**Supplementary Materials**

To test if the argument applies beyond the UK, I analyze data from Denmark and Australia with very different electoral and party systems. In the Danish proportional electoral system, multiple parties are in parliament. Hence, this provides a very clear contrast case to the British. Australia is in between with a majoritarian electoral system, but more parties usually present in parliament than in the UK even if the Liberal party and Labour dominates in terms of seats. Together, Denmark and Australia represent a party system with more than two large parties which is quite typical for many Western democracies.

Testing the argument on cases with more parties is important because multiple parties in opposition may produce a more ambiguous message to the voters in terms of which social problems voters should pay attention to and how or to what extent voters should hold the government to account. Rivalry between opposition parties would make such situation hard to escape. At the same time, the larger number of parties typically also in government in these countries may lower the ‘clarify or responsibility’ (Powell and Whitten 1993), and hence, increase the importance of the opposition as the messenger that makes voters aware of the government’s responsibility for social problems.

Getting comparable data on several issues across countries and over time on opposition criticism, government evaluations, and developments in social problems is very hard. Hence, the access to data is also a motivation for the case selection. The Danish Policy Agendas Projects (Green-Pedersen 2005) as well as the Australian counterpart (Dowding and Martin 2017) have kindly shared data on questions to the minister as an indicator of opposition criticism.[[1]](#footnote-1) The main analysis of the UK uses the same indicator. Government evaluations with the same question wording as in the UK analysis are difficult to muster on many issues over time, and the analysis therefore relies on issue ownership data. This is a good substitute because issue ownership also is concerned with how voters evaluate the government’s performance on an issue. The main difference to the government evaluations used in the UK analysis is that with issue ownership data, voters choose a party among the alternatives. Hence, if a low proportion of voters pick the incumbent party, this is a clear sign of bad evaluations (for details, see AUTHOR).

As the issue ownership data stems from national election studies, observations come for each election in the two countries since the early 1990s (see Table S1 for an overview). Opposition criticism and social problems are measured prior to each of these elections to ensure a short distance between the dependent variable and the independent variables. This leaves a very different data structure than the UK main analysis with far fewer observations over time and far less temporal detail. Moreover, the data leaves only 29 observations for the analysis providing a weak basis for reaching statistical significant results. In that sense, the extra analysis provides a conservative test of argument as it becomes harder to identify the same patterns.

The analysis covers almost the same issues as the UK test: unemployment, immigration, and health. As data is available also on the economy, it is included. Issue ownership data is not available on law and order in Australia, so this issue is not included. The social indicators are largely comparable and include the unemployment rate for the issue of unemployment, the number of asylum seekers per 1,000 population for the issue of immigration, and the number of cancer patients per 1,000 population for the issue of health (OECD 2016). GDP growth is used for the issue of the economy. With only 29 observations in total across countries and including all issues, I pool the data and use fixed effects with issues and countries as panels in the estimation. Like the UK analysis, the estimation uses moving averages for opposition criticism and social problems across the three years immediately prior to each of the issue ownership observations.

Importantly, the estimation across Denmark and Australia repeats the finding from the UK analysis: when the opposition criticizes the government during rising social problems, government evaluations systematically deteriorate. This is evident from the negative and statistically significant coefficient for the interaction between opposition criticism and social problems in the second column of Table S2. Again, social problems and opposition criticism do not operate separately, but only in concert as the statistically insignificant coefficients in the first column show. Hence, this data suggest that the results from the more elaborate analysis of the UK apply beyond this case and at least to two countries with different party systems.

Table S1. Overview of data in Denmark and Australia.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Denmark | Australia |
| Economy | 1990-2011 (7) | 1993-2013 (3) |
| Health | 1998-2011 (5) | 2001-2013 (5) |
| Unemployment | 1990-2011 (4) | 1990-2007 (6) |
| Immigration | 1998-2011 (5) | 1996-2013 (6) |

Note: Cell entries are the time interval in which data are available for the country on that issue. The parentheses report a count of the time points for analysis.

Table S2. The effect of social problems and opposition criticism on voters’ government evaluations in Denmark and Australia on three issues.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) |
| (A) ΔSocial problemsi,t | -0.31 (0.19) | -0.37\*\* (0.18) |
| (B) ΔOpposition criticismi,t | 0.05 (0.10) | 0.03 (0.10) |
| A x B |  | -0.03\* (0.01) |
| Yi,t-1 | 0.03 (0.21) | 0.02 (0.20) |
| Constant | 47.39\*\*\* (10.86) | 47.08\*\*\* (10.19) |
| Observations | 29 | 29 |

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.10, \*\* *p* < 0.05, \*\*\* *p* < 0.01. The estimation uses fixed effects with issues and countries as panels. The dependent variable is voters’ government evaluations.

Figure S1. The marginal effect of social problems and opposition criticism on voters’ government evaluations in Denmark and Australia on three issues.



Note: The Figure is based on the results in Table S1.

**Bibliography**

Dowding, Keith, and Aaron Martin (2017). *Policy Agendas in Australia.* Palgrave Macmillan. Palgrave Macmillan

Green-Pedersen, Christoffer (2005). *The political Agenda in Denmark. Measurement and trends since 1953*. University of Aarhus.

OECD (2016). Statistics accessed through http://stats.oecd.org/# (February 2017).

Powell, Bingham, and Guy Whitten (1993). ‘A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 37:2, 391–414.

1. Such data is also available for Belgium, but the lack of data on government evaluations prevents further analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)