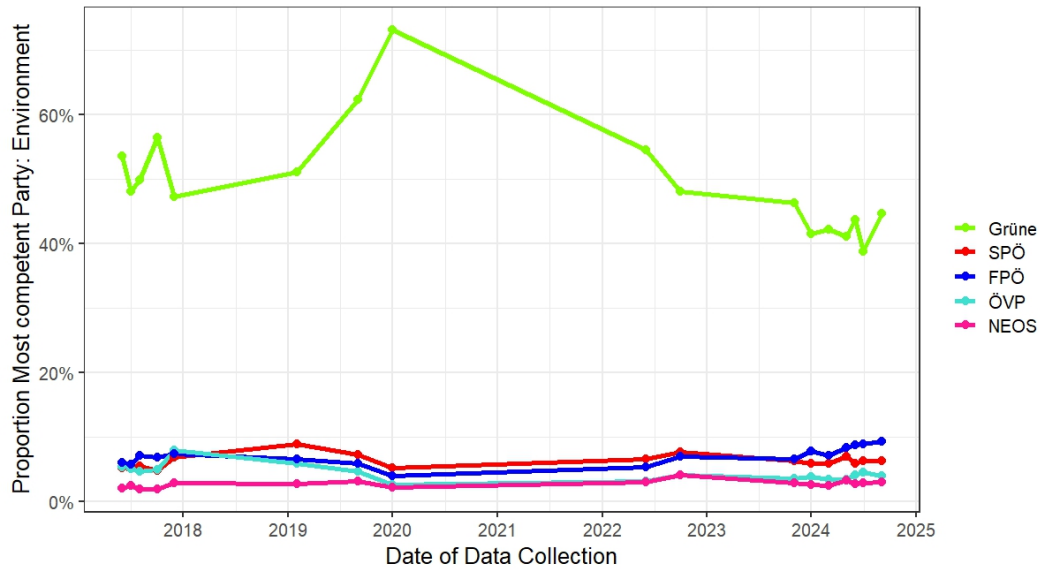


Figure 1: Issue ownership over the issue *Environment*. Own illustration, data from Partheymüller, Aichholzer, et al. (2024)

Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents for each wave of the AUTNES Online Panel study (Partheymüller, Aichholzer, et al. 2024) who state that the respective party is the most competent in handling the issue *Environment*. Due to limited data availability, not the entire observation period is covered, only the years 2017 to 2024. In the time frame pictured it is apparent that the Greens hold competence ownership over this topic. Their values ranged from 39% in June of 2024 up to 78% in January of 2020. The values of all other parties stayed well below 10%, thus the Green's ownership was not impaired by this fluctuation. Meyer and Müller (2013) investigated the issue agenda in Austria and show a similar picture of issue ownership over the topic *Environment*. Between 1989 and 2004 34% to 65% of the respondents named the Greens as the most competent party in handling this issue, way more than any of the other parties (Meyer and Müller 2013, p. 49).

Thus, the Green parties' ownership over the issue *Environment* appears to be very stable over time.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of articles in the twelve Austrian daily newspapers, including a selection of their websites, which include the terms *Environment* or *Climate*, per month. Both terms are included in the query to construct a more complete representation of the issue *Environment* in line with the understanding of it outlined above. As argued before, this measure is suitable to approximate the salience of the topics in the general population. For a more detailed description of the data see section 4.2.

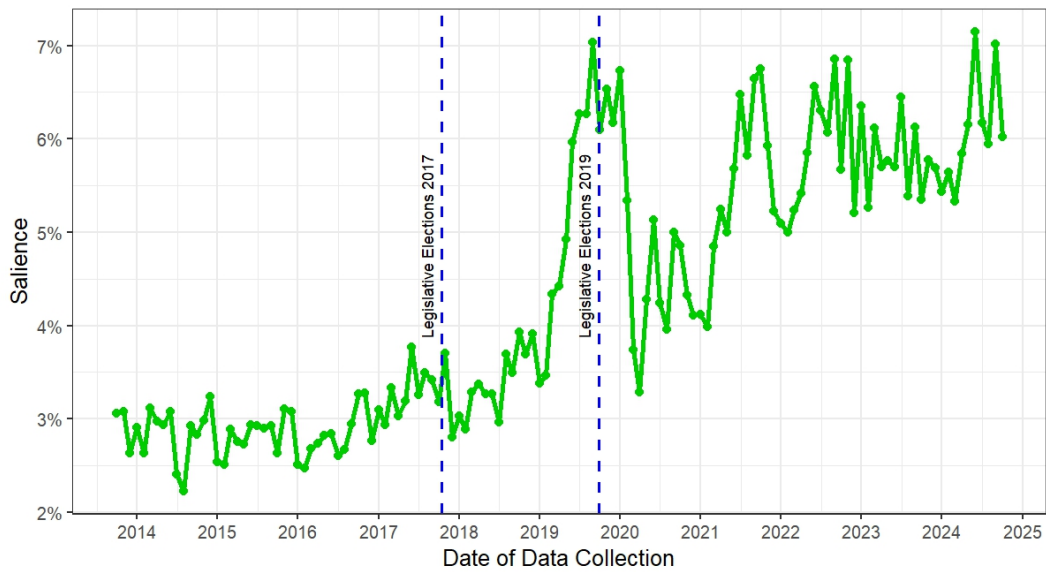


Figure 2: Salience of the issue *Environment* in Austrian daily newspapers during the observation period. Own illustration, data from (APA 2025)

As seen in figure 2, before 2019 the presence of the issue *Environment* was relatively low at values between 2% and 4%. In 2019, there is a surge to values up to 7%, very likely linked to the emergence of the ‘Fridays for Future’ movement, which succeeded in bringing attention to these issues, both from the general public as well as political parties (Berker and Pollex 2023).

After 2019, the fluctuation of the values increases drastically, but they generally are on a higher level than before. Therefore, the observation period offers phases of low and high salience, both with and without the Green party being represented in the National Council. This adds to the robustness of the analysis.

Party	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
SPÖ	5 (0.0%)	143 (8.4%)	106 (9.4%)	113 (7.1%)	152 (2.6%)	1288 (6.0%)	857 (6.2%)	1075 (4.1%)	1087 (5.6%)	971 (5.7%)	1195 (2.8%)	593 (3.4%)	7585 (5.0%)
ÖVP	0 (0.0%)	35 (0.0%)	44 (2.3%)	24 (8.3%)	19 (0.0%)	15 (0.0%)	19 (5.3%)	10 (10.0%)	29 (3.4%)	30 (13.3%)	23 (17.4%)	11 (9.1%)	259 (5.8%)
FPÖ	267 (1.5%)	1914 (4.8%)	2497 (2.4%)	2025 (3.6%)	1233 (5.8%)	4 (0.0%)	134 (2.2%)	1963 (5.4%)	2259 (4.7%)	2313 (5.8%)	1826 (5.3%)	1052 (5.5%)	17487 (4.6%)
GREENS	42 (4.8%)	427 (5.4%)	444 (5.2%)	484 (5.2%)	386 (5.7%)	-	30 (20.0%)	48 (4.2%)	67 (3.0%)	57 (12.3%)	42 (9.5%)	27 (14.8%)	2054 (5.8%)
NEOS	4 (0.0%)	210 (0.5%)	402 (3.7%)	391 (0.3%)	268 (1.5%)	692 (2.7%)	741 (4.9%)	1232 (2.4%)	1007 (2.9%)	882 (5.0%)	869 (6.6%)	395 (3.5%)	7093 (3.5%)
TS	54 (0.0%)	293 (2.7%)	473 (9.5%)	188 (9.0%)	108 (12.0%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1116 (7.4%)
LP	-	-	-	-	1 (0.0%)	424 (5.2%)	335 (7.2%)	-	-	-	-	-	760 (6.1%)
Total	372 (1.6%)	3022 (4.5%)	3966 (3.9%)	3225 (3.9%)	2167 (5.3%)	2423 (4.9%)	2116 (5.8%)	4328 (4.2%)	4449 (4.5%)	4253 (5.7%)	3955 (4.9%)	2078 (4.7%)	36354 (4.7%)

Table 2: Number of written parliamentary questions per year by party

Note: the values in parenthesis represent the proportion of environmental PQs. For 2013 and 2024 only the time frame which is part of the respective legislative period is covered. Not all parties were represented in parliament during the entire year in 2017 (Greens, TS, LP) and 2019 (Greens, LP) because they won or lost representation in the respective elections.

Table 2 gives an overview over the number of written PQs each party initiated per year. It is important to note that the numbers for 2013 and 2024 only include the time span covering the respective legislative period in these years. In 2017 and 2019 specific parties were only represented in the National Council for part of the year, because they gained or lost representation in the respective legislative elections.

The numbers in parentheses in table 2 depict the proportion of the questions which are concerned with the topic *Environment* each party initiated per year. It is apparent that there are stark differences in the number of (environmental) PQs both over time as well as between parties. Whether a party is part of the government is one obvious factor causing these differences. While parties in government still make use of PQs, they are intended as an instrument for government oversight, first and foremost used by the opposition. This becomes apparent in MPs from the ÖVP only initiating a very low number of PQs in general and MPs from the FPÖ initiating very few (69) PQs during the time the Green party was not represented in the National Council, because they were part of the government for most of this time. Additional possible factors which influence these differences include party strategy, party size, the available resources and the parties' issue focus. In general, the total number of written PQs increased over time (Konrath 2017).

4.2 Variables

Table 3 gives an overview over the dependent variable, the five independent variables and the three control variables including their coding. Descriptive statistics for the three continuous independent variables are showcased in table 4. Table 5 displays the frequencies of the binary variables.

Variable	Coding	Explanation	Type
<i>Topic Environment</i>	TRUE/FALSE	Is the parliamentary question concerned with the issue <i>Environment</i> (TRUE) or not (FALSE)	Dependent
<i>Greens not represented</i>	TRUE/FALSE	Is the Green party represented in the National Council (FALSE) or not (TRUE)	Independent (H1)
<i>Competition over Votes</i>	-1 to 1	Correlation of the propensity to vote for the Greens with the propensity to vote for the respective party	Independent (H2)
<i>Salience Environment</i>	0 - 100%	Proportion of the articles published in Austrian newspapers which are concerned with the topics <i>Environment</i> and <i>Climate</i>	Independent (H3)
<i>Member Environmental Committee</i>	TRUE/FALSE	Is the MP a member of the environmental committee (TRUE) or not (FALSE)	Independent (H4)
<i>Strength Greens RED</i>	0 - 100%	Proportions of the votes the Green party won in the regional electoral district, where the respective MP won his or her seat	Independent (H5)
<i>Seat RED</i>	TRUE/FALSE	Did the MP win his/her seat in a regional electoral district (TRUE) or not (FALSE)	Control
<i>In Government</i>	TRUE/FALSE	States, whether the initiating MPs party was part of the government at the date of receipt of the parliamentary question	Control
<i>Party</i>		Abbreviation of party name	Control

Table 3: The variables and their coding

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
<i>Competition over Votes</i>	-0.12	0.27	-0.41	0.25
<i>Salience Environment</i>	4.54	1.41	2.23	7.14
<i>Strength Greens RED</i>	9.57	2.74	4.24	19.23

Table 4: Key descriptive statistics for the continuous variables

Variable	TRUE	FALSE	Total
<i>Topic Environment</i>	1448 (4.5%)	30976 (95.5%)	32424 (100%)
<i>Greens not represented</i>	3442 (10.6%)	28982 (89.4%)	32424 (100%)
<i>Member Environmental Committee</i>	3007 (9.3%)	29417 (90.7%)	32424 (100%)

Table 5: Frequencies of the binary variables

For the purposes of this thesis, parliamentary issue trespassing is operationalized as the initiation of PQs concerned with the owned issue, in this case the issue *Environment*, by the non-issue owning parties. This operationalization lead to the dependent variable *Topic Environment*, which was coded using the topic classification provided by the Austrian Parliament. If one of the maximum five topics assigned to the PQ is set to *Climate, Environment and Energy (Klima, Umwelt und Energie)*, and the EuroVoc classification is not *Energy (Energie)*, *Electrical and nuclear industries (Elektrizitäts- und Kernkraftindustrie)* or *Electrical industry (Elektrizitätsindustrie)* the variable was set to TRUE, otherwise to FALSE. This ensured that items classified under *Energy*, which are not relevant for the research in this thesis, were not included.

The independent variable *Greens not represented* was created using the legislative period classification. If the PQ was initiated during the 26th legislative period, the time during which the Green party was not represented in the National Council, it was set to TRUE, otherwise to FALSE.

The independent variable *Competition over Votes* indicates whether and how much a party's (potential) voters overlap with the Green party's (potential) voters. The AUTNES Online Panel study (Kritzinger et al. 2020; Partheymüller, Aichholzer, et al. 2024) provided data on the propensity to vote. The participants were asked to rate the probability that they would vote for each of the parties on a scale from 0 to 10. Calculating the Kendall's τ correlation coefficient of these propensity to vote scores of the Green party with the scores of each of the other parties provided a measure for the competition over votes. Kendall's τ was chosen because the propensity to vote scores are not normally distributed. A positive value of the correlation indicates voter overlap, a negative value indicates little to no voter overlap².

As mentioned before, the independent variable *Salience Environment* is based on the salience of the issue *Environment* in the coverage of daily newspapers. Included are the twelve Austrian daily newspapers³ as well as their websites, where available⁴. The variable depicts the proportion of all articles published in a given month which include the terms *Environment* and *Climate*. This information was obtained through the *APA-Onlinemanager Library* (APA 2025).

The independent variable *Member Environmental Committee* was coded using additional data on the MPs provided by the Austrian Parliament. If the initiating MP, at the date of receipt of the PQ, was chairman, deputy chairman, secretary or member (*Obmann/Obfrau, Obmannstellvertreter:in/Obfraustellvertreter:in, Schriftführer, Mitglied*) of the environmental committee the variable was set to TRUE. For alternate members (*Ersatzmitglieder*) as well as all other MPs it was set to FALSE.

The creation of the independent variable *Strength Greens RED* was a two-step process. It only considers MPs who won their seat in a regional electoral district (RED, *Regionalwahlkreis*), the lowest of the three levels of electoral districts in the electoral system used for the Austrian legislative elections⁵. The first step was to check for all items of business if the initiating MP won his or her seat in a RED in the most recent legislative election predating the date of receipt and if so, in which district. This information was

²The statistical significance of the correlation is irrelevant for this purpose and was therefore not considered.

³Der Standard, Die Presse, Heute, Kleine Zeitung, Kronen Zeitung, Kurier, Neue Vorarlberger Tageszeitung, OÖ Nachrichten, Österreich, Salzburger Nachrichten, Tiroler Tageszeitung, Vorarlberger Nachrichten

⁴derstandard.at, diepresse.com, heute.at, kleinezeitung.at, krone.at, kurier.at, nachrichten.at, vn.at

⁵For further information on the Austrian electoral system see Perlot and Filzmaier (2023)

taken from the Open Data infrastructure of the Austrian Parliament (Parlament Österreich 2025). In a second step the average percentage of votes the Green party won in the respective RED in the three preceding legislative elections was added as the value of the variable (wahldatenbank.at).

During the observation period, the allocation of REDs was changed in multiple instances. Where existing REDs were only combined into a new district, the results of the Green party in the earlier REDs were simply added up⁶. In other cases, the districts were completely rearranged, making it impossible to compare election results from before to after the change. These districts could not be included in the analysis⁷.

Three control variables were added to the models. The variable *Seat RED* is only relevant for the models not including the variable *Strength Greens RED*. It indicates whether the initiating MP has won his or her seat in a RED. It was included to differentiate an effect simply caused by different behavior of MPs who won their seat in a RED. Literature suggests different issue behavior between frontbench and backbench MPs (Meyer and Wagner 2021; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al. 2022). Due to the logic of the Austrian electoral system, MPs who won their seat in a RED are expected to be mostly backbenchers. The variable *In Government* is binary and states whether the initiating MP's party was part of the government at the date of receipt of the PQ. The variable *Party* represents the party affiliation of the initiating MP. Since an effect of party size on the parliamentary behavior is likely, it would have been sensible to add a control variable depicting it, i. e. through the number of seats. But *Party* has already been added as a control variable and is very closely related to party size. Therefore, adding party size as a separate variable would cause severe multicollinearity. For this reason it was omitted from the models.

Since only few MPs won their seat in a RED, the variable *Strength Greens RED* only covers relatively few observations. To avoid a great reduction of the dataset, said variable was analyzed with separate models.

PQs initiated by MPs from the parties 'Team Stronach for Austria' or 'Liste Pilz' were excluded from the analysis, because those parties were not present in the National Council during the entire observation period. Additionally, only PQs directed at the govern-

⁶Steiermark Nord, Nord-West and West to Obersteiermark, Steiermark Ost and Süd-Ost to Oststeiermark

⁷Graz, Graz und Umgebung, Steiermark Mitte and Süd, Weststeiermark, Niederösterreich Süd-Ost, Niederösterreich Ost, Thermenregion, Wien Umgebung

ment were included in the final datasets. The main dataset *Data Main* includes all variables listed in table 3 except for *Strength Greens RED* and its number of observations lies at 32424. The additional dataset *Data RED* includes all variables listed in table 3 and its number of observations lies at 9117. The dependent variable is binary, therefore logistic regression models were the method of choice to test the hypotheses (Best and Wolf 2010).

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Main Effect (Hypothesis 1)

Table 6 presents the results of the first four models which were calculated with the dataset *Data Main*. Model 1 includes all independent variables except *Strength Greens RED* but no interactions. The Models 2-4 each add one interaction term to the variables in Model 1 in order to test the Hypotheses 2-4. Table 7 displays the results of two models calculated with the dataset *Data RED*. Model 5 includes all independent variables but no interactions while Model 6 adds an interaction term to test Hypothesis 5.

Model 1 shows that the absence of the Green party from the National Council has a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) positive effect on the probability of a PQ, which is initiated by any party other than the Greens, being about the topic *Environment*. For simplicity, this probability will be referred to as *Probability of an Environmental Question* going forward. For times when the Green party was represented in the National Council, the average predicted *Probability of an Environmental Question* is 4.3%. During the time of absence of the Green party this probability increases by 1.7 percentage points to 6%. With a relative increase of almost 40% these findings show great support for Hypothesis 1.

No effect was found for the control variable *Seat RED* while the control variable *In Government* exhibits a positive effect, meaning that MPs from parties in government have a higher probability to initiate an environmental PQ. Concerning the control variable *Party*, only the FPÖ differs significantly from the reference level (SPÖ).

5.2 Interaction Effects (Hypotheses 2 - 5)

One way to test interaction hypotheses is to analyze the change in the Average Marginal Effects (AMEs). Figure 3 displays plots of the AMEs of the Variable *Greens not in National Council* at the minimum and maximum of the according interaction variable. For

Table 6: Logistic Regression Models I (Data Main)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Topic Environment			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Greens not in NC	0.390*** (0.103)	-0.296 (0.363)	1.477*** (0.353)	0.456*** (0.118)
Competition over Votes	3.052** (1.130)	2.435* (1.171)	3.480** (1.138)	3.147** (1.134)
Salience Environment	0.149*** (0.021)	0.152*** (0.021)	0.171*** (0.023)	0.149*** (0.021)
Member Environmental Committee	2.343*** (0.058)	2.337*** (0.058)	2.349*** (0.058)	2.365*** (0.061)
Seat RED	-0.075 (0.066)	-0.083 (0.066)	-0.073 (0.066)	-0.079 (0.066)
In Government	0.618** (0.207)	0.651** (0.209)	0.660** (0.208)	0.609** (0.207)
FPÖ	1.786** (0.601)	1.487* (0.621)	2.047*** (0.607)	1.833** (0.603)
NEOS	-0.190 (0.099)	-0.162 (0.099)	-0.181 (0.099)	-0.198* (0.099)
ÖVP	0.544 (0.434)	0.483 (0.432)	0.645 (0.434)	0.572 (0.435)
Greens not in NC × Competition over Votes		3.782* (1.817)		
Greens not in NC × Salience Environment			-0.263** (0.084)	
Greens not in NC × Member Environmental Committee				-0.197 (0.182)
Constant	-4.905*** (0.233)	-4.834*** (0.237)	-5.112*** (0.242)	-4.927*** (0.234)
Observations	32,424	32,424	32,424	32,424
Adjusted Pseudo R^2 (McFadden)	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13
Log Likelihood	-5,172.979	-5,169.189	-5,167.644	-5,172.395
Akaike Inf. Crit.	10,365.960	10,360.380	10,357.290	10,366.790

Note: Non standardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. SPÖ is set as the reference level for the variable *Party*. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

the variable *Strength Greens RED* the values at the 25%-, 50%- and 75%-quantiles were also included, because the variables' distribution is skewed to the right. The value of the AME indicates the change in the *Probability of an Environmental Question*.

Figure 3a showcases the effect of the absence of the Green party at the lowest and highest value of *Competition over Votes*. When a party has little competition over votes

Table 7: Logistic Regression Models II (Data RED)

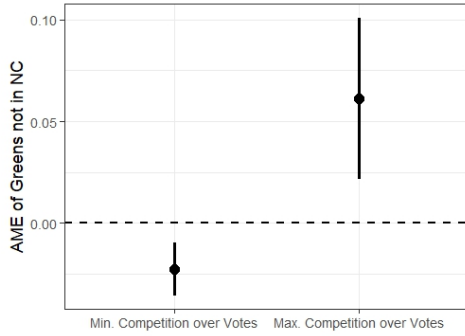
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Topic Environment	
	(5)	(6)
Greens not in NC	0.384 (0.214)	-1.675*** (0.488)
Competition over Votes	1.509 (2.310)	2.967 (2.356)
Salience Environment	0.284*** (0.044)	0.226*** (0.046)
Member Environmental Committee	2.185*** (0.112)	2.170*** (0.111)
Strength Greens RED	-0.060* (0.024)	-0.136*** (0.029)
In Government	0.949*** (0.267)	0.784** (0.271)
FPÖ	0.719 (1.237)	1.336 (1.255)
ÖVP	-0.463 (0.691)	-0.100 (0.701)
Greens not in NC × Strength Greens RED		0.209*** (0.043)
Constant	-4.587*** (0.574)	-3.767*** (0.591)
Observations	9,117	9,117
Adjusted Pseudo R^2 (McFadden)	0.14	0.14
Log Likelihood	-1,529.642	-1,518.754
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,077.285	3,057.508

Note: Non standardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. SPÖ is set as the reference level for the variable *Party*. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

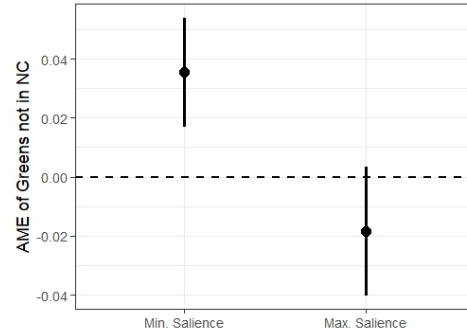
with the Green party, the AME of *Greens not in National Council* lies at -2.3 percentage points. The negative value indicates that MPs from such parties are less likely to initiate environmental questions when the Green party is not represented. For parties with high competition over votes the AME changes to 6.1 percentage points, signifying a sizable increase as well as change of the effect's direction through the absence of the Green party.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the effect of the absence of the Greens increases with higher competition over votes. The analysis supports that claim, though for low values of competition over votes the main effect proposed in Hypothesis 1, higher issue trespassing when the Greens are not represented, does not exist. This shows that parties react differently to the absence of the Green party depending on the voter overlap they share with

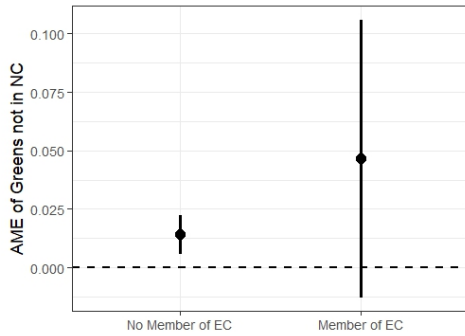
the Green party. This follows the underlying theoretical argument and is in line with the expected political strategies. For parties with little competition over votes with the Green party it is most beneficial to ignore the topic in order to further reduce its salience after the Greens lost parliamentary representation. For parties with high competition over votes it is sensible to utilize the window of opportunity to try and take over the issue.



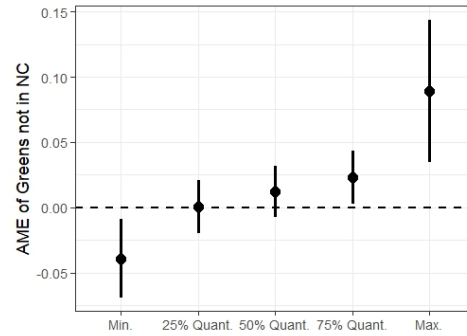
(a) Interaction Effect of *Competition over Votes* (Model 2)



(b) Interaction Effect of *Salience Environment* (Model 3)



(c) Interaction Effect of *Member Environmental Committee* (Model 4)



(d) Interaction Effect of *Strength Greens RED* (Model 6)

Figure 3: AME-plots including the 95%-confidence interval

Figure 3b displays the impact the salience of the topic *Environment* has on the effect of the absence of the Green party. For low salience, the AME of *Greens not in National Council* lies at 3.5 percentage points, meaning the absence of the Greens increases the *Probability of an Environmental Question*. For high salience, the effect changes direction and the AME lies at -1.8 percentage points. Hypothesis 3 assumed that the effect of the absence of the Green party increases with increasing salience. The results show that in reality the effect is the opposite. Thus, Hypothesis 3 must be discarded. This change to a negative

effect, not in line with theoretical expectations, is difficult to explain. During times of high salience the issue is already more present and therefore it is more difficult for the absence of the Green party to have a meaningful impact. Additionally, a ceiling effect can be expected, because parties have limited resources and therefore a maximum of focus they are willing to put on a single issue. However, these factors only explain a decrease of the effect during times of high issue salience but not the change of the direction of the effect to negative.

Figure 3c showcases the influence of environmental committee membership on the effect of the absence of the Green party. Hypothesis 4 proposed an increase of the effect for MPs who are members of the environmental committee. The analysis shows that no significant change of effect between members and non-members can be found. Thus, Hypothesis 4 must also be dismissed. Since members of the environmental committee may focus more on the issue *Environment* in general and the limitation of resources make it not sensible to put even more emphasis on that topic, it is reasonable that no effect is found. As seen in figure 3c, the confidence interval of the AME for the members of the environmental committee is very large. This could be explained by different behavior of committee members depending on additional categorization (e. g. party affiliation, government affiliation).

Table 8 displays additional models calculated to investigate party specific effects. The results show that members of the environmental committee of the SPÖ have a lower probability of initiating environmental questions when the Greens are not present. For committee members of the NEOS a positive effect is found. No effects were found for the other two parties. One reason for that is the low number of observations in general for the ÖVP (259) and the low number of observations for the period where the Greens were missing for the FPÖ (69). These results indicate that members of the environmental committee reacted differently to the absence of the Greens depending on their party affiliation but no clear overarching effect can be inferred.

Finally, figure 3d displays the influence of the strength of the Green party in the RED on the effect of the absence of the Greens. At the minimum of the strength of the Greens (4.24% of the votes) the AME lies at -3.9 percentage points. Thus, if the initiating MP won his or her seat in a RED where the Green party is particularly weak, the *Probability of an Environmental Question* decreases. For the RED with the maximum share of votes for the Greens (19.23%), the AME lies at 8.9 percentage points, meaning that the *Probability of*

Table 8: Logistic Regression Models for *Member Environmental Committee* per Party

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Topic Environment			
	(1): SPÖ	(2): ÖVP	(3): FPÖ	(4): NEOS
Greens not in NC	0.812*** (0.228)	-46.671 (4,292.528)	-12.266 (186.275)	0.002 (0.238)
Member Environmental Committee	2.741*** (0.138)	0.202 (0.827)	2.220*** (0.077)	2.551*** (0.162)
Competition over Votes	0.148 (2.955)	11.242 (6.508)	-1.036 (1.882)	4.846 (2.979)
Salience Environment	-0.019 (0.063)	0.456* (0.190)	0.141*** (0.027)	0.289*** (0.076)
In Government	0.234 (0.259)	-32.790 (3,551.227)	0.316 (622.528)	
Greens not in NC × Member Environmental Committee	-1.025*** (0.252)	33.986 (3,481.406)	-2.336 (1,045.844)	0.796* (0.362)
Constant	-3.798*** (0.550)	28.619 (3,551.228)	-4.549*** (0.666)	-6.225*** (0.493)
Observations	7,585	259	17,487	7,093
Adjusted Pseudo R^2 (McFadden)	0.15	0.16	0.12	0.15
Log Likelihood	-1,277.453	-47.108	-2,891.647	-913.288
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,568.906	108.215	5,797.294	1,838.576

Note: Non standardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

an Environmental Question increases drastically through the absence of the Green party. It is important to note that this particularly large change of effect is not robust against outliers, excluding them results in a far less pronounced positive effect.

This is amplified by the skewed distribution of the variable. It is skewed to the right since there are relatively few REDs where the Greens are around the maximum of their vote share. For this reason, the AMEs at the 25%-, 50%- and 75%-quantile are included. These show that the AME becomes neutral by the 25%-quantile and moderately positive around the 50%-quantile. While the very large effect at the maximum appears to be exaggerated, the direction of the effect change is consisted.

This change of effect on the *Probability of an Environmental Question* from negative to positive with increasing strength of the Greens in the RED shows great support for Hypothesis 5. It is apparent that MPs reacted differently to the absence of the Greens depending on the strength of the Green party in the RED they won their seat in. This follows the expected political strategies. For MPs from REDs where the Greens are weak, it is most beneficial to ignore the topic in order to further reduce its salience after the

Greens lost parliamentary representation. For MPs from REDs where the Greens had good results, it is sensible to use the window of opportunity to try and take over the issue.

5.3 Assumptions of Logistic Regression Models

To verify the models validity the key assumptions for logistic regression models (Osborne 2015) were checked. The first assumption proposes a linear relationship between the predictor variables and the Logit of the outcome for continuous variables. This is satisfactory for most variables except *Competition over Votes*. That variables non-linearity is likely caused by its bimodal distribution.

The second assumption posits the absence of multicollinearity between the independent variables. The interaction terms cause some collinearity and the variable *Competition over Votes* and the control variable *Party* are correlated. For reasons of completeness it is necessary to keep both variables in the model. Other than that, this assumption is met.

Thirdly, the models assume the absence of influential values. The dataset *Data Main* does not include any potential influential values with standard residuals greater than 3. The dataset *Data RED* does include some potential influential values (two for Model 5 and eleven for Model 6). Because the data is deemed to be robust and no other strong reasons for removal exist, these outliers were included in the analysis. The consequences of including them have already been described during the discussion of the results (see page 31).

6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the impact the loss of parliamentary representation of the issue owning party has on the remaining parties' issue strategies. Table 9 gives an overview over the tested hypotheses and the associated findings.

The application of issue ownership theory and the concept of issue trespassing to the parliamentary arena lead to the main expectation of higher issue trespassing during times when the issue owning party is not represented in parliament. This claim is supported by the analysis, which found that the probability of a PQ initiated by the remaining parties being concerned with the issue in question increases during the time the issue owning party is not represented in parliament. This signifies an increase of parliamentary issue trespassing.

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Issue Trespassing	✓
H2: Competition over Votes	✓
H3: Salience of the issue <i>Environment</i>	✗
H4: Member Environmental Committee	✗
H5: Strength Greens in RED	✓

Table 9: Hypothesis confirmation and non-confirmation

This main effect increases for parties with high competition over votes with the issue owning party, further indicating that party competition is a driving factor for trespassing behavior. Furthermore, the analysis showed that high issue salience in the general public has an effect contrary to the one expected in the hypothesis, not only lowering the main effect but even inverting it. This inversion is particularly puzzling and at the current point no obvious explanation why high issue salience should lead to less parliamentary issue trespassing during the absence of the issue owning party could be found.

In conclusion, parliamentary representation of the issue owning party does have an effect on the other parties' issue focus and parliamentary behavior. Thus, vote shifts causing the loss of parliamentary representation may even impact long standing issue ownership.

On the level of individual MPs, the results interestingly showed no effect of committee membership in the committee responsible for the issue in question on the probability of issue trespassing during the time the issue owning party was not represented. However, these results are not overly conclusive, since relatively few observations are available for the questions initiated by committee members and additional investigation revealed some evidence for inter-party differences in the committee members' behavior.

The findings showed that the strength of the issue owning party in the constituency does influence the behavior of MPs, who won their seat in the respective constituency, if the issue owning party is not represented in parliament. Particularly weak results for the issue owning party cause the MPs to focus less on the issue while the issue owning party is not represented. If the issue owning party is strong, the effect changes direction

and MPs are more likely to initiate PQs concerned with the issue. These findings offer evidence for a form of dyadic representation outside of the characteristic electoral systems (single-member districts, low party cohesion) and typical operationalization (voting behavior of MPs). As explained, the Austrian political system exhibits strong traits of parliamentarism and high intra-party cohesion.

More generally, these results add further evidence that issue trespassing, even though it carries relatively high costs and risks, is an issue strategy actually utilized by parties. Additionally, the use of issue trespassing is not confined to the electoral arena but also takes on the form of parliamentary issue trespassing. The findings offer proof that parliamentary behavior is also shaped by considerations based on electoral strategy.

One potential shortcoming of this thesis is the inherently limited generalizability of single case studies. As stated, Austria is regarded as a fairly representative Western European democracy. But the details of the political system include some peculiarities and the electoral system with its three level allocation of seats is quite distinct. Additionally, the case of a party holding such clear ownership over an issue as the Austrian Greens do and the same party losing parliamentary representation is very unusual. Still, the case does offer some generalizability. The Green party in Austria has existed for decades and is an established party with widespread structures. Therefore, all other parties most likely expected a return of the Greens to the National Council and aligned their behavior with this expectation. Those circumstances create a least-likely case for issue trespassing. Since the results still show very clear effects for the main hypothesis and two of the additional hypotheses this adds to the robustness of the findings.

Whether very strong issue ownership increases or reduces the effect of parliamentary non-representation on parliamentary issue trespassing is unclear. For cases of strong issue ownership the incentive to utilize the opportunity provided by the absence of the issue owning party is greater. On the other hand, if the issue ownership is not very strong, the risks of issue trespassing decrease and the chances of it being successful increase. Therefore it can be argued that the findings do have some applicability even for cases where the issue ownership is more moderate.

Further research may go various routes. One obvious option would be to investigate the effect issue ownership has on the parliamentary behavior of parties and MPs in general, possibly including multiple issues in the analysis. Otherwise, enlarging the operationalization to include other parliamentary items of business or the content of parlia-

mentary speeches, potentially using quantitative text analysis to research the latter, could be promising. A third opportunity would be to explore if the loss of parliamentary representation of the issue owning party or parliamentary issue trespassing on the owned issue change the actual, measured levels of issue ownership. Another related question is whether the issues presence in parliament decreases if the issue owning party loses representation or if the remaining parties' trespassing behavior provides sufficient compensation and holds the issues' presence constant.

The results prove that the remaining parties react to the loss of parliamentary representation of the issue owning party through adaption of their issue strategies. Specifically they increase their use of parliamentary issue trespassing. This behavior poses an additional threat to the already weakened issue owning party, because it has the potential to reduce the established ownership.

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