

ASSESSING THE INDEPENDENCE OF STATE PARTIES:
ISSUE OWNERSHIP AND MORALITY POLITICS IN US STATE PARTY PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

This study uses party platforms to assess the degree of independence between state and national political parties in the United States in light of issue ownership theory and morality politics. Utilizing a coding scheme adapted from the Comparative Manifesto Project, I analyze the ideology and content of 80 Democratic and Republican state party platforms from 2008-2010.

I uncover substantial variations among state party platforms and findings suggest that state parties manage to maintain a significant level of independence from the national parties. Some of the findings suggest our current understanding of state party politics is inadequate. For example, contrary to expectations, Republican state party platforms show more ideological variation than their Democratic counterparts. In contrast to national patterns, Democratic state party platforms conform more consistently with issue ownership theory than their Republican counterparts. And Democratic state party platforms are significantly more likely to balance their progressive policy preferences with conservative party interests. These findings highlight the variation in state political parties and underscores that any comprehensive understanding of American party politics will include a thorough analysis of state party behavior.