

Policy Voting and the Representation of Policy Preferences

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Abstract

Recent studies have suggested that policy preferences have little if any impact on citizens' vote choices. Thus, governments should feel little or no incentive to enact the policies citizens want and not enact those they do not want. However, these studies contrast with other findings suggesting that governments generally do what citizens actually want. Using an original dataset on policy implementation and Swedish National Election Studies data going back to 1956, we consider the extent to which citizens adjust their vote choice during election campaigns to reflect their policy preferences. We then consider whether their preferences are more likely to be implemented the more they vote on the basis of policy. We find that issue voting increases the likelihood that governments implement citizens' policy preferences.

Research Question

Does issue voting influence the likelihood that governments implement policies?

Background

- Lenz (2012) shows issue voting is rare and citizens follow parties
- However, policy preferences do sometimes influence party/candidate choice (Matthews, 2016; Tesler, 2015)
- Do citizens lead government when they do vote on the basis of policy preferences?

Hypotheses

1. When citizens who favour a policy proposal adjust their vote choice to reflect their policy preference, governments are more likely to implement that policy.
2. When citizens who oppose a policy proposal adjust their vote choice to reflect their policy preference, governments are less likely to implement that policy.

Data

- Swedish National Election Study (SNES) panel data from 1956 to 2010
- Dataset on policy implementation created by Gilljam and Persson
- Opinion and vote intentions before the election
- Vote choice after the election

Dependent Variable

Policy Implementation during government's mandate

Independent Variable

Amount of issue voting Change in proportion supporting a party among supporters/opponents of a policy - changes in proportion supporting a party among those who do not support/oppose the policy

Issue Voting Among Supporters of a Policy:

$$\sum_{j=1}^P ((V_{j,S,t+1} - V_{j,S,t}) - (V_{j,\bar{S},t+1} - V_{j,\bar{S},t}))$$

Issue Voting Among Opponents of a Policy:

$$\sum_{j=1}^P ((V_{j,O,t+1} - V_{j,O,t}) - (V_{j,\bar{O},t+1} - V_{j,\bar{O},t}))$$

Results

- Overall issue voting is low: average is 1.1 percentage points among supporters, 0.01 among opponents
- Variable: ranges from -13.1 to 38.9 percentage points among supporters and from -32.9 to 28.4 percentage points among opponents
- On 10.1% of issues, issue voting among supporters was at least 10 percentage points
- On 4.4% of issues, issue voting was 10 percentage points or greater

Figure 1: Issue Voting Among Supporters

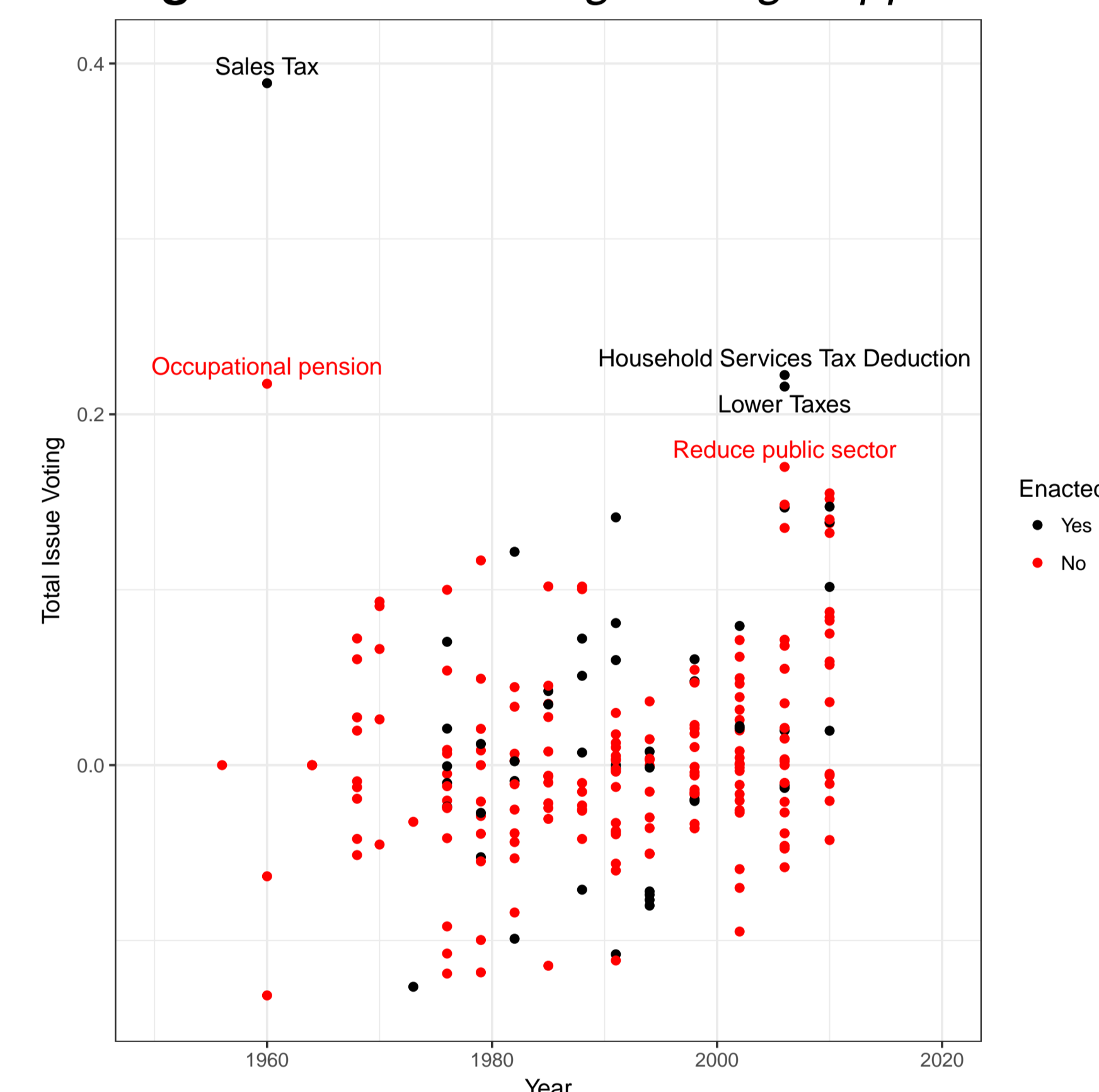


Figure 2: Issue Voting Among Opponents

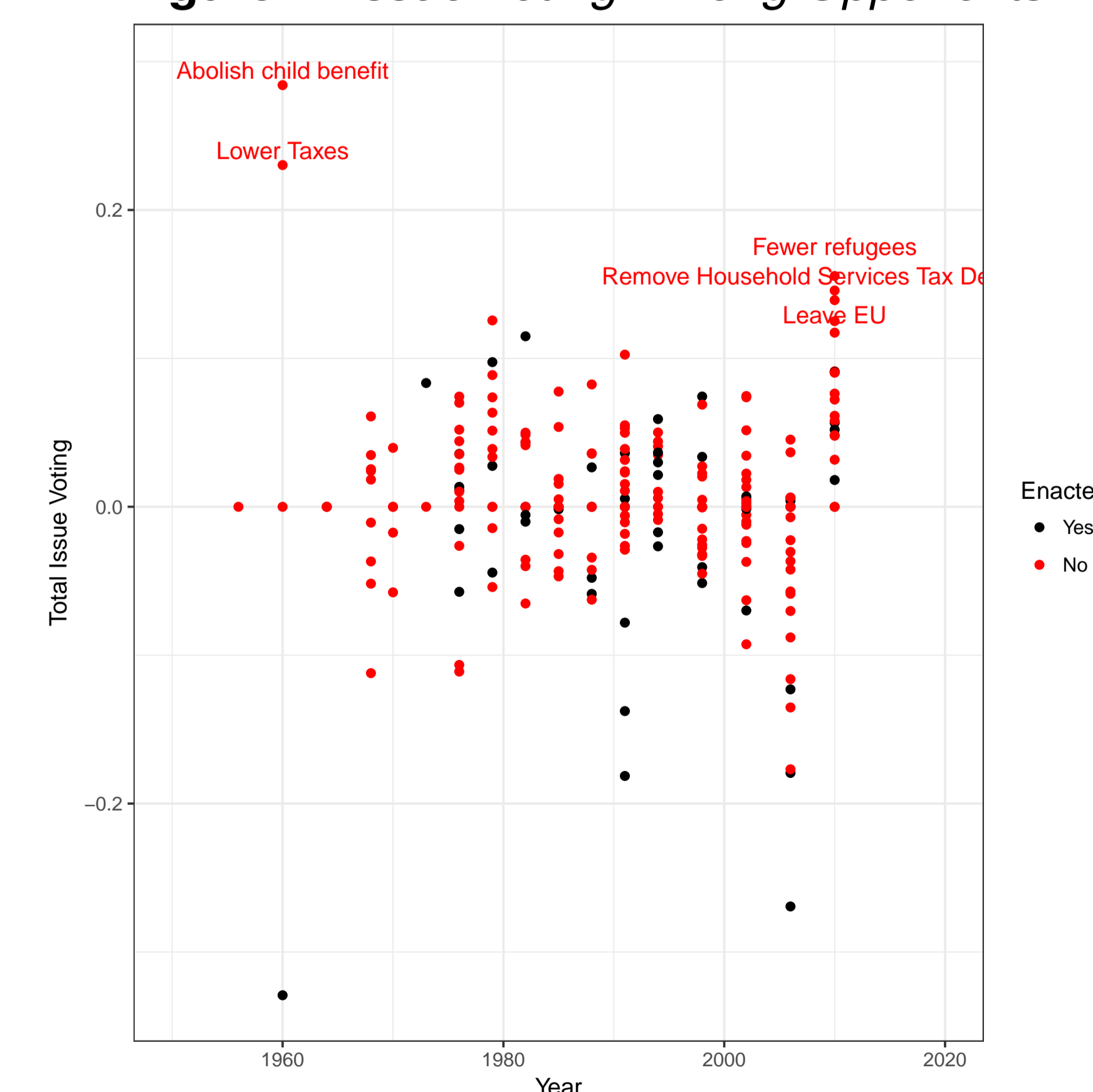


Table 1: Models of Policy Enactment with Controls

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	-2.00** (0.71)	-1.09 (0.72)
Issue Voting (Supporters)	4.64* (2.33)	
PM Party Support	-1.24 (1.53)	
Overall Support	2.30 (1.79)	
Issue Voting (Opponents)		-6.18* (2.55)
PM Party Oppose		0.83 (1.47)
Overall Oppose		-1.61 (1.84)
Don't Knows	0.79 (1.92)	0.29 (1.97)
N	226	226

Conclusion

- Issue voting is weak overall but high on a minority of issues
- Issue voting determines likelihood of implementation (more than public support/opposition!)

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