Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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A mio padre, mia madre,
mio fratello e mia sorella.

Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyse the influence that political parties have on citizens' attitudes toward the European Union. The focus is on a cueing process: citizens perceive the European Union as a distant and complex political system and lack the relevant information for constructing autonomous opinions about the integration process; for this reason, voters use party positions as shortcuts to develop preferences about EU issues. This process makes party positions on EU issues the cause rather than the consequence of voters' preferences.

The thesis improves the current understanding of this cueing process and focuses on three main points: (1) which voters are more likely to rely on party positions when developing attitudes toward the European Union and for which political issues their need for cues is higher; (2) which part of the messages that parties communicate shape citizens' attitudes; (3) which party system and party characteristics make the cueing process more likely.

The first part of the thesis tests the theoretical premise of the cueing model, looking at the effects that citizens' political knowledge and the complexity of the issue have on the effectiveness of party cues. The results from both experimental and observational data show that party influence is higher among voters that have a lower knowledge of EU politics and that even well-informed citizens need to use party cues when taking positions on particularly difficult issues. Given the high complexity of issues debated at the EU level and the low availability of information about EU politics, partisan voters appear more likely to conform to their party's positions than to question them.

However, to what extent that situation represents an obstacle to political elite accountability depends on how persuasion by political parties takes place. The second part of the thesis uses experimental data to investigate whether, when exposed to a message from their party about an EU issue, partisan voters are persuaded by the argumentations that it contains or by the fact it comes from a source that they trust. If voters care more about who is taking a particular position than what is being advocated, they are likely to conform blindly to the wills of political parties, absolving politicians from accountability for their behaviour. The results of this part of the thesis show that the presence of the party label exerts a larger influence on voters' attitudes than the content of the message; moreover, experiment participants appear willing to abandon their prior opinions in order to follow the official party line, leaving few incentives for political parties to take political positions which are consistent with their voters' political beliefs.

Finally, the third chapter focuses on the limits of party persuasive power. It shows that when a party system is unstable, people tend to rely less on parties for political cues, given that voters need to feel some sort of familiarity with political parties to rely on their cues. This kind of experience is hard to develop when political parties are continuously changing. This chapter uses observational data from different EU countries to test the relation between party system or party instability and effectiveness of party cues. To take into account the nested nature of the data, the analysis is composed of multilevel models.

Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar la influencia de los partidos políticos en las actitudes de los ciudadanos hacia la Unión Europea. La atención se centra en un proceso de "cueing": los ciudadanos perciben la Unión Europea como un sistema político distante y complejo y carecen de la información relevante para construir opiniones propias sobre el proceso de integración. Por esta razón, usan las posiciones de los partidos como atajos para desarrollar sus propias preferencias sobre temas de la UE. Este proceso conlleva que las posiciones de los partidos sobre las cuestiones de la UE sean más la causa que la consecuencia de las preferencias de los votantes.

La tesis mejora la comprensión actual de este proceso de "cueing" y se centra en tres puntos principales: (1) cuáles son los votantes más propensos a utilizar las posiciones de los partidos como atajos; (2) qué parte de los mensajes de los partidos afecta las actitudes de la ciudadanía; (3) qué características del sistema de partidos y de los partidos hacen que el proceso de "cueing" sea más probable.

La primera parte de la tesis prueba la premisa teórica del modelo de "cueing" considerando los efectos que el conocimiento político de los ciudadanos y la complejidad del tema tienen sobre la efectividad de las "cues". Los resultados muestran que la influencia de los partidos es mayor entre los votantes que tienen un menor conocimiento de la política de la UE, e incluso los ciudadanos bien informados necesitan usar estos atajos cuando toman posiciones en asuntos particularmente difíciles. Dada la alta complejidad de las cuestiones debatidas a nivel de la UE y la escasa disponibilidad de información sobre la política de la UE, los votantes partidistas parecen más propensos a ajustarse a las posiciones de sus partidos que a cuestionarlas.

Sin embargo, hasta qué punto esta situación representa un obstáculo para la rendición de cuentas de las élites políticas depende de cómo se produce la persuasión de los partidos políticos. La segunda parte de la tesis investiga si la recepción de un mensaje de su partido sobre una cuestión de la UE persuade a los votantes de ese partido debido a las argumentaciones que el mensaje contiene o debido a que procede de una fuente en la que confían. Si los votantes se preocupan más por quién está tomando una posición que por lo que se está proponiendo, es probable que se conformen ciegamente a las voluntades de los partidos políticos, absolviéndolos de rendir cuentas por su comportamiento. Los resultados de esta parte de la tesis muestran que la presencia de la etiqueta del partido ejerce una mayor influencia sobre las actitudes de los votantes que el contenido del mensaje; además, los participantes en el experimento parecen dispuestos a abandonar sus opiniones anteriores para seguir la línea oficial del partido.

Finalmente, el tercer capítulo se centra en los límites del poder persuasivo de los partidos. El capítulo muestra que cuando un sistema de partidos es inestable, la gente tiende a depender menos de los partidos políticos, dado que los votantes necesitan sentir algún tipo de familiaridad con los partidos para confiar en sus "cues". Este tipo de experiencia es difícil de desarrollar cuando los partidos están continuamente cambiando. Este capítulo utiliza datos observacionales de diferentes países de la UE para probar la relación entre la inestabilidad del sistema de partidos o la inestabilidad de los partidos y la efectividad de las "cues" de partido. Dada la naturaleza jerárquica de los datos, el análisis se compone de modelos multinivel.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the influence that political parties have on what voters think about the European integration process and EU issues. Its main interest is in whether and to what extent European citizens depend on their parties for developing and updating their opinions in the context of EU politics. In other words, this study aims at understanding if, and under which circumstances, voters use cues from political parties to develop their attitudes toward the European Union.

Each of the chapters of this thesis focuses on a different element of the cueing process. In any attempt at persuasion, it is possible to distinguish three components: the recipient (whom), the message (what), and the source (who) (Druckman and Lupia, 2000: 14). My work provides a comprehensive analysis of party influence identifying who the voters are that are more likely to use party cues (recipient), which part of the party message shapes their attitudes (message), and from which parties voters are more likely to take cues (source).

The analysis of the cueing process is particularly relevant in the current situation of EU politics. In this moment of polarization, it is crucial to understand the role that political parties have in the formation of public attitudes toward the EU. The European Union has traditionally been a complex and distant political arena, where voters' attitudes are particularly prone to the influence of political parties and other more informed political actors (Hooghe and Marks, 2008). However, EU politics is also experiencing an unprecedented process of politicization that is increasing its saliency in the national political debate (Kriesi and Grande, 2014). This growing relevance of EU issues might

interfere with the cueing process, making it harder for political parties to affect the attitudes of a better-informed electorate.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on individual characteristics. In particular, it provides evidence that the less knowledgeable about EU politics voters are, the higher the likelihood that they will use party cues. The idea that voters' attitudes toward the EU are influenced by party cues is based on the assumption that the electorate is ill-informed. However, the negative relation between party cue effectiveness and citizens' knowledge of EU politics has never been tested. The chapter, therefore, provides the first test in this sense. Moreover, the analysis relies on experimental as well as observational data to maximize both the internal and the external validity of the results. On the one hand, the use of experimental data allows us to cope with problems related to reverse causality. In other words, the experimental manipulation of party cues permits us to estimate the influence of party stances on voters' positions net from the opposite process, that is the influence that voters have on the positions of their parties. On the other hand, the estimation of Instrumental Variables models with cross-sectional observational data confirms that the influence of party cues is also higher among less informed citizens outside the experimental setting and in different European countries.

The second chapter shifts the attention from the recipients of party messages to the message itself. I use a second experiment to understand if, when receiving a message on the EU from their political party, voters are persuaded by its content or by the fact it comes from a source they like. The aim is to assess to what extent public attitudes can constrain the political elite's activity at the EU level. If, in fact, people avoid processing the content of the messages they receive and focus on their source, there are few incentives for political parties to take positions that resonate with the values and prior opinions of their

voters. On the contrary, if voters only follow the party line when the political content of its messages fits their values and beliefs, political parties are forced to take into account voter preferences when formulating their official stances if they do not want to be electorally punished. No academic work on EU attitudes to date has disentangled the source and the content effect of party messages. The majority of studies of party cues in the context of EU politics exclusively use observational data, so they cannot manipulate the messages that voters receive to understand which parts have the highest persuasion effect. The results of the chapter show that the content of the party message exerts a relatively small effect on voter attitudes compared with its source. In other words, people seem to care more about who is communicating the message than what this message is about. The chapter, therefore, provides the first evidence that European citizens tend to use a heuristic model of information processing when thinking about EU issues.

Finally, the third chapter focuses on the characteristics of the parties and party system, that is, the source of the persuasion attempt. It shows that when a party system is unstable, people tend to rely less on parties for political cues. The chapter, therefore, focuses on the limits of party persuasive power. It shows that voters need to feel some sort of familiarity with political parties to rely on their cues. This kind of experience is hard to develop when political parties are continuously changing. This chapter uses observational data from different EU countries to test the relation between party system or party instability and effectiveness of party cues. To take into account the nested nature of the data, the analysis is composed of multilevel models.

Collectively, these results improve the current understanding of the cueing process in the EU political context and shed light on which recipient, message, and source characteristics increase the persuasive power of political parties. Moreover, the broad range

of statistical techniques used and the different types of data analysed provide robustness to the findings. As a result, this work represents an original contribution to literature on heuristics, party cues, attitudes formation, and public attitudes toward the EU.

In the following sections of the Introduction, I will highlight the relevance of my work showing that (1) even if EU issues are highly salient, and increasingly politicized, the parties keep their leading role in building support for the integration process; (2) the influence of parties on voters' attitudes can be a problem for the accountability of the political elite; and (3) the fact that political parties strongly affect voters' opinions about the integration process makes the problem of the EU democratic deficit more complicated to address.

Attitudes toward the EU and the role of political parties

Over the years, citizens' attitudes toward the EU have undergone relevant changes. Citizens went from providing general and quiescent support to European integration, to questioning several of its implications. As a consequence, political decisions on European integration have moved from being a prerogative of political and economic elites to being discussed in the mass politics arena. However, even though public attitudes on EU issues have now more relevance than in the past, political parties still play the central role in the integration process, given the influence they can exert on voters' opinions.

As described by both neofunctionalists and intergovernmentalists, the first three decades of European integration were characterised by the exclusive relevance of national and supranational interest groups. Their demands for supranational coordination inspired

and shaped the integration process from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. As described by Hooghe and Marks (2008), during these years public opinion was quiescent, providing political parties with the so-called *permissive consensus* that enabled elites to make deals at the European level free from the pressure of the electorate. Starting in the early 1990s, however, the expansion and deepening of EU competences has led to an increase in the politicization of European integration and EU issues, with the consequent interest and engagement of mass publics. This politicization has been driven in particular by political parties that oppose the integration process. Mainstream parties have tried to defuse the salience of the EU in the national political debate, with the consequence that the debate of the EU has been mainly shaped by Eurosceptic parties. As a consequence, the period of permissive consensus has ended. Mainstream parties and interest groups have lost their exclusivity in the management of EU politics. The EU has entered the mass public political arena, limiting the liberty of mainstream parties in their activity at the European Union level. Political parties are now pressed by a *constraining dissensus* that forces them to take into account public attitudes when taking positions and decisions about the European integration process (Hooghe and Marks, 2008).

The new relevance of public attitudes in the debate on the EU, however, has not taken political parties' guiding role in the integration process away from them. Regardless of the public consensus or public dissensus context in which political elites move, they can still lead the integration process, due to the influence they can exert on voters' attitudes. Hooghe and Marks point out simply that, compared with the period of permissive consensus, public opinion is now more interested in EU politics and that citizens' negative attitudes toward the EU have risen. But the development and the mobilization of these negative attitudes is still in the hands of the political parties, in particular, in the hands of

opposition parties that see in the politicization of the EU a possibility to change the established power relations among political parties (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012) or think that the interests and values they defend are threatened by the integration process (Bornschier, 2011; Van Elsas and Van der Brug, 2015). European citizens do not autonomously develop political opinions about the EU or EU issues. Voters' attitudes need to be mobilized because the average citizen is ill-informed about politics in general and even less informed about EU politics (Anderson, 1998; Hobolt, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2005), and this lack of information prevents an analysis of pros and cons of the integration process.

In fact, the literature on public attitudes toward the EU often recognizes, explicitly or implicitly, the influential role played by political parties. Usually, this literature is organized into three broad groups: the economic, the political, and the cultural approach. The studies that belong to the economic approach focus on the costs and benefits generated by the process of European integration to explain why some people support and others oppose the EU. Scholars have analysed the impact that national and individual economic conditions have on public support for the EU, assuming that European citizens decide their level of Europeanism depending on what they gain or lose from the integration process (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Whitten, 1997; Herzog and Tucker, 2010; Tucker et al., 2002).

On the other hand, the studies that belong to the political approach focus on the effect that the national political context has on citizens' attitudes toward the EU. The study of Anderson has introduced the idea that when asked to evaluate the EU, 'respondents may have little knowledge about the EU but instead substitute their attitudes toward similar political structure' (Anderson, 1998: 575). Indeed, factors like the trust in and the

satisfaction with national political institutions or the support for specific national political parties have been found to be good predictors of citizens' attitudes toward the EU (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000; Muñoz et al., 2011).

Finally, the cultural approach has analysed the impact that factors such as attachment to national identity and perceived cultural threats have on what people think about the integration process (Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002). In this case, the idea is that the integration process causes the loss of national sovereignty and aspects of the national specificity, raising cultural concerns among European citizens.

Even though at first glance political parties can be considered relevant only according to the political approach, their role is also essential in inspiring economic and cultural considerations about the EU among their voters. These factors exert an impact on public support for the EU only if political entrepreneurs decide to mobilize them. In Hooghe and Marks' words:

> Connections between national identity, cultural and economic insecurity and issues such as EU enlargement cannot be induced directly from experience, but have to be constructed. Such construction is most influential for individuals who do not have strong prior attitudes and for attitudes towards distant, abstract or new political objects. Hence, public opinion on Europe is particularly susceptible to construction: i.e. priming (making a consideration salient), framing (connecting a particular consideration to a political object) and cueing (instilling a bias) (Hooghe and Marks, 2008: 13).

This power of the political elite to influence voters' attitudes toward the EU is

not limited to Eurosceptic parties. In general, partisan voters look at political elites when they have to express an opinion on the EU and tend to assimilate their own positions to the stances of their party (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Kumlin, 2011; Maier et al., 2012; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Wessels, 1995).

This thesis focuses on the impact that national political parties have on voters' support for the European Union. As such, it does not uniquely speak to studies on EU attitudes that focus on political variables, but is relevant for all of the mentioned approaches. The role played by political parties and the extent to which they are able to influence the attitudes of their voters have a fundamental importance for studies on the formation of citizens' attitudes toward the EU, regardless of whether they focus on political, economic, or cultural factors. In fact, even though today public attitudes toward the EU are thought to have a more central role in the integration process compared to the past, their development still depend on the actions of the political elite.

The party cue heuristic

From the previous section, we know that citizen attitudes toward the EU and EU issues are influenced by political parties. Is this a problem for political party accountability? Or does the influence of political parties have a positive and instructive effect on voters' attitudes? Political science literature has historically been inclined toward the second possibility, neglecting the negative consequences of the use of party cues.

The fact that political parties are able to influence the opinions of their voters is not

new in political science, and it has not always been seen as a problem for democratic systems. It is well known that the average citizen is ill-informed about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997), and from the introduction of survey research in political science, scholars consistently found that the general public profoundly lacks political knowledge and sophistication (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000). However, this situation does not mean that voters do not hold political opinions. When developing attitudes and decisions about political issues, citizens can overcome this lack of information by relying on heuristics, that is, an 'information shortcut—a simple way to draw complex inferences' (Druckman and Lupia, 2016: 16). According to Sniderman and his colleagues, heuristics 'are judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice. (…) Insofar as they can be brought into play, people can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about political choices without necessarily possessing a large body of knowledge about politics' (Sniderman et al., 1991: 19).

Among the different heuristics that citizens can use to simplify political choices (see, for example, Lau and Redlawsk, 2001), party cues can be used to decide whether, and to what extent, to support a particular policy or candidate. For example, partisan voters (can) decide their position on a political issue on the basis of their party position. This is a type of "endorsement heuristic" (Lupia, 1994). In other words, 'as individuals try to determine their own opinions on political issues or how to vote, they look to major social groups for cues. Such groups often provide endorsements, indicating to citizens how they should behave. (…) Individuals decided which social group to take their cues from simply based on how close they felt or how much they liked any particular group. Thus, they

allowed these groups to analyze policies and candidates for them, while still being able to make choices that matched their overall preferences' (Carmines and D'Amico, 2015: 5). People that lack political information can look for "help" from elected officials, political parties, or interest groups that they trust regarding what they should think about a specific political issue, the relevant point being that 'such cues arguably eliminate the need for substantive information about an issue' (Kuklinsky and Quirk, 2000: 155). Thanks to this resource-saving device, 'individuals will rely on trusted experts and political elites to form their opinions on political issues without having to work through the details of those issues themselves' (Gilens and Murakawa, 2002: 15).

Classical works on heuristics, therefore, look at shortcuts such as party cues as positive because they enable unsophisticated citizens to make competent choices even when lacking information on the issue at stake. As noted by Kuklinski and Hurley (1994), studies like Popkin (1991) and Sniderman et al. (1991) share a fundamental point, that is, they 'view cue-taking as a rational and an effective means by which citizens can make the right choices' (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994: 731). In general, political scientists see heuristics as an efficient and beneficial way of processing and organizing information (Carmines and D'Amico, 2015: 4). From this point of view, heuristics would be the 'next-best thing to fully rational democratic decision-making' (Druckman et al., 2009: 493).

This mostly positive view depends on how political science has imported from (social) psychology the concept of heuristics. In fact, important differences exist in the two disciplines on how heuristics are conceptualized and, in turn, on what the implications of their use are (Druckman at al. 2009; Carmines and D'Amico, 2015; Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000). Carmines and D'Amico (2015) highlight that in decision-making psychology, heuristics were seen as tools that allowed people to arrive to a decision employing minimal

effort, but it was equally stressed that these shortcuts were likely to bias people's judgements and produce the wrong decisions. For Druckman and his colleagues, the crucial point 'is that, as developed in psychology, heuristic-based decision-making falls short of the rational ideal' (Druckman et al., 2009: 493). In its original (psychological) meaning, heuristics are computational shortcuts, not informational ones. They are not used by people to compensate for a lack of information, but to avoid the effort to engage in a rigorous analysis of the information that they have. A person can use the little information that (s)he has in a non-heuristic way if (s)he engages in effortful thinking. By contrast, a person with a lot of information can use heuristic processing if s(he) wants to avoid cognitive efforts. In other words, in psychology, non-heuristic (or rational) decisions are not the ones taken by informed people, but the decisions taken by people that use the information they have. It is not the amount of information that makes the difference, but the way it is processed. And, more importantly, people that use heuristic processing are not aware of its shortcomings and do not question its results (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000: 163). In sum,

> political scientists have borrowed the concept of heuristics from psychology while overlooking its main significance in that literature. Viewing heuristics as rational strategies for dealing with ignorance, political scientists have stressed how they enhance competence. They have not looked for problems with them. (…) Such differences in perspective and emphasis are largely understandable. What is not warranted, in our view, is political scientists' virtual abandonment of the psychologists' notion of heuristics and its expectation of serious distortion. (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000: 166–167).

This discourse on the negative effects of the use of heuristics also applies to party cues. The potential problem that arises from the use of heuristics from parties is that citizens can be tempted to blindly rely on their cues for deciding their policy positions. In such cases, voters would completely delegate the task of taking an informed position to their political parties. Indeed, research in social cognition points to the fact that people can be tempted to use their trust in the source of a message as the unique (or main) criterion for evaluating a political message (Chaiken, 1987; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Cohen, 2003). In such cases, voters would not analyse the content of a political message when receiving it, but they would assess its validity based on if they like or dislike the politician or the political party that communicate it. Even though party cues can be considered an efficient device that people use when lacking political information, by which political parties "help" their voters to develop political attitudes, the problem is that party cues can also be misleading, given that politicians 'are not in the business of educating the public. Instead, they use rhetoric to trigger the psychological mechanisms that distort judgment. They present isolated, unrepresentative facts; they frame issues tendentiously; and they seek to evoke an emotional response rather than encourage rational deliberation' (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000: 168).

The use of party cues, therefore, can result in citizens focusing strongly on the "who" and neglecting the "what". In Kuklinski and Hurley's words, 'the more frequently this occurs, the more one can justifiably question the quality of public opinion that derives from this particular heuristic' (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994: 732–733). It is theoretically true that, with experience, voters could learn whether or not the use of party cues is a reliable method for obtaining desired political outcomes and decide to spend more efforts

in analysing the "what" if the heuristic processing results are unsatisfactory. However, 'given the complexity of national policy making, it is the rare citizen who can determine whether or not a particular policy has worked. Even if one can validly conclude that it has not, the assignment of responsibility to this or that legislator can challenge even the most politically astute' (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994: 732). This point is even more relevant in the context of European Union politics. The EU has a really complex institutional architecture, where it is very hard to establish political responsibility for single politicians and political groups (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). This virtual impossibility to check the reliability of party cues on EU issues makes their uncritical use even more likely than in the context of national politics. As stressed by Kuklinsky and Hurley, 'like religion, taking political cues may be a matter of faith' (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994: 732).

The contribution of this thesis therefore goes beyond the field of EU attitudes and EU studies. It places itself in the broader debate on attitude formation, party cues, and heuristics, highlighting the potential risks of the use of informational and cognitive shortcuts.

Citizens' attitudes toward the EU and the democratic deficit

The influence that political parties have on voters' attitudes toward the EU is particularly relevant for the discussion of the so-called EU democratic deficit. Over the years, scholars have proposed to increase the importance of citizen attitudes in the EU decision-making process, as a way to legitimize EU policy outcomes and to link political elite policy choices to voters' preferences. In other words, the attitudes of

citizens toward EU issues have been seen as a way to constrain party activity at the EU level. However, as seen in the previous sections, European citizens use party cues when developing attitudes toward the EU, which gives political parties a fair amount of manoeuvring room. It means, in other words, that parties are able to influence the constraints that are supposed to limit their autonomy.

The discourse on the democratic deficit of the EU has characterized the academic discussion for several years. In its classical formulation (Follesdal and Hix, 2006), the European Parliament was considered too weak compared with intergovernmental bodies such as the European Commission or the Council. Moreover, the shift of competences to the supranational level has weakened the role of national parliaments and strengthened the autonomy of national executives, given that the latter can use intergovernmental agreements to implement policies that would be rejected if voted on in the national assemblies. Apart from the problems in the EU institutional design, problems for the democratic legitimacy of the EU also derive from the absence of real EU elections where voters are called to clearly choose among different political alternatives for policies at the EU level. The only directly elected institution of the EU, the European Parliament, has important limitations in the decision-making process and its election is not really linked to EU issues. European elections are considered by voters "second order elections" and national political parties use them to test their popularity among voters for their activity at the national level (Hobolt, 2014). From this point of view, citizens do not have the possibility to send electoral messages to their representatives on whether they approve their activity or want a change in the direction of policies. In other words, the classical conceptualization of the democratic deficit highlights the weak link between voter preferences on EU issues and EU policy

resulting from the inability of voter attitudes to act as constraints of political elite activity at the EU level.

Over the years, reforms included in EU treaties have tried to fix some of the institutional problems of the European Union by increasing the relevance of the European Parliament in the policy-making process. However, the standard counter-arguments against the democratic deficit remarks postulate that the EU does not need to be as democratic as its member countries. According with this view, the European Union is a form of intergovernmental decision making, where supranational institutions are under the control of member states; therefore, if member states are democratic political systems, they legitimate the activity of EU institutions (Moravcsik, 2002). Following a different line of reasoning, but coming to the same conclusions, Majone (1998) argued that most EU policies are regulatory, are about technical issues, and have no distributional consequences. As such, they have the same degree of legitimacy than decisions made by the national non-elected agencies. Recently, Sánchez-Cuenca (2017) has argued that however correct the arguments of Moravcsik and Majone were when they were presented, they lost their validity after the economic crisis. EU institutions and agencies have demonstrated that they have large authority over member states and have implemented policies that clearly have distributional implications. For example, the principle that the debts must be repaid, whatever the costs for the debtor countries, is not a neutral one, has imposed a large-scale distribution, and represents a clear choice in favour of creditor countries (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2017). Moreover, the new EU economic governance raised from the crisis has made clear that classical solutions to the democratic deficit like the improvement of EP powers vis-à-vis intergovernmental institutions does not solve the problem, given that decisions on important distributive

measures cannot be the object of political deliberation. Economic policy 'has been almost fully depoliticized through delegation to independent agencies [e.g. the ECB] and through binding rules [e.g. Fiscal Compact, Tow-Pack, Six-Pack]' (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2017: 365).

As noted by Simon Hix (2015), EU policy outcomes need once again to be legitimized. The redistributive consequences (in both creditor and debtor countries) that are emerging from the new EU system can make "losers" retrieve support for the European Union if they do not 'perceive that they will only be on the losing side for a short time' and that 'they are still represented in the political process (for example, with seats in a parliament)' (Hix, 2015: 190). According to Hix, a maximalist way to provide legitimacy to the new economic governance would be to formalize the new structure in an EU treaty and then to make the treaty ratified by referendum in all member states. In this way, citizens' EU attitudes would determine the pace of European integration and, if citizens supported the institutional changes, this would provide the strongest possible legitimacy to the new architecture. Along the same lines, Hix also suggests that citizens could be called on to directly elect the President of the European Commission (or a "European President" if the offices of Commission President and President of European Council were fused). This would provide the Commission with an electoral mandate for its role as national economic policy scrutinizer that the new agreements between member states assign to it. These mechanisms 'would provide stronger direct legitimacy, would force European elites to engage directly with voters and set out clearer policy choices going forward (…)' (Hix, 2015: 196).

Thus, in both the classical and the more recent conceptualization of the democratic deficit, citizens' attitudes are seen as the principal way to provide legitimacy

to political decisions taken by a political elite irrespective of voters' opinions. Adopting the right institutional mechanisms, both the peace of European integration and the direction of EU policies could be shaped by voters' preferences. Electoral punishment would signal to political parties whether their voters approve their activity at the EU level.

However, if European citizens tend to blindly follow party cues when developing attitudes toward the EU, this accountability mechanism is unlikely to take place. A further contribution of this thesis, therefore, is to shed light on whether citizens' attitudes toward the EU can be considered a valid constraint for political elite activity, or if the use of party cues makes the democratic deficit problem more complicated to address.

The content of the thesis

The thesis is composed of three chapters. Each of them is structured as an independent paper that can be totally understood if read in isolation. However, they have a common thread. All the chapters concern the extent to which voters' attitudes toward the EU and EU issues are influenced by political parties, and how this affects parties' accountability for their activity at the EU level. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the cueing process and makes a different contribution to the understanding of parties' influence on citizens' attitudes toward the EU. The following section summarizes the contents and findings of each chapter of the thesis.

The top-down process of attitude formation described in the previous pages is based

on the assumption that the average citizen is ill-informed about politics in general and has even less information about EU politics. Regardless of whether we consider party heuristics an informational or a computational shortcut, people with low levels of political knowledge are supposedly more likely to use them. Despite its relevance, however, the negative relation between political knowledge about the EU and effectiveness of party cues has never been tested.

The relation between political knowledge and party cues is nevertheless particularly important in the context of European Union politics, given that information about EU politics are particularly rare and complex. In fact, even though the saliency of the European integration in the national political debate has increased with the economic crisis (Kriesi and Grande, 2014), recent studies have also demonstrated that media coverage tends to focus on the "horse race" of European elections and to neglect policy-related information (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). Moreover, electoral campaigns for the European Parliament, instead of focusing on European issues, are mainly used by the political elite to test the popularity of their political agenda among national voters (Hobolt, 2014).

Consequently, it is not easy for citizens to be well informed about EU issues. This situation could represent an obstacle to parties' accountability for their activity at the EU level. If the influence of political parties on citizens' preferences depends on voters' ill-information, and information about European Union politics is hardly available, this gives the political elite a fair amount of room to manoeuvre when taking stances on EU issues. Voters' attitudes toward the integration process cannot be a constraint for political elite activity if parties can easily change these attitudes.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on this debate and provides a relatively comprehensive picture of the relationship between citizens' lack of information on EU

politics and the influence of political parties on voters' preferences. To this aim, the chapter uses experimental as well as observational cross-sectional data to discover if the voters are more likely to take cues from their parties when lacking information about the European Union and when they have to express an opinion on particular complex issues. The results of this chapter show that party influence is higher among ill-informed voters than among knowledgeable ones. Moreover, even though party cues are not more persuasive on hard issues than on easy ones, issue complexity still appears to be relevant for the cueing process. The few people that are well informed about the EU, in fact, are able to express autonomous opinions on issues that are not particularly complex, but they need to rely on party cues when facing difficult themes. These results suggest that the accountability of political parties for their activity at the EU level can be eluded.

The fact that the opinions of ill-informed voters on EU issues can be easily changed by political parties is concerning, but its impact on democratic accountability can only be assessed by looking at which part of a party's message shapes voters' attitudes (Bullock, 2011). Party persuasion can, in fact, occur in different ways. On the one hand, voters' attitudes could be influenced because political parties communicate arguments that resonate with voters' prior beliefs and/or are consistent with voters' ideological values. In this case, to be persuasive, parties should be careful with the content of the message they communicate and be sure it does not challenge voters' prior opinions (too much). In such a situation, political parties would still be accountable, because if they took a position on an EU issue that contrasted with their voters' beliefs and values, voters would not align to the stance of the party and would electorally punish it. On the other hand, it could be that citizens totally delegate the demanding task of taking positions on EU issues to their political parties. In this case, voters would be persuaded by a party message not because

they share its content, but because they trust its source. In other words, voters would align with a political stance simply because it belongs to their party and not because they find it consistent with their political beliefs and values. In this case, party accountability for EU activity would be seriously compromised, given that voters would be unlikely to electorally punish their party for positions taken on EU issues.

The second chapter of the thesis aims to understand which of the two described dynamics takes place when voters receive party messages on the EU. This could not be understood from the results of chapter one, given that the observational data did not allow to disentangle the source and the content effects, and the chosen experimental design did not allow for comparison. To understand if and to what extent party accountability for EU activity is compromised, I use a second experiment in chapter two to compare the source and the content effect on voter attitudes. The chapter focuses, in other words, on whether the content of the message or its source shapes voter preferences.

The results are not reassuring. Citizens, in fact, seem to use heuristic processing when thinking about the EU: they always support a political stance more if it is ascribed to their party than if it comes from a neutral source, while its Eurosceptic/Pro-EU connotation itself has a lower impact. This means that when voters have to decide to what extent they support a stance on an EU issue, they put more attention on who is taking it than on whether it is advocating more or less integration. The presence of the party label is able to affect voters' attitudes more than the content of the message. Moreover, the experiment shows that voters' attitudes are influenced by the message content, but only when the message comes from a neutral source. When receiving a message from their party, people tend to follow it regardless of its content. In such a situation, electoral punishment for a political party seems quite unlikely, given that voters will tend to follow the official party

line instead of questioning it.

The results of the first and the second chapter depict partisan voters as easily influenced by party positions on EU issues. Given the general lack of information about EU politics and the high complexity of EU issues, voters need to rely on their party cues to develop their own political opinions. Moreover, this cueing process takes place not because political parties show their voters the link between party policy positions and party/voter political values. The persuasion does not occur because party discourse resonates with voters' prior beliefs. The partisan voter aligns with the party stances simply because they are the stances of his or her party. When a political position is linked to the label of the preferred party, citizens not only support it to a greater extent, but are also willing to renounce their prior opinions and beliefs to follow the party line. Consequently, party accountability for EU activity appears weak. Voters' attitudes do not seem to represent a particular hard constraint for the political elite.

However, party influence on partisan voters has its limitations. The third chapter of the thesis investigates the conditions under which party cues on EU issues can be ineffective. In particular, the chapter focuses on the concept of party stability to demonstrate that in changeable party systems the cues of political parties are less effective than in more stable ones. The idea is that feeling some sort of attachment for a party is not enough for voters to use its cues. Voters need to have experience with political parties to follow their cues. If parties experience changes in their structure, this can reset their reputations and compromise the effectiveness of their cues.

The results of this chapter provide evidence that the influence of political parties on voter attitudes toward the EU is limited by party instability. At the party system level, the results are clear. When the party system experiences a high number of party changes,

partisan voters are less likely to follow party cues on EU issues. This means that a chaotic party system pushes voters to rely on political actors other than their political parties for cues. At the party level, the results are mixed, given that not all the permanent changes in party structure negatively impact the effectiveness of party cues. In any case, the chapter shows that the persuasive power of the party label has limitations. Voters may blindly follow the official party line on EU issues, but only after they have enough experience with party interests and values.

In sum, this thesis contributes to the academic literature on party cues regarding the European Union in several ways. First of all, it tests for the first time the theoretical assumption of the top-down model, showing that the ability of political parties to shape voter attitudes on EU issues depends on citizens' lack of political information about the EU. Secondly, the thesis applies for the first time the heuristic processing model to the realm of EU attitudes, showing that it is unlikely that voters' attitudes constrain elite activity, given that citizens tend to focus more on the source of political messages than on its content. Finally, the thesis shows that despite the low level of citizens' knowledge about the EU and their tendency to use heuristic processing, party cues cannot always influence voters' attitudes. Voters' familiarity and experience with political parties is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of party cues.

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CHAPTER 1

Is the European Union too complicated? Citizens' lack of information and party cue effectiveness[1]

Abstract

Previous literature suggests that citizens lack information about EU politics and need party cues to develop attitudes toward EU issues. This process would make party positions the cause rather than the consequence of voters' preferences, reducing the accountability of the political elite. The paper tests the premise of this top-down model investigating how issue complexity and citizens' political knowledge affect party cues effectiveness. The results from both experimental and observational data show that party influence is higher among less knowledgeable citizens. Moreover, well-informed voters have autonomous opinions on easy issues, but they rely on party cues when facing harder ones. Given the low availability of information about EU politics and the high complexity of the debated issues, parties appear largely able to shape voters' attitudes.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate whether the influence of political parties on voter attitudes toward the European Union (EU) is larger when voters lack information about EU politics. The ability of political parties to shape political attitudes of voters is thought to depend on the average citizen's general lack of political information. Voters look for cues from political parties as shortcuts to express opinions on political issues about which they are not informed. In the context of EU politics, the need for party cues can be even higher, since citizens perceive the Union to be a distant and complicated political system, and their knowledge about EU issues is even lower than their knowledge of national ones.

Several studies, in fact, have demonstrated that citizens take cues from their party when expressing opinions on the integration process (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007). However, despite the fundamental theoretical value that citizen lack of information has for that top-down view, the relationship between party cues and citizen knowledge of EU politics has never been tested. The point is nevertheless highly significant, given the apparent difficulty that citizens face in being well informed about EU issues. Recent studies have demonstrated that media and political parties do not provide voters with information about EU policies; although the EU is increasingly present in national political debates, the attention of media and political actors almost always focuses exclusively on electioneering, whereas EU policy and institutional aspects go undebated (Hobolt, 2014; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014: 69-84). As a result, though party cues about the EU are readily available, what remains missing from the political debate is the information that individuals need to critically evaluate them. It is therefore crucial to assess whether and, if so, then to what extent voters' lack of information about EU politics makes the party

stances on EU issues the cause rather than the consequence of voter preferences, reducing the accountability of the political elite.

This paper tests the theoretical premise of the top-down model by scrutinising how citizens' political knowledge and issue complexity affect the impact of party cues. If party influence is based on citizen's lack of information, then on the one hand, the opinions of more knowledgeable citizens should be more independent of party positions than those of their less informed counterparts. On the other hand, when asked for their opinions about complex issues, citizens should be more likely to use cues than when asked for their opinions about less complex ones.

This study relies on experimental as well as observational cross-sectional survey data to cope with problems of reverse causality and external validity. The results show that less informed citizens are more easily influenced by party cues than are citizens with a better knowledge of EU politics, while issue complexity does not seem to affect the ability of political parties to shape citizen attitudes. However, the moderating role of political knowledge seems to be stronger for easy issues than for difficult ones: when facing a complex issue, even well-informed citizens tend to rely on party cues. Such results depict a situation in which political parties have a good deal of room to manoeuvre when taking stances on EU issues, since the low availability of information on EU politics and the high complexity of EU issues make voters more likely to conform to party positions instead of questioning them.

1.1 Party cues and information

Citizens and information about the EU

Ample evidence suggests that the average citizen knows very little about politics, and researchers of public opinion agree that ordinary people tend to pay only occasional and superficial attention to politics (Sniderman et al., 1991: 15). The phenomenon is so pervasive that 'the widespread ignorance of the general public about all but the most highly salient political events and actors is one of the best documented facts in all of the social sciences' (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001: 951). That circumstance, however, does not mean that voters do not have political preferences. When an average citizen has to express an opinion about political issues about which he or she lacks relevant information, he or she 'will seek assistance from men who are experts in those fields, have the same political goals he [or she] does, and have good judgment' (Down, 1957: 233). In short, given the lack of information among voters, 'cues offered by informed actors can influence the opinion of less informed individuals on complex issues' (Hellström, 2008: 1130). Among different cues that people follow, the position of the political party to which they feel closest is clearly a popular one, given their shared ideological predispositions (Zaller, 1992). Altogether, a party position on a particular issue offers a shortcut used by citizens who lack detailed information to infer their own positions on the same issue (Hobolt, 2007).

In the EU context, the need for party cues can be even greater because citizens perceive the EU as a distant political system, mostly given their lack of direct influence upon it. In fact, voter knowledge about EU politics is even lower than their knowledge of national politics (Anderson, 1998; Hobolt, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Unsurprisingly, the influence of parties on voter attitudes toward the EU has been successfully tested in various academic publications (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and

Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007). These studies demonstrate the existence of a top-down process by which voters tend to assimilate their position on the EU issue to that of their party.

Despite its fundamental theoretical value, however, the link between voter knowledge about the EU and the effectiveness of party cues has never been tested.[2] The relationship is nevertheless potentially significant, given it is not easy for citizens to be informed about EU issues. National political parties tend to use European elections 'as opportunities to test their standing with the public in terms of their domestic political agendas', and consequently, campaigns 'have tended to focus on domestic political matters and be dominated by national political actors' (Hobolt, 2014: 1530–1531). Moreover, recent studies have shown that media coverage of EU politics, if any, tends to focus on electioneering and the 'horse-race' of European Parliament elections, yet neglects policy-related news (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014: 69-84). Consequently, the public political debate provides citizens with party cues about the EU, but not with the information needed to critically evaluate them. It appears important, therefore, to understand if, and to what extent, citizen positions on EU issues are shaped by party stances instead of shaping them. In such situations, voter attitudes could not constrain the activity of political elites, thereby granting political parties with relatively broad freedom of action at the European level and reducing politicians' accountability.

[2] An exception is Hobolt (2007), who nevertheless refers to voting choices, not to changes in attitude. Her results show that factual knowledge about the EU does not significantly affect the probability of voting according to party indications in an EU referendum.

Political sophistication and issue complexity

Investigating the relationship between party cues and citizen knowledge, however, can be more complicated than it seems. From a theoretical perspective, different aspects of political sophistication have different relationships with the effectiveness of party cues. As Ray (2003: 988) has highlighted, 'Political awareness could be expected to enhance persuadability if it implies simply a greater likelihood of receiving political cues. Conversely, it would decrease persuasion if awareness is associated with the holding of firm opinions'. Political sophistication can thus negatively or positively relate to the acceptance of party cues, depending on which of its aspects researchers highlight. In this regard, despite the top-down model's underlying assumption of an ill-informed electorate, EU literature has focused exclusively on aspects of political sophistication related not to the amount of information that voters have about the EU (and therefore, to their likelihood of *needing* party cues), but to the level of their political involvement (and hence, to their likelihood *of being exposed to* party cues). Consistently, these works expect a positive relationship between political sophistication and the effectiveness of party cues; however, they do not test the hypothesis, which is crucial for the top-down process, that a negative relationship exists due to the firmer opinions held by more informed voters (Gabel and Scheve, 2007a; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Ray (2003), for example, used an index measuring the frequency of political discussion to test his *political interest hypothesis*, which predicts a greater influence of party positions for voters interested in and attentive to politics. Along similar lines, Steenbergen et al. (2007) have shown that political parties can more easily influence their potential electorate if it is formed by more opinion leaders, operationalised as voters who discuss politics more often and try to persuade others to share their views. In sum, by focusing on the part of political

sophistication related to cue exposition and not to cue need, previous works are unable to provide evidence of a direct, negative relationship between citizen knowledge of EU politics and the effectiveness of party cues. Consequently, they cannot establish whether the lack of available information about EU politics reduces the accountability of political elites in their activity in the EU political arena.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to test the assumption of the top-down model that a lack of information about EU politics allows party cues to easily influence voter opinions about EU issues. To this aim, I articulate a set of hypotheses to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of the relationship between information and party influence on citizen attitudes toward the EU. Firstly, as previous literature has shown, political parties can shape voter opinions on EU issues.

H1: People align their positions on EU issues to the positions of their party.

Second, according to the top-down model, a negative relationship should emerge between the use of party cues and the amount of information that citizens have about the EU. By using measures of political sophistication that gauge the amount of information that citizens have about the EU, we should be able to focus on the part of political sophistication correlated with the likelihood of having firmer opinions.

H2: Political knowledge moderates the influence of parties on their voters: the greater a voter's political knowledge, the weaker the influence of the party position on the voter.

Moreover, I argue that the need for cues is measurable not only according to respondent levels of political knowledge, but also according to issue complexity. Using political sophistication indices allows researchers to assess the role of information by examining the extent to which citizens with different levels of political knowledge resist party cues. However, the assumptions of the top-down model are also testable by scrutinising how citizens with a constant level of political knowledge use the cues of political elites depending on the complexity of the political issue at hand.

I use the theoretical framework provided by Carmines and Stimson (1980) to differentiate easy and hard issues. Easy issues are symbolic instead of technical, deal with policy ends instead of means, and have formed part of the political agenda long enough to be familiar to the general public. By contrast, hard issues are technical, do not deal with abstract values but rather with concrete policy measures, and are relatively new to the political agenda. If party influence stems from citizen lack of information, then citizens should need party cues to a greater extent when faced with a hard issue than when faced with an easy one.

H3: The influence of party positions on citizen attitudes is greater for hard issues than for easy ones.

Although studies on heuristics have underscored the influential role that parties play in shaping opinions on complex issues (Coan et al., 2008; Mondak, 1993), that role has never been considered in literature addressing the EU. Instead, scholars have chosen to focus on individual, party, and contextual factors, thus neglecting the importance of issue characteristics (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a; Ray, 2003;

Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the difference between easy and hard issues seems relevant in the EU context, for the Union is an intricate political system with a complex structure, and the issues on its agenda are usually quite technical, given their economic implications. Moreover, discussions about policy are typically complex, due to the different levels at which the political debate takes place. In sum, EU politics seems to be characterised by a high concentration of hard issues, which makes the use of party cues highly likely when voters need to develop attitudes toward EU issues.

Lastly, it is possible to formulate expectations about the interaction between citizen level of political knowledge and issue complexity. Although the second hypothesis states that more informed citizens form opinions about EU issues that are more independent of their parties' positions, it is unlikely that political knowledge exerts the same moderating effect for issues with different levels of complexity. The amount of information that enables citizens to express independent opinions on easy issues can be insufficient to 'emancipate' voters from party cues when the issues at stake are more complex. Citizens are likely to need more information to express independent opinions on hard issues than on easy ones.

H4: The moderating effect of political knowledge is weaker for hard issues than for easy ones.

The preceding hypotheses aim to shed light on the mechanism that makes European citizens dependent on their parties for their preferences on EU issues. This test acquires even more relevance given the current debate about the reasons of party influence on

opinion formation (Leeper and Slothuus, 2014). A recent strand of research has challenged classical views on party cues by shifting attention from a lack of information to voter motivations (Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010; Taber and Lodger, 2006). In fact, literature on motivated reasoning 'sees citizens following parties through longstanding loyalties' (Leeper and Slothuus 2014: 137). In other words, according to those studies, citizens follow party cues not because they lack cognitive resources needed to form autonomous opinions, but because they do not want to question their partisanship. In principle, those two mechanisms could be deemed complementary instead of alternative. Indeed, classic dual-process theories claim that citizens use shortcuts such as party cues due to a lack of *ability or motivation* to engage in more rigorous processing (Chaiken, 1987; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). That argument would allow one to consider both the lack of information and the protection of partisanship as causes of the effect of party cues on voter attitudes. In practice, however, the two lines of study have opposite expectations and provide conflicting results. According to motivated reasoning studies, in fact, the protection of partisanship and prior beliefs requires considerable effort and skill, since it implies the development of political argumentations to defend preconceived conclusions about policies and political parties, which is possible only for more politically sophisticated individuals (Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010; Taber and Lodger, 2006).

Therefore, whereas literature on classic party cues has maintained that knowledgeable voters are more able to critically evaluate party messages than ill-informed ones, motivated reasoning studies have held that the former are more likely to develop biased attitudes than the latter. At the same time, motivated reasoning literature also predicts greater influence of party cues on conflicting and polarising issues than on more

consensual ones (Druckman et al., 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010), the reason being that '(…) on issues at the center of partisan conflict—where partisan values seem to be particularly at stake—citizens' partisan loyalties should be especially salient (…)' (Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010: 633). Although the conflictual–consensual dichotomy does not perfectly correspond to the easy-hard categorisation, in this case motivated reasoning predictions also extend in the opposite direction of more classical studies on party cues. A further contribution of this paper, therefore, is to clarify whether the relationship between information and cue effectiveness reflects the expectations of classic party cues studies or those of the motivated reasoning approach.

1.2 Analysis

The hypotheses articulated in the previous section will be tested using experimental and observational data for two reasons. First, using an experimental methodology solves the problem of reverse causality. There is the possibility that the primary independent variable (i.e. party position) is endogenous to the model, given the influence that voters can exert on the positions of their parties. Literature addressing EU support provides evidence of both a 'top-down' (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007) and 'bottom-up' dynamic (Carruba, 2001; Steenbergen et al., 2007). If the former finds its theoretical justification in citizen lack of information, the latter stems from the idea of parties as vote-seekers. Since the EU is becoming a more salient issue, political parties try to maximise their votes by adopting positions on the EU that are reasonably similar to those of their

potential voters. From that perspective, the influence would run from voters to political elites.

Consequently, the proposed analysis risks overestimating the top-down effect. The research design should be able to measure the influence of parties on citizens, net of the opposite process. The use of experimental data in Study 1 perfectly satisfies that need, as different values of the independent variable will be the result of only researcher manipulation of party positions.

However, experimental data are well-known to have problems of external validity. For that reason, in Study 2 I perform an analysis of observational cross-sectional data, accounting for reverse causality by using instrumental variable models. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate that the cueing mechanism detected in the experimental data is observable in the 'real world' beyond the experimental setting.

Study 1

Research design: The experiment was embedded in the seventh wave of an online panel addressing citizen political attitudes in Spain. The survey was completed by 1014 Spanish citizens older than 17 and younger than 50 years of age. Only the 410 respondents who reported being supporters of Partido Popular (PP), Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), or Podemos were included in the experiment. Appendix A provides a comparison of the experiment sample and another face-to-face standard survey completed in the same period by a representative sample of the Spanish population.

The online survey was administered between 27 April and 8 May 2015, shortly before the regional and municipal elections and before the electoral campaign commenced. Spain represents a particularly difficult test for the hypotheses articulated in the previous

section. In May 2015, the percentage of Spanish citizens who tended to trust political parties was only 7% (Eurobarometer). Moreover, Spain's party system has recently experienced the emergence of new political parties (e.g. Podemos) that, at the time of the survey, were quite unfamiliar to the general public. Since trust in and familiarity with political parties are fundamental for citizens to accept party cues (Coan et al., 2008), it seems particularly unlikely to find evidence of the top-down mechanism in the Spanish context.

The experimental design closely mirrored those used by De Sio et al. (2014) and Brader and Tucker (2012). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups, in which they were presented with four political issues: two concerning national politics and two concerning the EU. For each issue, participants were asked to select their preferred policy option among three different proposals. In the treatment group, the proposals were labelled with the name of the three political parties (i.e. PP, PSOE, and Podemos), whereas participants in the control group were presented with the same options unattributed to any party. The policy options used in the experiment were the actual positions that each party had on each political issue, taken from their electoral manifestos or the public speeches of their representatives. For the EU level, the issues used in the experiment were 'European austerity policies' and the 'Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership' (TTIP). The two national issues are not taken into account in this paper, though Appendix A provides the complete wording of the treatment. Membership in the control or treatment group was the same for each issue; if a participant received policy options with party labels for one issue, then she also received them for the other three. By the same token, participants in the control group received party labels for none of the four issues. The order of the issues in the survey was randomised, as was the order of the policy options for each political issue.

Participant partisanship was ascertained by the question, 'Which of the following political parties do you like the most or do you feel is closest to your ideas?' which was answered long before the experiment in order to prevent a consistency effect. Respondents who answered that they felt close to no party were redirected to the question, 'Even if you do not feel close to any party, is there any party that you like more than others?' If they opted for PP, PSOE, or Podemos in that second question, then they were included in the experiment, as was the case for 54 respondents, or 13.17% of the experimental sample.

Results: Given the focus of this paper, the following analysis addresses the two EU issues only, of which 'European austerity policies' represents an easy issue and the 'TTIP' a hard one. Appendix A presents an evaluation of the congruence of this categorization with the theoretical criteria used by Carmines and Stimson (1980).

From the empirical point of view, it is possible to rely on different indicators to verify whether the categorisation of the issues was correct. To measure participants' personal assessment of the complexity of the different issues, the experimental design included a manipulation check, the item for which read, 'We would like to know to what extent you consider it is complicated to understand the following issues. (1) Not complex at all, (2) A bit complex, (3) Complex, or (4) Very complex'. The left-hand panel of Figure 1.1a depicts the mean values corresponding to austerity and the TTIP. As it is possible to see, participants considered the latter to be more complex than the former. The difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$, two-tailed t-test).

It is possible to rely on another indicator for issue complexity as well: the percentage of respondents who answered 'I don't know' when asked for their opinion on the issue. We can assume that 'questions that are more difficult will be those that evoke

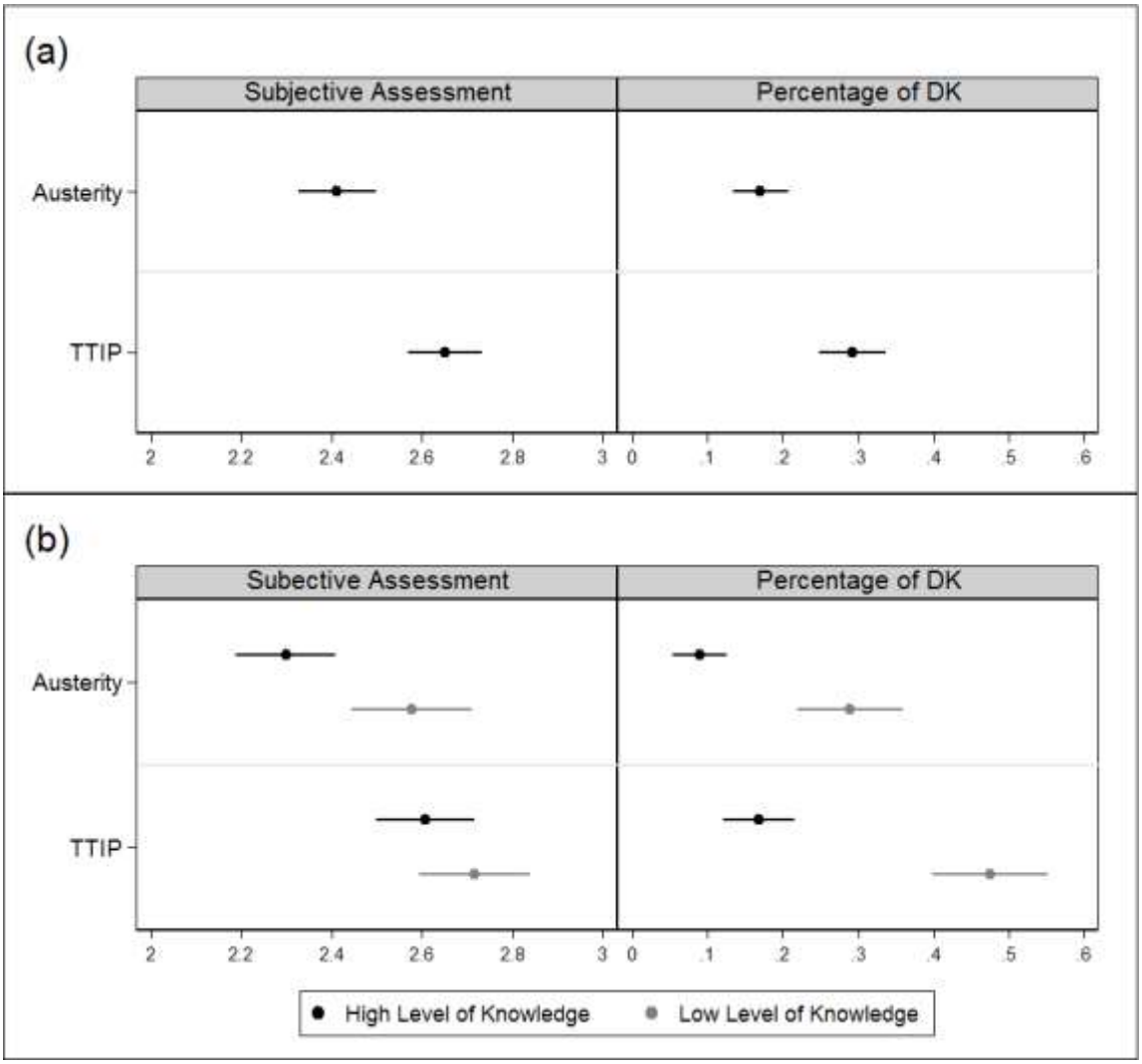

Figure 1.1. Assessment of issue complexity *Note*: The left-hand panel of both sections (a) and (b) plots the mean values of respondents' assessments of issue complexity. The question used is 'We would like to know to what extent you consider that it is complicated to understand the following issues: (1*) Not complex et all, (2) A bit complex, (3) Complex* or *(4) Very complex.* The right-hand panel of both sections (a) and (b) depicts the proportion of experiment participants for each issue who answered 'I don't know' when asked about their preferred policy option.

higher levels of uncertainty from the pool of respondents' (Coan et al., 2008), and thus, would receive a higher rate of 'I don't know' answers. The idea is that respondents would be less able to express opinions about more complex issues. As the right-hand panel of Figure 1.1a shows, slightly more than 17% of participants could not express an opinion

about austerity policies, in contrast to the 29% who could not articulate an opinion about the TTIP. The difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Figure 1.1b shows that for both subjective and objective measures, the TTIP seemed more complex for participants regardless of their levels of political knowledge. I used six items of factual knowledge about EU politics to create an index ranging from 0 (i.e. denoting participants who either gave the incorrect answer or answered 'I don't know' to all questions) to 6 (i.e. denoting participants whose answers were always correct).[3] Afterward, I dichotomised the index by separating the less informed 43% of the sample from the more informed 57%. As the two panels show, on the one hand, both issues were more complex for poorly informed participants than for more knowledgeable ones; on the other, for both groups, the TTIP was a more complex issue than austerity policies. All differences within and between levels of political knowledge are statistically significant ($p < .05$), with the sole exception of the difference in the subjective assessment of TTIP's complexity between less and more knowledgeable participants ($p < .1$, one-tailed *t*-test).

Are political parties able to affect voter attitudes about European political issues? Figure 1.2 presents the share of participants in both the treatment and control groups who selected the policy option from their party for each issue; proportions were calculated according to the total of participants, including those who answered 'I don't know'. Regarding both austerity and the TTIP, the percentage of respondents who showed support for their preferred party's position increased when party labels were attached to policy options. The party label provided voters with a cue for selecting their preferred option. In short, participants were more likely to select a policy option when they knew it was

[3] See Appendix A for item descriptions. Table A2 also presents the index distribution. It could be argued that Item 5 does not strictly measure knowledge about the EU; however, I consider that the debt-to-GDP ratio is important information for understanding the current debate on the euro crisis and austerity.

endorsed by their party. The differences between the control and treatment groups are both statistically significant ($p < .001$). We can accept the first hypothesis: citizens tend to align their positions on EU issues to the positions of their party.

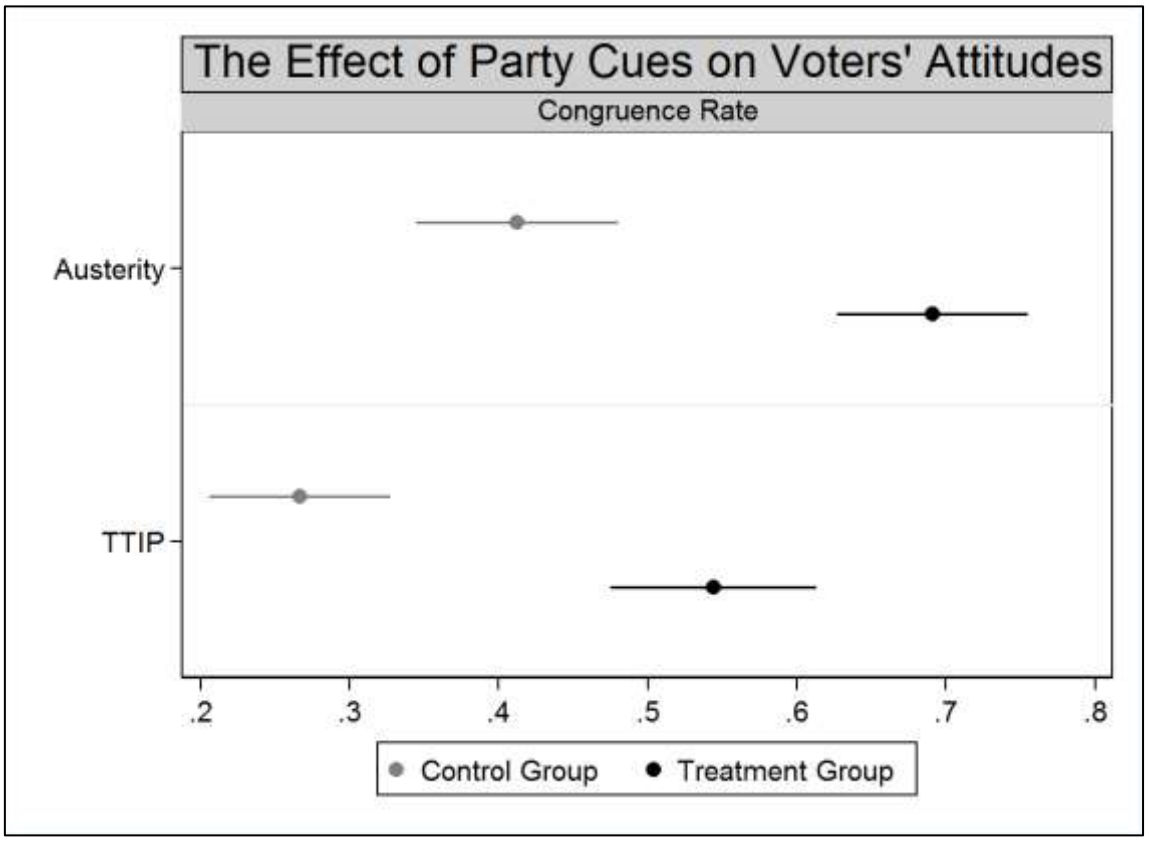

Figure 1.2. Treatment effect. Note: The figure depicts the share of respondents for each issue and for both experimental groups who selected their party's proposal when asked about their preferred policy option.

We can now analyse the relationship between party cues and voters' knowledge of EU politics. The first and second columns of Table 1.1 present two OLS regression models, one for each issue. In both models, the dependent variable is a dummy that distinguishes participants who selected their preferred party's option from those who selected another option or answered 'I don't know'. The primary independent variable is a dummy for the

experimental treatment. The models also include the interaction between the treatment dummy and the 0–6 index of EU political knowledge.

Results indicate that political knowledge negatively affects party cues; for both issues, the sign of the interaction is negative, meaning that the effect of the party's endorsement was lower for citizens with a greater level of political knowledge (Appendix A shows that the results are virtually identical when we exclude Item 5 from the political knowledge index). Even if the interaction term is not statistically significant in the case of the TTIP, the results clearly indicate that the more citizens are informed about the EU, the less their parties can influence their opinions.[4] The second hypothesis can thus also be accepted.[5] To account for the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, I replicated the analysis using probit models, as shown in the third and fourth columns of Table 1.1. Again, the interaction term has the expected negative sign for the easy as well as hard issues, albeit not to a statistically significant degree.[6]

[4] Table A4 in Appendix A shows the share of respondents who selected the preferred party's policy option in the control and treatment groups, clustered by issue and level of knowledge (dichotomous version). The results in the 'Difference' columns point in the same direction of the OLS models; the impact of party cues is lower among knowledgeable respondents than among less informed ones.

[5] It could be argued that the lower treatment effect among more knowledgeable respondents could be due to pre-treatment: more informed citizens already knew the position of their party before the experiment and thus could also identify it in the control group (Slothuus, 2016). For that reason, I replicated the OLS models in Table 1.1 controlling for exposure to political information from television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet; see Appendix A. The results are the same, meaning that the moderating role of political knowledge also holds among people who are equally exposed to political information and were therefore equally likely to know party positions before the experiment.

[6] Throughout the paper, I favour the use of linear probability models due to ease of interpretation. Evaluating the statistical significance of interaction effects in the context of nonlinear models is more complex, since the conditional effects vary by observation, depending on the predicted value of the dependent variable (Ai and Norton, 2003; Karaca–Mandic et al., 2012). Nevertheless, in Appendix A, I present the marginal effects of the experimental treatment estimated with probit models. Clearly, the marginal effects presented in Figure A1 are very similar to those resulting from the linear model estimation (Figure 1.3a).

Contrary to expectations, however, party influence does not seem to be stronger for the hard issue than for the easy one. As results in Figure 1.2 clearly show, even if a significant treatment effect emerged for both the hard and easy issues, it does not change according to issue complexity.[7] Consequently, we cannot accept the third hypothesis.

Table 1.1. Ordinary least squares (OLS) and probit models

	OLS		Probit	
	Austerity	TTIP	Austerity	TTIP
Treatment	0.38***	0.33***	1.01***	0.98***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.21)	(0.22)
Pol. Knowledge	0.09***	0.07***	0.26***	0.21***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Treat. X Pol.Know.	-0.05+	-0.02	-0.12	-0.10
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Constant	0.21***	0.12*	-0.80***	-1.13***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.15)	(0.17)
Observations	410	410	410	410
R^2	0.145	0.122		
Pseudo R^2			0.110	0.096

Note: Standard errors in parentheses
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Lastly, concerning the *H4*, Figure 1.3a shows the marginal effects of the experimental treatment for participants with different levels of political knowledge. For the easy issue (upper panel), the role of political knowledge is clear; there is a significant difference between the treatment effect for citizens without any information about the EU and those who were well informed about the European Union. Indeed, the opinions of respondents with the highest levels of political knowledge are independent of the influence of political parties, whereas the treatment effect is not significant for respondents with a level of political knowledge of 5 or 6. For the hard issue (lower panel), the relationship

[7] In Appendix A, it is possible to compare the treatment effects for the hard and the easy issues. The table also allows a comparison of the additive against the interaction models.

between party influence and political knowledge has the same direction, though the slope of the line is flatter and the interaction term in the table not significant. Such results indicate that when respondents face a hard issue, political knowledge does not exert the same 'emancipating' effect that it exerts for the easy issue. For example, respondents with political knowledge at level 5 were not influenced by political parties on the easy issue, but relied on party cues for expressing an opinion on the hard one. Therefore, the moderating effect of political knowledge seems to be lower for the hard issue than for the easy one. We can accept the fourth hypothesis.

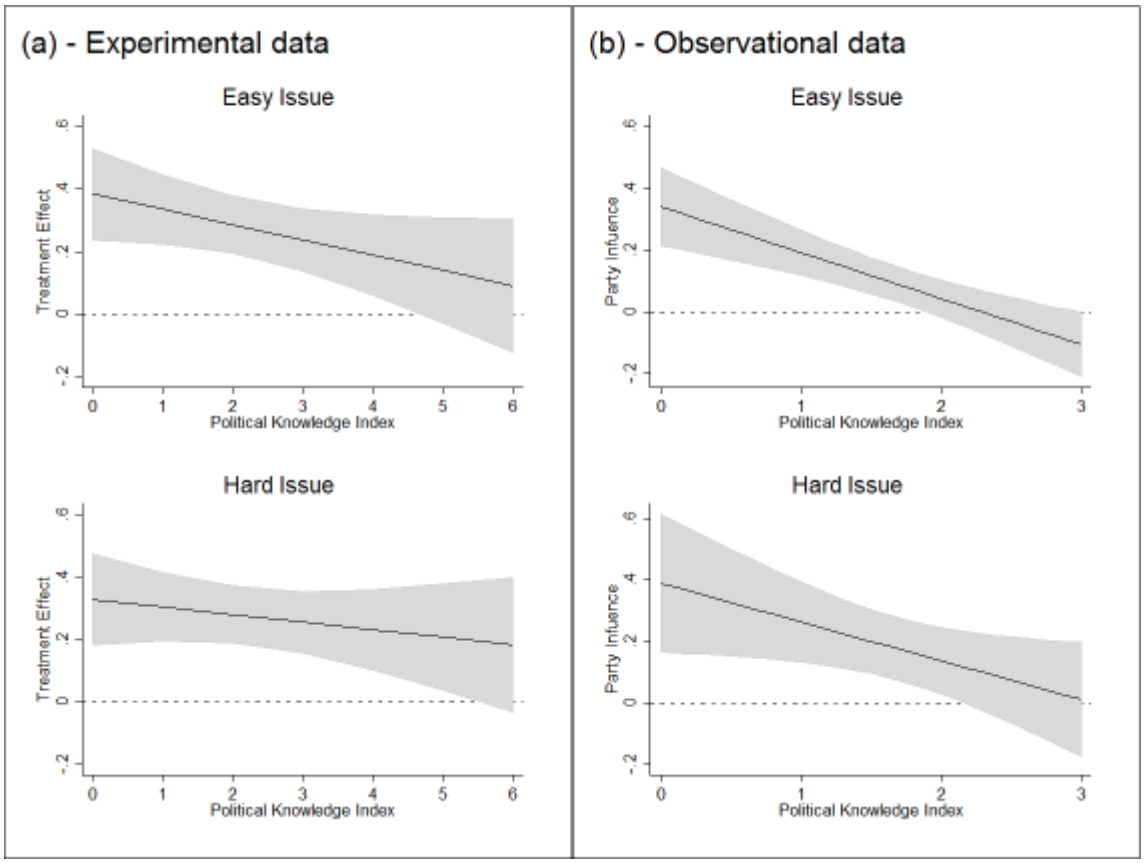

Figure 1.3. Effect of party cues on voters' attitudes for different levels of political knowledge *Note*: Section (a) of the figure shows for both the easy and hard issues the marginal effect of the experimental treatment upon different levels of respondents' political knowledge (OLS models). Section (b) shows for both the easy and hard issues the marginal effect of party positions upon different levels of respondents' political knowledge (Instrumental variable models).

Altogether, the results of the experiment support three out of the four hypotheses, thereby stressing the importance of citizen lack of political information for the effectiveness of the cueing process. However, these results are limited to both the experimental setting and Spain's political context. The way in which European citizens receive and use party cues in their everyday lives could differ from how those activities were simulated in the experiment. The following analysis with cross-sectional data is aimed at improving the external validity of the aforementioned findings, showing that the mechanisms detected in the experimental data are also observable in the 'real world' and in different European countries.

Study 2

Research design: The results of Study 1 partially confirm the expected outcomes. Participants tended to follow party cues and to a greater extent when they lacked information about EU politics. Moreover, the moderating role of political knowledge appeared to be stronger for the easy issue than for the hard one, thereby underscoring that people need more information to express an autonomous opinion about complex issues. At the same time, and contrary to the expectations, the impact of party cues was not stronger for the hard issue than for the easy one.

However, as any experiment, Study 1 has limited external validity. Receiving a party message during a survey on a computer screen can be a poor simulation of how people develop political attitudes in the 'real world'. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the mechanism detected also occurs in citizens' everyday lives. Moreover, the

experiment was run in only one country, which precludes ruling out that party cues exert a different impact in political contexts unlike the Spanish one. For those reasons, in Study 2 I test the four hypotheses using cross-sectional data from different EU countries.

For the following analysis, I model citizens' positions on EU issues as a function of party positions, particularly to assess the following model:

$$Position_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Party\ Position_p + \beta_2 * Political\ Knowledge_i + \beta_3 * Party\ Position_p * Political\ Knowledge_i + \Phi X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

in which *i* indexes individuals, *Position* refers to the voter's position on the easy or the hard issue, *Party Position* refers to the position of the voter's preferred party *p* on the same issue, *Political Knowledge* refers to the level of knowledge of EU politics, *X* is a vector of control variables, ε is the error term, and β_0, β_1, β_2, β_3, and Φ are parameters to be estimated.

In Equation (1), however, the primary independent variable $Party\ Position_p$ is endogenous to the model. Since political parties seek to align their positions to the ones of potential supporters in order to maximise their share of votes, party positions can be modelled as a function of the average of their voters' positions:

$$Party\ Position_p = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_p} Position_{ip}}{n_p} + \Gamma Z_p + \varepsilon_p \quad (2)$$

Using a simple OLS to estimate Equation (1), would therefore overestimate the impact of party position on voter attitudes. To address the problem of reverse causality, I use instrumental variables, as previously employed to analyse both the impact of public

opinion preferences on political elite positions (Carruba, 2001; Steenbergen et al., 2007) and the effect of party stances on voter attitudes (Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007). To avoid the problem of endogeneity, in Equation (1) I do not use the independent variable *Party Position*$_p$ in its 'natural' form, but in a version free of the possible effect of the dependent variable *Position*$_i$. I use values predicted by a set of instrumental variables that can predict the independent variable, but are not correlated with the dependent one. In that way, it is possible to ensure that the values of the independent variable are determined by the instruments only, not by the dependent variable. In other words, the analysis is composed by two steps. In the first one, I predict *Party Position*$_p$ through the following model:

$$Party\ Position_p = \beta_0 + \Gamma Z_p + \varepsilon_p \quad (3)$$

in which Z is a vector of exogenous predictors (i.e. instrumental variables) that does not include *Position*$_i$, ε is the error term, and β_0 and Γ are parameters to be estimated. In the second step, I estimate Equation (1) using the values of *Party Position* predicted with Equation (3). Doing so ensures the use of values of *Party Position* not determined by individual preferences on EU issues.

To estimate Equation (1), I rely on two datasets. The first—the Chapel Hill expert survey from 2006 (Hooghe et al., 2010)— refers to political parties. For each country, experts provided the position of major political parties on some political issues, including European integration. Given I am interested in the effect of party cues on voter attitudes toward the EU, I use the party positions provided by the experts as the independent variable of the analysis. The second dataset is the IntUne Mass Survey conducted in 2007

(Cotta et al., 2007), which contains questions about respondents' support for the integration process that I use as a dependent variable in Equation (1). Appendix A contains a detailed description of the items from both datasets that were chosen to operationalize party and citizen positions on hard and easy issues. The analysis includes 14 countries, all members of the EU (i.e. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom).

Since I cannot use party positions from the expert survey in their 'natural' form, I need to identify appropriate instruments to predict them as in Equation (3). Marks et al. (2002) have identified different characteristics of parties that can predict their position about the European integration. Party size and party extremity are the instruments selected for Equation (3) that will be used to predict the primary independent variable of Equation (1) (i.e. party position). Party size is thought to be positively related with party support for the EU, while party extremity is supposed to have a negative relation with party Europeanism (see Appendix A for a more detailed discussion).

In using instrumental variables, however, two conditions need to be met. First, the instruments have to actually predict the endogenous regressor; this concern is an empirical one that I address in the results section. The second condition is that the instruments need not to exert a direct effect on the outcome of the main regression; accordingly, party size and party extremity need not to have an impact on individual positions on EU issues, apart from the effect they have through party positions. This condition can be only partially tested by the tests of over-identifying restriction I report in the subsequent section. However, other scholars have used party size and party extremity as instruments for party

positions on the EU (Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007), and I found no reason to assume that they directly affect individual positions.[8]

I operationalised the share of a party vote with the percentage of votes received by the party in national elections prior to 2006. The extremity of the party was operationalised by calculating the absolute value of the party's distance from the national mean on the left–right axis.

Results: Table 1.2 presents the instrumental variable models, in which the dependent variable is the respondents' position on the easy (Model 1) or hard (Model 2) issue, whereas the primary independent variable is the position of the respondent's party on the same issue as predicted by the instruments through Equation (3), that is, purged of the effect of the dependent variable. Respondent partisanship was determined with the question, 'Which political party do you feel closest to?' For all analyses, the positions of voters and political parties on hard and easy issues were recoded to range from 0 to 1. As controls, I employ classic factors indicated in the literature to be predictors of citizens' attitudes toward the EU; a description of those control variables from the IntUne survey is included in Appendix A. Models 3 and 4 of Table 1.2 replicate Models 1 and 2, but with an interaction between party position and political knowledge.[9]

[8] It cannot be ruled out, however, that party size and party extremity are functions of earlier values of individual positions on EU issues.

[9] Appendix A presents the results of all first-stage regressions (Tables A8 and A9). Moreover, Table A11 provides results for the same models shown in Table 1.2, albeit performed with standard OLS. It is worth noting that the difference between the results of Tables 1.2 and A11 cannot be attributed only to the fact that in the former I eliminated the endogenous part of party positions. When I instrumented the primary independent variable, I eliminated not only the share of its variation due to variation in voter positions, but also the share due to all (exogenous) predictors of party positions different from party extremity and party size.

Table 1.2. Determinants of citizens' positions on easy and hard issues. Instrumental variable models

	Model 1 Easy	Model 2 Hard	Model 3 Easy	Model 4 Hard
Party position	0.08*	0.17**	0.34***	0.39***
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.11)
Political knowledge	-0.02***	-0.00	0.10***	0.10*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Party position X political knowledge			-0.15***	-0.13*
			(0.03)	(0.06)
Satisfaction with national democracy	0.01+	-0.01*	0.01	-0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Personal benefit	0.12***	0.06***	0.12***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Attachment to country	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Trust in people from the EU	0.02***	0.01***	0.02***	0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.07***	0.06***	0.07***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual worker	-0.04*	-0.03	-0.04*	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Without a paid job	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic situation changes	-0.01*	-0.01**	-0.01*	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	-0.02**	-0.02*	-0.02**	-0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Left-right position	-0.00*	-0.01***	-0.00*	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party closeness	0.01	0.01+	0.01	0.01+
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.26***	0.50***	0.05	0.32***
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.10)
First-stage statistics				
Party position				
Partial R^2	0.32	0.21	0.33	0.22
F- statistic for the instruments	1389.3	804.39	707.14	409.95
F-statistic *p*-values	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Party position*political know.				
Partial R^2			0.29	0.19
F-statistic for the instruments			605.76	347.02
F-statistic p-values			0.00	0.00

Test of over-identifying restriction				
Sargan's X^2	0.68 (p = 0.41)	0.53 (p = 0.47)	1.89 (p = 0.39)	0.42 (p = 0.81)
Basmann's X^2	0.68 (p = 0.41)	0.53 (p = 0.47)	1.88 (p = 0.39)	0.42 (p = 0.81)
Observations	5876	5955	5876	5955
R^2	0.148	0.100	0.144	0.099

Standard errors in parentheses
The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-employed'.
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Note: When I reshape data in a long form and perform Models 1 and 2 with a unique regression, the interaction between party position and issue complexity exhibits the expected negative direction, but is not statistically significant.

Before examining the effect of party position on voter attitudes, it is necessary to confirm that the choice of instrumental variables was efficient. Table 1.2 presents statistics from the first-stage regressions that help to check whether the selected instruments predict party positions and are not endogenous to Equation (1). For all models, the partial R^2 is quite high, and the *F*-statistic for the instruments is significant, thereby indicating that party extremity and party share of the vote exert explanatory power for party positions provided by the expert survey. Moreover, as an indirect test of the instruments' exogeneity, the test of over-identifying restriction reveals that in all four models the null hypothesis that the instruments are valid cannot be rejected.

Concerning the analysis of the influence of political parties on voter opinions, Models 1 and 2 confirm the experimental results. For both issues, the position of the closest party has a significant effect on voter attitudes, even with the other factors in the models controlled for. We can, therefore, consider the *H1* to be confirmed once again: citizens align their positions on EU issues to the stances of their parties.

In the case of observational cross-sectional data, does a party's influence depend on amount of information that citizens have about the EU? I measured respondents' political

sophistication with questions about factual knowledge of the EU. Respondents of the IntUne survey were asked whether three countries (i.e. the Netherlands, Malta, and Croatia) were members of the EU. I created an index of political knowledge ranging from 0 (i.e. denoting people who answered all questions either incorrectly or by stating 'I don't know') to 3 (i.e. indicating people whose answers were always correct). Appendix A provides the index distribution. To test the second hypothesis, it is necessary to examine Models 3 and 4, shown in Table 1.2. The results are highly similar to those of the experimental analysis; in both models, the interaction term has a negative sign.[10]

Those results can be better interpreted by examining the marginal effects shown in Figure 1.3b. Clearly, *H2* finds support; in both cases, the influence of the party decreases as political knowledge increases. Unlike in the experimental analysis, the interaction term is statistically significant for both issues, meaning that political knowledge also plays a moderating role in party influence regarding more complex issues. However, Figure 1.3b depicts a situation highly similar to the one observed with the experimental data; the difference between the two interaction terms is quite small and not significant, yet nevertheless enough to render the positions of respondents with political knowledge at level 2 'independent' from the positions of the party for the easy issue, but not for the hard one. Again, the 'emancipating' effect of political knowledge seems larger for easy issues. In other words, when the issue is hard, even respondents with high levels of political knowledge need to rely on party cues. The fourth hypothesis finds partial support in the cross-sectional data as well.

[10] The results are substantially confirmed even if I use other model specifications. Tables A12 and A13 in Appendix A replicate the same models of Table 1.2, but with the addition of clustered standard errors (by country) or dummy variables for countries, respectively.

Again, however, the third hypothesis cannot be accepted, since the effect of the party's position does not seem to change depending on issue complexity. The two lines in Figure 1.3b are quite similar, and their confidence intervals overlap. Moreover, the difference between the effect of party positions in Models 1 and 2 (Table 1.2) is not statistically significant.[11] In that case, the observational data also confirm the results of the experiment.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between information and party influence on citizen attitudes toward EU issues. Despite its theoretical relevance for the top-down process, previous literature on the EU has either neglected this point or focused on aspects of political sophistication not related to citizens' knowledge of EU politics, but to their likelihood of exposure to party cues. Moreover, the recent development of motivated reasoning literature has provided theoretical and

[11] To test the interaction between party position and issue complexity, I needed to perform Models 1 and 2 as a single model (not shown here). To that end, I reshaped data in a long form by creating a dataset in which a single variable contained respondents' positions on the easy and hard issues, whereas another single variable contained the respondent's party positions on the same two issues. Each respondent therefore had two observations in the dataset, while a new variable identified if the party's and respondent's positions referred to the easy or the hard issue. With the reshaped dataset, I ran an instrumental variable regression model in which the dependent variable was the single variable respondent position and the primary independent variable was the single variable party position; the controls and instruments were the same as in Table 1.2. The model also included an interaction between party position and the new variable that identified issue complexity. The coefficient of the interaction had the expected direction—that is, party position had a stronger effect on the hard issue—although it was not statistically significant.

empirical grounds for questioning the fundamental idea of the top-down approach—namely, that citizens' lack of information allows political parties to affect voter attitudes toward the EU.

Results confirm that information plays a critical role in shaping the level of influence that a political party can exert on its voters. In general, citizens with a greater level of political knowledge seem better able to express an autonomous opinion. However, the relationship between cues and political knowledge seems to depend on the complexity of the issue. Greater levels of political knowledge make voters more 'independent' in their opinions about an easy issue; however, when faced with a complex issue, even more informed citizens need to rely on party cues to express their opinions.

Contrary to expectations, the influence of political parties does not change with issue complexity. Two competing explanations can be proposed for those results. On the one hand, we can assume that the complexity of an issue makes no difference; voters always follow party cues to the same extent. On the other, it is possible that the European context is so complex and citizens have so little information about it that voters consider all European issues to be hard. An argument in support of the second explanation emerges with a comparison of the issues of austerity policy and the TTIP with national political issues included in the experiment (i.e. the management of mortgage debt and the use of different sources of energy). Although the two national issues have technical and complicated aspects, respondents considered them to be less complex than both European issues in the study (analysis not shown).

In any case, the results of the study provide strong support for the idea that citizen lack of political information about the EU means that voters can be swayed by party cues. The data do not corroborate motivated reasoning's theory that more sophisticated people

are more likely to use party cues. Moreover, the results concerning issue complexity do not allow to conclude that party cues are more effective for more salient and conflicting issues. It is worth noting, however, that the nature of party conflict over EU issues could explain why we found no evidence of motivated reasoning. The politicisation of EU issues remains a relatively recent phenomenon, and as noted in the discussion about instrumental variables, party conflict does not follow linear ideological divides. In such a context, the activation of affective partisan loyalty could be deemed unlikely, at least in the current moment.

At present, party influence on voter attitudes toward the European integration process seems to depend on citizen lack of information about EU politics. This point raises concerns about parties' accountability for their actions at the EU level. Given the low availability of information about EU politics, citizens are left to rely on party cues when developing attitudes about an EU issue. Moreover, given the considerable complexity of most issues discussed at the European level, even the few citizens who are well informed about the EU cannot express an opinion independent of their party's position. Such a situation gives national political parties a good deal of room to manoeuvre when taking stances on European issues. They need not worry too much about electoral punishment, for the lack of information about EU politics will make voters align with their party positions instead of questioning them.

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Appendix A

Experimental treatments

Two of the issues concern EU politics, while the other two concern the national political debate. The parts in square brackets only appear in the treatment group version.

We are interested in your opinions on some political issues.

Which of the following opinions about the Transatlantic Free Trade Area between Europe and the USA is closest to yours?

1. It is necessary to reach this agreement to allow free movement of goods, services, capital and knowledge between both sides of the Atlantic [as proposed by the PP]
2. It is necessary to bind this agreement to the protection of people's human and social rights [as proposed by the PSOE]
3. It is necessary to paralyze the negotiation process of this agreement [as proposed by Podemos]
4. DK

Which of the following opinions about the European austerity policies is closest to yours?

1. It is necessary to order public finance to achieve economic growth [as proposed by the PP]
2. It is necessary to apply budget discipline but add a plan for investment [as proposed by the PSOE]
3. It is necessary to block austerity policies [as proposed Podemos]
4. DK

Which of the following opinions about the development of different energy sources in Spain is closest to yours?

1. It is necessary to choose a combination of energy sources that offers competitive prices, without promoting one over the other [as proposed by the PP]

2. It is necessary to move gradually but resolutely toward a carbon-free economy [as suggested by the PSOE]
3. It is necessary to plan for the rapid development of renewable energy through public investment and its massive introduction in the government's infrastructure [as proposed by Podemos]
4. DK

Which of the following opinions about the management of families' mortgage debt is closest to yours?

1. It is necessary to protect people failing to meet their mortgage obligations not through miscalculation, but because they have lost their job [as proposed by the PP]
2. It is necessary to provide mechanisms for the protection against eviction and to allow dation in payment [as proposed by the PSOE]
3. It is necessary to establish conditions for the moratorium, restructure or removal of families' debt produced as a result of the asymmetrical power of financial institutions [as proposed by Podemos]
4. DK

Political knowledge index

The index of political knowledge in EU politics used in the experimental analysis is composed by the following six items. The item number five does not strictly measure EU knowledge. However, the debt/GDP ratio is important for understanding the current debate on the euro crisis and austerity.

1) **What position is currently occupied by Jean-Claude Juncker?** (1) President of ECB (2) President of European Council (3) President of Eurogroup (4) President of European Commission (5) I Don't Know
2) **Who forms part of the European Council?** (1) The heads of state and governments of the member countries of the EU (2) The MEPs elected in the European elections (3) The presidents of European parties (4) The finance ministers of member states of the EU (5) I Don't Know

3) **How many EU countries use the euro as their official currency?** (1) 13 countries (2) 15 countries (3) 19 countries (4) All member states of EU (5) I Don't Know
4) **What institution sets interest rates?** (1) The Spanish government (2) The International Monetary Fund (3) The European Central Bank (4) The Bank of Spain (5) I Don't Know
5) **What percentage of GDP is the current public debt of Spain?** (1) Less than 60% of GDP (2) Between 60% and 90% of the GDP (3) Between 90% and 120% of GDP (4) More than 120% of GDP (5) I Don't Know
6) **If the euro depreciates against other currencies, you think that…** (1) Our exports outside the Eurozone will be damaged (2) Our exports within the Eurozone will be favoured (3) Our exports outside the Eurozone will be favoured (4) Our exports within the Eurozone will be damaged (5) I Don't Know

Data description for Study 1

Hard and Easy issues: In Study 1 I used austerity policies as an easy issue and the TTIP as a hard one. That classification is compatible with at least two of the three criteria used by Carmines and Stimson (1980). First, austerity policies and TTIP differ in their salience in the Spanish political agenda. Austerity policies at both the national and EU level have been broadly debated in Spain, and PP, PSOE, and Podemos have clear positions on the issue. Each of those parties also has a position on the TTIP, but the trade and investment partnership between the EU and United States has received far less attention in the political debate. Second, positions on austerity policies have a more symbolic meaning than party positions on the TTIP, for they are linked to current ideological conflict over different visions of the EU and, at least in the case of Podemos, also constitute part of the *raison d'être* of the party. Unfortunately, the chosen experimental design prevented the fulfilment of the third criterion regarding the difference between ends and means. However, party

positions on European austerity policies are often linked to the idea that each party has formed about the European integration process, and from that point of view, they are more related to ends than positions on the TTIP. Such considerations suggest that for Spanish citizens, the TTIP is a more complex issue than European austerity policies.

Data description for Study 2

Hard and Easy issues: For each dataset (Chapel Hill and the IntUne), I used two indicators of issue positions: one concerning a more general, easy issue, and another related to a more specific, complex one. For the party sample, the questions asked to the experts were, **'**How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2006?' and 'What position did the party leadership take over the course of 2006 on the following policies: EU cohesion or regional policy (e.g. the structural funds)?' In both cases, the answer options ranged from (1) 'Strongly opposed' to (7) 'Strongly in favour'. I used these questions to operationalise party positions on the easy and hard issues, respectively. For the IntUne survey, the question chosen to operationalise voters' position on the easy issue were, 'Some say European unification has already gone too far. Others say it should be strengthened. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 10-point scale. On this scale, "0" means unification "has already gone too far" and "10" means it "should be strengthened".' To operationalise voters' position on the hard issue, I selected the following item: 'Thinking about the European Union over the next ten years or so, can you tell me whether you are in favour or against the following: More help for EU regions in economic or social difficulties'. The response options were recoded to be: (1) Strongly against; (2) Somewhat against; (3) Neither in favour nor against; (4) Somewhat in favour; (5) Strongly in favour.

The pairs of questions fulfil at least two of Carmines and Stimson's (1980) three criteria; the questions used for the easy issue are symbolic instead of technical because they asked about general support for European integration, not for a specific policy. Moreover, the two questions for the easy issue asked about ends (i.e. European integration), not means (i.e. specific measures). By contrast, the two questions regarding the hard issue asked experts to express a party's opinion and citizens' their own opinion on a particular EU policy—namely, the redistribution of funds among different regions. The issue is a hard one because it is technical and concerns not ends, but concrete means through which to achieve European integration. The third criterion, regarding the saliency of the issues, is slightly more problematic. Since the analysis takes into account 14 countries where the salience of different issues could vary, it is difficult to affirm that the easy issue is more familiar than the hard one. Nonetheless, it does not seem too risky to affirm that political parties are more likely to express their general positions on European integration than on specific policy measures, including those regarding cohesion.

Another possible criticism of the chosen items concerns the complexity of the hard issue. Arguably, redistribution policy is not an exceptionally complicated topic about which people would struggle to express an opinion. Although that circumstance might be true, two considerations need to be taken into account. First, even if the issue is not clearly complicated, it nevertheless requires more information and cognitive effort than forming a simple opinion on the general integration process. Second, I needed to strike a balance between issue complexity and the possibility of citizens knowing their party's position. If an issue is too technical or complicated, then it might not appear on the public agenda, meaning that citizens could not know about their party's position. In that case, the cueing

process could not occur. For that reason, the choice of cohesion policy seems to be acceptable.

Instrumental variables: To predict party positions through Equation (3) I used two instrumental variables: party size and party extremity. This choice was mainly based on the work of Marks at al. (2002). In short, European integration constitutes a new issue in the political systems of all member states, and it or any new issue is liable to transform political competition and shift power relations among existing parties. Consequently, mainstream parties seek to defuse the salience of the European issue by taking a median position. Since 'European integration was conceived as a top-down project based on a broad elite consensus' (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012: 252), mainstream parties tend to support it. Peripheral parties, by contrast, seek to change established power relations in order to better position themselves and, to that end, emphasise the new issue by taking extreme positions.

Marks et al. (2002) have suggested various ways to operationalise the difference between mainstream and peripheral parties in their support of the European integration process. First, parties with a larger share of votes tend to exhibit a greater level of Europeanism than less successful ones. Second, the relationship between a party's position on the European issue and its position on the left–right scale forms the shape of an inverted U, wherein parties in the ideological periphery demonstrate a lower level of Europeanism (see also Hooghe et al., 2002). Party size and party extremity, therefore, can predict party support for the EU.

Figures and tables

Table A1. Characteristics of the experimental sample: test of proportions

	CIS 3082 May 2015 (21 to 49)	Experiment Sample May 2015	Difference (Experiment Sample-CIS 3082)
Gender (% women)	49.03	46.59	-2.44
Age			
21-24	9.71	3.91	-5.8***
25-29	14.00	15.16	1.16
30-34	17.72	13.45	-4.27*
35-39	20.15	24.94	4.79*
40-44	19.90	27.63	7.73**
45-49	18.53	14.91	-3.62^{+}
Education			
Primary or less	5.12	0.49	-4.63***
Secondary (1ststage)	27.62	27.07	0.55
Secondary (2nd stage)	24.21	18.78	-5.43*
Vocational (high)	15.35	13.17	-2.18
University or more	27.70	40.49	12.79***
N	1236[a]	409	

[a] The N for "Education" in CIS 3024 is 1231

$^{+}$p<0.01 *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001 (two-tailed)

Note: The experiment sample population is slightly older and far more educated than the corresponding Spanish population. However, it is worth noting that, according to the theoretical framework of the paper, more educated people can express political opinions without relying on party cues, which makes testing the hypotheses more difficult than it would be in a more representative sample.

Table A2. Political knowledge index (experimental data)

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	76	18.54	18.54
1	90	21.95	40.49
2	81	19.76	60.24
3	64	15.61	75.85
4	45	10.98	86.83
5	35	8.54	95.37
6	19	4.63	100.00
Total	410	100.00	

Table A3. OLS Models with alternative political knowledge index (no item 5)

	Austerity	TTIP
Treatment	0.39***	0.33***
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Pol. Knowledge	0.10***	0.08***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Treat. X Pol.Know.	-0.06+	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Constant	0.21***	0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.05)
Observations	410	410
R^2	0.135	0.123

Standard errors in parentheses
+ p=0.07, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A4. Share of respondents that selected the preferred party's policy option

	Easy Issue			Hard Issue		
	Treatment	Control	Diff.	Treatment	Control	Diff.
High Knowledge	0.76	0.51	0.25	0.60	0.35	0.25
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Low Knowledge	0.59	0.26	0.33	0.46	0.14	0.32
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.07)

Standard errors in parentheses

Table A5. OLS Models with media exposition controls

	Austerity	TTIP
Treatment	0.37***	0.34***
	(0.07)	(0.07)
Pol. Knowledge.	0.09***	0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Treat. X Pol.Know.	-0.05+	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)
TV and Radio	0.01	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Newspapers	-0.01	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Internet	0.05*	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	0.16+	0.09
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Observations	410	410
R^2	0.159	0.138

Standard errors in parentheses
+ p<0.065, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A6. OLS and Probit Models (additive and interaction models)

	OLS				Probit			
	Austerity		TTIP		Austerity		TTIP	
Treatment	0.28***	0.38***	0.28***	0.33***	0.72***	1.01***	0.73***	0.98***
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.21)	(0.13)	(0.22)
Pol. Knowledge		0.09***		0.07***		0.26***		0.21***
		(0.02)		(0.02)		(0.05)		(0.06)
Treat. X Pol.Know.		-0.05+		-0.02		-0.12		-0.10
		(0.03)		(0.03)		(0.08)		(0.08)
Constant	0.41***	0.21***	0.27***	0.12*	-0.22*	-0.80***	-0.62***	-1.13***
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.15)	(0.09)	(0.17)
Observations	410	410	410	410	410	410	410	410
R^2	0.078	0.145	0.080	0.122				
Pseudo R^2					0.058	0.110	0.060	0.096

Standard errors in parentheses
+ p<0.065, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

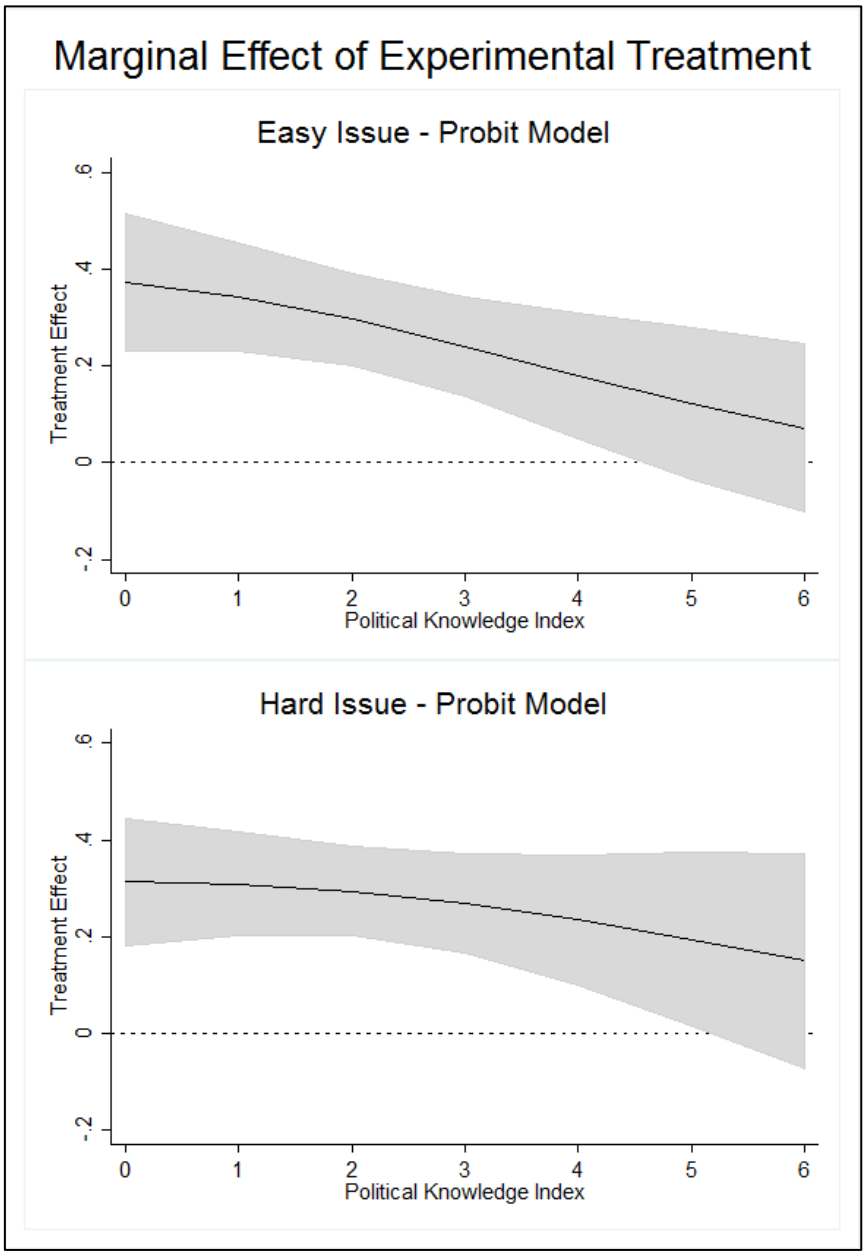

Figure A1. The effect of party cues on voters' attitudes for different levels of political knowledge (Probit). *Note*: The figure shows the marginal effect of the experimental treatment upon different levels of respondents' political knowledge.

Table A7. Control variables' coding

Satisfaction with national democracy	**On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in (COUNTRY)? Are you…?** (1) Very dissatisfied (2) Somewhat dissatisfied (3) Somewhat satisfied (4) Very satisfied
Personal benefit	**And what about of people like you? Have people like you on balance benefited or not from (COUNTRY)'s EU membership?** (0) Have not benefited (1) Have benefited
Attachment to country	**People feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country and to Europe. What about you? Are you very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached or not at all attached to the following? OUR COUNTRY** (1) Not at all attached (2) Not very attached (3) Somewhat attached (4) Very attached
Trust in people from the EU	**Please tell me on a scale of 0 to 10 how much you personally trust each of the following groups of people. '0' means that "you do not trust the group at all" and '10' means "you have complete trust" - PEOPLE IN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES** (1) No trust at all (11) Complete trust
Satisfaction with European democracy	**On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union? Are you…?** (1) Very dissatisfied (2) Somewhat dissatisfied (3) Somewhat satisfied (4) Very satisfied
Occupation	**As far as your current occupation is concerned, would you say you are self-employed, an employee, a manual worker or would you say that you do not have a paid job?** (1) Self-Employed (2) Employee (3) Manual worker (4) Without a paid job
Economic situation changes	**How do you think the general economic situation in (COUNTRY) has changed over the last 12 months?** (1) Got a lot worse (2) Got a little worse (3) Stayed the same (4) Got a little better (5) Got a lot better
Gender	(1) Male (2) Female
Left-Right position	**In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where '0' means "the left" and '10' means "the right", and '5' means "neither left nor right"?** (1) Left (10) Right
Party closeness	**Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?** (1) Not very close (2) Somewhat close (3) Very close

Table A8. Determinants of party positions on the easy and the hard issue (First stage results for Models 1 and 2 of Table 1.2)

	Easy Issue	Hard Issue
	Party position	Party position
Party's share of votes	0.01***	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party's extremity	-0.08***	-0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political knowledge	0.02***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.00	-0.02***
	(0 .00)	(0.00)
Personal benefit	0.04***	0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Attachment to country	0.01*	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Trust in people from the EU	0.00	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.03***	0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Occupation		
Employee	-0.01	-0.01^{+}
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual worker	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Without a paid job	-0.01	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic situation changes	0.02***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	0.01	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Left-Right position	0.00^{+}	-0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party closeness	-0.01*	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	0.58***	0.84***
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Observations	5876	5955
R^2	0.36	0.28
Adjusted R^2	0.36	0.28

Standard errors in parentheses
The reference category for the variable "Occupation" is "Self-Employed"
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Note: The effect of all instruments on the relevant endogenous regressors is significant and in the expected direction. The party share of votes has a positive effect on party positions, whereas party extremity has a negative one

Table A9. Determinants of party positions on the easy and hard issue and its interactions with political knowledge (first stage results for Models 3 and 4 of Table 1.2)

	Easy Issue		Hard Issue	
	Party position	Party pos.*political know.	Party position	Party pos.*political know.
Party's share of votes	0.01***	0.00*	0.00***	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party's extremity	-0.08***	-0.02^{+}	-0.03***	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Party's share of votes*political knowledge	-0.00***	0.00***	-0.00***	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party's extremity*political knowledge	0.00	-0.06***	-0.00	-0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political knowledge	0.04***	0.81***	0.01*	0.79***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.00	-0.01^{+}	-0.02***	-0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Personal benefit	0.04***	0.07***	0.04***	0.07***
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Attachment to country	0.01*	0.02**	-0.01***	-0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Trust in people from the EU	0.00	0.00	-0.00*	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.03***	0.05***	0.03***	0.06***
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01+	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual worker	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)

Without a paid job	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.01)	0.02	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic situation changes	0.02***	0.03***	-0.01***	-0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Left-Right position	0.00^{+}	0.00*	-0.00***	-0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party closeness	-0.01*	-0.01^{+}	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Constant	0.53***	-0.37***	0.80***	0.08*
	0.02	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Observations	5876	5876	5955	5955
R^2	0.37	0.82	0.29	0.89
Adjusted R^2	0.36	0.82	0.28	0.89

Standard errors in parentheses
The reference category for the variable "Occupation" is "Self-Employed"
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Note: Models 3 and 4 of Table 1.2 contains two endogenous regressors: party position and its interaction with political knowledge. For that reason, the latter also has to be instrumented. Following Gabel and Scheve (2007a), the instrumental variables that I used were the interaction between the instruments of party position and political knowledge: party vote*political knowledge and party extremity*political knowledge. The effect of all instruments on the relevant endogenous regressors is significant and in the expected direction. The party share of votes has a positive effect on party positions, whereas party extremity has a negative one. Likewise, party vote*political knowledge exerts a positive impact on party position*political knowledge, whereas party extremity*political knowledge exerts a negative one.

Table A10. Political knowledge index (observational cross-sectional data)

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	383	6.39	6.39
1	1,378	22.99	29.38
2	2,627	43.83	73.22
3	1,605	26.78	100.00
Total	5993	100.00	

Table A11. Determinants of citizens' positions on the hard and easy issue (OLS)

	Model 1 Easy	Model 2 Hard	Model 3 Easy	Model 4 Hard
Party position	0.15***	0.37***	0.22***	0.50***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Political knowledge	-0.02***	-0.00	0.01	0.05*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Party position X political knowledge			-0.04*	-0.07*
			(0.02)	(0.03)
Satisfaction with national democracy	0.01	-0.01*	0.01	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Personal benefit	0.12***	0.06***	0.12***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Attachment to country	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Trust in people from the EU	0.02***	0.01***	0.02***	0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.06***	0.05***	0.06***	0.05***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual worker	-0.04*	-0.02	-0.04*	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Without a paid job	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic situation changes	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Left-Right position	-0.00**	-0.01***	-0.00**	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party closeness	0.01+	0.01*	0.01+	0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.23***	0.34***	0.17***	0.23***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Observations	5944	6024	5944	6024
R^2	0.153	0.111	0.153	0.112

Standard errors in parentheses. The reference category for the variable "Occupation" is "Self-Employed" + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A12. Determinants of citizens' positions on the hard and easy issue. Instrumental variables models with standard errors clustered by country

	Model 1 Easy	Model 2 Hard	Model 3 Easy	Model 4 Hard
Party position	0.08	0.17	0.34***	0.39*
	(0.07)	(0.12)	(0.07)	(0.15)
Political knowledge	-0.02*	-0.00	0.10**	0.10
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.07)
Party position X political knowledge			-0.15**	-0.13
			(0.05)	(0.08)
Satisfaction with national democracy	0.01	-0.01*	0.01	-0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Personal benefit	0.12***	0.06***	0.12***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Attachment to country	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Trust in people from the EU	0.02***	0.01**	0.02***	0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.07***	0.06***	0.07***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual Worker	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Without a paid job	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic situation changes	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender	-0.02*	-0.02+	-0.02*	-0.02+
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Left-Right position	-0.00+	-0.01***	-0.00+	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party closeness	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.26***	0.50***	0.05	0.32*
	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.14)
First stage's statistics				
Party position				
Partial R^2	0.32	0.21	0.33	0.22
F statistic for the instruments	14.83	8.80	10.81	12.60
F p-values	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Party position*political know.				
Partial R^2			0.29	0.19
F statistic for the instruments			8.36	8.48
F p-values			0.00	0.00
Observations	5876	5955	5876	5955
R^2	0.148	0.100	0.144	0.099

Standard errors in parentheses. The reference category for the variable "Occupation" is "Self-Employed" + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A13. Determinants of citizens' positions on the hard and easy issue. Instrumental variables models with country dummies

	Model 1 Easy	Model 2 Hard	Model 3 Easy	Model 4 Hard
Party position	0.10***	0.08	0.38***	0.24*
	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.12)
Political knowledge	-0.00	0.00	0.12***	0.08
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Party position X Political knowledge			-0.16***	-0.09
			(0.03)	(0.06)
Satisfaction with national democracy	0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Personal benefit	0.10***	0.05***	0.10***	0.05***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Attachment to country	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01**	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Trust in people from the EU	0.02***	0.01***	0.02***	0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.05***	0.04***	0.05***	0.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual worker	-0.03+	-0.03*	-0.03+	-0.03*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Without a paid job	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic situation changes	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	-0.02*	-0.01*	-0.02*	-0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Left-Right position	-0.00*	-0.01***	-0.00*	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party closeness	0.01*	0.01	0.01+	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Country dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.17***	0.48***	-0.06	0.35***
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.10)
First stage's statistics				
Party position				
Partial R^2	0.43	0.26	0.44	0.27
F statistic for the instruments	2236.52	1056.93	1131.5	534.16
F p-values	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Party position*political know.				
Partial R^2			0.39	0.22
F statistic for the instruments			921.80	421.94
F p-values			0.00	0.00
Test of over-identifying restriction				
Sargan's X^2	10.06	10.31	10.48	11.71
	(p = 0.0015)	(p = 0.001)	(p = 0.005)	(p = 0.003)
Basmann's X^2	10.03	10.27	10.44	11.67
	(p = 0.0015)	(p = 0.001)	(p = 0.005)	(p = 0.003)
Observations	5876	5955	5876	5955
R^2	0.199	0.157	0.193	0.158

Standard errors in parentheses. The reference category for the variable "Occupation" is "Self-Employed" + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

CHAPTER 2

When parties are always right: The relative importance of party cues and policy information for voters' attitudes toward EU issues. An experimental test

Abstract

This work analyses the influence that political parties have on citizens' opinions about European integration, using experimental data. By measuring at the same time the content and the source effect on political attitudes, the paper considers the possibility that voters pay less attention to the argumentations used in a political message than to the source it comes from. The simultaneous analysis of the two effects also allows investigation of possible interaction effects. Results show that partisan voters use a heuristic model of processing when taking positions on EU issues. Furthermore, people tend to reduce the attention they pay to the message's content when the message comes from their preferred party. These findings raise concerns about parties' accountability for their activity at the EU level.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate how political parties shape voters' attitudes toward EU issues. In particular, it focuses on if, when receiving a party message, citizens are persuaded by its content or by the fact it comes from a source they trust. The paper also discusses the implications that each of these scenarios has for party accountability.

Literature on the European Union democratic deficit has denounced the weak link between citizens' preferences on European integration and the EU decision making process (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). It has been noted that, given the absence of a European element in both national and European elections, 'there is not a democratic electoral contest for EU political office or over the direction of the EU policy agenda' (Hix, 2008, p. 70). As a consequence, citizens do not have the possibility to cast a vote based on their preferences on EU issues and cannot send messages to political elites on what they are allowed to do in the European political arena. In other words, parties appear unaccountable for the decisions taken at the EU level. On the other hand,

> (..) if the EU were a system with a genuine electoral contest to determine the make-up of "government" at the European level, the outcome of this election would have a direct influence on what EU "leaders" do, and whether they can continue to do these things or are forced to change the direction of policy (Follesdal and Hix, 2006, p. 536).

In sum, if European and/or national elections were (also) fought on European issues, citizens' preferences about integration could act as constraints for political elite activity. To avoid electoral punishment, political parties would be forced to take into account voters'

preferences.

However, even a genuine electoral contest about EU issues may be not enough to guarantee parties' accountability. An extended literature suggests that citizens' preferences about the EU are shaped by the messages of political parties. Given citizens' lack of information about EU politics, parties are able to influence what their voters think about European integration (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen *et al*., 2007; Wessels, 1995). According to this view, 'even though the public has clearly become more engaged with the issue of Europe in the course of the last decade (…), parties are still structuring public opinion rather than responding to it.' (Down and Wilson, 2010, p. 82). This means that political elites are able to shape the constraints that are supposed to limit their activity.

Should we conclude that even elections fought on EU issues could not eliminate the democratic deficit? Are voters' attitudes toward the integration process too manipulable to guarantee parties' accountability? This paper suggests that the answer to these questions lies on how voters process the political messages they receive. In other words, it depends on how persuasion by political parties takes place. When receiving a message from the party, citizens can be persuaded by the argumentations that it contains or by the fact it comes from a source they trust. As stressed by Broockman and Butler (2017), this difference has serious implications for the relation between elected official and voters. If for voters *who* is taking a particular position matters more than *what* is being advocated, they are likely to blindly conform to political parties' wills, making politicians unaccountable for their behaviour. On the contrary, if citizens give importance to the *content* of a political message and not to its *source*, political parties are forced to take

positions in accordance with their voters' preferences.

The main contribution of the present paper is to assess the impact of party cues and policy considerations on voters' attitudes on EU issues. The aim is to understand if, when thinking about the EU, European citizens systematically process the information they receive or prefer to delegate to their political parties the effortful task of taking an informed position in their interest. In the last case, it would be unlikely for citizens' preferences to represent a constraint for political parties' activity, even in elections fought on EU issues.

The analysis will also focus on possible interaction effects. A potentially larger impact of the source could be due to different mechanisms. On the one hand, citizens could pay no attention to the message's content because they are indifferent to the consequences of different policy proposals. If this was the case, an increase of citizens' interest in EU policies could reduce the impact of source effect, leaving some room for politicians' accountability. On the other hand, party cues could be the reason why citizens ignore message's content: voters could consider the party endorsement a sufficient guarantee for the goodness of the proposal. In this last case, even interested citizens would passively conform to the party's line, leaving no incentive for politicians in taking positions consistent with voters' attitudes.

The results show that the source of a political message has a larger impact on citizens' preferences than its content. Moreover, the presence of party labels reduces the attention that voters pay to the content of the message. These findings suggest that citizens' preferences on EU issues are unlikely to constrain political parties' activity at the EU level.

The paper is organized as follows: the first and the second sections summarize the theoretical framework and present the hypotheses. The third section presents the research design. The fourth and the fifth sections present, respectively, the data and the results of the

analysis. The last section is reserved for the conclusions.

2.1 Parties' influence on voters' attitudes toward the EU

Literature on the EU democratic deficit highlights that there is a weak link between citizens' preferences on EU issues and EU policy outcomes (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). This depends on the fact that there is not a democratic electoral contest where people can choose among different candidate for EU political office or among different EU policy agendas. European citizens can vote for their national government, which takes part in the European decision making process in the Council; they can also vote for their representatives in the European Parliament. However, neither the national nor the European elections are European contests about European issues. In national elections, political parties focus on domestic themes and rarely talk about European issues during the campaign. On the other hand, European elections are treated by national media and political parties as mid-term elections where citizens are called to express their opinion on the incumbent national government for its activity at the national level (Hix, 2008, p. 70). In other words, European citizens are never called to base their vote on their preferences on European issues. This situation weakens parties' accountability, given that 'without an electoral contest connected to political behaviour in these EU institutions it is impossible for voters to punish MEPs or governments for voting the "wrong way"' (Follesdal and Hix, 2006, pp.553)[12].

[12] Some studies have shown that EU is becoming a more salient issue in EP elections and that, to some extent, voters do vote on the base of their preferences on European issues (see, for example, Hobolt *et al.*

The economic crisis has slightly changed the focus of this discussion that now concentrates on the low legitimacy of the new EU economic governance and the redistributive consequences of its policies (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2017). However, voters' preferences are still seen as the main way to constrain elite activity. Hix (2015), in fact, proposes a referendum in European countries to legitimize the new economic governance, so that voters' preferences could define the pace of the integration; or, alternatively, a direct election of the President of the European Commission to provide to the Commission an electoral mandate for its role of scrutinizer of national economic policies.

However, a large literature suggests that, even if European citizens had the possibility to base their vote on their preferences on EU issues, politicians' accountability would not be guaranteed. The democratic deficit would not disappear because political parties could escape electoral punishment changing their voters' preferences. Political elites, in fact, are able to shape voters' opinions about European integration; they can shape, at least in part, the constraints that are supposed to limit their activity at the EU level. This influential role played by political parties have been directly or indirectly taken into account by numerous studies, and it is present in all the three main approaches that try to explain voters' support for the EU: the political approach, the economic approach and the cultural approach.

The assumption of works that belong to the political approach is that the domestic political context strongly affects voters' Europeanism. These studies have demonstrated that factors such as the satisfaction with, or the trust in, the national political system are good predictors of the public's attitudes toward integration (Anderson, 1998; Muñoz *et al*.,

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2009; Hobolt, 2015). The aim of the present paper is not to establish whether or not European citizens use their attitudes toward the integration process as vote criteria, but to understand to what extent, in the case they did, this can increase parties' accountability.

2011; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). More importantly here, Anderson (1998) has shown that, because of their lack of information on EU politics, voters use their attachment to national political parties as a proxy on which to base their evaluation of the EU. According to Anderson's results, given new political parties use Euroscepticism as a way 'to prove they are both real political parties and different from the established parties (…)' (Anderson, 1998, p. 579), voters of national anti-establishment parties tend to be less supportive of the EU than voters of mainstream ones.

The economic approach, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between costs and benefits of the integration process, assuming that the citizens' attachment to EU institutions is basically utilitarian (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Whitten, 1997; Herzog and Tucker, 2010; Tucker et al., 2002). This kind of analysis usually assumes that citizens are well informed about European issues, a circumstance far from being confirmed (see Anderson, 1998; Hobolt, 2007). In his study, Gabel (1998) affirms that the evaluations of public opinion are formulated thanks to *cheap information* that the public can find in the political and social context: better informed groups (politicians, journalists, trade unions members, etc.) provide citizens with more understandable information about the integration process and its economic consequences on their lives (Gabel, 1998, p. 39-42). Once again political elites appear essential for the development of voters' attitudes toward the EU

Finally, also the cultural approach recognizes the role played by political parties. These studies are based on the assumption that being part of the EU means to move toward a certain dilution of cultural national specificities (McLaren, 2002). Consequently, these works focus on variables, such as the attachment to national identity or the fear of other cultures, for predicting voters' attitudes toward the EU (Carey, 2002; Duchesne and

Frognier, 1995; McLaren, 2002). It has been demonstrated that these cultural concerns are not autonomously linked by voters to the EU. The work by De Vries and Edward (2009), shows that the extent to which an exclusive national identity inhibits support for the EU depends on if (and on to what extent) political party decide to activate these feelings among the population[13]. Also in this case, therefore, the role played by political parties is decisive for what voters think about European integration.

Numerous works have also specifically tested a top-down model of attitudes formation (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen *et al*., 2007; Wessels, 1995). Differently from the studies reviewed above, these works test the direct relation between the position of political parties on the European issue and that of their supporters. Political parties are supposed to send messages to the public about their position on the EU. According to this literature, European voters tend to use these party messages as shortcuts for structuring their own attitudes toward the EU. As a consequence, citizens assimilate their position to the one of the party they identify with. The results of these studies led to the conclusion that 'though the days of elite-level bargaining insulated from public opinion by a *permissive consensus* seem to be over, the fate of the European Union still lies in the hands of the political leadership of Europe' (Ray, 2003, p. 991).

[13] Consistently with what suggested by Gabel (1998), they also find that economic anxiety about EU is mobilized by left-wing extremist parties.

2.2 Party cues and policy information

The literature reviewed in the previous section questions the possibility for European citizens to use their preferences as a constraint for party action at the European level. In particular, the studies on the top-down model strongly demonstrate that citizens' opinions are (also) shaped by the messages that voters receive from (their) political parties. This means that parties are able to shape the constraints that are supposed to limit their actions. The extent to which this represents a problem for parties' accountability depends on how citizens process party messages they receive. It depends on if voters give more importance to *who* is taking a particular position or to *what* is being advocated.

The issue of the relative strength of party cues and policy information has been widely debated in political science (for a review, see Bullock, 2011). Dual-process theories of attitude change assert that people can assess the validity of a political message in two different ways. On the one hand, they can engage in an effortful "systematic processing" checking the content of the message they receive and contrasting it with an existing stock of prior knowledge. On the other hand, they can opt for a "heuristic processing" and use simple decision rules (like source likability) that allow them to assess the validity of the message without paying attention to the message's content (Chaiken, 1980, 1986; see also Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The choice between these processing options defines the relationship between elected officials and voters. If citizens' attitudes are shaped by the source of a political message and not by its content, there are few incentives for political parties to take political positions in line with their voters' beliefs. They can act without worrying about possible electoral costs, given voters will tend to adopt the party line. As stated by Broockman and Butler (2017), 'Such [voters'] position adoption, to the extent it occurs, implies that citizens are inclined to defer to politicians' judgment without

demanding justifications. Consequently, public opinion may not constrain politicians' decisions much at all' (Broockman and Butler, 2017, pp. 209).

On the contrary, a public attentive to what is being proposed leaves less margin to manoeuvre for political elites. In this case, parties could lose the support of citizens that disagree with the position they take and will be forced to take into account voters' preferences. In other words, political parties' activity would be constrained by the attitudes of an attentive public.

Although previous literature demonstrates the influence of party messages on voters' attitudes toward the EU, it is not able to identify which of the two cited dynamics is taking place. As pointed out by Bullock (2011), 'comparing the effects of party cues to those of policy when people are exposed to both requires research designs that expose people to both types of stimuli' (Bullock, 2011, p. 498). Previous studies overwhelmingly opted for observational data; given the impossibility of manipulating the messages voters are exposed to, they can describe to us the effect of parties' messages on voters' attitudes, but they cannot say if citizens care about *what* is being proposed or about *who* is proposing it (or both). Unfortunately, the few experimental studies in the literature also do not provide a comparison between the two different effects (Kumlin, 2011; Maier *et al*., 2012).

The main contribution of the present paper is to assess the impact of party cues and policy considerations on voters' attitudes toward EU issues. The aim is to understand if, and to what extent, citizens' preference on EU issues can act as constraints for parties' activity at the European level, eliminating (or attenuating) the EU democratic deficit.

Regarding the expectations, dual-process theories predict the use of a heuristic processing when citizens lack the ability or the motivation to scrutinize the content of the message they receive. This suggests that European citizens will pay more attention to the

source than to the content of a political message about the EU. It is widely known, in fact, that the average citizen is ill-informed about EU issues and that his knowledge of EU politics is even lower than in the case of national political issues (see Anderson, 1998; Hobolt, 2007). Therefore, it is possible to formulate the following first hypothesis:

H1: the impact of the political message's source on people's attitudes is larger than the impact of its content.

The possible larger impact of the source, however, could be generated by two alternative scenarios. On the one hand, citizens' attitudes could be unresponsive to the content of the message because voters are not interested in the issue at stake. In other words, the reason why citizens are not persuaded by the message's content might not be the lack of attention to what is being proposed; it might be that voters do process the policy information they receive, but they are indifferent to (or marginally interested in) its implications. In this case, we should find that the content of a political message does not have impact on voters' attitudes regardless the source it comes from. The following hypothesis, therefore, predicts that

H2a: the content effect is independent of the source of the political message.

On the other hand, a low content effect could be due to the presence of the party cue. Outside the realm of European studies, Rahn (1993) has demonstrated that, when evaluating political candidates, voters react to the content of the messages that they receive only when no party label is shown. Similarly, Kuklinski and Hurley (1994) find that people

can better remind the content of a political message when it has no source than when it is ascribed to a politician (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994, pp. 743-744). These findings point to the fact that 'the messenger diverts attention from the message itself (…) people attend to the cue-giver at the cost of hearing the message' (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994, p. 744). If this was the case also when European issues are considered, we should expect that:

H2b: the content effect decreases when the source of the message is the preferred political party.

Hypotheses H2a and H2b tell alternative stories about the strength of party cues. In terms of accountability, the first one leaves some room for hope: if people developed more interest for EU issues, they could devote more attention to the scrutiny of policy implications, scaling down the use of party heuristics. To the contrary, H2b depicts a more pessimistic scenario: even when people are interested in policy implications, they prefer to delegate to political parties the effortful task of taking an informed position in their interest, making political accountability virtually impossible.

2.3 Research design

The research designed is a survey experiment in Spain. The Spanish case is especially useful for demonstrating the paper's point. In this country, citizens' trust in political parties

has undergone a steep decline in the last few years[14]. As noted in the literature, trust in political parties is needed in order for their labels to be used as heuristic by voters (Coan *et al*., 2008). This means that in the Spanish context it should be particularly unlikely to observe a source effect and to find it outweighs the content one. If party cues prove to be able to shape citizens' preferences in such an unfavourable context, they are likely to have the same ability also in the other EU member states.

Respondents were randomly exposed to one of eight political messages, differentiated on the basis of three dimensions: the source of the message (neutral/party), its content (Eurosceptic/Pro-Integration), and its valence (risk/opportunity). All messages concerned integration of energy policies. Table 2.1 shows the position of each message on the three dimensions.

In the "party cues" groups, the political messages have been attributed to the respondent's preferred party, previously ascertained in the survey[15]. In the neutral groups, the same stances have been attributed to "some people". These last groups were necessary to have, for each message, a baseline for calculating the source effect. The respondents' (different) reaction to messages that only differ on their source will allow us to understand to what extent voters pay attention to *who* is taking a particular position (see Brader and Tucker, 2009, 2012; Brader *et al*., 2013). The party position did not change depending on a respondent's preferred party: For example, a supporter of Partido Popular (PP) and a

[14] In June 2014, one month after the experiment, the percentage of Spanish citizens that tended to trust political parties was only 7 per cent, in contrast with 40 per cent in April 2008 (Source: Eurobarometer).

[15] I used the question: "Which of the following parties do you consider closer to your ideas?" If the respondent declared closeness to a party that was not in the list (see Appendix B), she was excluded from the experiment. If the respondent claimed she did not feel close to any party, she was redirected to the question: "Even if you do not feel close to any party, is there any party that you like more than others?" If in this case, too, the respondent declared she did not feel close to any party in the list, she was excluded from the experiment.

supporter of Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) in group A were exposed to the same message; the only difference was the party that expressed this position. The same message is also used in group B, but it is not ascribed to a party but to "some people".

In groups A, G, B, and H, the messages were in favour of the European integration process, while in groups E, C, F, and D, the messages were against it. This differentiation will allow us to estimate the importance that voters give to *what* is being proposed: if respondents process the content of the messages they receive, they should react in different ways to messages that propose different views on the EU. For the purpose of this paper, messages are considered Pro-Integration if they propose more European integration or oppose a step back. Similarly, messages are considered Eurosceptic if they propose a step back or oppose more integration.

Messages were also differentiated on the basis of their valence. Messages in the "opportunity" category proposed a change in the status quo (i.e. more or less integration) highlighting a possible economic gain for citizens (specifically, a reduction in gas and electricity bills). In contrast, messages that are included in the "risk" category opposed those changes underscoring possible economic losses (the rise of energy bills). The use of the risk/opportunity dimension was needed for avoiding confounding factors in the measurement of the content effect. According to Cobb and Kuklinski (1997), when the consequences of a particular new policy are uncertain, people 'assign relatively more weight and importance to events that have negative, as opposed to positive, implications for them (…) they place more emphasis on avoiding potential losses than on obtaining potential gain' (Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997, pp. 91). This higher persuasiveness of risk messages has been also demonstrated with regard to EU issues (de Vreese et al., 2011). The use of risk and opportunity messages for both Pro-Integration and Eurosceptic content is

therefore aimed to ensure an equal persuasive power of the argumentations for and against the integration process[16].

After the stimulus, respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the message they were exposed to (on a scale from 1 to 10). The choice of a non-salient issue

Table 2.1. The eight experimental treatments.

	PARTY GROUPS	
	PRO-INTEGRATION	**EUROSCEPTIC**
OPPORTUNITY	The party proposes further integration in energy policies (A)	The party proposes a step back on integration in energy policies (E)
RISK	The party opposes a step back on integration in energy policies (G)	The party opposes further integration in energy policies (C)
	NEUTRAL GROUPS	
	PRO-INTEGRATION	**EUROSCEPTIC**
OPPORTUNITY	Some people propose further integration in energy policies (B)	Some people propose a step back on integration in energy policies (F)
RISK	Some people oppose a step back on integration in energy policies (H)	Some people oppose further integration in energy policies (D)

in the Spanish political debate (integration in energy policies) and the generic nature of the proposals used assured that any position could be plausibly attributed to any party. Moreover, the use of artificial party positions[17] reduced the likelihood of pre-treatment. In

[16] An alternative strategy could have been to use messages that did not vary on the risk/opportunity dimension. However, this design would have restricted the findings to only risk or opportunity messages, compromising the generalization of the results.

[17] A note at the end of the survey debriefed participants about the artificial nature of party positions used in the experiment.

the real world, in fact, respondents have not been exposed to the party messages used in the experiment (Slothuus, 2016).

The stimulus consisted of a short text informing the respondents about the position of their preferred party (or "some people"). In each stimulus, a small picture summarized the position expressed and also included the party's icon (or a neutral icon)[18].

2.4 Data

The experiment was embedded in an online survey administered between the 5th and 12th of May 2014, shortly before the 2014 European elections. The survey was completed by 1071 Spanish citizens, while the number of participants in the experiment was 639[19]. Table B1 in Appendix B compares both the survey and the experiment samples with another face-to-face standard survey carried out in the same period on a representative sample of the Spanish population[20]. It is also worth noting that the data confirm the high distrust of

[18] It is possible to find the English translation of all the eight treatments in the "Experimental materials" section of Appendix B. Figures B1 and B2 of Appendix B show two examples of the original Spanish material with the graphic characteristics as used in the survey.

[19] The survey was the sixth wave of the online panel study "Stability and Change in Political Attitudes" financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (CSO2010-18534). It was completed by citizens older than 17 and younger than 48 years of age. The difference between the N of the survey and the one of the experiment is due to the fact that only partisan respondents were included in the experiment.

[20] In the survey and experimental samples, there is an overrepresentation of people between 35 and 39 years of age, while people between 18 and 24 years of age are underrepresented. There is also an overrepresentation of the most educated part of the population and an underrepresentation in categories of those without a university degree. These characteristics of the sample limit the possibility of generalization for the study. However, it is worth noting that the young age of the sample and the overrepresentation of the most educated citizens within it work against the expectations. People with high levels of education are

Spanish citizens in political elites. Among experiment participants, the trust in political parties has a mean of 1.85 on a 0–10 scale (SD=0.08, MEDIAN=1). The situation of the Spanish political system, therefore, makes it difficult to find evidence of a party cue effect.

To be sure that the randomization was successful, I ran a multinomial logistic regression (Table B2 of Appendix B). As the dependent variable, I used respondents' membership in the different groups, while independent variables were selected from factors that the literature considers predictors of party cues' persuasiveness (such as party attachment and political sophistication) and voters' support toward the EU (such as trust in national institutions, attitudes toward other cultures, perceptions of economic situation, etc.). The model's likelihood ratio chi-squared was not statistically significant (p=.31), confirming that the random assignment was performed correctly.

2.5 Results

Table 2.2 reports the mean level of support expressed by respondents in each of the eight experimental groups, also clustered by the three different dimensions. In Figure 2.1, the results presented allow us to test H1. Each plot represents the difference (*t*-test) in respondents' support for messages that differ along the dimension taken into account. In particular, the upper part of the figure shows the difference between the average of the support expressed by respondents for all the party messages and the average of the support

supposed to be more politically sophisticated and therefore less likely to need party cues (Kam, 2005), while young people are less likely to have developed the familiarity with the party that allows the effectiveness of the cue (Coan et al., 2008).

expressed by respondents for all the neutral ones; that is, the source effect. The lower part of the figure indicates the difference between the average of support for all the Pro-Integration messages and the average of support for all the Eurosceptic ones; that is, the content effect[21]. From the analysis of the figure it seems clear that, when taking a position on an EU issue, voters pay more attention to the source of the message than to its content. Taking into account the whole sample of the experiment (left-hand panel), we can see that, on average, the support expressed by respondents in the four party groups is 0.94 points higher than the support expressed by participants assigned to the four neutral groups ($p<0.001$, two-tailed t-test). This is an increase of almost 10 per cent of the scale. This means that identical messages receive a higher level of support when they come from political parties than when they come from a neutral source. It is possible to assert, therefore, that partisan voters do look at the source when they assess the validity of a political message. On the other hand, the change of the message's content does not have the same impact: respondents that received one of the four Pro-integration messages expressed a support only 0.27 points higher than respondents in the Eurosceptic groups. Moreover, this last difference does not reach statistical significance.

The analysis of the whole sample, however, could mask opposed content effects for different groups of respondents. It is likely that people with positive attitudes toward the EU express higher support for Pro-Integration messages, counterbalancing the preference of Eurosceptic respondents for messages against the integration process. In this case, the

[21] For the source effect, positive values indicate that respondents express higher support for party messages than for neutral ones. For the content effect, positive values indicate that respondents express higher support for Pro-Integration messages than for Eurosceptic ones. It is also worth noting that I am not comparing the effect of changing the valence of the message (risk vs. opportunity). As explained in the previous section, the use of the risk/opportunity dimension was only aimed to eliminate confounding factors when measuring the content effect.

two content effects would cancel each other, resulting in a non-effect in the whole sample. For this reason, I repeated the analyses differentiating the sample on the basis of individual attitudes toward the EU (central and right-hand panel of Figure 2.1)[22]. In the case of Eurosceptic respondents, the results are really similar to findings for the whole sample. The content effect is negligible (0.11 points) and not statistically different from 0. In contrast, the source effect remains significant and sizable (0.88 points, $p<0.01$ two-tailed t-test). In the case of Pro-EU respondents also it seems the source of the message matters more than its content (1.02 vs. 0.52 points), even though, differently from the case of Eurosceptic respondents, the larger confidence intervals prevent the two effects from being statistically different[23]. Overall, the results are in line with H1: the source of the message has a larger impact on voters' attitudes than its content. Partisan voters decide to what extent they support a political message depending on *who* is its source, while *what* the message proposes for the integration process has a much smaller effect.

The second step of the analysis is to explore the reasons of the smaller impact of content effect. The aim is to understand if people are indifferent to the Eurosceptic and Pro-integration content per se, or this disinterest is caused by the presence of party labels. In the first case, an increase in the interest for the issue at stake could scale down the

[22] I created a measure of respondents' attitudes toward the EU using the question: "And how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions?" The question concerned European Parliament and Spanish Parliament, among other institutions. Respondents answered in both cases using a scale from 0 ("No trust") to 10 ("Total trust"). I subtracted respondents' trust in the Spanish Parliament from their trust in the European Parliament. I dichotomized the resulting variable so that the lower 60 per cent was coded as "Eurosceptic", while the upper 40 per cent was coded as "Pro-EU".

[23] The differences between the two effects are tested through the following process. I first run a regression model where the dependent variable is the respondent' support for the received message and the independent variable is a dummy that identifies the source (party/neutral). Secondly, I run a model with the same dependent variable and a dummy for Eurosceptic/Pro-Integration content as independent variable. Lastly, I tested the difference between the two regression coefficients.

influence of party heuristics, making more likely politicians' accountability. In the second case, it would be not possible for voters' attitudes to constrain party activity. Figure 2.2 helps us to test H2a and H2b. It shows the content effect differentiating among party and neutral groups.

Table 2.2. Mean level of support for the received message (standard error in parentheses).

	PARTY GROUPS 6.8 (0.13)		
	PRO-INTEGRATION	**EUROSCEPTIC**	**Total**
OPPORTUNITY	6.9 (0.26)	6.9 (0.24)	6.9 (0.18)
RISK	6.9 (0.24)	6.6 (0.27)	6.7 (0.18)
Total	6.9 (0.18)	6.8 (0.18)	
	NEUTRAL GROUPS 5.9 (0.14)		
	PRO-INTEGRATION	**EUROSCEPTIC**	**Total**
OPPORTUNITY	6.6 (0.28)	5.5 (0.31)	6.1 (0.21)
RISK	5.6 (0.28)	5.7 (0.25)	5.7 (0.19)
Total	6.2 (0.2)	5.6 (0.2)	

Eurosceptic and Pro-UE respondents seem to behave in different ways. In the case of Eurosceptic respondents, the content effect is close to 0 in both neutral and party groups. These findings could suggest that voters are not interested in the issue at stake and indifferent to the implications of the different positions. However, the right-hand panel of Figure 2.2 tells us that even when voters do have preferences on the integration of energy policy, parties are able to change them. Pro-EU respondents process the content of the message when it comes from a neutral source and express more support for positions that

are consistent with their beliefs. The upper part of the right hand panel shows that Pro-EU respondents express more support for Pro-integration messages than for Eurosceptic ones (the difference is 1.1 points, $p<0.05$, two-tailed t-test). However, when the message comes from their preferred party, they avoid scrutinizing its content and they express virtually the same level of support for Eurosceptic and Pro-Integration positions (in this case the difference is only 0.08 points, and not statistically significant). These results point toward the more pessimistic of the two hypothesized scenarios: voters' political attitudes cannot represent a constraint for politicians' activity at the European level because parties can easily change them[24].

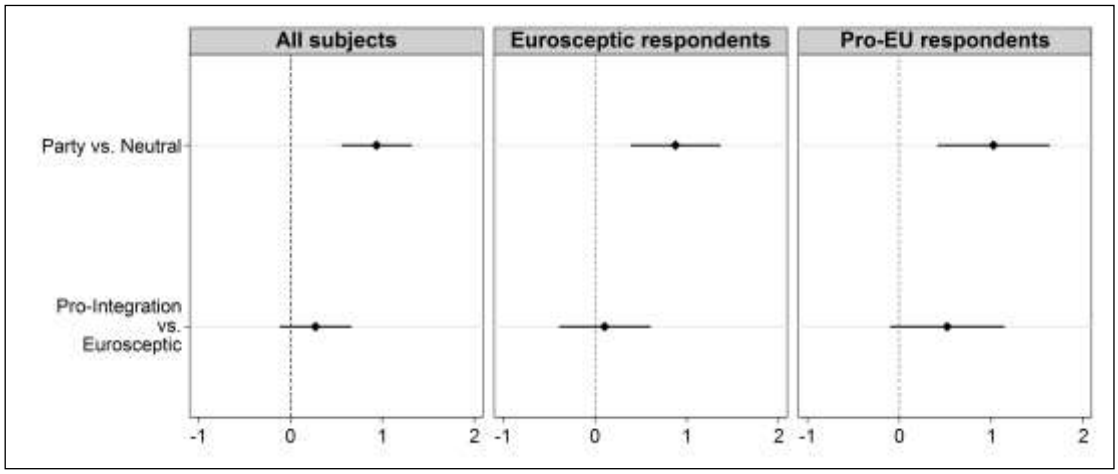

Figure 2.1. The source and the content effect. Notes: positive values indicate higher support for party messages (source effect) or higher support for Pro-Integration messages (content effect); 95% confidence intervals.

[24] The differences in information processing between Eurosceptic and Pro-EU respondents could be due to unobserved heterogeneity between the two groups. Individual attitudes toward the integration process are not randomly assigned and can be correlated with factors that affect the ability to process policy information.

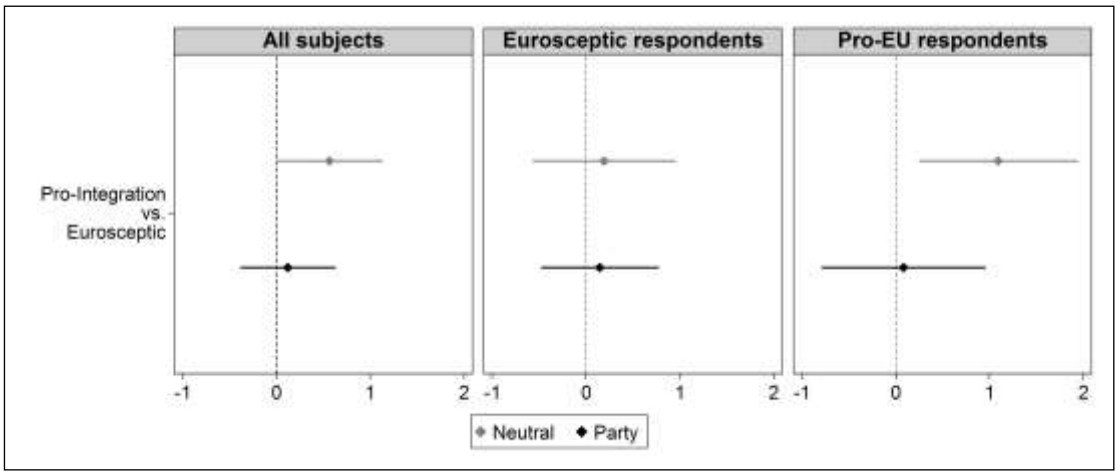

Figure 2.2. Interaction between content and source effect. Note: positive values indicate higher support for Pro-Integration messages; 95% confidence intervals.

It is also worth to note, however, that participants to the experiment do not seem always able to differentiate among the four different positions used as experimental treatments. Manipulation checks about the content effect reveal that voters can clearly distinguish between the Pro-Integration opportunity position and the Eurosceptic opportunity one: they are aware that the former proposes more integration and the latter proposes a step back. However, the majority of respondents who were exposed to the Eurosceptic risk messages and to the Pro-Integration risk position assimilated these positions to the Eurosceptic opportunity one. On the one hand, these results confirm for us that voters do not pay attention to the content of the message they receive, but they care about its source; manipulation checks about source effect, in fact, show that the overwhelming majority of respondents can correctly indicate if they received a neutral or a party message. This means that people actually paid attention to the message they received, but they paid more attention to its source than to its content. On the other hand, the general results of the study are substantially confirmed even when restricting the analysis to just

the Pro-Integration opportunity and Eurosceptic opportunity positions[25].

Conclusion

The literature on EU democratic deficit suggests that if there was a genuine European electoral contest, citizens' attitudes toward EU issues could act as constraints for the political elite activity at the European level. Differently from the current situation, voters could base their vote on EU preferences and in this way send messages to political parties on what they are allowed or not allowed to do. However, studies on party cues have shown that political parties are able to shape citizens' attitudes toward the EU; they are able to shape the constraints that are supposed to limit their activity.

The extent to which this situation represents an obstacle to party accountability depends on how voters process political messages they receive. If people pay attention to *what* is being proposed, political parties are likely to pay an electoral cost when taking positions that are not in line with voters' preferences. In contrast, if people are more sensitive to *who* is taking a particular position, they are likely to passively conform to their party's positions on the EU, making accountability virtually impossible. The use of observational data in previous literature prevented disentangling the effect of the message's content from the effect of its source. The present paper, on the contrary, used experimental data to investigate citizens' use of systematic and heuristic processing and their

[25] The only relevant difference refers to the relative importance of source and content effect for Pro-EU respondents: In the restricted analysis, the content effect appears larger than the source one (1.17 vs 0.75 points), even though the two effects are not statistically different.

implications for parties' accountability.

According to the results, citizens opt for a heuristic processing when thinking about EU issues. If a political message comes from the preferred political party, it will receive higher support than if it is ascribed to a neutral source. This effect is constantly larger than the content one. This means that for partisan voters the source of the message is more important than what the message advocates for the future of the integration. Therefore, political elites' accountability for positions taken at the European level seems unlikely.

Moreover, the study of the interaction between source and content effect justifies pessimistic conclusions about a possible reduction of the party cues effect. The results show that when the message comes from a neutral source, voters do care about what it proposes for the integration process. However, when the message comes from the preferred party, its Pro-Integration or Eurosceptic content is irrelevant in voters' processing. In sum, partisan voters are ready to abandon their prior opinions for following the official party line. These results are surprising when we consider that in Spain the trust in political parties is dramatically low. Even in a context where the political elites are losing their political legitimacy, they are still able to exert a strong influence on citizens' political attitudes by simply attaching their label to a policy proposal.

We also have to take into account the limitations of the study. The first one refers to the fact that the inferences only concern partisan voters. For understanding if citizens take cues from their party on EU issues, I was forced to include in the experiment only respondents that did have a preferred party (for the same research strategy, see Brader and Tucker, 2009, 2012; Brader *et al*., 2013). The findings, therefore, do not exclude the possibility that people without party identification could engage in a more effortful information processing. That said, 60 per cent of respondents of the survey declared they

feel close to some party, a quite high figure considering the young age of the sample and the low level of trust in political parties in Spain. This means that the share of the population interested by the conclusions of this study is far from being negligible.

Secondly, Bullock (2011) suggests that party cue could be less effective for salient issue and/or when voters are provided with a sufficient amount of policy information (Bullock, 2011, p. 510; on this point, see also Arceneaux 2008). Consequently, it could be argued that the results of the study depend on the fact that the experimental stimulus contained a very short description of the policy and it referred to an issue that was not on the Spanish political agenda. While this may be true, we need to take into account the following consideration. Figure 2.2 shows that, however meagre, the policy description is strong enough to change voters' attitudes. Pro-EU respondents in the neutral groups are sensitive to the content of the treatments, showing that in the irrelevance of policy information is not caused by its amount. Even few words regarding the pace of integration have an effect on respondents' preferences. Moreover, as showed in the previous section, the magnitude of the content effect found among Pro-EU respondents in neutral groups is virtually the same of the overall source effect. So, at least under the "right conditions", the content stimulus proved to be as strong as the source one.

In sum, while we cannot claim that on European issues the source effect is predominant with respect to *any* content, we do can assert that for an unfamiliar issue like energy policies voters care more about *who* is taking a particular position than about *what* this position advocates with reference to the pace of the integration process. These findings are important for the current political debate at the national and European level on the future of the EU, where proposals for integration in new policy fields are flanked with claims for the return to fully sovereign states. The results suggest that, all else being equal,

parties are unlikely to pay an electoral cost when taking a position inconsistent with their voters' preferences.

Finally, future research should mainly focus on two directions. First of all, the role of individual factors needs to be taken into account. Voters' characteristics such as political knowledge and the strength of party attachment are likely to have an effect on the kind of information processing that citizens decide to use (Coan *et al*., 2008; Kam, 2005). These factors could be even more relevant when European issues are taken into account, given the low availability of information on EU politics and the consequent need for cues that citizens experience when taking a position on the European integration. Secondly, future research should also investigate the differences found between Eurosceptic and Pro-EU respondents in their tendency to process policy information.

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Appendix B

Table B1. Characteristics of the sample. Test of proportions.

	CIS 3024 May 2014 (18 to 47)	Survey Sample May 2014	Experiment Sample May 2014	Difference (Survey Sample– CIS 3024)	Difference (Experiment Sample- CIS 3024)
Gender (% women)	47.99	46.58	44.97	-1.41	-3.02
Age					
18-24	16.93	7.87	7.55	-9.06***	-9.38***
25-29	15.73	15.84	13.84	0.11	-1.89
30-34	16.69	15.37	14.47	-1.32	-2.22
35-39	18.94	26.99	27.83	8.05***	8.89***
40-44	20.06	23.34	23.58	3.28	3.52
45-47	11.64	10.59	12.74	-1.05	1.10
Education					
Primary or less	5.70	0.75	0.63	-4.95***	-5.07***
Secondary (1st stage)	30.28	24.27	23.58	-6.01**	-6.70**
Secondary (2nd stage)	26.35	16.87	15.72	-9.48***	-10.63***
Vocational (high)	13.01	14.90	14.62	1.89	1.61
University or more	24.66	43.21	45.44	18.55***	20.78***
N	1246[a]	1067	636		

Notes: [a] The N for "Education" in CIS 3024 is 1245
*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001 (two-tailed)

Table B2. Randomization Test. Mlogit Regression Model.

	Party Pro-Integration Opportunity	Party Eurosceptic Risk	Neutral Eurosceptic Risk	Party Eurosceptic Opportunity	Neutral Eurosceptic Opportunity	Party Pro-Integration Risk	Neutral Pro-Integration Risk
Age	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Gender	-0.10 (0.33)	0.14 (0.33)	-0.16 (0.32)	-0.23 (0.31)	-0.51 (0.34)	0.02 (0.33)	-0.31 (0.33)
Close to mainstream parties	0.38 (0.35)	0.51 (0.35)	0.51 (0.34)	0.17 (0.32)	0.17 (0.36)	-0.56 (0.37)	0.25 (0.35)
Political sophistication (EU)	0.13 (0.17)	-0.02 (0.17)	-0.22 (0.17)	-0.31 (0.16)	-0.01 (0.17)	-0.38* (0.17)	-0.21 (0.17)
Perception of economic situation	0.07 (0.23)	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.06 (0.23)	-0.23 (0.21)	0.04 (0.24)	-0.15 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.23)
Unemployed	-0.10 (0.38)	-1.04* (0.45)	-0.02 (0.37)	-0.38 (0.36)	0.27 (0.37)	-0.41 (0.39)	0.04 (0.37)
Party closeness[a]	-0.32 (0.41)	-0.21 (0.40)	-0.43 (0.41)	-0.15 (0.36)	-0.73 (0.44)	-0.90* (0.45)	-0.17 (0.39)
Left-Right position	0.07 (0.10)	0.02 (0.10)	0.05 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.12 (0.10)	0.15 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.10)
Trust in political parties	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.15 (0.09)	-0.20* (0.09)	-0.15 (0.08)	-0.22* (0.10)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.14 (0.09)
Trust in European Parliament	0.07 (0.08)	-0.00 (0.08)	0.12 (0.08)	0.01 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)	-0.00 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)
Perceived cultural threat	0.05 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.11 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.13* (0.06)	-0.05 (0.07)
Constant	-0.11 (1.55)	2.24 (1.51)	0.92 (1.51)	2.58 (1.41)	1.92 (1.55)	1.94 (1.49)	1.66 (1.53)
Likelihood ratio X^2	82.79						
Significance	0.31						
Observations	639						

Notes: Dependent Variable: treatment. Base category: Treatment B (Neutral Pro-Integration Opportunity)

[a] This variable distinguishes between partisan respondents (value=0) and respondents that feel they agree more with one party compared to the others, although they do not feel close to any of them (value=1).

Figure B1. Example of a Party Pro-Integration opportunity message (original Spanish version)

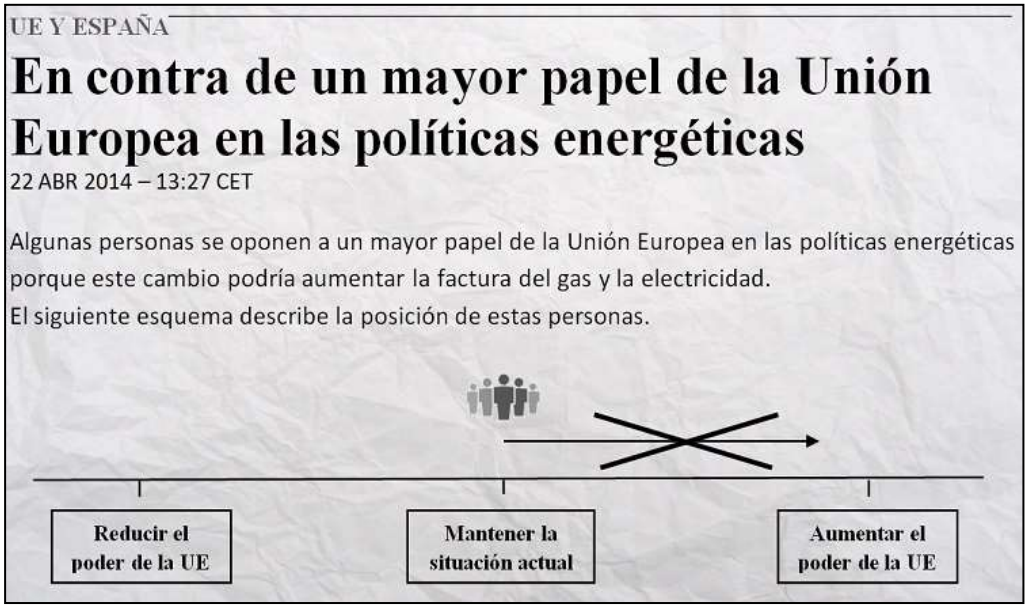


Figure B2. Neutral Eurosceptic risk message (original Spanish version.

Experimental materials

Participants of the experiment were randomly exposed to one of the following eight messages. The original material was in Spanish. The translation into English is presented below.

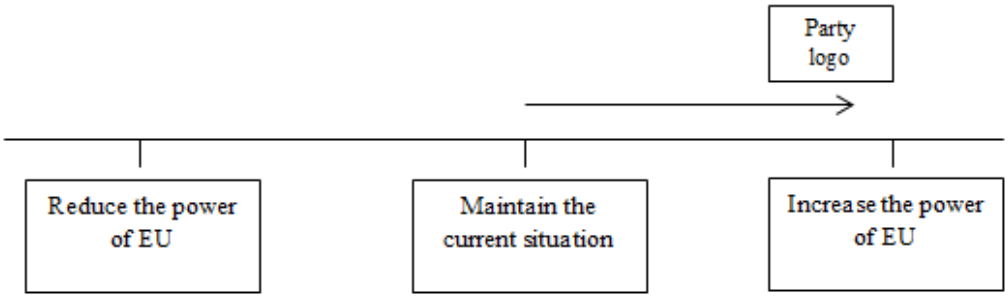
1. PARTY PRO-INTEGRATION OPPORTUNITY (A)

EU AND SPAIN

[PARTY] IN FAVOUR OF A BIGGER ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

[PARTY] proposes a bigger role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could decrease gas and electricity bills.
The following picture describes the position of this party.



2. NEUTRAL PRO-INTEGRATION OPPORTUNITY (B)

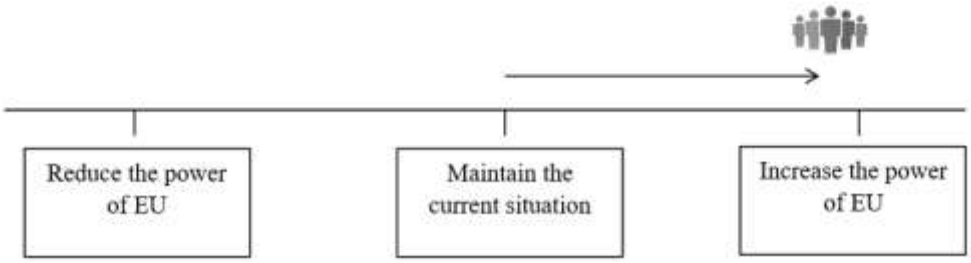
EU AND SPAIN

IN FAVOUR OF A BIGGER ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

Some people propose a bigger role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could decrease gas and electricity bills.

The following picture describes the position of these people.



3. PARTY EUROSCEPTIC RISK (C)

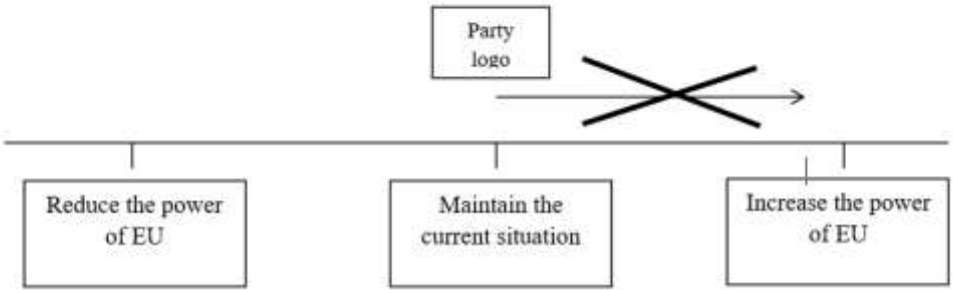
EU AND SPAIN

[PARTY] AGAINST A BIGGER ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

[PARTY] opposes a bigger role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could raise gas and electricity bills.

The following picture describes the position of this party.



4. NEUTRAL EUROSCEPTIC RISK (D)

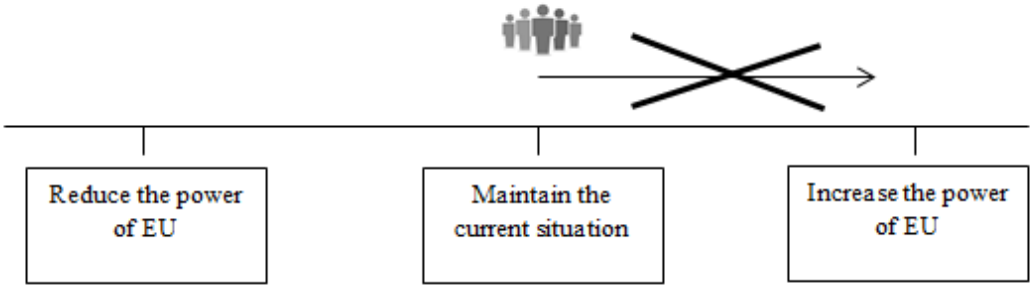
EU AND SPAIN

AGAINST A BIGGER ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

Some people oppose a bigger role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could raise gas and electricity bills.

The following picture describes the position of these people.



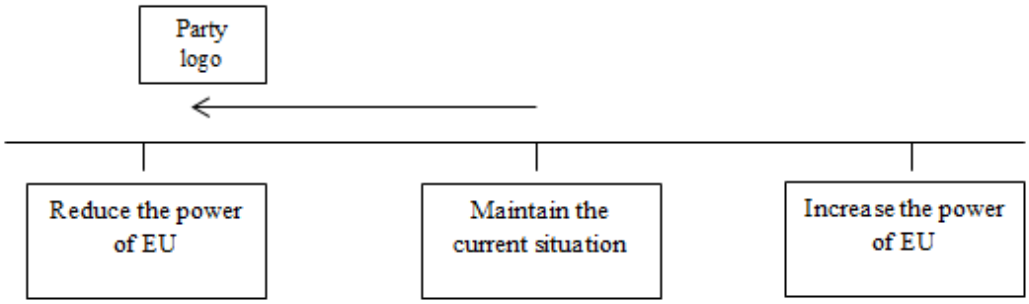
5. PARTY EUROSCEPTIC OPPORTUNITY (E)

EU AND SPAIN

[PARTY] IN FAVOUR OF A REDUCTION OF THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

[PARTY] proposes a reduction of the role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could decrease gas and electricity bills.
The following picture describes the position of this party.



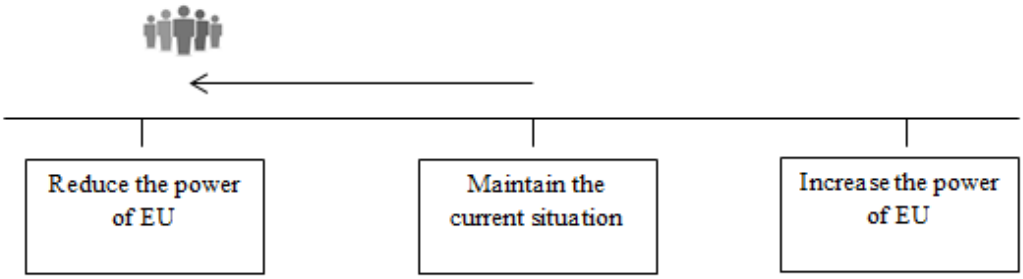
6. NEUTRAL EUROSCEPTIC OPPORTUNITY (F)

EU AND SPAIN

IN FAVOUR OF A REDUCTION OF THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

Some people propose a reduction of the role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could decrease gas and electricity bills.
The following picture describes the position of these people.



7. PARTY PRO-INTEGRATION RISK (G)

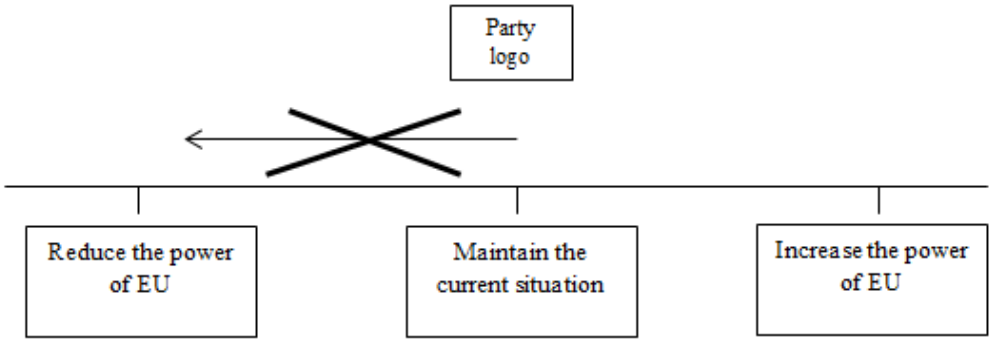
EU AND SPAIN

[PARTY] AGAINST A REDUCTION OF THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

[PARTY] opposes a reduction of the role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could raise gas and electricity bills.

The following picture describes the position of this party.



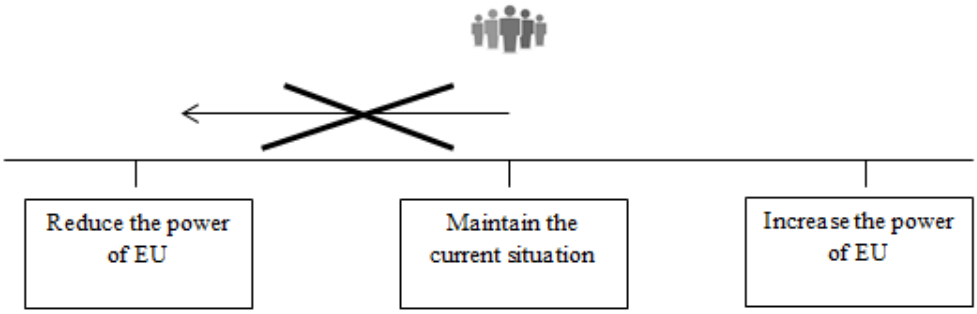
8. NEUTRAL PRO-INTEGRATION RISK (H)

EU AND SPAIN

AGAINST A REDUCTION OF THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ENERGY POLICIES

22 April 2014 – 13:27 CET

Some people oppose a reduction of the role of the European Union in energy policies because this change could raise gas and electricity bills.
The following picture describes the position of these people.



Dependent variable

After having read one of the eight messages, respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the position exposed:

"To what extent do you agree with the position stated by [this party/these people]?"

Totally disagree										Totally agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Pre-treatment questions

Before exposing respondents to the stimuli of the experiment, the following question was asked:

"Which of the following parties do you consider closer to your ideas?"

El PSOE
El PP
IU
ICV
CIU
La CUP
Ciutadans
El PNV
UpyD
Amaiur
ERC
El BNG
CC
Compromis
Equo
FAC
Geroa Bai
NABai
UPN
Cha
Others
None

People who answered "Others" were excluded from the experiment, while people who answered "None" were redirected to the following question:

“Even if you do not feel close to any party, is there any party that you like more than others?”

El PSOE
El PP
IU
ICV
CIU
La CUP
Ciutadans
El PNV
UpyD
Amaiur
ERC
El BNG
CC
Compromis
Equo
FAC
Geroa Bai
NABai
UPN
Cha
Others
None

If the respondent again answered “None”, (s)he was excluded from the experiment.

CHAPTER 3

Changes in party structure and effectiveness of cues on the EU

Abstract

Several studies have shown that the average citizen is ill-informed about national politics and has even less information about European Union politics. For this reason, partisan voters usually rely on cues from their parties when developing attitudes toward EU issues. This paper, however, argues that this process is not equally effective in all party systems. In a context of high party system instability, voters rely less on party cues because they are less familiar with the political parties. When parties experience changes in their structure, the reputational value of their brands decreases, and cues are less likely to shape voters' attitudes. Results from multilevel models show that, in an unstable party system, voters are less likely to follow the party line and that, at the party level, the effectiveness of party cues on EU issues depends on the type of party change.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the link between party stability, party reputational value, and effectiveness of party cues on European Union issues. The European Union is a complicated political system, and usually citizens have very little information about it. For this reason, in order to take political positions on EU issues, they need to rely on cues from more informed political actors such as the political party they feel close to.

Previous literature has consistently and widely demonstrated that political parties are able to affect the attitudes of their voters toward the European integration process (Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Kumlin, 2011; Maier et al., 2012; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Wessels, 1995). However, this paper argues that that to feel close to a political party is not enough to use its cues on EU issues. European voters need to feel some sort of familiarity with political parties to consider their cues useful. Voters need to recognize the political interests and values that inspire the party activity. This kind of experience is hard to develop in unstable contexts, when parties are continually changing. For this reason, this paper will focus on how changes in the electoral structure of political parties debilitate the reputational value of their labels and, in turn, weaken the persuasiveness of party cues.

This study formulates expectations at the party system as well as at the party level concerning party instability and effectiveness of cues on EU issues. The results of multilevel models show that voter familiarity with political parties affects the likelihood of using party cues. In unstable party systems people do not align with the positions of their party and probably look elsewhere for useful political cues. At the party level, results are less robust. Consistent with expectations, new parties are significantly less able to affect their voters' attitudes than more stable parties are. However, party changes like mergers

and splits do not have the expected effect on the persuasiveness of cues. Results do not change when using instrumental variable models to control for the possibility of reverse causality. Overall, the results provide evidence for the idea that party cues can be ineffective if partisan voters do not feel enough confidence in their source. This effect, however, seems stronger at the party system level than at the party one, suggesting that instability compromises the reputational value of the single party brand less than the reputation of political parties as a reliable source of cues.

3.1 Party cues and the European Union

It is widely acknowledged in political science that the average voter is largely uninformed about national politics (Sniderman et al., 1991; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001) and that citizens know even less about European Union politics (Anderson, 1998; Hobolt, 2007). However, to develop political attitudes, voters can easy compensate for their lack of cognitive resources by looking for help from more informed political actors. In particular, 'partisans may look to their preferred party for cues as to how they should feel about a policy (…)' (Brader et al., 2013: 1488). This top-down mechanism of attitude formation is particularly relevant in the context of EU politics given that 'European integration presents sufficiently technical issues that citizens may find it hard to formulate a view. For instance, it may be difficult to make utilitarian calculations about the impact of European integration, because it is unclear how the EU affects a person's life (…)' (Steenbergen et al., 2007: 17). This means that because of the complexity of EU politics and citizens' lack of knowledge about it, political parties are able to exert an influence on what their voters think about EU issues

(Down and Wilson, 2010; Gabel and Scheve, 2007a, 2007b; Hellström, 2008; Kumlin, 2011; Maier et al., 2012; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Wessels, 1995).

Despite the low level of citizens' knowledge and the highly-complicated structure of the EU political system, however, political parties are not always equally successful in shaping partisan voters' opinions about the integration process. The literature has identified several moderators of the top-down effect. At the individual level, party cues seem to particularly affect people that feel more attached to their party (Ray, 2003) and those who are attentive to politics, given that they are more exposed to party messages (Ray, 2003; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). Factors measured at the party level also seem to moderate the effect of cues: political parties with a low level of intraparty dissent on the European issue and a high level of European issue saliency are more likely to shape citizens' attitudes (Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007). A cohesive party will send consistent cues to its voters, while a party that gives high importance to the EU issue will more often vocalize its position. In both cases, parties will send clear messages to their voters, facilitating cue acceptance. Finally, some characteristics of the national political context can also predict the effectiveness of party cues. Steenbergen et al. (2007) have demonstrated that party influence is higher in countries with a proportional electoral system than in countries that use a plurality representation electoral system, given that with the former, parties tend to be less broad and to present a more unified position on European integration. Down and Wilson (2010) have shown that the European issue needs to be salient in the national debate for parties to be able to shape voters' attitudes, while Ray (2003) has underscored that a consensus among parties on the European issue suppresses its politicization, debilitating the effectiveness of party cues.

However, this literature has neglected a potentially important moderator: the stability of party systems. Citizens need to have some experience with political parties to consider their cues useful. For this reason, it is unlikely that political elites can influence voters' attitudes in highly unstable contexts. This paper will focus on how changes in the electoral structure of political parties debilitate the reputational value of party labels and, in turn, weaken the persuasiveness of party cues.

Even outside the realm of EU studies, few studies have taken into account the role of party familiarity in moderating the effect of party cues (Merolla et al., 2008; Coan et al., 2008; Brader et al., 2013; Brader and Tuker, 2012). Moreover, these studies focus on a single country (Merolla et al., 2008; Coan et al., 2008) or analyse party cues in more than one country but on different issues (Brader and Tuker, 2012; Brader et al., 2013). In this regard, the study of party cues on views of European integration can improve the current state of knowledge on the role of party familiarity, by relying on party data from different countries (EU member states) on the same issue (European integration). This means that it is possible to rely on the analysis of a higher number of parties while keeping the political issue and the confounding factors associated with it constant.[26]

3.2 Party reputation and cues effectiveness

What do political parties need in order to influence their voters' preferences? How can

[26] The analyses of party cues in different countries on the same issue helps to keep constant some confounding factors like the domestic/foreign nature of the issue or, to a lesser extent, citizens' knowledge about it. However, other issue characteristics, such as saliency in the political debate, are strongly dependent on the national context and for this reason cannot be kept constant across countries.

political parties persuade citizens to follow their line? Jackman and Sniderman (2002) use a metaphor to show how citizens choose which shortcut to use when developing political attitudes or elaborating electoral decisions. They imagine the ordinary citizen in front of two doors; she has to decide in which of the rooms beyond them she will find the key (i.e. the heuristic) that she is looking for in order to make her political choice. However, 'one room is *close* by, its content *familiar* (our ordinary citizen has found useful things there before), perhaps even friendly; the other room is *further away*, relatively *unfamiliar*, perhaps even threatening. Where, then, do we think our "ordinary citizen" will search?' (p. 219).[27] This quote suggests that, apart from party attachment, the acceptance of party cues requires additional factors to take place. Voters also need to be *familiar* with the 'room' they choose; they need to have previous experience with it to know that beyond that door they can find 'useful things.' In Lupia and McCubbins' (1998) words, 'brand names and party labels are valuable to consumers and voters only if the brands have strong and consistent connections to particular outcomes' (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998: 36). A similar point is also stressed by Coan et al. (2008). They show that cues are weaker when they come from minor parties than when they come from major ones, the reason being that 'the lower visibility, inconsistency, and lack of office-holding experience characteristic of minor parties may make their 'brand names' vulnerable to a lack of familiarity and trust among the general public which, in turn, should make their labels less useful to citizens looking to employ cognitive shortcuts' (Coan et al., 2008: 391). In short, people need to know the source of the cues they follow.

But why is the familiarity of voters with the party brand so important for the cueing process? Brader et al. (2013) argue that partisan voters need to be able to clearly

[27] Italics added.

identify which are the core values and interests that a political party serves to use its cues. Therefore, to shape the preferences of their voters, it is important for political parties to have the possibility to present a clear and consistent ideological image. Indeed, Brader and his colleagues find that party cues are more likely to affect the attitudes of partisan voters when they come from longstanding political parties, exactly as one would expect if previous experience with the party label helped citizens to understand its ideological outlook. Along the same lines, the authors also find that, compared with incumbent parties, opposition parties can more easily influence voters' attitudes because of their clearer ideological image. Incumbent parties, in fact, have to face all sorts of problems when implementing promised policies. This will inevitably make them deviate to some extent from their original purposes, debilitating in this way the clarity of a party's image.[28] Woon and Pope (2008) are even more precise in establishing a link between clarity of party ideological brand and previous party behaviour by demonstrating that 'uninformed voters use party labels as informational shortcuts, and it is the congressional parties who produce the information in party labels through their legislative activities' (p. 823). In other words, voters' experience with a particular party helps them to understand the ideological values that inspire the party activity, and therefore improves the likelihood of cue acceptance.

From the previous discussion, it follows that party stability should be a prerequisite for party cue effectiveness. For voters, in fact, it is hard to develop the kind of familiarity they need for following cues if parties change over the time. Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2010) stress this point, arguing that party organizational volatility 'certainly slows down, for instance, the development of trust in parties' ability to deliver policies—something that only evolves as voters see parties deliver their policy promises once they

[28] The effect of party longevity on party cues disappears when introducing party incumbency status and a more direct measure of party ideological clarity to the model.

receive majority status—and organizational turnover is clearly an obstacle in the way of achieving this goal' (p. 65). In more detail, Marinova has analysed how party transformations that are visible on the electoral ballot affect voters' familiarity with electoral alternatives. She focused on how, in a specific election, it is harder for citizens to correctly identify the left-right position of parties that experienced some kind of change in their electoral organization (Marinova, 2016a). She found that citizens are less familiar with new parties, parties that have formed after splitting from an existing party and parties that left a joint list than with parties that did not change their electoral image from the previous elections. For Marinova, party instability 'interrupts the continuity of the organisation and adds considerable uncertainty about the extent to which past performance is a good predictor of parties' future governing capacity' (Marinova, 2016b: 10). In other word, changes in party organization are likely to reset the familiarity that citizens have with their party, with the consequence that 'the effective communication from new or newly transformed parties to voters may be strained' (: 21).

The aim of this paper is to test the relation between the effectiveness of party cues on the European Union and party instability. The theoretical framework exhibited above suggests that the cueing process is possible only if citizens develop familiarity with political parties. Through their past experience, people are able to link a party label with a particular ideological outlook, and they can consequently be sure about the values and interests that inspire the party activity. It is unlikely that voters develop this kind of experience in political contexts where parties are constantly changing. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this paper is as follows:

H1: party cues are less effective in unstable party systems.

In previous studies, it is possible to find indications that party cues are less effective in unstable party systems, but to the best of my knowledge this hypothesis has never been directly tested. The study from Brader and Tucker (2012), for example, suggests that the tendency of voters to take party cues is higher in older and more stable party systems, given that voters are more likely to develop partisanship when parties are not continually changing. For the same reasons, Tucker et al. (2002) question the use of party cues on EU issues by voters in east and central Europe. In their study on support for EU in post-communist countries, the authors argue that the influence of political parties on voters' attitudes is only possible in West European countries, whereas such a cueing process would be impossible in post-communist countries given 'the presence of so many new parties and the constant fluctuations between parties being in power and being marginalized' (pp. 559). Lastly, and more importantly, Marinova (2016a) has demonstrated that in elections with a high number of party changes it is costlier for voters to identify the ideological leaning of political parties. Given that, as stressed in the previous pages, the identification of party interests and values is a prerequisite to use party cues, the first hypothesis is in line with the suggestions from previous literature.

However, the mechanisms that make party cues less persuasive in unstable contexts can be numerous. On the one hand, it is possible that this effect is only present at the contextual level. When the party system, as a whole, experiences several party changes, citizens that are looking for cues can feel disoriented. The cost of keeping track of all party changes in a chaotic party system can be high. The utility of party cues as shortcuts can be compromised by the effort that partisan voters should exert to monitor the continuous changes in party interests and values. In such a context, voters could be tempted to consider the category of political parties not a reliable and useful source of cues, and to

look at other political actors, such as opinion leaders, religious leader, etc., as source of shortcuts.

On the other hand, the lower effect of party cues in unstable party systems could depend on single party changes. In other word, it is possible that only voters of unstable parties are more reluctant to use party cues, whereas other citizens continue to consider political parties a reliable source of cues and to align their positions with their own party's stances. If this were the case, we should find that

H2: citizens are less likely to follow cues from unstable parties than from stable ones.

The two mechanisms do not exclude each other, but tell different stories about the relation between instability and party cues. In the case of a systemic effect, voters do not recognize the category of political parties as a political actor that can provide useful cues. For this reason, they look elsewhere for political cues. In the case of a party effect, voters of stable parties keep using party cues in developing attitudes toward the EU, even if the party system as a whole is unstable. Political parties, as a political actor, are still considered a reliable source of cues.

3.3 Data

The data used in this paper come from two datasets. For voters' and parties' positions on EU issues, I relied on the IntUne dataset of 2007. The purpose of the IntUne project is to

allow a comparison among the attitudes of the various actors involved in the European integration process, in twenty countries of Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. For this reason, the project has compiled data on the attitudes of citizens and the political and economic elite. The elite questionnaire has been compiled in close connection with that used for citizens' sample. This means that the same questions have been asked to national MPs of a particular party and to their voters. This characteristic enhances the comparative possibilities of the present study.

The dependent variable of my analysis is voters' support for the European Union, while the main independent variable is their party's position on the same issue. Both variables are operationalised through an index that takes into account attitudes toward integration in some specific policy areas. In the IntUne dataset, the following question is asked for both citizens and MPs: 'Thinking about the European Union over the next ten years or so, can you tell me whether you are in favour or against the following:' 'A unified tax system for the EU,' 'A common system of social security in the EU,' 'A single EU foreign policy toward outside countries,' 'More help for EU regions in economic or social difficulties.' The five answer options range from 'Strongly against' to 'Strongly in favour.'[29] The voters' general support for the EU is obtained by summing, for each individual, the score he or she has on the four items. A similar operation is done on surveyed MPs. For each party, I calculated the mean value among MPs on each item.[30] Afterward, I calculated, for each party, the sum of the four mean values. In this way, I have

[29] The original coding of the answer is: 1 "Strongly in favor," 2 "Somewhat in favor," 3 "Somewhat against," 4 "Strongly against," 5 "Neither in favour or against." Apart from reversing the coding in a more intuitive way for my analysis (1=Strongly against), I also coded "Neither in favour or against" as the central category.

[30] For each country, the MPs' sample design was proportional by seniority, gender, age, party, and tenure in parliament. The number of MPs surveyed for each country ranges from 46 to 94, while the number of MPs surveyed for each party ranges from 1 to 50.

an index of parties' support for the European Union based on the attitudes of their members elected to the national parliament. This operationalisation can be considered particularly useful for the study of party cues, given that elected officials, due to their higher visibility, are likely to be the members of the party that send political messages to voters. The correlation of the positions of voters on the items that compose the index ranges from 0.24 to 0.44, while for parties it ranges from 0.12 to 0.79.

The other dataset to be used for the analysis has been created by Dani Marinova and refers to the instability of parties (Marinova 2013). Marinova has built an index of electoral instability in parties (EIP) based on the changes in their electoral structure and independent from election results. The EIP index has been computed starting from detailed data on six categories of electoral change in parties: the emergence of new parties, the disbanding of existing parties, party mergers, party splits, and party entry into and exit from joint lists. Marinova documents changes in these six categories, in each party organization between two consequent elections (at time t-1 and t) at the party level of analysis. All parties that had at least five percent of the vote in the lower-house parliamentary elections have been included in the dataset. The result is a dataset of 1100 parties from 148 elections and 27 European democracies (seventeen West European and ten Central and East European). EIP is obtained by summing, for each election in each country, all the changes documented at the party level. In this way, Marinova obtains the electoral instability in parties experienced by a specific party system in a specific election.[31]

These indicators, at both the election and the party level, are particularly suitable

[31] In the EIP index, the number of mergers and joint lists are recorded regardless of the number of parties comprising each. Otherwise, merger, joint list entry and joint list exit would weight more than the other categories because, by definition, they involve more than one party.

for the purposes of this paper. This paper focuses on how changes in the party system's stability affect the reputational value of party labels and, in turn, parties' ability to shape the attitudes of their voters. To this end, an index that takes into account changes of the electoral structure of parties between elections is likely to capture the loss of familiarity among voters that parties experience when changing their image. Therefore, I used Marinova's dataset to obtain two kinds of moderator variables. On the one hand, I will use the six-category EIP index measured at the elections level for testing if a chaotic party system debilitates the effectiveness of party cues. In other words, I will use the index to test H1. On the other hand, I will take into account some of the changes recorded at the party level to test H2 and discover if the instability in the image of a single party prevents its voters from using party cues. In particular, I will examine if new parties, parties that resulted from a merger, and parties that resulted from a split are less likely to persuade their voters than parties with a more stable structure. I focus on these specific party changes because, unlike the entries and exits from joint lists, they create new and permanent party organizations.[32]

Finally, the analysis will also include control variables that the literature identifies as predictors of citizen support for the European Union. The detailed coding of these variables is presented in Table C1 of Appendix C. The analysis takes into account 13 countries from different regions of the EU (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia Republic, Spain, and UK) and 63 political parties, with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 7 parties for each country.

[32] Note that two out of three moderators at the party level (new party and party resulting from a split) are present in Marinova's original dataset, whereas the third (party resulting from a merger) has been created for the present analysis.

3.4 Results

For the following analysis, I will use multilevel models. The first level of analysis is the individual one, while the second level is represented by the respondent's party. The use of this statistical tool is necessary for the study to take into account the nested nature of the data: people that feel close to or vote for the same political party are likely to share characteristics that make them share similar views about the EU. Therefore, the observations cannot be considered completely independent (Steengerben and Jones, 2002). Moreover, party positions are measured at the party level, and to assign them to individual respondents without taking into account the multilevel nature of the data will artificially inflate its N. The use of multilevel models ensures that we are not underestimating the standard errors of the regression coefficients and we are not obtaining a biased statistical significance.

As a useful starting point, I ran a random effect ANOVA with the dependent variable and no covariates. The aim was to see what portion of the variance in respondents' support for the EU is due to party differences as compared to individual differences. In other words, I wanted to check if there are characteristics of the voters' preferred party that can account for respondents' variation in support for the EU. If this was not the case, the analysis would not be useful. The first column of Table 3.1 shows that the grand mean of support for EU is 11.20 and statistically different from 0, meaning that the average level of respondents' Europeanism across parties is quite high (the scale ranges from 0 to 16). The LR test for the null model compares the fit of the model with the one of an ordinary regression model (with only the constant) and tells us if there is variance at the 2nd level (namely, partisanship). The *p* value of this test is <0.01, meaning that we can reject the null hypothesis that there is no variance at the party level. This is evidence that the 2nd level of

analysis accounts for some variation in individual support for the EU and that the multilevel structure of the data should not be ignored. We can also calculate the intra-class correlation (ICC) for discovering the exact part of variance in voter positions due to differences across parties. We need to calculate 1.45/(1.45+10.69) = 0.12. This means that 12% of variance in voter positions on EU issues depends on which party they prefer, while the remaining 88% depends on individual factors.

The second step of the analysis was to run a random intercept model with level-1 covariates. This model shows the effects that the individual level predictors have on the dependent variable. In contrast to an ordinary regression, however, this model also demonstrates if the intercept varies across partisanship. In other words, this model shows us if there are differences in the baseline evaluation of EU policies that depend on which party respondents feel close to. The results are reported in the second column of Table 3.1. With the exception of political sophistication, satisfaction with national democracy and attachment to country, all the individual level covariates have a statistically significant effect on respondents' support for the EU. More importantly for the purpose of the paper, we can see that there is evidence of variation in the intercept. The variance component at the 2nd level is sizeable (1.06), and the statistical significance of the LR test allows us to reject the null hypothesis that the intercept is the same across all the parties, as an ordinary regression model would assume. It means that the baseline of support for the EU does vary depending on the party that respondents feel close to. Once again, partisanship seems to play a relevant role in determining voter position on EU issues. For a better understanding of these results, Figure 3.1 shows how the intercept varies across partisanship. The spread in intercept values is considerable, serving as further evidence that cross-party variation is important in the data. The range goes from a minimum of 8.67 to a maximum of 13.39,

covering almost 30% of the scale.

Why does support for the EU vary across partisanship? According to the theoretical framework exposed in the previous sections, citizens use the position of their party as a shortcut for developing their own attitudes toward the integration process. Given their lack of information about EU politics, voters assimilate their political positions to the ones of the party they like the most. This expectation can be tested by adding to the model the position of respondent's preferred party and by looking at its effect on both the dependent variable and the 2nd-level variance. The party position is a level-2 covariate because it is measured at the party level and not at the individual one. The third column of Table 3.1 shows the results for this random intercept model with level-1 and level-2 covariates.

Table 3.1. Null model and random intercept models with level-1 and level-2 covariates of voters' support for the EU.

	Null	Random intercept (level-1)	Random intercept (l-1 & l-2)
Fixed-effects			
Party position			0.24***
			(0.04)
Political sophistication		0.08	0.08
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Satisfaction with national democracy		-0.07	-0.07
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Perceived personal benefit		0.79***	0.77***
		(0.12)	(0.12)
Attachment to country		-0.05	-0.05
		(0.08)	(0.08)
Trust in people from the EU		0.19***	0.18***
		(0.03)	(0.03)
Satisfaction with European democracy		0.82***	0.81***
		(0.08)	(0.08)
Job			
Employee		-0.55**	-0.54**
		(0.17)	(0.17)
Manual worker		-0.67*	-0.67*
		(0.26)	(0.26)

Without a payed job		-0.08	-0.09
		(0.17)	(0.17)
Perceived changes in national economic situation		0.13*	0.14**
		(0.05)	(0.05)
Gender		-0.48***	-0.47***
		(0.11)	(0.11)
Left-Right position		-0.09**	-0.08**
		(0.03)	(0.03)
Party closeness		0.15^{+}	0.16^{+}
		(0.09)	(0.09)
Constant	11.20	8.23***	5.47***
	(0.17)	(0.50)	(0.67)
Random-effects			
2nd-level variance	1.45	1.06	0.56
	(0.32)	(0.25)	(0.15)
1st-level variance	10.69	9.72	9.72
	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Observations	3681	3681	3681
Number of groups	64	64	64
LR test for the null model			
LR test vs. linear model: chibar2(01) = 353.71		Prob >= chibar2 = 0.0000	
LR test for the random intercept model (level-1)			
LR test vs. linear regression: chibar2(01) = 254.46		Prob >= chibar2 = 0.0000	
LR test for the random intercept model (level-1 and -2)			
LR test vs. linear model: chibar2(01) = 115.90		Prob >= chibar2 = 0.0000	

$^{+}$ p< 0.1 * p<0.05. ** p<0.01. *** p<0.001

The reference category of the variable "Job" is "Self-Employed."

Standard errors in parentheses

As regards the fixed effects, we can see that there are no changes in the significance of level-1 covariates. The level-2 covariate that I added to the model (i.e. party position) is also statistically significant, and its effect is in the expected (positive) direction. This means that respondents with a preferred party that is more supportive of EU policies have a higher level of Europeanism. This result strongly supports previous findings on the effect that party cues have on voters' attitudes toward the EU. Adding party position to the model has also strongly reduced the level-2 variance component, which has passed from 1.06 in the model with only level-1 covariates (second column of the Table) to 0.56 in the model

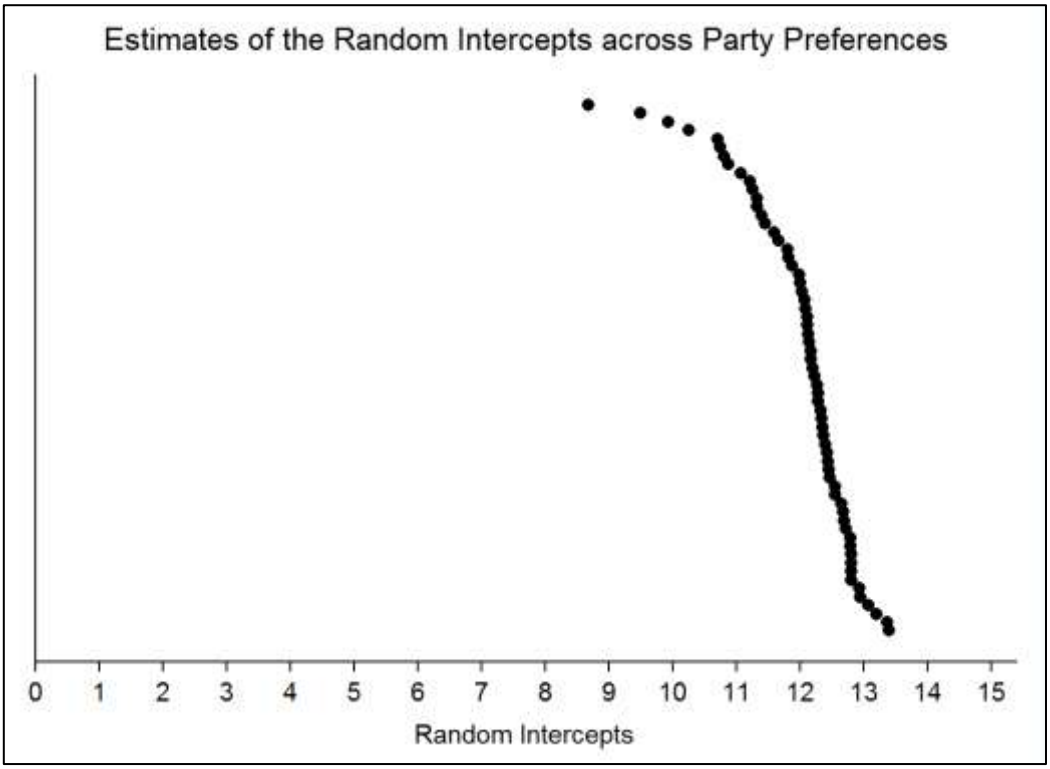


Figure 3.1. Random Intercepts. *Note:* The figure shows the spread in intercept values of support for the EU across groups of voters that feel close to the same party.

with level-1 and level-2 regressors (third column). We can calculate how much of the level-2 variance is explained by the level-2 covariate. In other words, we can calculate to what extent party cues explain the variation in the baseline evaluation of the EU showed in Figure 3.1. We can calculate it through the following operation: 1-(0.56/1.06)=0.47. Party position explains 47% of the cross-partisanship variance in EU support. However, the LR test for the third model tells us that the level-2 variance component remains statistically different from 0, meaning that the position of the preferred party does not account for all the variance of the intercept. How can we improve the predictions of respondents' attitudes at level-2?

Table 3.2. Random intercept model of respondents' support for the EU with level-1 and level-2 covariates. Interactions with party system and party instability.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed-effects				
Party position	0.35***	0.25***	0.24***	0.24***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Political sophistication	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Sat. with national democracy	-0.08	-0.07	-0.08	-0.07
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Personal benefit	0.77***	0.78***	0.78***	0.77***
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Attachment to country	-0.03	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Trust in people from the EU	0.18***	0.18***	0.19***	0.19***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Sat. with European democracy	0.80***	0.81***	0.81***	0.80***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.55**	-0.55**	-0.55**	-0.54**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Manual worker	-0.72**	-0.69**	-0.67*	-0.67*
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Without a paid job	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.09
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Economic situation changes	0.13*	0.15**	0.15**	0.15**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Gender	-0.47***	-0.46***	-0.47***	-0.47***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Left-Right position	-0.09***	-0.08**	-0.07**	-0.08**
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Party closeness	0.15+	0.15+	0.16+	0.16+
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
EIP	1.26***			
	(0.28)			
Party position*EIP	-0.10***			
	(0.02)			
New party		18.88**		
		(6.99)		
Party position*New party		-1.49**		
		(0.55)		

Party merger			-8.09*	
			(4.09)	
Party position* Party merger			0.63+	
			(0.33)	
Splinter party				-95.69
				(80.21)
Party position*Splinter party				8.06
				(6.75)
Constant	4.22***	5.37***	5.50***	5.48***
	(0.69)	(0.67)	(0.67)	(0.67)
Random-effects				
2nd-level variance	0.37	0.52	0.53	0.55
	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)
1st-level variance	9.72	9.71	9.72	9.72
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Observations	3681	3681	3681	3681
Groups	64	64	64	64

Standard errors in parentheses. The reference category for the variable "Occupation" is "Self-Employed."
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

As suggested in the theoretical section, an unstable party system can be demanding for voters trying to identify the interests and values of political parties, and for this reason it is less likely that people use party cues. In other words, the instability of the party system as a whole can affect the effectiveness of party cues. To test this relation, I performed again the random intercept model with level-1 and level-2 covariates by adding an interaction between party position and Marinova's EIP index at the election level in its original form with six party change categories (emergence of new parties, disbanding of existing parties, party mergers, splinter parties, and party entry into and exit from joint lists). The EIP refers to the last national elections held before the 2007 IntUne survey. The results are shown in Model 1 of Table 3.2. The model shows that the interaction between party position and the EIP has the expected direction and is statistically significant. The higher the number of party changes experienced by a party system between two elections, the lower the effect that party's cues have on voters' attitudes. This result supports H1: in unstable party

systems, political parties are less able to shape their voters' attitudes than in party systems where parties do not change their electoral image. Figure 3.2 shows the marginal effect of party position on voters' attitudes across different values of EIP.[33] It seems that when there are three or more changes in parties' electoral structure between two elections, political elites are no longer able to shape voters' preferences. Moreover, it is also possible to observe that the level-2 variance for this model is substantially lower than in the previous ones, meaning that the interaction between party position and EIP accounts for a relevant part of the intercept variation.

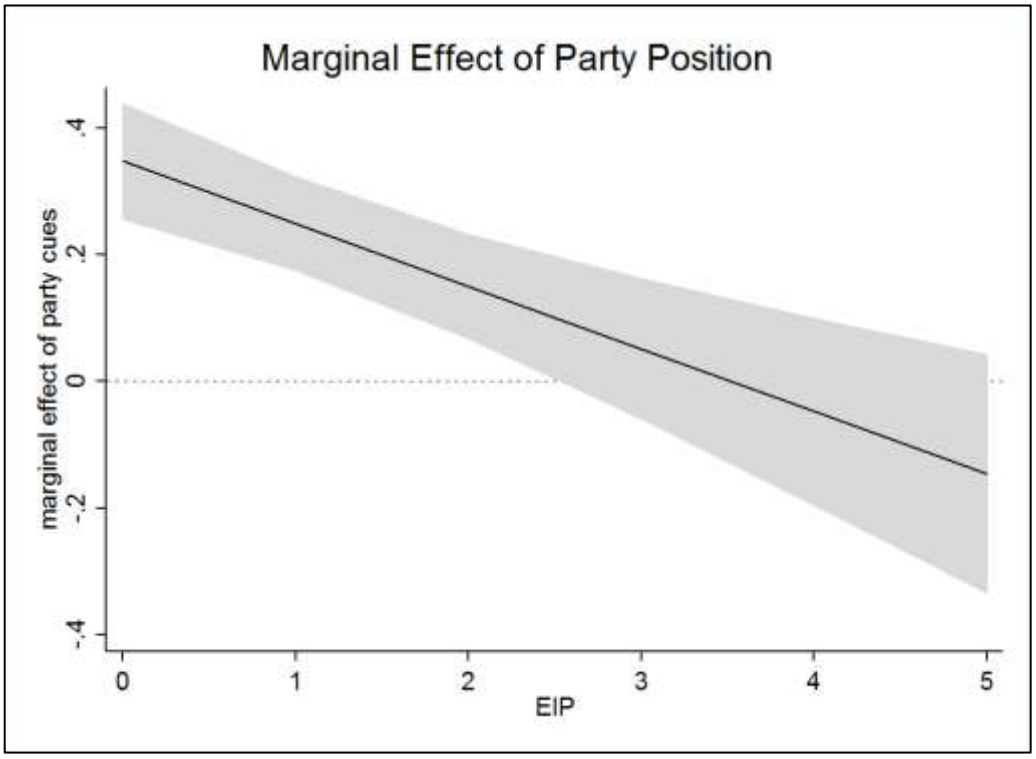


Figure 3.2. Effect of party position across different levels of electoral instability in parties (EIP).

[33] Bulgaria is excluded from the graph because it is the only country that has an EIP higher than 5 (see Table C5 in Appendix C) and as a strong outlier it drags the line into negative values. Excluding Bulgaria from the regression does not change the results concerning the interaction term.

The second hypothesis aims understand whether, apart from a systemic effect of instability, it is also possible to find an effect from the instability of single parties. In other words, the objective is to discover if when a party experiences a change in its electoral structure, its voters are less likely to use party cues than voters of more stable parties are. To test this hypothesis, I replicated the previous model three times, but instead of using the interaction with the EIP at the party system level, I used interactions with three changes at the party level from Marinova's dataset. In particular, I examined if new parties, parties that resulted from a merger, and parties that resulted from a split have fewer effective cues than more stable parties do. These party changes refer to the last elections held before the IntUne survey.[34]

Model 2 in Table 3.2 shows the results for the interaction between party position and the new/old status of a party. The interaction term is in line with the expectations: party cues from a new party are substantially less likely to shape voter attitudes than cues communicated by an old one. The labels of new parties do not have reputational value, and voters are not familiar enough with them to use their cues. However, the other two interactions showed in Models 3 and 4 did not perform as expected. Model 3 tells us that, if anything, parties that resulted from a merger are better able to affect voters' attitudes than more stable parties are. The interaction term is only marginally significant (p=0.056), but it confirms the results of Marinova (2016a): it seems that party mergers clarify the ideological position of party organizations and in this way increase the reputational values of the party label. Finally, Model 4 of Table 3.2 shows the difference in effectiveness of

[34] Results that refer to party level changes, however, need to be interpreted very cautiously and only as a clue of the effect of party changes on cues' effectiveness. In fact, only a very low number of respondents in the sample actually felt close to a party that experienced some sort of organizational change (see Table C2 in Appendix C for the frequencies).

party cues between stable parties and parties that resulted from a split. The interaction term is neither in the expected direction nor statistically significant. We have to conclude, therefore, that labels of splinter parties do not have lower reputation values than the other parties. H2, therefore, finds only partial support in the data. The only parties that seem to have less effective cues are the new ones. Even though these results are consistent with the theoretical background exposed above, they do not represent strong evidence of an effect of instability at the party level.

The results of Table 3.2 are also substantially confirmed if I take into account the possibility of reverse causality. The correlation between voter and party positions, in fact, can be due to the influence that the latter exerts on the former, but also to the opposite process. On the one hand, as argued in the theory section, people tend to assimilate their positions on EU issues to the ones of their parties because they lack relevant information to form autonomous opinions. On the other hand, given that the EU is becoming a salient issue, political parties try to intercept the preferences of their potential voters to maximize their share of vote. From this point of view, citizens are able to influence party positions on EU issues (Carruba, 2001; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Consequently, the second-level independent variable (i.e. party position) is endogenous to the models, and the results are probably overestimating the influence of political parties on voter attitudes. For this reason, Table C3 of Appendix C replicates the models of Table 3.2, but performed with instrumental variables. Instead of using the values of party position in its "natural" form, I used the values predicted by a set of regressors (instrumental variables) that can predict party positions but are not endogenous to the model. Given that mainstream parties are usually more pro-EU than peripheral ones (Mark et al., 2002), I predicted party positions using the following instrumental variables: party extremity, party share of seats in the

national parliament, government/opposition status of the party[35]. Table C3 shows that the results concerning the interactions between party position and instability do not change even if I take into account the possibility of reverse causality.

The results of Tables 3.2 provide evidence of a clear effect of instability at the system level and a somehow less robust effect of instability at the party level. These results suggest that the effect of instability at the party system level is not the simple sum of the effect of instability at the party level. It seems that if the party system is unstable, voters do not use party cues, irrespective of whether their party is experiencing changes in its structure. It is possible to test this mechanism by looking at the effect of party system instability while controlling for party level changes. Table 3.3 presents the results of this analysis. Models 1 to 3 replicate Model 1 of Table 3.2, controlling for each of the changes in the party structure that I took into account for the analysis, whereas Model 4 controls for all of them.[36] These models show that in an unstable party system, a party is less likely to affect its voters' positions on EU issues even if it does not experience any permanent change in its electoral structure. In other words, even if the reputation values of a party remain unchanged, a chaotic context can affect its capacity to shape voters' political opinions. In other words, when the party system is unstable, voters are more likely to look to political actors different from parties as a source of cues.

[35] For calculating party extremity, I first calculated the mean left-right position among the MPs of each party; afterward, I used these values to calculate the mean national left-right party position for each country. Finally, I calculated party extremity as the absolute ideological distance of each party from the national mean.

[36] Given that the EIP index is measured at the national level, Table C4 in Appendix C replicates all the models with the EIP using country as second level of analysis. The models also use instrumental variables to account for the reverse causality. The results are not substantially different from results presented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.3. Random intercept model of voters' support for the EU with level-1 and level-2 covariates. Party system instability. Party level controls.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed-effects				
Party position	0.35***	0.35***	0.35***	0.35***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)
EIP	1.27***	1.27***	1.27***	1.30***
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Party position*EIP	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Political sophistication	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Personal benefit	0.77***	0.77***	0.77***	0.77***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Attachment to country	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Trust in people from the EU	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.80***	0.81***	0.80***	0.80***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.54**	-0.55**	-0.54**	-0.55**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Manual worker	-0.72**	-0.72**	-0.72**	-0.73**
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Without a paid job	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Economic situation changes	0.13*	0.13*	0.13*	0.13*

	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Gender	-0.48***	-0.48***	-0.48***	-0.48***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Left-Right position	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.09***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Party closeness	0.15+	0.15+	0.15+	0.15+
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
New party	-0.41			-0.46
	(0.66)			(0.65)
Party merger		-0.68		-0.72
		(0.64)		(0.63)
Splinter party			-0.23	-0.28
			(0.60)	(0.59)
Constant	4.19***	4.20***	4.21***	4.16***
	(0.69)	(0.68)	(0.69)	(0.68)
Random-effects				
2^{nd}-level variance	0.37	0.34	0.37	0.33
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)
1^{st}-level variance	9.72	9.72	9.72	9.72
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Observations	3681	3681	3681	3681
Groups	64	64	64	64

Standard errors in parentheses
The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-Employed'
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.00

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to understand if a link between party reputation and cue effectiveness on EU politics exists. I formulated this expectation in response to the suggestion by a broad range of literature that voters need to feel familiar with and trust in a party to accept its cues. The argument was that changes in parties' electoral structure decrease the reputational value of their labels and their usefulness as a source of cues. When voters are no longer able to clearly identify the political interests and values that lead party activity, they do not find party cues persuasive.

In line with previous research, I found that party cues do have an impact on voters' attitudes toward the EU. I also found that party positions account for almost half of the cross-party variance in voters' preferences. The analyses have also shown that the number of party changes that occur at the party system level has an impact on the effectiveness of party cues. The higher the number of party changes, the lower the parties' ability to influence voters' opinions. This moderating effect is robust to control for single permanent changes in party structure. This means that the instability of the party system decreases the effectiveness of party cues independently from the stability of the single party. In other words, even when a party does not change its structure, the persuasiveness of its cues on EU issues can decrease if the party system as a whole experiences enough changes.

On the other hand, not all the moderators at the party level have the expected effect. I did find that new parties are significantly less likely to persuade their voters than old parties are. These findings fit with the theoretical argument that the labels of new parties do not have reputational value, and that people are less likely to follow their indications because they are not sure about the political interests and values that inform their actions. On the contrary, political parties that resulted from a merger seem better able to shape

voters' preferences than other parties. These findings are consistent with Marinova (2016a) in suggesting that a merger among parties, instead of decreasing the reputational values of the party label, can clarify the ideological leaning of the resulting party. Finally, I found that splinter parties have the same persuasive power as other parties. Contrary to the expectations, it seems that political organizations resulting from a split can at least in part rely on the reputational value of the party they left. In other words, it is possible that voters feel some sort of familiarity with splinter parties because they know their interests and values cannot be very different from the interests and values of the split party. Therefore, it seems that what makes the difference in party cue effectiveness between new parties on the one hand and parties that resulted from a merger or a split on the other is the possibility to rely on previous experience. In the first case, if the party is completely new, voters have little information that can help them to understand the ideological leaning of the organization. On the contrary, in the case of parties that resulted from a merger or a split, voters can rely on the experience they have with the previous organizations.

All in all, the results suggest that the systemic dynamic is more robust than the party level one. The lower effect of party cues in unstable party systems seems to be due not only to the lower persuasive power of unstable parties on their voters. Instead, it is the whole electorate that lost trust in political parties as a reliable source of cues and looked elsewhere when developing attitudes toward the EU.

In any case, this paper shows that the persuasive power of the party label has some limitations and that voters, however in need they may be for party cues to make up for their lack of knowledge of EU politics, are not always willing to align with party positions. It seems that European citizens are not mere passive agents of the cueing process. They can actually choose whether and to what extent to follow a cue. They may blindly follow the

official party line on EU issues, but only after it has demonstrated its compromise with voter interests and values.

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Appendix C

Table C1. Control variables' coding

Political knowledge	The index is composed by the following three items: **Can you tell me which of the following countries are members of the European Union (European Community)? [A] The Netherland (0) Wrong answer (1) Correct answer; [B] – Malta (0) Wrong answer (1) Correct answer; [C] Croatia (0) Wrong answer (1) Correct answer**
Satisfaction with national democracy	**On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in (COUNTRY)? Are you…?** (1) Very dissatisfied (2) Somewhat dissatisfied (3) Somewhat satisfied (4) Very satisfied
Personal benefit	**And what about of people like you? Have people like you on balance benefited or not from (COUNTRY)'s EU membership?** (0) Have not benefited (1) Have benefited
Attachment to country	**People feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country and to Europe. What about you? Are you very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached or not at all attached to the following? OUR COUNTRY** (1) Not at all attached (2) Not very attached (3) Somewhat attached (4) Very attached
Trust in people from the EU	**Please tell me on a scale of 0 to 10 how much you personally trust each of the following groups of people. '0' means that "you do not trust the group at all" and '10' means "you have complete trust" - PEOPLE IN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES** (1) No trust at all (11) Complete trust
Satisfaction with European democracy	**On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union? Are you…?** (1) Very dissatisfied (2) Somewhat dissatisfied (3) Somewhat satisfied (4) Very satisfied
Occupation	**As far as your current occupation is concerned, would you say you are self-employed, an employee, a manual worker or would you say that you do not have a paid job?** (1) Self-Employed (2) Employee (3) Manual worker (4) Without a paid job
Economic situation changes	**How do you think the general economic situation in (COUNTRY) has changed over the last 12 months?** (1) Got a lot worse (2) Got a little worse (3) Stayed the same (4) Got a little better (5) Got a lot better
Gender	(1) Male (2) Female
Left-Right position	**In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where '0' means "the left" and '10' means "the right", and '5' means "neither left nor right"?** (0) Left (10) Right
Party closeness	**Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?** (1) Not very close (2) Somewhat close (3) Very close

Table C2. Supporters of changing parties

New party supporters	35		
Old party supporters	3646		
Party merger supporters		45	
No-party merger supporters		3636	
Splinter party supporters			76
No-splinter party supporters			3605
Total	3681	3681	3681

Table C3. Random intercept model of respondents' support for the EU with level-1 and level-2 covariates. Interactions with party system and party instability (Instrumental variables models)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed-effects				
Party position	0.54	0.14	0.13	0.16
	(0.42)	(0.15)	(0.20)	(0.19)
Political sophistication	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.08
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.05	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Personal benefit	0.75***	0.79***	0.78***	0.78***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Attachment to Country	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Trust in people from the EU	0.18***	0.19***	0.19***	0.19***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.80***	0.81***	0.81***	0.81***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.55**	-0.55**	-0.55**	-0.54**
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Manual Worker	-0.69**	-0.68*	-0.67*	-0.67*
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Without a paid job	-0.09	-0.09	-0.09	-0.09
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Economic situation changes	0.14*	0.14**	0.14**	0.14**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Gender	-0.48***	-0.47***	-0.47***	-0.47***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Left-Right position	-0.09**	-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.08**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)

Party closeness	0.15+	0.15+	0.15+	0.15+
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
EIP	1.73+			
	(0.97)			
Party position*EIP	-0.14+			
	(0.08)			
New Party		17.66*		
		(7.46)		
Party position*New Party		-1.38*		
		(0.59)		
Party merger			-8.67+	
			(4.65)	
Party position*Party merger			0.68+	
			(0.37)	
Splinter party				-99.56
				(88.48)
Party position*Splinter Party				8.40
				(7.44)
Constant	2.13	6.68***	6.73**	6.45**
	(4.47)	(1.78)	(2.23)	(2.13)
Random-effects				
2nd level variance	2.83	0.68	0.84	0.81
1st level variance	9.75	9.75	9.75	9.75
Observations	3681	3681	3681	3681
Groups	64	64	64	64

Standard errors in parentheses
The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-Employed'
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table C4. Random intercept model of respondents' support for the EU. Party system instability. Instrumental variable models with country as second level

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Party position	0.31**	0.32**	0.30**	0.28**	0.28**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
EIP	1.24**	1.29***	1.23**	1.28***	1.34***
	(0.38)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.37)
Party position*EIP	-0.10**	-0.10**	-0.10**	-0.10**	-0.10***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political sophistication	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.09
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.17*	-0.17*	-0.17*	-0.16*	-0.16*
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Personal benefit	0.85***	0.85***	0.86***	0.86***	0.87***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Attachment to Country	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.07
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Trust in people from the EU	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.86***	0.86***	0.87***	0.87***	0.87***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Occupation					
Employee	-0.56**	-0.56**	-0.57**	-0.57**	-0.57**
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Manual Worker	-0.79**	-0.80**	-0.81**	-0.80**	-0.83**
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)
Without a paid job	-0.18	-0.18	-0.20	-0.17	-0.18
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Economic situation changes	0.16**	0.16**	0.16**	0.15**	0.15**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Gender	-0.46***	-0.47***	-0.47***	-0.47***	-0.48***

	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Left-Right position	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.09***	-0.09***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Party closeness	0.17*	0.17*	0.18*	0.17+	0.17+
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
New Party		-0.44			-0.48
		(0.55)			(0.55)
Party merger			-1.15*		-1.19*
			(0.48)		(0.48)
Splinter Party				-0.40	-0.44
				(0.38)	(0.38)
Constant	4.28***	4.21***	4.29***	4.58***	4.55***
	(1.04)	(1.05)	(1.04)	(1.02)	(1.02)
Random-effects					
2^{nd} level variance	0	0	0	0	0
1^{st} level variance	9.86	9.87	9.86	9.88	9.87
Observations	3681	3681	3681	3681	3681
Groups	13	13	13	13	13

Standard errors in parentheses
The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-Employed'
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table C5. Distribution of electoral instability in parties (EIP) by country

Country	EIP
Austria	0
Portugal	0
Spain	0
United Kingdom	0
Germany	1
Greece	1
France	2
Belgium	3
Estonia	3
Slovakia Republic	3
Italy	4
Hungary	5
Bulgaria	10

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the relation between party stances on the EU and the attitudes of their voters. In particular, the focus was on the influence that political parties can exert on citizens' opinions. I was interested in discovering whether and to what extent what voters think about the European integration process and EU issues depends on the messages that they receive from their parties, and in exploring the actual mechanisms of this influence.

Of course, the research took into account that the direction of the influence is twofold: on the one hand, European citizens use party cues as heuristics to develop their own political attitudes. Party stances, therefore, can shape citizens' positions. On the other hand, political parties are interested in maximizing their share of votes and for this reason try to intercept the preferences of their potential voters. Thus, citizens' positions on EU issues can influence party stances.

However, my interest in the first of these mechanisms comes from the fact that the use of party cues by citizens can harm the accountability of the political elite for its activity at the EU level. Heuristics can be a useful device to employ when citizens lack relevant political information on a specific issue, but they can also produce relevant bias and distortion in the opinions of partisan voters. If people completely delegate to political parties the cumbrous task of taking an informed position on EU issues, there is little

likelihood that voters attitudes can constrain political elites' activity. If citizens tend to uncritically align their positions on EU issues with the stances of their parties, there is no reason for the political elite to fear electoral punishment.

In the context of EU politics, the use of party cues as heuristics and its consequences are particularly relevant for two reasons. First of all, citizens' knowledge of EU politics is usually even lower than their already low awareness of national politics. This means that they lack the ability to engage in toilsome thinking about EU issues and are consequently more likely to base their attitudes mainly on heuristic devices like party cues. Secondly, it is quite hard for citizens in the EU political context to learn whether or not the use of party cues is beneficial. In theory, citizens could decide not to use party cues and engage in a more laboured thinking if they realize with experience that the use of such heuristics leaves the political elite free of implementing policies that contrast with their constituents' interests and preferences. However, the complex structure of EU decision making makes it hard for the average citizen to attribute blame to specific actors for specific policies. Consequently, it is very difficult for voters to assess if delegating to political parties the task of taking a position on EU issues has produced policy outcomes consistent with their interests and preferences.

The three chapters that compose this thesis aimed to highlight the implications of the use of party cues on the EU for political party accountability. They focused on different aspects of the cueing process, but they were linked by a common interest in investigating to what extent partisan citizens are willing to follow official party lines on EU issues.

The findings of the first chapter are quite robust and underscore the strong, negative relationship between the use of party cues and political knowledge. The results of the experiment have shown that the lower the voter's knowledge of EU politics, the higher his

or her likelihood to use party cues is. The highly sophisticated voters do not change their preferences when exposed to party cues. Interestingly, party influence is exerted on more complex issues like the TTIP as well as on issues like austerity policies that have been largely covered by the public debate and on which citizens are more likely to have clear and firm opinions. Moreover, when the issue is particularly complex, even well-informed voters tend to rely on party cues and to decide which policy option to support depending on which one is endorsed by their party.

The chapter also showed that these results are not limited to the Spanish political context and/or to the experimental setting. The analysis of observational cross-sectional data has largely confirmed the results of the experiment, leaving few doubts about the fact that political parties are able to influence voter attitudes in the "real world." Indeed, on average, the effect of party cues on voters' opinions is equal to a change of 8 and 17 percent of the scale, for the easy and the hard issue respectively. This is roughly twice the effect of an important factor in the formation of political attitudes such as left-right position. Moreover, for people with the lowest level of EU political knowledge, the impact of party positions reaches 34 percent of the scale for the easy issue and almost 40 percent for the hard one. The magnitude of this effect is, therefore, far from negligible.

Given the low level of information that citizens have on the European Union, the results of this chapter suggest that political elites are only weakly constrained by their voters' preferences, given that the elites have a great ability to influence their constituents' ideas. Moreover, the fact that the use of party cues is especially strong for the less sophisticated citizens is likely to generate a situation of political inequality. With their firmer opinions on EU issues, politically sophisticated voters can force political parties to behave according to their preferences. On the contrary, parties have no incentives to adapt

to the preferences of the less-sophisticated segment of their voters. Given that political knowledge is usually correlated with higher education and higher levels of cognitive skills, the risk is that parties feel accountable only to that part of the population that has more to gain from the integration process and international competition.

The second chapter has provided further evidence of voters' dependence on party cues by focusing on how party persuasion works. The findings of this section of the thesis show that partisan voters tend to pay more attention to *who* takes a specific position on EU issues than *what* this position stands for. Participants of the second experiment decided to what extent they agreed with a political message more on the basis of its source than on the basis of its content. If a political message comes from the preferred political party, it always receives higher support than if it is ascribed to a neutral source. Varying the content of the message, on the contrary, does not produce the same effect on voters' attitudes: when partisanship is present, the manipulation of the content does not produce significant changes in support. The experiment shows that people do have preferences about the pace of the European integration process, but, in some cases, they are willing to change them to follow the party line. This mechanism makes people more likely to align with party positions than to question them, even when party stances conflict with their prior attitudes. Therefore, political parties are not very likely to pay an electoral cost for positions taken at the EU level, and consequently their activity does not appear very constrained by voters' attitudes.

Finally, the third chapter focused on the limitations of the party persuasive power. The results of the multilevel analyses showed that even though citizens lack information about EU issues and they perceive the EU as a distant and complicated political system, party cues are not always effective. Also for this chapter, the effect of party cues is

substantial. Moving party stances from the least to the most pro-EU position produces a net change in voters' attitudes equal to 24 percent of the scale, which amounts to more than three times the effect of the left-right position. However, the results also show that partisan voters are not mere passive agents of the heuristic process. The fact that they are in need of cues and that they have a preferred party does not automatically imply that they will align with its positions. People need to have enough familiarity with political parties to consider them a reliable source of cues. The analysis at the country level reveals that when a party system is particularly unstable, with many changes in party structure occurring between elections, voters are less likely to look at the parties as sources of heuristics and instead probably look for cues from other and more stable political actors. The results are less robust at the party level, where new parties appear less successful than established parties in influencing their voters' attitudes about EU issues, whereas parties that resulted from a merger or a split do not seem to have less effective cues than more stable parties. The results of this chapter are particularly important because they point to the fact that people may blindly follow the official party line on EU issues, but only after they have enough experience with party interests and values.

All in all, the thesis provides two arguments that point toward a weakly constrained political elite and offers one reason to believe that the influence of political parties has its limitations. Citizens' lack of information about EU politics makes their attitudes easily influenced by political party messages; partisan voters are even willing to change their prior attitudes to align with their party's position. However, this happens only to the extent that political parties, both as a system and individually, have been previously successful in making voters familiar with their interests and values.

These conclusions need to be taken into account in the debate on the democratic

deficit of the European Union. In both its pre- and post-crisis versions, the debate has proposed the centrality of citizens' attitudes as a solution for improving the legitimacy of the EU regime and its policy outcomes. The argument is that if people have the possibility to cast a vote to choose among different political alternatives for policies at the EU level and/or to mark the pace of European integration, they can send electoral messages to their political representatives regarding what they are allowed or not allowed to do. In sum, the European Union and its activity would gain legitimacy if public attitudes constrained elite activity at the EU level. This work has demonstrated, however, that political parties are able to shape the constraints that are supposed to limit their actions.

These results are even more compelling when taking into account that, for the most part, they refer to a case that might be regarded as an unlikely setting for parties to lead public opinion on the EU: Spain. There are at least three factors that concur in the Spanish case that may lead to think that the estimates presented here constitute a lower boundary of the party cueing effect: the economic crisis, an extremely low general level of trust in political parties, and a recent process of party system instability. The economic crisis has considerably increased the saliency of EU issues in the national political debate. Even though citizens' knowledge of the EU remains particularly low, people are now more knowledgeable about EU politics than they were ten years ago. At the same time, Spanish political parties are experiencing an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy that has made them lose the trust of their voters. In May 2014, when the experiment in Chapter 2 was run, the percentage of Spanish citizens that tended not to trust political parties was 91.48 percent, the highest in the EU after Slovenia. The situation was not substantially different one year later, when the experiment of Chapter 1 was run (Source: Eurobarometer). As a consequence of this low level of trust, new parties like Podemos and Ciudadanos entered

the national political arena, destabilizing the previous two-party system.

Such a context should have lowered the need of citizens for heuristics, decreased their trust in political parties as a reliable source of cues, and increased voters' capacity to engage in rigorous processing when receiving information on EU politics. However, the experiment in the first chapter shows that people have kept using party cues. This is true for a relatively unknown issue like the TTIP as well as for the austerity policies, possibly one of the most debated EU issues in Spanish politics. In both cases, partisan voters are almost 30 percentage points more likely to choose their party's policy option when party labels are shown. At the same time, the experiment in the second chapter provides evidence of the fact that the increased saliency of EU issues during the economic crisis has not increased the ability or the motivation of citizens to use rigorous information processing. The presence of the preferred party's label increases the support for a policy option by almost 10% of the scale, while a significant content effect is only present when party labels are not shown. Partisan voters, therefore, still prefer to use shortcuts such as party labels to assess the validity of a political message than to process its content. Therefore, the political changes caused by the economic crisis do not prevent political parties from influencing their voters' opinions.

This influence, however, is unlikely to concern all aspects of European integration. Further research should try to understand if the recent politicization of EU issues allows political parties to transmit to their voters all aspects of their positions. The bulk of research in party cues on the EU have used observational data and focus on how political parties are able to affect the *degree* of support for the EU among their voters. However, the current political scenario of the EU no longer allows one to consider party and citizen positions on the EU simply in terms of their degree of support for the EU. Political

positions on the EU are currently much more multifaceted. This is true first of all for the so-called Eurosceptic parties. Even though parties from both extremes of the ideological axis are highly critical of the EU, their opposition translates into different political aims: while leftist parties focus their criticisms on economic policies without calling into question the whole integration process (or even asking for closer integration), rightist concerns for preserving national sovereignty and cultural identity are incompatible with the very idea of a supranational political community. There is currently no research investigating if, and to what extent, political parties are successful in making their voters perceive these differences.

In any case, the results of this thesis have shown that even though public attitudes toward the integration process have now gained more relevance in EU decision making; even if the political elite cannot rely on the *permissive consensus* anymore; even though European citizens are now more aware of EU politics than they were in the past; political parties still seem able to lead the integration process due to the influence they can exert on voters' attitudes. This is particularly true for the part of the population that is ill-informed about EU politics, which is more likely to use party cues and to delegate to political parties the task of taking an informed position on EU issues. From this point of view, political party accountability for EU activity could greatly benefit from a broader and deeper national debate on EU issues and European integration.

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