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The Partisan Construction of Policy Agendas: Party Ideology, Party Systems and Policy Attention in English Canadian Provinces, 1945–2020

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Governments are expected to address many issues, from delivering essential services to legislating on abortion. How do governments decide which policy issues to prioritize? My research examines the role that politics, particularly party ideology and party systems, plays in setting the policy agendas of provincial governments. Policy scholars argue that agenda setting is largely apolitical and driven by external factors, such as crises. Yet, provincial agendas are set by executives formed by a single, disciplined political party with few institutional checks on power. Parties have historically and socially rooted positions on policy issues that are hard to break. I assemble a new dataset that maps changes to the ideology of provincial parties from 1945-2020 using party manifestos. I then use this data to examine how party positions influence the governing priorities laid out in Speeches from the Throne, which open the start of every sitting of legislative assemblies.