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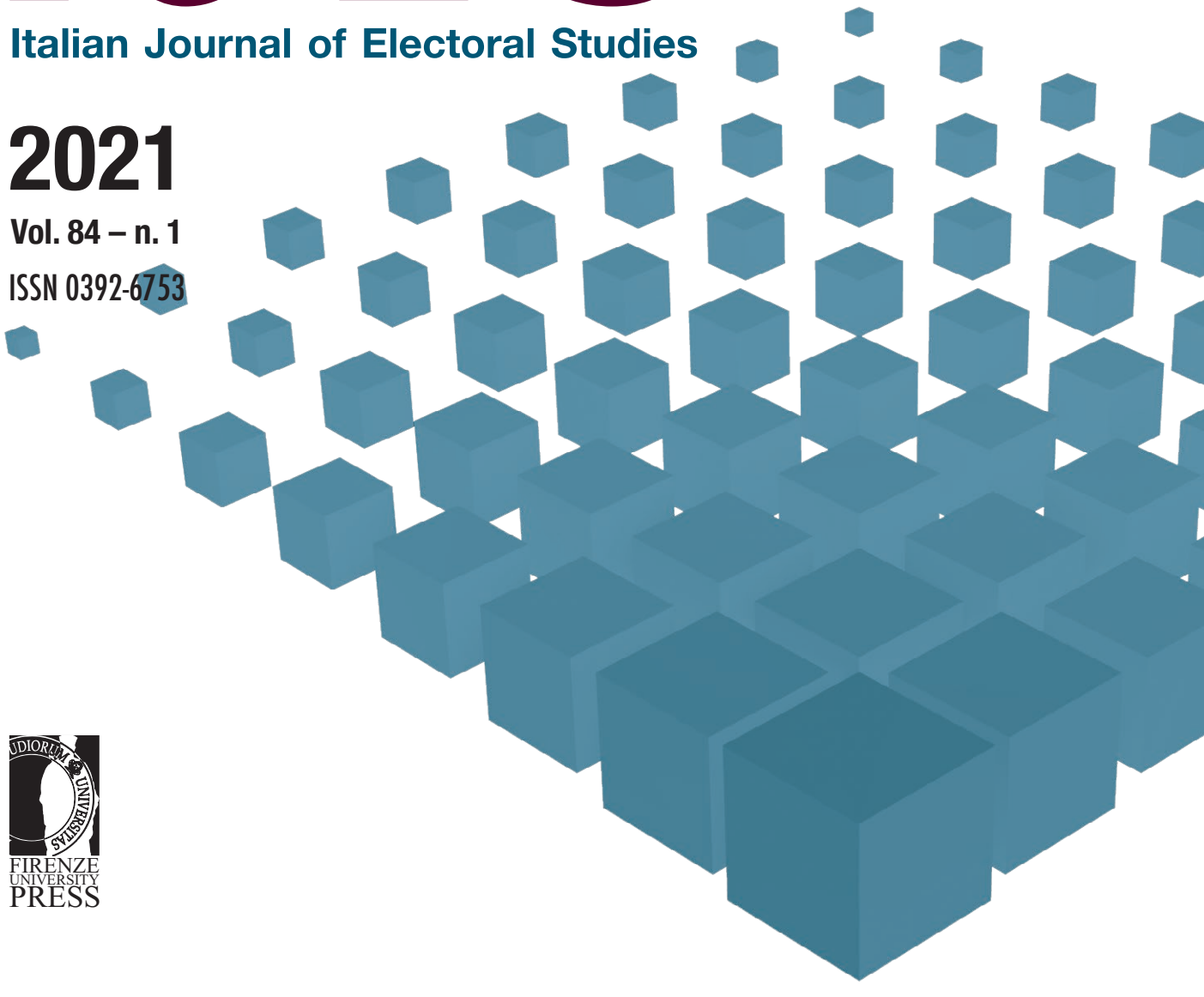

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Zooming in on the 'Europeanisation' of national politics: A comparative analysis of seven EU countries

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Abstract. This article empirically revisits and tests the effect of individual distance from parties on the EU integration dimension and on the left–right dimension for vote choice in both national and European elections. This analysis is based on the unique European Election Study (EES) 2014 survey panel data from seven EU countries. Our findings show that in most countries the effect of individual distance on the EU integration dimension is positive and significant for both European and national elections. Yet the effect of this dimension is not uniform across all seven countries, revealing two scenarios: one in which it is only relevant for Eurosceptic voters and the other in which it is significant for voters of most parties in the system. The first is mainly related to the presence of a 'hard' Eurosceptic party in the party supply, but the second, which indicates a more advanced level of Europeanisation of party systems, is not explained by most current theoretical and empirical contributions. We conclude by proposing two additional explanations for this latter scenario in which the EU integration dimension is present for most voters in both type of elections, including those voting for the main parties. Our findings and further discussion have implications for the understanding of the Europeanisation of national politics and its relationship with vote choice.

Keywords: europeanisation, European elections, national elections, party supply, conditional logit.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is the effect of individual positioning on the EU integration dimension of vote choice? Does this dimension shape vote choice both in the EU and national elections, or are its effects only present for the supranational elections? Scholars have examined whether the EU is a salient dimension in individual vote choice ever since the first elections for the European Parliament (EP). Yet, and despite a significant number of empirical contributions, the question remains not fully and satisfactory answered.

The lack of a definitive answer is partly explained by the changing nature of the European project, which forces scholars to continue revisiting their

theoretical and empirical expectations. Thus, the study of the effect of the EU issues on vote choice has been frequently framed using the second-order elections (SOE) model. This framing posits that European elections have been less relevant to the electorate because, together with other factors, the issue at stake, Europe, does not matter to voters (Schmitt and Toygür 2016). Yet this understanding has traditionally coexisted with several studies showing that, under some circumstances, European issues matter (Ferrara and Weishaupt 2004; Reif 1984; van der Eijk 1996). However, no overall conclusion was reached and many scholars still concluded that the EU dimension did not matter or was largely irrelevant (Hix and Marsh 2007).

Over the last few years, this debate has once again gained momentum by the contributions of an important and growing literature on the politicisation of Europe. More concretely these contributions have started to show that European issues are increasingly present in national public opinion, gaining space in people's discussions and interests, and structuring national political competition (Spanje and Vreese 2011; Wilde and Lord, 2016; Ares et al., 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018). There are contributions pointing at that direction such the one by Hobolt et al. (2008) showing that voters defect from governing parties because the government is generally far more pro-European than they are. Similarly, Hobolt and Wittrock (2011) concluded that while voters base their EP vote choices primarily on domestic preferences, those having additional information about the European integration dimension are also more likely to vote on this basis. As Hernández and Kriesi (2015) more recently pointed out the so-called 'Europeanisation of National Politics' is gaining traction among specialists.

However, despite all these significant contributions, the empirical evidence is still inconclusive, especially when it comes to comparing the micro-level explanations of party support behind this process.There have certainly been several empirical attempts to show how 'Europe matters' in national elections (Gabel 2002; de Vries 2007), but the literature has yet to fully explore the effect of individual positioning on the EU dimension *vis-à-vis* that of the traditional left–right dimension which traditionally has been driving the competition at the national arena. In other words, there is still missing a conclusive and comprehensive cross-national study comparing the effects at the individual level of both dimensions of party competition for both types of elections (for an exception see van der Eijk and Franklin 2004).

This article aims at extending previous literature by revisiting the (relative) effect of individual positioning on the EU integration dimension of vote choice across different European countries using a unique panel dataset, the European Election Study (EES) 2014 survey panel that includes two waves in seven then-EU member states[1]: Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Greece. One of the waves took place as part of the 2014 European post-electoral survey and the other as part of a national post-electoral survey of the same seven countries. This dataset allows, for these two types of elections, an assessment of the significance and magnitude of the EU integration dimension *vis-à-vis* the left–right dimension, the other dimension against which the EU dimension is usually compared for both elections and for the same set of respondents. Crucially, we also extend this analysis to examining whether the EU dimension equally matters for the electoral support of all parties in the party system.

Our empirical analysis proceeds in two steps. In the first part, we analyse whether the European dimension drives people's vote in all seven EU countries. If the process of Europeanisation referred to by the literature is taking place, we should observe that individual positioning on the European dimension shapes people's vote choice, with its effects being similar to that of the left-right dimension. Our results show that individual positioning on the dimension has an effect on vote choice in all seven countries under analysis and it shapes people's political behaviour not only in European elections but also in national elections to a quite similar degree. Yet the effect of the European dimension is still much smaller than that of the left–right dimension.

In the second part, we look more closely at the variation in the effect of individual positioning on the EU dimension, both across countries and between parties. On the one hand, we suggest that the EU integration dimension will likely be more salient to voters in party systems that have 'hard Eurosceptic parties' (Hix and Marsh 2007, 2011; Hobolt and de Vries 2016). Therefore, the EU integration dimension becomes salient, but only to voters who support these political formations. For the remaining voters, the left–right dimension, strongly related to national issues, is still the only one that matters. However, in other countries, the EU integration dimension seems to be relevant also for the individual

[1] For the first time, the EES 2014 includes an online panel component which consists of a number of online panel surveys that are administered in eight EU member countries for national and European elections. This dataset does not allow us to extend our approach to all EU countries. Yet the seven countries selected for the analysis (Austria is excluded due to the lack of some relevant variables for the analysis) vary both in the presence of Eurosceptic parties and the type of party system. For more information about the role of the EES 2014 project, go to: http://europeanelectionstudies.net/european-election-studies/ees-2014-study/panel-study-2014.

vote choice of most parties and for both types of elections, suggesting a more advanced stage in the Europeanisation of national party systems. We suggest here that current explanations about the party supply are not able to explain that more advanced stage we observe in countries such as Germany or Greece, proposing to focus future research on explaining the contextual factors that might contribute to the creation of this more advanced scenario of Europeanisation of national party systems. More concretely, we suggest two alternative explanations to be considered in further research on this topic. These two contextual explanations are related to potential perceptions that the national vote in both elections might have an impact on the country's fade in the European Union.

2. THE EUROPEANISATION OF NATIONAL POLITICS

Recent studies have shown an increase in the politicisation of EU governance in national arenas (Brouard et al. 2012; Ares et al. 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018). As has recently been claimed, this change is empirically observed in three factors: the growing salience of European governance, opinion polarisation on EU issues and an increase in the number of actors and audiences engaged in monitoring EU affairs (van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). It has been suggested that this process may ultimately be changing the role of EU issues in structuring public opinion on EU affairs and voting mechanisms in EU elections (Spanje and Vreese 2011; Hobolt and Wittrock 2011; Ares et al. 2016; Hobolt and de Vries 2016).

Because of the increasing preponderance of EU issues in the political debate, the 'Europe Matters' school is once again trying to understand its implications for vote choice or political attitudes towards the EU (van der Eijk et al. 2006; Koepke and Ringe 2006; de Vries and Tillman 2011). Since this process might still be in its inception, recent research suggests that national issues still have more weight in citizen voting processes and the European elections remain of second-order significance, a characteristic that was already apparent in 2014 (Schmitt and Toygür 2016).

Despite the prolific number of recent works on the topic, this literature does not fully examine the effect of the individual positioning on the EU integration dimension, *vis-à-vis* that of the left–right dimension, of vote choice for the most recent wave of European elections and the most remarkable attempt to do so has involved two cross-sectional studies (de Vries 2007; van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). This empirical gap is even more remarkable if we consider that since the 2008 financial crisis and the refugee crisis that started in early 2014, EU institutions have increasingly assumed, or been requested in other cases to play, a prominent role in political decisions, triggering an intense debate about the extent and limits of EU integration. Indeed, several recent studies have shown that the 2008 economic crisis had important effects on people's vote choice (Hernández and Kriesi 2015). In recent years, thus, the politicisation of the EU might have reached remarkable levels, potentially leading to an increase in the effect of EU issues on vote choice across the board.

Nonetheless, this process might depend on the differential degree of EU politicisation across elections. The current system of EP elections inevitably links national issues, political parties and EU issues (Clark and Rohrschneider 2009, 660). For instance, De Vries (2007) shows, after comparing the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany that EU issue voting is more likely to occur in elections in which both the extent of partisan conflict over European integration and the degree of EU issue salience among voters are high.

This Europeanisation of vote choice is not confined to European elections but is also affecting national elections (de Vries 2007), with the European debate increasingly present in national election campaigns (Kriesi et al. 2006, Grande and Hutter 2016). Several studies have shown an increase in national parliamentary questions about the EU (Senninger 2016).

Following the previous theoretical discussion, our first expectation is the following:

> H1: Following the 'Europe matters school', if the European integration dimension matters for voting choice in European elections, it should matter equally in national elections.

3. THE HETEROGENEOUS IMPACT OF THE EUROPEANISATION OF NATIONAL POLITICS

Following the previous discussion, it is consequentially convenient to examine whether individual positioning on the EU integration dimension shapes people's vote choice, to compare the magnitude of the effect with that of the left–right dimension and examine whether the EU integration dimension matters for both EU and national elections. After this starting point, however, we also delve into the differential effect of the EU integration dimension within and across countries. As we review below, there are theoretical reasons to expect the effect of this dimension to matter when voting for some parties and not others and to differ across countries.

More concretely and following previous studies, we test the main hypotheses that might account for this heterogeneity: whether the differential impact of the EU integration dimension of vote choice in a party system is related to the presence of a significant 'hard Eurosceptic party'. The factor of the party supply explanation might increase the saliency of this issue among voters, media and public opinion in general.

As shown by previous studies, the consensus on the EU integration dimension at the party level is essentially broken due to the emergence of small or ideologically extreme left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties, which offer very differentiated policy choices regarding the country's permanence in the EU (Anderson 1998; Vasilopoulou 2011; Hobolt and de Vries 2016) and which position themselves far from the consensual status quo (remaining in the EU). These are the so-called 'hard Eurosceptic' parties (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). Following the logic of the spatial model literature, the party differential should increase the effect of this dimension of vote choice. The empirical implication is that, once these hard Eurosceptic parties are present, the EU integration dimension becomes relevant and salient. This effect might likely be larger for voters of Eurosceptic parties than for the rest,[2] but its salience might also affect the other parties in the party system, given the priming effect it might have in the media and general public opinion. Conversely, we should observe that, in contexts in which these parties are not present, the effect of the EU integration dimension should be negligible for all parties in the system.

To sum up, we should observe the following:

H2: If a 'hard Eurosceptic party' is in the party supply, the EU integration dimension matters for both national and European elections for all voters.

4. DATA AND METHODS

Our empirical analysis is based on the individual-level panel survey data that formed part of the 2014 EES (see footnote 1). These panels included two post-electoral waves, covering one national election and the 2014 European election. These data provide a perfect tool for analysing the effects of the EU integration dimension on both types of elections in a more reliable and valid way. In addition, the order of elections across the seven countries varies: while in some, the observed European election takes place after the national one (Italy, Sweden and Germany), the opposite happens in the others. This allows us to rule out potential patterns of spill-over effects, especially to check whether the EU integration dimension matters more when the EU elections are close to the national ones.

The outcome of interest is vote choice for the 2014 European post-electoral wave and vote choice for the national post-electoral wave. We exclude regional parties and parties with a very low percentage of votes at the national level.

The main explanatory variables are individuals' ideological distances based on respondents' self-reported positions and reported party positions on the ideological scale (0, 'extreme left-wing', to 10, 'extreme right-wing') and the EU integration dimension (0, 'Unification should go further', to 10, 'Unification has already gone too far')[3] (for the distribution of these variables among the seven countries, see Figures A1–A6 in the online Appendix).

We follow the literature and conceptualise a voter's utility as the distance between the party's policy position and the respondent's self-placement on the same scale. This means that voters derive a larger utility as they get closer to a party's policy position (Downs 1957).

Since neither the ideological distance nor the distance along the EU integration dimension is the same for each party alternative, we employ a conditional logit model. This is considered the correct procedure for estimating discrete vote choice in multi-party systems (van der Eijk et al. 2006). We estimate the effects of *alternative-specific* variables (i.e. distances between a voter and each candidate) separately, which in the next section will allow us to compare the effect of each alternative-specific coefficient on vote choice. In statistical terms, this is important as voters are likely to offer different (perceived) ideological positions for different alternatives (parties in our case).

Our statistical specifications also take other confounders into account. First, we control for individual-

[2] This might sound obvious, but we (a) do not yet have empirical findings that back this proposition and (b) Eurosceptic parties compete using the EU dimension, but they also use other dimensions, such as immigration, which might be better subsumed along the traditional left–right continuum, or the centre–periphery conflict, as is the case in Spain.

[3] For this study's questionnaire, go to: http://europeanelectionstudies.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/EES-2014-Panel-survey-questionnaire.pdf. The scale also includes the option 'don't know/no answer'. Since it is not possible to calculate spatial distances when individuals do not report an ideological position, we exclude these cases from the empirical analysis. The German survey also employed a 1–7 scale for both the ideological and EU integration dimensions. The correlation between the respondents' self-placements on the ideological and the EU dimensions is 0.04 ($p<0.01$) for Spain, −0.26 ($p<0.01$) for Italy, −0.20 ($p<0.01$) for Germany, −0.029 ($p>0.05$) for Poland, 0.110 ($p<0.01$) for Greece and −0.1375 ($p<0.01$) for the United Kingdom.

specific characteristics, such as gender and age. Second, we control for party identification as the most relevant non-spatial factor (Thurner and Eymann 2000). Table A1 in the online Appendix provides a summary of the main explanatory variables and the other controls included in the models for each of the seven countries.

Finally, in the second part of the study, we are also interested in calculating the effect of individual distance on each of the two dimensions (the left–right and the EU) of vote choice across all parties in each of the seven countries. To estimate these effects, we follow Greene (2012) and Mauerer et al. (2015) by splitting the coefficients into as many alternative-specific coefficients as there are parties in the political system. This model allows us to test whether voters' distance from each party on both dimensions varies across parties in a conditional model framework. In other words, this model allows to capture whether the effect of perceived distance towards one party may be different from another party for each respondent.

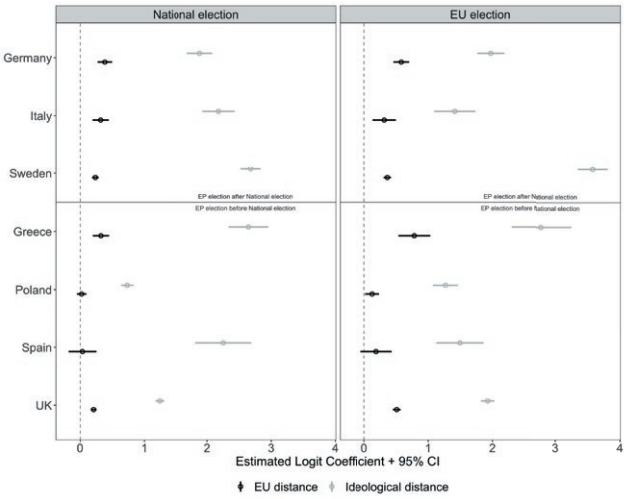

Figure 1. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and in each country's national election. Note: An F-test or a Chow test show significant differences across models.

5. DOES EUROPE MATTER FOR VOTE CHOICE?

Following our initial hypothesis, we test whether the EU integration dimension drives an individual's vote choice and, if this is the case, we examine whether its effects are as present in EU elections as in national elections. In terms of the magnitude, recall that the baseline expectation, as posited by the SOE model, is that the effect of the EU integration dimension should be lower than that of the left–right dimension for vote choice, which remains the most relevant dimension. To test this, we ran conditional logits and plotted the (standardised) effect of each dimension for each country. The right panel on Figure 1 shows the average effect of respondents' distance from each party on the EU dimension and the left–right dimension of vote choice in the context of the 2014 European election. The panel on the left shows the effects for the same variables in each country's national election. This figure also indicates those countries where an EP election took place after the country's national election (Germany, Sweden and Italy) or otherwise (the rest). This is important as one might argue that the effect of the EU integration dimension on vote choice is only felt in the national arena when the EU election takes place before the national one. If the order is the opposite, the national debates might cloud the European election even more.

As expected, Figure 1 shows that the distance based on the left–right scale has a significant and positive effect on vote choice, both in the EU and for each country's national election. Across all contexts and regardless of whether the EP election took place before or after the national one, its effect is larger than that of the EU integration dimension. Notwithstanding this pattern, the effect of this dimension is not negligible. As Figure 1 shows, the effect of the EU integration dimension on vote choice in EU elections is statistically significant in all countries except Spain (and marginally in Poland). Most crucially, this dimension not only shapes vote choice in the 2014 EP elections but is also an almost equally important factor in national elections. In other words, regardless of whether the national elections took place before or after the EP elections, the EU dimension was similarly integrated into voters' decision-making logic when casting a ballot both in the European and in national elections. These results mostly confirm H1, although we need to look at these results for individual parties in more detail.

To strengthen our findings, we take advantage of the panel structure of the data and replicate the analysis by using respondents' self-positions on the EU and the left–right scale at t-1. This design ameliorates concerns about the endogenous relationship between people's and parties' policy position on a given dimension and allows us to further corroborate that the EU integration dimension matters, even when we isolate context-specific debates that might increase the salience of EU issues temporarily. The results show the exact same pattern: Thus, even when we isolate context-specific debates by measuring our key explanatory factors at t-1, the effect of the EU integration dimension on vote choice remains.

Most importantly, it remains positive and significant regardless of whether the EU election took place before or after the national election (see results in Figure A7 in the Appendix).

6. THE EFFECT OF EUROSCEPTIC PARTIES

The previous section shows the EU integration dimension matters for vote choice in the majority of the countries included in the analysis which allows accepting Hypothesis 1. In other words, the EU integration dimension matters for vote choice in the majority of the countries included in the analysis. The effect size is smaller than the left–right dimension, but it turns out to be important in both national and European elections.

Next, we unpack the effect of the EU dimension by analysing the heterogeneous impact it might have for the different parties in the party system and across the seven countries for which we have data. As we discuss in the theoretical part, the expectation is that the EU integration dimension will be relevant in contexts in which the party supply incorporates a 'hard Eurosceptic party'.

Before we enter into the next set of results, Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the EU party position of the different national parties included in our analysis. As can be seen, both the presence and strength of Eurosceptic parties varies within each of the seven EU countries showing the presence of soft and hard Eurosceptics in each of the seven countries under study.

For all seven countries, we plotted the coefficients of the ideological and EU dimensions on vote choice for each of the political formations for both the EP and national elections (for the coefficients and intervals represented in all the figures, see Tables A2–A7 in the online Appendix; the complete models with all the vari-

Table 1. EU party positions by member state, 2014.

Political Parties*	Position on the EU integration scale**
Germany	
Christian Democratic Party (CDU) – Pro-EU	6.4
Socialdemocratic Party (SPD) – Pro-EU	6.4
Greens (Grune) – Pro-EU	6.2
Liberal Party (FDP) – Pro-EU	5.7
The Left (Die Linke) – SE	3.0
Alternative for Germany (AfD) – HE	1.6
Greece	
New Democracy (ND) – Pro-EU	6.5
PASOK (Olive Tree in 2014) – Pro-EU	6.5
The River – Pro-EU	6.0
Syriza – SE	3.4
Golden Dawn – HE	1.1
Independent Greeks – HE	1.1
Italy	
Democratic Party (PD) – Pro-EU	6.6
Forward Italy (FI) – Pro-EU	3.4
Five Star Movement (M5S) – HE	1.4
Northern League (LN) – HE	1.1
Poland	
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) – Pro-EU	6.6
Civic Platform (PO) – Pro-EU	6.5
Polish People's Party (PSL) – Pro-EU	5.5
Your Movement (RP) – Pro-EU	6.7
Poland Together (PR) – SE	4.0
Law and Justice Party (PiS) – SE	3.8
United Poland (SP) – SE	3.0
Congress of the New Right (KNP) – HE	1.1
Spain	
Popular Party (PP) – Pro-EU	6.7
Socialist Party (PSOE) – Pro-EU	6.8
Citizens (C's) – Pro-EU	6.7
United Left (IU) – SE	4.6
We can (Podemos) – SE	4.4
Sweden	
Social Democratic Labour Party – Pro-EU	5.3
Moderate Coalition Party – Pro-EU	6.4
Liberal People's Party – Pro-EU	6.9
Left Party – E	2.2
Green Ecology Party – Pro-EU	4.4
Christian Democrats – Pro-EU	5.9
Centre Party– SE	5.4
Sweden Democrats – HE	1.3
United Kingdom	
Labour – Pro-EU	5.6
Libdems – Pro-EU	6.7
SNP – Pro-EU	6.3
Green Party – Pro-EU	5.2
Plaid Cymru – Pro-EU	6.0
Conservatives – SE	3.1
UKIP – HE	1.1

* Pro-EU = Pro European parties; SE = Soft Eurosceptic parties; HE = Hard Eurosceptic parties This classification is based on the scored obtained according to this dataset.
** EU position (1-7): "overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in 2014.'
Source: CHES Chapel Hill 2014.

ables are in Tables A8–A13 in the same Appendix).[4] To ease interpretation of these figures, each graph includes a vertical dotted line showing the significance threshold. A positive coefficient indicates that the spatial proximity to a particular party along the ideological dimension significantly increases the probability of voting for that particular party.

6.1 The effect of the absence of a significant 'hard' Eurosceptic party

In Spain, we have focused on the five parties that competed in the 2014 EU elections: the national incumbent, the Popular Party (PP); the main opposition party, the Socialists (PSOE); the traditional left-wing political formation, United Left (IU); and two emerging platforms, *Ciudadanos* (*Citizens–Cs*) and *Podemos* (*Yes We Can*). This party system does not include any 'hard' Eurosceptic political formation. *Podemos* was clearly, at least at that time, a 'soft' Eurosceptic party with a score of 4.4 (see Table 1).

Figure 2 plots the coefficients extracted from the conditional logit model for this country. The results show that none of the party-varying coefficients for the EU integration dimension are significant for either of the two elections, while the ideological distance coefficients are significant for all parties and for both elections.

We do not have data on more countries in our sample that are similarly characterised by the total absence of hard Eurosceptic parties, but according to Freire and Santana-Pereira (2015), this also seems to be the case for Portugal, where the EU integration dimension also seems to have a weak impact on vote choice.

6.2 The heterogeneous effects of the presence of a significant 'hard' Eurosceptic party

In this sub-section, we will discuss and present the results of the effects of the presence of some significant 'hard' Eurosceptic parties in the party supply. As we will discuss, the effect of the EU integration dimension on voters' choice of parties is not homogenous for all party systems (countries). We will distinguish between two types of scenarios: a) the EU integration dimension is only relevant for the support given to hard Eurosceptic parties; b) the EU integration dimension is relevant also

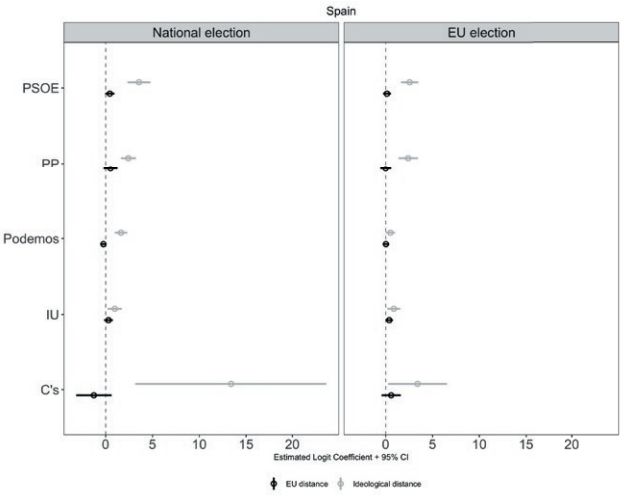

Figure 2. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and the parliamentary election in Spain.

for most political parties in the system including mainstream parties.

a) The EU integration dimension is only relevant for the support given to hard Eurosceptic parties

Figure 3 contain the results of the model for two cases that represent this scenario. The Italian case is the first one. We replicate the same analysis for Italy for both types of election. In this case, we take four parties into account: the Democratic Party (PD), *Forza Italia* (FI), *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) and the *Lega Nord* (LN), although FI ran as part of a coalition for the national elections.[5] The party system, in this case, includes two clear 'hard' Eurosceptic political formations: the *LN* and, most notably, the M5S with scores of 1.1 and 1.4, respectively (see Table 1). The configuration of the party supply is therefore likely to increase the salience of the EU integration dimension. As shown in Figure 2, neither of the coefficients for *PD* shows statistically significant effects for either election. Only *FI* seems to be significant for the 2013 national elections, but with a much reduced coefficient (0.019) and a *p* value of 0.037, which seems to be remarkable given that the campaign in this particular election took place in the middle of the debate on a potential financial rescue of Italy.

In contrast, the distance between the self-reported position and the party policy position along the EU dimension is significant for the two 'hard' Euroscep-

[4] Additionally, Figure A8 in the online Appendix displays the results of the same analysis but using the Chapel Hill expert survey to establish party location to compute the proximity scales on both the left–right and the EU scale. This measure is less likely to be affected by endogeneity. As we can observe, results are exactly the same.

[5] *Forza Italia* ran with another platform, *Il Popolo della Libertà (PdL)* – People of Freedom, in the preceding national elections.

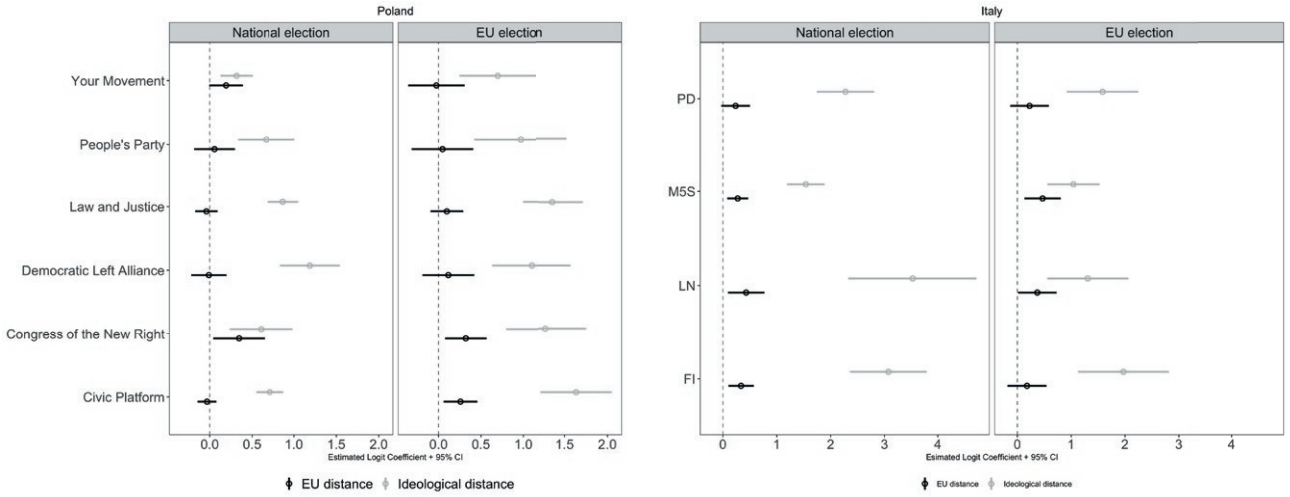

Figure 3. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and the parliamentary election in Italy and Poland.

tic parties, *LN* and *M5S,* for both types of election. The coefficients for the effect of the ideological distance are positive and significant for the four parties and tend to be larger for voters opting for *FI* and *PD*. All in all, the analysis for Italy confirms that the ideological dimension still has more weight, although Europe also matters–but only for those voters opting for 'hard' Eurosceptic parties (Giannetti et al. 2017).

Poland in 2014 is characterised by the presence of a significant 'hard' Eurosceptic party. Results from estimating the same model are similar to those of Italy, as Figure 3 also illustrates. The effect of the individual distance to parties in the EU integration dimension is significant for voters for the 'hard' Eurosceptic *Congress of the New Right* (score 1.1 in Table 1), but it is not significant for the remaining parties including 'soft' Eurosceptics (at least at that time) *Law and Justice* (PiS) and *United Poland*. The only exception is the then incumbent *Civic Platform* and only for EU elections (not for national ones). This can probably be explained by the intense confrontation that the issue of Poland–EU relations triggered between the incumbent party, a party that has a pro-European stance and other significant parties adopting more critical views against the government during the run-up to the 2014 European election.

b) EU integration dimension is relevant for the support given to most of the main parties

We replicate the same analysis for another four countries: Germany, Greece, Sweden and the UK. All of them are countries with important 'hard' Eurosceptic parties, but unlike what we observe in the preceding cases, the EU integration dimension is significant when it comes to explaining the support of most main parties in both types of elections.

Germany has one significant 'hard' Eurosceptic party, AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) with a score of 1.6 in Table 1. However, as we see for Germany in Figure 4, the coefficients for the *CDU/CSU* (*Christian Democratic Union* and *Christian Social Union*), *SPD* (*Social Democratic Party*), *Die Linke* (The Left), *Die Grünen* (the Greens) and, finally, AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*), are significant for both the ideological and the EU dimensions. The coefficients for both dimensions for nearly all the parties are significant for both types of election. The exception is *Die Link*e, which displays a non-significant coefficient for the EU integration dimension. In all the other more relevant parties in the German party system–*CDU/CSU, SPD, Die Grünen* and *AfD*–the EU dimension shaped vote choice for both types of election. The EU distance effect is therefore relevant, although once again the magnitude of the coefficients is smaller than the ideological distances of the coefficients.

Another quite similar case was that of the UK in 2014. Eurosceptic views were relevant in UK politics even before the 2008 economic crisis with at least a significant 'hard Eurosceptic party' (UKIP score in Table 1 is 1.1). Results displayed in Figure 4 also confirm that the effect of the EU integration dimension is positive and significant for both the EU and national elections for all parties and not only for the UKIP. The effect is weaker than that of the traditional left–right dimension. The positive effect of the individual proximity scale on the EU integration dimension persists in the national

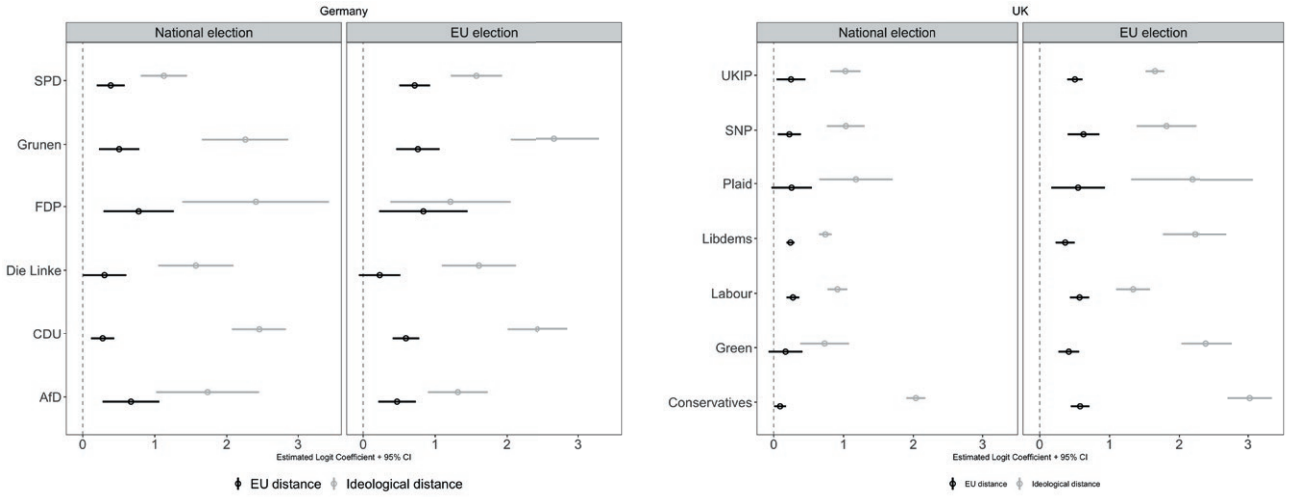

Figure 4. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and the parliamentary election in Germany and the UK.

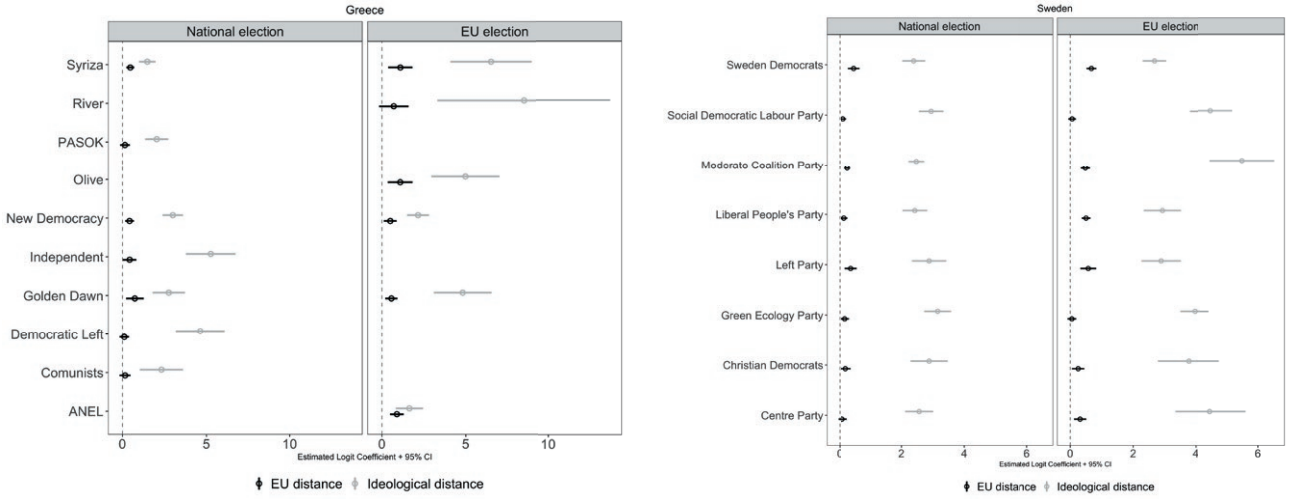

Figure 5. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and the parliamentary election in Greece and Sweden.

election. Interestingly, however, only voters opting for regional parties give less salience to the EU integration dimension in the national election, probably due to the greater relative salience of other issues (Hobolt 2016).

In Figure 5, we display the results of the same models for Greece and Sweden. The Greek party system transitioned from the previously very stable two-party system dominated by the Socialist *PASOK* and the conservative *New Democracy* (*New Democratia*) to a more fragmented system with bipolar competition between the latter and the more leftist party SYRIZA. This party is a 'soft' Eurosceptic party (3.4 on the CHSE EU scale) (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, 511) although its score is far from that of the pro-EU parties (with an average on the same scale of 2.9 – see Table 1). The Greek party system also witnessed the electoral consolidation of two significant right-wing 'hard' Eurosceptic parties: *Golden Dawn* and *ANEL* (both with a score of 1.1 in Table 1). As we can observe again in Figure 5, and similar to the two preceding cases, the EU dimension became relevant across all the political formations in Greece (except for *Olive Tree* voters). Interestingly, even in the 2015 national election, when the debate over the EU was less salient and Greek politics was returning to a normal setting, the EU dimension remained significant for most of the voters of the main parties.

In Sweden, also in Figure 5, the far-right *Sweden Democrats* constitute a clear 'hard' Eurosceptic party (1.3 score in Table 1), although the party has linked its attacks on the EU to the refugee crisis. However, as in Germany and the UK, results show that the EU dimension constitutes a significant factor not only for vote choice among far-right voters but also for vote choice among other political formations, both conservative (i.e. *Moderate Coalition Party*) and left-wing (*Left Party*), with significance in both EU and national elections. The most significant exception is the *Social Democratic Labour Party* and only for national elections. All in all, Sweden displays a scenario in which the anti-EU discourse of a Eurosceptic party spills over to voters of the other parties in the political system, making the EU dimension a significant factor for the overall vote choice in both types of elections.

7. THE UNEXPLAINED HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS OF THE PARTY SUPPLY

The preceding section has shown how the presence of a 'hard' Eurosceptic party might produce two different scenarios in 2014. In the first scenario, the EU integration dimension only seems to influence the party preference for this type of party for both types of elections (Italy and Poland). The second scenario seems to display more of a spread effect of the EU integration scale for voters of most of the relevant parties in the party systems (Germany, Greece, Sweden and the UK). This second scenario seems to reflect the fact that most parties' voters are influenced by the EU integration dimension when choosing how to vote.

It is obvious that the presence of 'hard' Euroscepticism in the party supply and/or their consequential presence of Eurosceptic content during the campaign and in the media are not sufficiently adequate to explain the scenarios detected in countries those last four countries. This is why we suggest two additional and complementary explanations for the presence of this more comprehensive stage in the Europeanisation of national party systems[6]: the pivotal role of the national authorities in the decision-making of the EU and the perception that EU decisions are heavily affecting important issues with strong national salience. In both cases, voters need to feel that their voting choices at the national level have clear consequences for both levels of governing.

First, then, we suggest that the EU integration dimension matters because of the country's role within the EU. As Clark and Rohrschneider (2009, 660) suggest, national issues may dominate EU issues in EP elections due to the perception that EP elections are disingenuous instruments of accountability. Following this argument, this logic might be the opposite, for instance, in countries in which national governments play a prevalent pivotal role in the EU (see Antonakakis et al. 2014), which might result in more EU citizens being aware of the role of national governments in EU decisions. A highly pivotal role might increase citizens' perception that their votes, both at the national and at the EU level, might alter European policies. This ultimately enhances the importance of the national arena as a mechanism for EU accountability. This argument fits with the literature that suggests that when voters believe governing parties are better positioned to influence EU issues, they might also be more inclined to look to EU issues in deciding to punish or reward these parties (Clark and Rohrschneider 2009).

Consequently, the main observational consequence of a country's 'pivotality' is that citizens integrate the structure of power present at the European level into their voting decision processes. In some EU countries, citizens might think that voting for certain parties in the system may have consequences in terms of the political, economic and social model that is implemented at the European level. Citizens thus might perceive that they have greater leverage to directly or indirectly alter European policies with their votes. If this is the case, the EU integration dimension will also be significant in shaping their vote choice. Finally, it is important to stress again that, if this logic is correct, the EU dimension could be relevant for both EU and national elections.[7]

This could clearly be said to be the case for Germany and the UK in 2014. As we can see in Table 2, which shows the country distribution in 2014 of the Bargain Power Index[8] in EU decision-making, a proxy measuring the pivotal role of each member state, Germany holds a prevalent pivotal role in EU institutional arrangements

[6] These two hypotheses are not to be understood as opposite expectations. It might be that a country has both a high pivotal role and the presence of a hard Eurosceptic party (or the contrary). Yet this empirical challenge is partially circumvented due to our case selection.

[7] It is important to highlight here that, in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, national governments reverted to conventional intergovernmental diplomatic relations to resolve the euro and fiscal crisis, side-lining the EU institutions (Jones et al. 2016) and, as a result, highlighting in the eyes of their national citizens the importance of the relative power of the member states in EU decision-making processes.

[8] The Shapely–Shubik power index measures the powers of players in a voting game. It is based on the ratio between the number of times each country plays a pivotal role compared to the total number of times all players (together) play pivotal roles. Sources of bargaining power include different indicators of state, institutional and individual capacity. This index has been applied to explain the distribution of power in several EU institutions, such as the Council and the European Parliament.

Table 2. Bargain Power Index in the EU decision making in seven EU countries, 2014.

Countries	Bargain Power Index[a]
Germany	14.9 Position: 1st
United Kingdom	11.24 Position: 3rd
Italy	10.78 Position: 4th
Spain	8.02 Position: 5th
Poland	6.73 Position: 6th
Greece	2.33 Position: 8th
Sweden	2.07 Position: 13th

Source: Antonakakis et al. (2014) based on the Shapley-Shubik power index.

[a] The Shapley-Shubik power index measures the powers of players in a voting game. It is based on the ratio between the number of times each country is pivotal versus the total number of times all players (together) are pivotal. Sources of bargaining power include different indicators of state, institutional and individual capacity. This index has been applied to explain the distribution of power in several EU institutions, such as the Council and the European Parliament.

and plays a key role in EU politics, which might explain the significance of EU individual distance in shaping vote choices for all parties. In other words, German citizens are aware that their vote can have an impact on EU policies because of their pivotal position in the EU decision-making process. Thus, the effect of the European dimension is significant for voters opting for the right-wing populist and 'hard' Eurosceptic political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and for those choosing other parties, including mainstream parties.

The effect of the EU integration dimension in the UK is similar to its effect in Germany. At the time of our study, the UK happened to hold with Germany an important institutional role in the decision-making of the EU (third in the ranking with only 3.7 points difference with Germany but far distant from the rest; see Table 2). These two countries have a substantive and prevalent difference in the pivotal role of their national authorities and representatives in the decision-making process in the EU Commission, Council and even the EP (Milushev 2019).

The importance of the EU integration dimension in the vote choice for most parties in the Greek and Swedish cases might be situated in a different contextual factor: as a consequence of an EU intervention in a relevant national issue. Greek national politics suffered a significant earthquake due to the 2008 economic and financial crisis. The Eurozone authorities forced Greek governments to implement harsh austerity policies (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014), making this intervention the main disputed element in national politics. This exceptional context, together with other internal factors, resulted, as discussed previously, in an important party system change. Thus, after the 2012 Greek national elections, the country entered 'a phase of triangular polarisation marked by centrist pro-European forces (represented by the old major parties), anti-austerity forces on the left and xenophobic anti-bailout forces on the right' (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014, 238). The political debate revolved around polarising questions, including EU integration, the austerity measures and the bailout negotiations with the 'Troika' (ECB, FMI and EU Commission). As a consequence, the EU dimension might have subsequently played a role in levels of support for all the parties in this new 'trivotal' party system, in which all the parties from *SYRIZA* to *Golden Dawn* brought EU policies to the fore.

Something similar can be observed for Sweden. In this country, EU issues have almost always been in the political debate but especially so because of the immigration issue. This centrality has been exacerbated by discussion on how the EU has been handling immigration, which has become prevalent since the refugee crisis, making this EU issue often come to the fore in Swedish politics (Odmalm 2011), as in the UK (Hobolt 2016)

8. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In light of the findings, can we claim that individual positioning on the EU integration dimension was relevant for vote choice in the 2014 European elections? The answer is positive but with important nuances. First, the effects of the EU dimension are substantially lower than those of the left–right dimension. Second, we observe substantial heterogeneity across countries even in those countries where we observe this Europeanisation of national politics.

These findings are relevant for two reasons. First, we have shown that 'Europe matters' in explaining vote choice. Its relevance is still secondary to the traditional left–right conflicts (as predicted by the second-order model), but its effects are equally present in national and EP elections. This suggests that, to study the effect of the EU dimension, it is essential to note that the Europeanisation of national politics is not about the type of elec-

tion but the nature of the issue itself, as a growing body of literature has suggested (Kriesi et al. 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2018). Future research should continue with the focus on how the EU issue creates challenges and opportunities for an established party competition (De Sio et al. 2016), leaving aside the argument about the type of elections. Our results also offer a tentative description of the effect of the presence of Eurosceptic parties in the party supply and why, once they emerge in EU elections, they tend to remain competitive in national elections.

Crucially, we also noticed that there are still cross-national differences in the process of Europeanisation of national politics. In one scenario, the EU integration dimension is relevant only for the support given to Eurosceptic parties which can be explain by the presence of strong 'hard' Eurosceptic parties in the party supply. However, we have also detected some other countries where the EU integration dimension is also relevant for the rest of the main parties.

We appeal to and suggest two additional factors to explain this last scenario. The first one is the pivotal role of the national authorities in the decision-making of the EU. Europeanisation of national politics on voting preferences and competition might depend on a more systemic institutional configuration (Clark and Rohrschneider 2009), such as member states' bargaining power in the EU decision-making process (Antonakakis et al. 2014). This contextual factor might affect the entire party system and the average voter. The cases of Germany and the UK suggest that the EU integration dimension can become a relevant factor shaping the whole party system when voters perceive that their voting decisions have the power to alter the EU's decision-making process.

The second contextual factors might be resulting from the heavy intervention of the EU in an issue that have salient presence in national politics, generating the perception that EU decisions heavily affect it. We think that this contextual factor might also facilitate this second step of the Europeanisation of national competition making 'Europe' a central issue of the national debate, as it the case of Greece (national economy) or Sweden (immigration policies).

We are, however, aware of the limitations of our research. First, our conclusions are based on a limited number of cases. The data on which this research is based are unfortunately not present for the remaining EU countries. Second, we have proposed two contextual factors to explain cross-country variations on the presence of the EU integration dimension in voters' choices, but they both present clear limited evidence. To start with, the indicator used to measure the pivotal role of the member states is an institutional and objective one, while our argument implies the importance of subjective citizens' perceptions about such a role. About the second one, we do not have any convincing individual level data to prove not only the importance of such issue but also if citizens attribute the responsibility of handling it to the EU authorities.

Unfortunately, no survey measure does a satisfactory job capturing them. Thus, future research needs to delve into this process even further, by expanding this study to other outcomes or other countries. Finally, future studies will need to further investigate the dynamics of these multi-dimensionality conflicts in voters' preferences by paying attention to whether parties converging on one scale trigger heterogeneous effects on other scales (see van der Eijk and Franklin 2004).

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Mean position on the left-right and the EU dimensions and the list of control variables included in all the models.

	Ideological self-placement (0-10)	European Union integration self-placement (0-10)	Controls
Spain	4.0	4.2	Gender, age, assessment of the government's performance.
Italy	4.7	5.2	Gender, age, party identification, region.
Germany	3.8	4.0	Gender, age, political interest, income
Poland	5.6	4.7	Gender, age, size of town, assessment of the economy
United Kingdom	4.9	3.1	Gender, age, education, assessment of the government's performance
Sweden	4.7	5.0	Gender, age, education, assessment of the government's performance
Greece	6.1	4.4	Gender, age, household income.

Note: Due to variables not being present, the same controls are not consistently included in all the models.

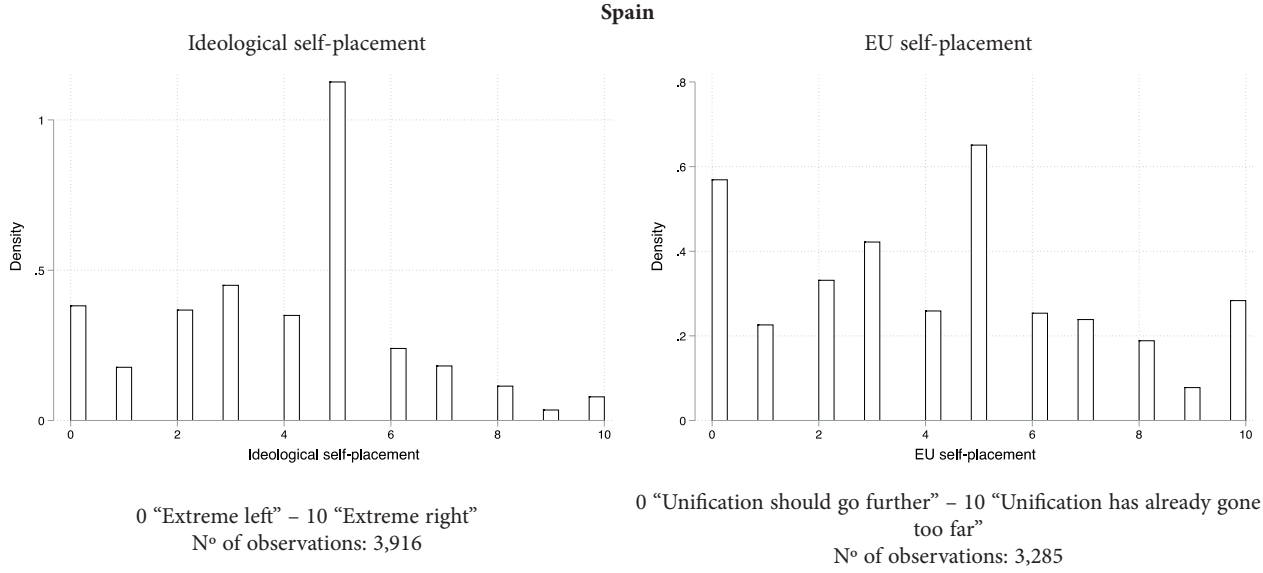
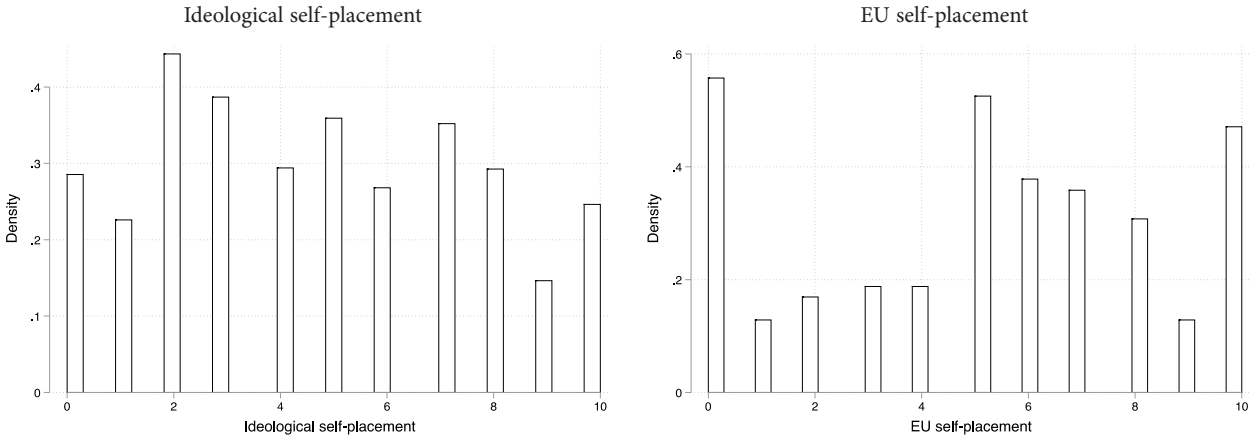


Figure A1. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in Spain.

Italy

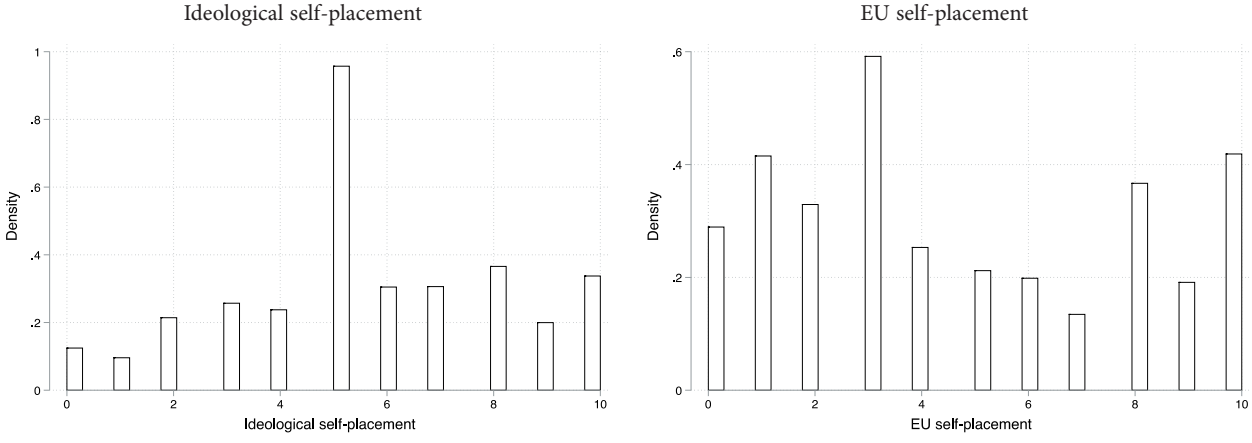


0 "Extreme left" – 10 "Extreme right"
Nº of observations: 2,278

0 "Unification should go further" – 10 "Unification has already gone too far"
Nº of observations: 2,751

Figure A2. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in Italy.

Poland

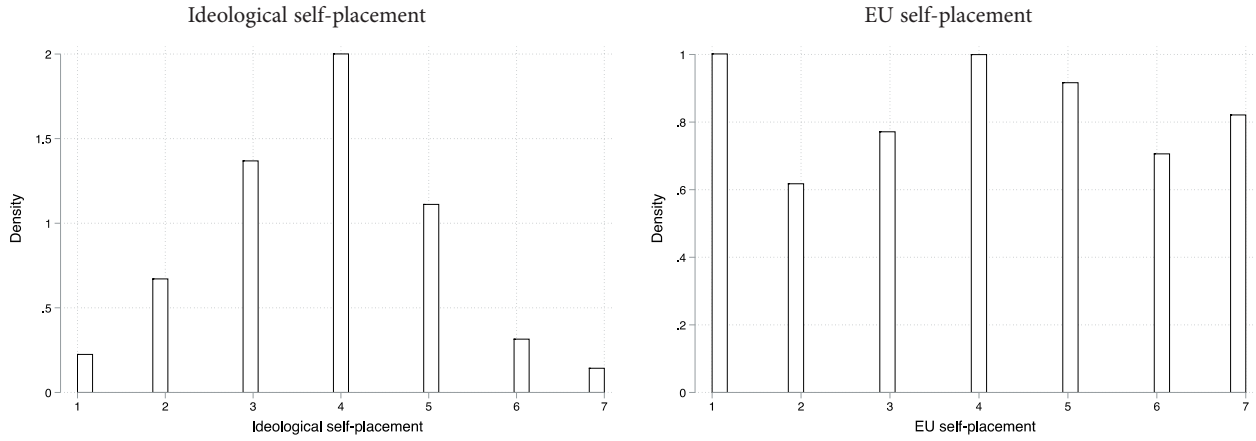


0 "Extreme left" – 10 "Extreme right"
Nº of observations: 2,621

0 "Unification should go further" – 10 "Unification has already gone too far"
Nº of observations: 2,809

Figure A3. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in Poland.

Germany

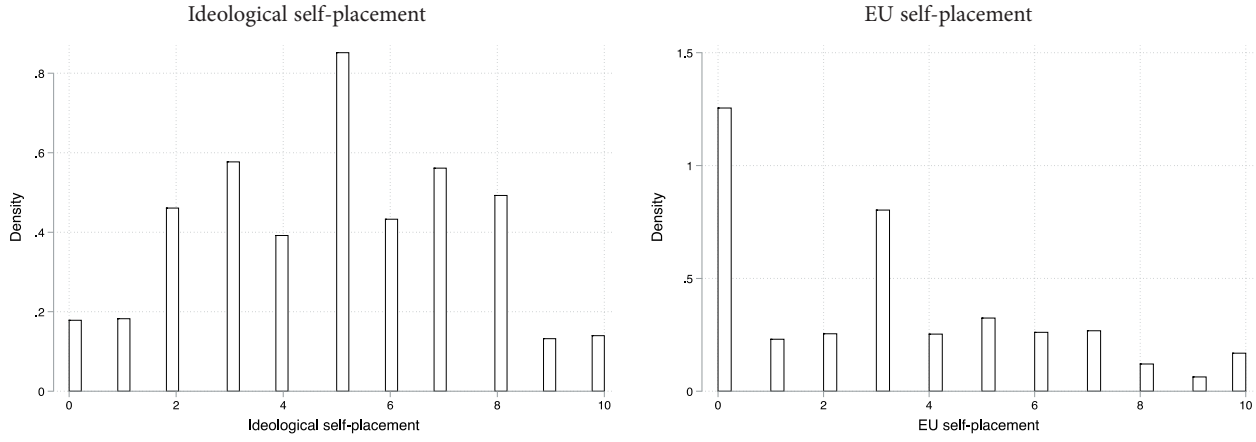


0 "Extreme left" – 10 "Extreme right"
Nº of observations: 3,427

0 "Unification should go further" – 10 "Unification has already gone too far"
Nº of observations: 3,495

Figure A4. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in Germany.

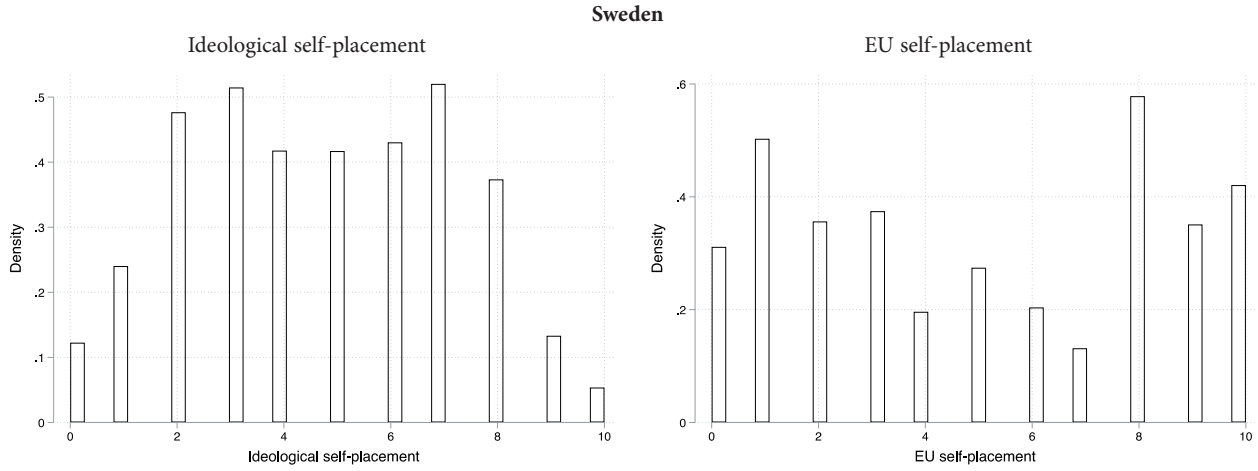
UK



0 "Extreme left" – 10 "Extreme right"
Nº of observations: 25,592

0 "Unification should go further" – 10 "Unification has already gone too far"
Nº of observations: 12,428

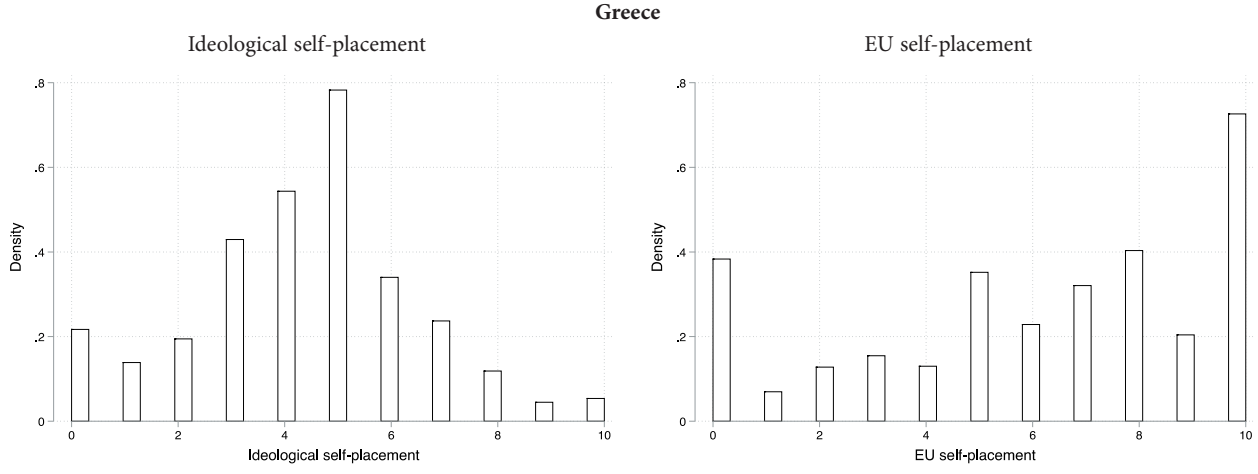
Figure A5. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in UK.



0 "Extreme left" – 10 "Extreme right"
Nº of observations: 5,527

0 "Unification should go further" – 10 "Unification has already gone too far"
Nº of observations: 5,682

Figure A6. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in Sweden.



0 "Extreme left" – 10 "Extreme right"
Nº of observations: 1,386

0 "Unification should go further" – 10 "Unification has already gone too far"
Nº of observations: 1,383

Figure A7. Distribution of the left-right and EU integration dimensions in Greece.

Table A2. Conditional logit model for Spain. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	PP	2.39	1.35	3.43
Ideological distance	PSOE	2.55	1.64	3.46
Ideological distance	IU	0.86	0.16	1.56
Ideological distance	C's	3.40	0.26	6.54
Ideological distance	Podemos	0.50	0.01	1.00
EU distance	PP	-0.01	-0.59	0.57
EU distance	PSOE	0.13	-0.28	0.55
EU distance	IU	0.37	-0.02	0.76
EU distance	C's	0.58	-0.45	1.61
EU distance	Podemos	0.02	-0.31	0.35
National elections				
Ideological distance	Podemos	2.41	1.61	3.22
Ideological distance	PSOE	3.55	2.33	4.77
Ideological distance	IU	0.97	0.20	1.73
Ideological distance	Podemos	1.63	0.97	2.30
Ideological distance	C's	13.39	3.15	23.63
EU distance	PP	0.51	-0.22	1.25
EU distance	PSOE	0.44	-0.05	0.93
EU distance	IU	0.30	-0.17	0.76
EU distance	Podemos	-0.25	-0.54	0.05
EU distance	C's	-1.26	-3.15	0.62

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, assessment of the government's performance and region. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

Table A3. Conditional logit model for Italy. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	FI	1.97	1.13	2.81
Ideological distance	LN	1.31	0.55	2.06
Ideological distance	M5S	1.04	0.56	1.52
Ideological distance	PD	1.58	0.92	2.25
EU distance	FI	0.18	-0.18	0.54
EU distance	LN	0.37	0.01	0.73
EU distance	M5S	0.47	0.13	0.81
EU distance	PD	0.23	-0.13	0.59
National elections				
Ideological distance	PD	2.28	1.74	2.81
Ideological distance	M5S	1.54	1.19	1.89
Ideological distance	LN	3.52	2.33	4.72
Ideological distance	FI	3.07	2.36	3.78
EU distance	PD	0.24	-0.03	0.50
EU distance	M5S	0.27	0.08	0.47
EU distance	LN	0.43	0.09	0.77
EU distance	FI	0.34	0.10	0.57

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, region and assessment of the economy. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

Table A4. Conditional logit model for Poland. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	Civic Platform	1.63	1.22	2.05
Ideological distance	People's Party	0.97	0.42	1.52
Ideological distance	Democratic Left Alliance	1.10	0.63	1.57
Ideological distance	Law and Justice	1.36	1.00	1.71
Ideological distance	Your Movement	0.70	0.25	1.15
Ideological distance	Congress of the New Right	1.27	0.80	1.75
EU distance	Civic Platform	0.26	0.06	0.46
EU distance	People's Party	0.05	-0.32	0.41
EU distance	Democratic Left Alliance	0.12	-0.19	0.42
EU distance	Law and Justice	0.10	-0.10	0.29
EU distance	Your Movement	-0.03	-0.36	0.31
EU distance	Congress of the New Right	0.32	0.08	0.57
National elections				
Ideological distance	Civic Platform	0.71	0.55	0.87
Ideological distance	People's Party	0.67	0.34	1.00
Ideological distance	Democratic Left Alliance	1.19	0.83	1.54
Ideological distance	Law and Justice	0.87	0.68	1.05
Ideological distance	Your Movement	0.32	0.13	0.51
Ideological distance	Congress of the New Right	0.61	0.23	0.98
EU distance	Civic Platform	-0.03	-0.14	0.08
EU distance	People's Party	0.06	-0.18	0.30
EU distance	Democratic Left Alliance	-0.01	-0.22	0.20
EU distance	Law and Justice	-0.04	-0.17	0.09
EU distance	Your Movement	0.19	-0.01	0.39
EU distance	Congress of the New Right	0.35	0.04	0.65

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, region and assessment of the economy. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

Table A5. Conditional logit model for Germany. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	CDU	2.43	2.01	2.85
Ideological distance	SPD	1.57	1.22	1.93
Ideological distance	Die Linke	1.61	1.09	2.12
Ideological distance	Grunen	2.67	2.05	3.29
Ideological distance	AfD	1.32	0.90	1.73
Ideological distance	FDP	1.21	0.38	2.05
EU distance	CDU	0.59	0.41	0.78
EU distance	SPD	0.72	0.50	0.93
EU distance	Die Linke	0.23	-0.06	0.52
EU distance	Grunen	0.76	0.46	1.06
EU distance	AfD	0.47	0.21	0.73
EU distance	FDP	0.84	0.22	1.45
National elections				
Ideological distance	CDU	2.45	2.07	2.83
Ideological distance	SPD	1.13	0.81	1.45
Ideological distance	FDP	2.40	1.38	3.43
Ideological distance	Grunen	2.26	1.66	2.86
Ideological distance	Die Linke	1.57	1.05	2.09
Ideological distance	AfD	1.73	1.02	2.45
EU distance	CDU	0.28	0.11	0.44
EU distance	SPD	0.39	0.19	0.58
EU distance	FDP	0.78	0.29	1.26
EU distance	Grunen	0.51	0.22	0.79
EU distance	Die Linke	0.30	0.00	0.60
EU distance	AfD	0.67	0.28	1.06

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, political interest, assessment of the economy, and household income. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

Table A6. Conditional logit model for the United Kingdom. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	Conservatives	3.02	2.71	3.34
Ideological distance	Labour	1.34	1.10	1.58
Ideological distance	Libdems	2.23	1.77	2.69
Ideological distance	Green	2.40	2.03	2.77
Ideological distance	UKIP	1.65	1.51	1.79
Ideological distance	SNP	1.82	1.39	2.25
Ideological distance	Plaid	2.19	1.31	3.07
EU distance	Conservatives	0.58	0.44	0.71
EU distance	Labour	0.57	0.43	0.71
EU distance	Libdems	0.36	0.23	0.50
EU distance	Green	0.42	0.27	0.56
EU distance	UKIP	0.50	0.39	0.61
EU distance	SNP	0.63	0.40	0.85
EU distance	Plaid	0.55	0.17	0.93
National elections				
Ideological distance	Conservatives	2.04	1.90	2.17
Ideological distance	Labour	0.91	0.77	1.06
Ideological distance	Libdems	0.74	0.65	0.83
Ideological distance	Green	0.73	0.38	1.08
Ideological distance	UKIP	1.03	0.81	1.24
Ideological distance	SNP	1.03	0.76	1.30
Ideological distance	Plaid	1.18	0.65	1.70
EU distance	Conservatives	0.09	0.01	0.18
EU distance	Labour	0.28	0.18	0.37
EU distance	Libdems	0.24	0.18	0.30
EU distance	Green	0.17	-0.07	0.41
EU distance	UKIP	0.25	0.04	0.45
EU distance	SNP	0.22	0.06	0.39
EU distance	Plaid	0.26	-0.03	0.54

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, education, and assessment of the government's performance. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

Table A7. Conditional logit model for Sweden. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	Social Democratic Labour Party	4.50	3.81	5.19
Ideological distance	Moderate Coalition Party	5.49	4.48	6.51
Ideological distance	Green Ecology Party	3.97	3.50	4.44
Ideological distance	Liberal People's Party	2.93	2.34	3.52
Ideological distance	Centre Party	4.48	3.35	5.61
Ideological distance	Sweden Democrats	2.68	2.30	3.05
Ideological distance	Christian Democrats	3.78	2.78	4.77
Ideological distance	Left Party	2.89	2.26	3.52
EU distance	Social Democratic Labour Party	0.06	-0.06	0.18
EU distance	Moderate Coalition Party	0.48	0.33	0.63
EU distance	Green Ecology Party	0.05	-0.09	0.19
EU distance	Liberal People's Party	0.50	0.36	0.64
EU distance	Centre Party	0.31	0.11	0.51
EU distance	Sweden Democrats	0.67	0.51	0.83
EU distance	Christian Democrats	0.25	0.05	0.45
EU distance	Left Party	0.57	0.32	0.82
National elections				
Ideological distance	Social Democratic Labour Party	2.95	2.56	3.34
Ideological distance	Moderate Coalition Party	2.47	2.22	2.72
Ideological distance	Green Ecology Party	3.15	2.73	3.58
Ideological distance	Liberal People's Party	2.43	2.03	2.82
Ideological distance	Centre Party	2.56	2.12	3.01
Ideological distance	Sweden Democrats	2.39	2.03	2.75
Ideological distance	Christian Democrats	2.88	2.29	3.47
Ideological distance	Left Party	2.88	2.33	3.43
EU distance	Social Democratic Labour Party	0.13	0.03	0.24
EU distance	Moderate Coalition Party	0.27	0.18	0.36
EU distance	Green Ecology Party	0.19	0.06	0.33
EU distance	Liberal People's Party	0.17	0.05	0.28
EU distance	Centre Party	0.11	-0.05	0.26
EU distance	Sweden Democrats	0.48	0.29	0.67
EU distance	Christian Democrats	0.21	0.04	0.39
EU distance	Left Party	0.38	0.19	0.57

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, and assessment of the government's performance. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

Table A8. Conditional logit model for Greece. Coefficients and confidence intervals.

Variable	Party	Coefficient	Lower bound	Upper bound
EU elections				
Ideological distance	Golden Dawn	4.81	3.09	6.53
Ideological distance	New Democracy	2.15	1.50	2.81
Ideological distance	Olive	4.98	2.95	7.00
Ideological distance	River	8.47	3.30	13.65
Ideological distance	Syriza	6.50	4.08	8.93
Ideological distance	ANEL	1.64	0.82	2.45
EU distance	Golden Dawn	0.57	0.19	0.92
EU distance	New Democracy	0.50	0.12	0.88
EU distance	Olive	1.09	0.35	1.83
EU distance	River	0.71	-0.17	1.58
EU distance	Syriza	1.10	0.37	1.82
EU distance	ANEL	0.89	0.48	1.30
National elections				
Ideological distance	New Democracy	3.00	2.39	3.61
Ideological distance	Syriza	1.48	0.98	1.98
Ideological distance	PASOK	2.04	1.35	2.73
Ideological distance	Independent	5.26	3.78	6.74
Ideological distance	Golden Dawn	2.76	1.80	3.72
Ideological distance	Democratic Left	4.63	3.17	6.09
Ideological distance	Communists	2.32	1.03	3.61
EU distance	New Democracy	0.42	0.16	0.68
EU distance	Syriza	0.46	0.23	0.70
EU distance	PASOK	0.14	-0.14	0.43
EU distance	Independent	0.43	0.02	0.83
EU distance	Golden Dawn	0.73	0.21	1.26
EU distance	Democratic Left	0.11	-0.17	0.38
EU distance	Communists	0.15	-0.18	0.48

*Table shows the coefficients extracted from a conditional logit model with party-varying coefficients. The model includes the controls of gender, age, party identification, household income, political interest and assessment of the economy. All distances are standardized. Lower and upper bounds are based on 95% confidence intervals.

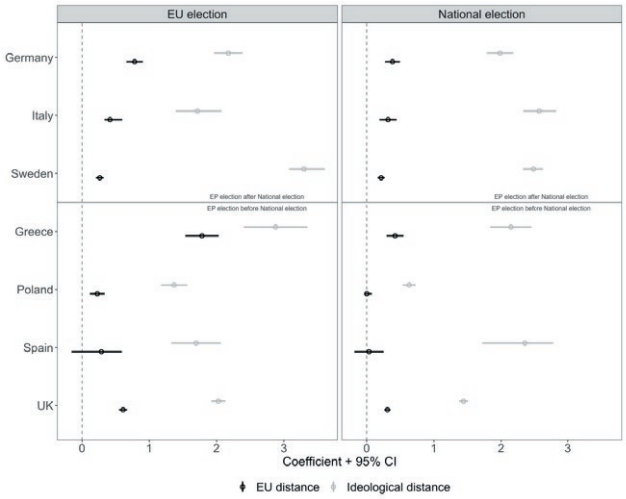


Figure A8. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and in each country's national election (distance on the EU and the national dimension measured at t-1). Note: An F-test or a Chow test show significant differences across models.

Table A9. Conditional logit voting model for Spain.

	Spain			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Constant (ref. PP)				
Constant - PSOE	-1.659	(1.017)	-1.494	(1.116)
Constant - IU	-1.721	(1.136)	1.845+	(1.086)
Constant - Cs	0.151	(2.371)	-8.496	(5.235)
Constant - Podemos	-0.331	(1.065)	1.610	(1.014)
LR distance - PP	2.753***	(0.590)	2.414***	(0.410)
LR distance - PSOE	2.499***	(0.465)	3.552***	(0.622)
LR distance - IU	0.764*	(0.362)	0.967*	(0.389)
LR distance - CS	3.184*	(1.556)	13.390*	(5.225)
LR distance - Podemos	0.427+	(0.244)	1.633***	(0.340)
EU distance - PP	-0.163	(0.342)	0.512	(0.375)
EU distance - PSOE	0.155	(0.218)	0.437+	(0.249)
EU distance - IU	0.383+	(0.200)	0.297	(0.236)
EU distance - CS	0.603	(0.547)	-1.261	(0.962)
EU distance - Podemos	0.041	(0.173)	-0.247	(0.152)
Gender (ref. PP)				
Gender - PSOE	-0.724	(0.465)	-0.781	(0.485)
Gender - IU	-0.497	(0.501)	-0.467	(0.527)
Gender - CS	-0.484	(0.970)	0.537	(1.254)
Gender - Podemos	-0.664	(0.505)	-0.221	(0.489)
Age (ref. PP)				
Age - PSOE	0.002	(0.017)	-0.029+	(0.016)
Age – IU	-0.016	(0.018)	-0.069***	(0.018)
Age – Cs	-0.043	(0.033)	0.017	(0.049)
Age - Podemos	-0.041*	(0.018)	-0.053**	(0.016)
Opinion on government performance (ref. PP)				
Performance – PSOE	3.017***	(0.567)	3.189***	(0.518)
Performance – IU	4.258***	(0.779)	2.269***	(0.620)
Performance – Cs	1.280	(1.137)	1.770	(1.081)
Performance – Podemos	2.685***	(0.647)	2.915***	(0.524)
Observations	2,262	2,163		

Standard errors in parentheses + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.
Note: Opinion on government performance captures an individual opinion on the party's performance over the previous legislature (1 Very good or good, 0 otherwise).

Table A10. Conditional logit voting model for Italy.

	Italy			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Constant (ref. PD)				
Constant – FI	-0.451	(0.704)	-0.307	(0.450)
Constant - Lega	-0.141	(0.718)	-1.891**	(0.722)
Constant – M5S	0.576	(0.599)	1.022**	(0.360)
LR distance – FI	1.970***	(0.430)	3.080***	(0.366)
LR distance – Lega	1.307***	(0.384)	3.513***	(0.607)
LR distance – M5S	1.042***	(0.246)	1.547***	(0.178)
LR distance – PD	1.582***	(0.339)	2.370***	(0.275)
EU distance – FI	0.180	(0.184)	0.339**	(0.120)
EU distance – FI	0.371*	(0.183)	0.433*	(0.172)
EU distance – M5S	0.470**	(0.172)	0.293**	(0.098)
EU distance – PD	0.227	(0.183)	0.299*	(0.135)
Gender (ref. PD)				
Gender - FI	0.156	(0.345)	0.124	(0.325)
Gender – Lega	0.240	(0.379)	0.105	(0.311)
Gender – M5S	0.273	(0.317)	0.138	(0.300)
Age (ref. PD)				
Age – FI	-0.000	(0.011)	-0.030	(0.201)
Age – Lega	-0.010	(0.012)	-0.000	(0.032)
Age – M5S	-0.008	(0.010)	-0.056	(0.060)
PID – FI	2.845***	(0.360)	1.051*	(0.518)
PID – Lega	1.779***	(0.332)	-0.019	(1.523)
PID – M5S	3.417***	(0.393)	-1.842**	(0.648)
PID – PD	2.826***	(0.296)	-4.020***	(0.916)
N	4391		4908	

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

Table A11. Conditional logit voting model for Poland.

	Poland			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Constant (ref. CP)				
Constant – PP	-1.057+	(0.597)	-1.881***	(0.433)
Constant – DLA	-1.627**	(0.572)	-1.597***	(0.400)
Constant – L&J	0.179	(0.399)	-1.149***	(0.296)
Constant – Your M	-0.975*	(0.392)	-1.802***	(0.387)
Constant – CNR	-1.414**	(0.487)	-1.479**	(0.478)
LR distance – CP	1.635***	(0.211)	0.711***	(0.082)
LR distance – PP	0.971***	(0.281)	0.669***	(0.170)
LR distance – DLA	1.101***	(0.240)	1.187***	(0.180)
LR distance – L&J	1.355***	(0.183)	0.867***	(0.094)
LR distance – Your M	0.699**	(0.231)	0.318**	(0.097)
LR distance – CNR	1.275***	(0.244)	0.608**	(0.191)
EU distance – CP	0.259*	(0.101)	-0.032	(0.056)
EU distance – PP	0.046	(0.185)	0.057	(0.122)
EU distance – DLA	0.115	(0.155)	-0.010	(0.106)
EU distance – L&J	0.098	(0.099)	-0.039	(0.068)
EU distance – Your M	-0.025	(0.170)	0.193+	(0.101)
EU distance – CNR	0.321*	(0.125)	0.346*	(0.156)
Size of town (ref. CP)				
Size of town – PP	-0.001	(0.037)	-0.034	(0.024)
Size of town – DLA	0.007	(0.032)	0.002	(0.021)
Size of town – L&J	0.014	(0.024)	0.004	(0.015)
Size of town – Your M	0.017	(0.037)	0.033	(0.021)
Size of town – CNR	-0.002	(0.027)	-0.020	(0.027)
Assessment of the economic situation (ref. CP)				
Economy – PP	-0.243	(0.600)	0.172	(0.140)
Economy – DLA	0.719	(0.556)	0.125	(0.129)
Economy – L&J	-0.394	(0.400)	0.418***	(0.097)
Economy – Your M	0.742+	(0.607)	0.117	(0.124)
Economy – CNR	0.852+	(0.470)	-0.028	(0.159)
Gender (ref. CP)				
Gender – PP	-0.095	(0.340)	0.140	(0.210)
Gender – DLA	0.326	(0.294)	0.068	(0.192)
Gender – L&J	-0.104	(0.224)	0.018	(0.136)
Gender – Your M	-0.953*	(0.371)	0.341+	(0.184)
Gender – CNR	0.631*	(0.258)	-0.318	(0.237)
N	4017		9178	

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

Table A12. Conditional logit voting model for Germany.

	Germany			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Constant (ref. CDU)				
Constant – SPD	0.857	(0.609)	-0.211	(0.411)
Constant – Linke	1.881*	(0.953)	-2.857***	(0.761)
Constant – Grunen	1.169	(0.730)	-0.062	(0.485)
Constant – Linke	n.a.	n.a.	0.806	(0.579)
Constant – AfD	1.377+	(0.814)	-0.653	(0.674)
LR distance – CDU	2.580***	(0.224)	2.452***	(0.193)
LR distance – SPD	1.594***	(0.188)	1.127***	(0.164)
LR distance – Linke	1.616***	(0.270)	1.570***	(0.266)
LR distance – FDP	n.a.	n.a.	2.404***	(0.522)
LR distance – Grunen	2.671***	(0.323)	2.259***	(0.308)
LR distance – AfD	1.394***	(0.219)	1.734***	(0.364)
EU distance – CDU	0.629***	(0.098)	0.276***	(0.082)
EU distance – SPD	0.747***	(0.113)	0.388***	(0.099)
Eu distance – FDP	n.a.	n.a.	0.777**	(0.249)
EU distance – Linke	0.255+	(0.152)	0.302*	(0.154)
EU distance – Grunen	0.798***	(0.158)	0.505***	(0.144)
EU distance – AfD	0.456***	(0.137)	0.670***	(0.201)
Age (ref. CDU)				
Age – SPD	0.005	(0.006)	0.005	(0.006)
Age – FDP	n.a.	n.a.	-0.006	(0.010)
Age – Linke	0.003	(0.010)	-0.012	(0.009)
Age – Grunen	-0.025***	(0.007)	-0.018*	(0.007)
Age – AfD	-0.005	(0.008)	-0.019+	(0.010)
Gender (ref. CDU)				
Gender – SPD	0.494**	(0.168)	0.408*	(0.160)
Gender – FDP	n.a.	n.a.	-0.162	(0.266)
Gender – Linke	1.142***	(0.285)	0.595*	(0.256)
Gender – Grunen	-0.025	(0.200)	-0.280	(0.190)
Gender – AfD	0.992***	(0.263)	1.210***	(0.331)
Political interest (CDU ref.)				
P. Interest – SPD	-0.128	(0.110)	n.a.	n.a.
P. Interest – Linke	-0.272	(0.178)	n.a.	n.a.
P. Interest – Grunen	-0.086	(0.130)	n.a.	n.a.
P. Interest – AfD	-0.219	(0.153)	n.a.	n.a.
Income (CDU ref.)				
Income – SPD	-0.031	(0.020)	-0.095	(0.074)
Income – Linke	-0.094**	(0.036)	-0.595***	(0.119)
Income – FDP	n.a.	n.a.	0.345*	(0.134)
Income – Grunen	0.003	(0.024)	0.007	(0.088)
Income – AfD	-0.017	(0.029)	-0.221	(0.134)
N	6712		7666	

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

Table A13. Conditional logit voting model for United Kingdom.

	United Kingdom			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Constant (Con ref.)				
Constant – Lab	1.454***	(0.393)	-0.364*	(0.180)
Constant – Lib	-1.778***	(0.511)	1.108***	(0.152)
Constant – Green	1.629***	(0.426)	-0.910*	(0.381)
Constant – UKIP	2.452***	(0.291)	-2.615***	(0.317)
Constant – SNP	1.975***	(0.589)	-1.010**	(0.312)
Constant – Plaid	2.014*	(0.862)	0.069	(0.552)
LR distance – Con	3.022***	(0.160)	2.036***	(0.070)
LR distance – Lab	1.338***	(0.124)	0.913***	(0.073)
LR distance – Lib	2.228***	(0.236)	0.740***	(0.047)
LR distance – Green	2.398***	(0.188)	0.729***	(0.179)
LR distance – UKIP	1.650***	(0.069)	1.026***	(0.111)
LR distance – SNP	1.817***	(0.218)	1.034***	(0.138)
LR distance – Plaid	2.189***	(0.448)	1.178***	(0.268)
Eu distance – Con	0.578***	(0.068)	0.091*	(0.043)
Eu distance – Lab	0.570***	(0.070)	0.275***	(0.047)
Eu distance – Lib	0.365***	(0.070)	0.240***	(0.029)
Eu distance – Green	0.417***	(0.075)	0.169	(0.123)
Eu distance – UKIP	0.504***	(0.056)	0.247*	(0.106)
Eu distance – SNP	0.627***	(0.116)	0.224**	(0.084)
Eu distance – SNP	0.549**	(0.196)	0.256+	(0.147)
Gender (Con ref.)				
Gender – Lab	-0.154	(0.119)	0.089	(0.086)
Gender – Lib	0.006	(0.137)	0.019	(0.074)
Gender – Green	-0.505***	(0.122)	0.089	(0.204)
Gender – UKIP	0.268**	(0.085)	0.630***	(0.144)
Gender – SNP	0.363*	(0.178)		0.528***
Gender – Plaid	-0.371	(0.254)		-0.081
Age (Con ref.)				
Age – Lab	-0.025***	(0.004)		-0.013***
Age – Lib	-0.010*	(0.005)		-0.020***
Age – Green	-0.034***	(0.004)		-0.033***
Age – UKIP	0.007*	(0.003)		0.005
Age – SNP	0.003	(0.006)		0.013**
Age – Plaid	-0.025**	(0.008)		-0.013
Education (Con ref.)				
Education – Lab	-0.049	(0.099)		-.0964
Education – Lib	0.506***	(0.133)		0.236***
Education – Green	0.307**	(0.109)		0.373
Education – UKIP	-0.427***	(0.069)		-0.115+
Education – SNP	-0.299+	(0.153)		-0.016
Education – Plaid	0.144	(0.228)		-0.175
N	34388			39,199

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

Table A14. Conditional logit voting model for Sweden.

	Sweden			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	s.e.	Coefficient	s.e.
Constant (SP ref.)				
Constant – MCP	-1.802**	(0.890)	0.807	(0.567)
Constant – Green	0.080	(0.639)	-0.119*	(0.589)
Constant – LP	-1.198	(0.801)	-1.549	(0.700)
Constant – CP	-0.087	(0.989)	0.201	(0.803)
Constant – SD	1.871***	(0.694)	1.683**	(0.665)
Constant – CD	-3.027***	(1.064)	-2.463**	(0.843)
Constant – LP	0.537	(0.724)	0.004	(0.591)
LR distance – SP	4.499***	(0.301)	2.947***	(0.198)
LR distance – MCP	5.495***	(0.576)	2.474***	(0.127)
LR distance – Green	3.972***	(0.191)	3.153***	(0.217)
LR distance – LP	2.929***	(0.301)	2.426***	(0.200)
LR distance – CP	4.478***	(0.576)	2.564***	(0.228)
LR distance – SD	2.678***	(0.191)	2.388***	(0.185)
LR distance – CD	3.775***	(0.506)	2.881***	(0.301)
LR distance – LP	2.889***	(0.319)	2.881***	(0.279)
EU distance – SP	0.057	(0.061)	0.134**	(0.053)
EU distance – MCP	0.479***	(0.075)	0.272***	(0.047)
EU distance – Green	0.049	(0.070)	0.195***	(0.070)
EU distance – LP	0.501***	(0.070)	0.166***	(0.058)
EU distance – CP	0.311***	(0.100)	0.105	(0.079)
EU distance – SD	0.671***	(0.079)	0.480***	(0.095)
EU distance – CD	0.249**	(0.100)	0.215**	(0.087)
EU distance – LP	0.571***	(0.128)	0.384***	(0.097)
Gender (SP ref.)				
Gender – MCP	-0.165	(0.204)	-0.056	(0.142)
Gender – Green	-0.569***	(0.129)	-0.247*	(0.115)
Gender – LP	-0.709***	(0.182)	-0.237	(0.156)
Gender – CP	0.671***	(0.214)	-0.349*	(0.174)
Gender – SD	0.660***	(0.207)	0.704***	(0.214)
Gender – CD	0.026	(0.250)	0.180	(0.207)
Gender – LP	-0.244	(0.157)	-0.167	(0.127)
Age (SP ref.)				
Age – MCP	0.013*	(0.006)	-0.001	(0.004)
Age – Green	-0.033***	(0.004)	-0.039***	(0.004)
Age – LP	0.009	(0.006)	-0.013***	(0.005)
Age – CP	-0.012+	(0.007)	-0.029***	(0.006)
Age – SD	0.002	(0.006)		-0.012*
Age – CD	0.015*	(0.007)		0.003
Age – LP	-0.012***	(0.005)		-0.026***
Education (SP ref.)				
Education – MCP	0.006	(0.208)	0.118	(0.148)
Education – Green	0.983	(0.167)	0.691***	(0.163)
Education – LP	0.306	(0.198)	0.603***	(0.188)
Education – CP	0.175	(0.239)	0.484*	(0.224)
Education – SD	-0.225	(0.166)		-0.330*
Education – CD	0.565	(0.269)		0.604***
Education – LP	0.529	(0.181)		0.353*
N	28033			34565

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

Table A15. Conditional logit voting model for Greece.

	Greece			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	Confidence Interval	Coefficient	Confidence Interval
Constant (Nd ref.)				
Constant – GD	-4.557+	(2.394)	1.879+	(0.995)
Constant – Olive	-2.596	(2.423)		
Constant – River	-5.446+	(3.122)		
Constant – Syriza	-3.777	(2.298)	2.630***	(0.594)
Constant – Anel	-0.813	(1.969)		
Constant – Pasok			-0.388	(0.677)
Constant – Indep			-1.189	(0.890)
Constant – DL			-0.448	(0.804)
Constant – KKE			-0.121	(0.976)
LR distance – GD	4.813***	(0.877)	2.757***	(0.491)
LR distance – ND	2.152***	(0.335)	2.998***	(0.310)
LR distance – Olive	4.976***	(1.034)		
LR distance – River	8.474**	(2.641)		
LR distance – Syriza	6.505***	(1.238)	1.480***	(0.256)
LR distance – Anel	1.635***	(0.416)		
LR distance – Pasok			2.039***	(0.351)
LR distance – Indep			5.260***	(0.753)
LR distance – DL			4.631***	(0.743)
LR distance – KKE			2.323***	(0.657)
EU distance – GD	0.365	(0.284)	0.734**	(0.269)
EU distance – ND	0.500*	(0.194)	0.420**	(0.134)
EU distance – Olive	1.090**	(0.377)		
EU distance – River	0.707	(0.447)		
EU distance – Syriza	1.097**	(0.369)	0.463***	(0.121)
EU distance – Anel	0.891***	(0.209)		
EU distance – Pasok			0.145	(0.148)
EU distance – Indep			0.425*	(0.205)
EU distance – DL			0.106	(0.142)
EU distance – KKE			0.153	(0.167)
Gender (ND ref.)				
Gender – GD	-1.657**	(0.589)	-0.004	(0.546)
Gender – Olive	-0.652	(0.669)		
Gender – River	-0.588	(0.715)		
Gender – Syriza	-0.928	(0.568)	-0.409***	(0.123)
Gender – Anel	-0.656	(0.543)		
Gender – Pasok			-0.193	(0.141)
Gender – Indep			-0.734***	(0.186)
Gender – DL			-0.679*	(0.306)
Gender – KKE			-0.363	(0.423)
Age (ND ref.)				
Age – GD	0.016	(0.023)	-0.029	(0.022)
Age – Olive	0.023	(0.024)		
Age – River	0.027	(0.026)		
Age – Syriza	-0.001	(0.021)	-0.024*	(0.011)
Age – Anel	-0.031	(0.020)		
Age – Pasok			0.009	(0.012)

Table A15. (Continued).

	Greece			
	European elections		National elections	
	Coefficient	Confidence Interval	Coefficient	Confidence Interval
Age – Indep			0.013	(0.016)
Age – DL			-0.017	(0.013)
Age – KKE			-0.024	(0.018)
H. Income (ND ref.)				
H. Income – GD	0.021	(0.207)	-0.689*	(0.281)
H. Income – Olive	0.408+	(0.231)		
H. Income – River	0.097	(0.243)		
H. Income – Syriza	0.128	(0.191)	-0.409***	(0.123)
H. Income – Anel	0.199	(0.181)		
H. Income – Pasok	0.199	(0.181)	-0.193	(0.141)
H. Income – Indep			-0.734***	(0.186)
H. Income – DL			-0.252+	(0.138)
H. Income – KKE			-0.091	(0.188)
N	3822		5779	

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

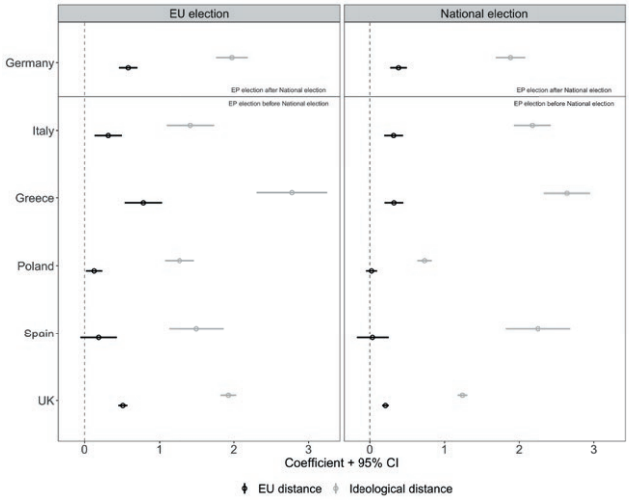


Figure A9. The effects of ideological distance and EU distance in the 2014 EP election and in each country's national election (Chapel Hill Survey).

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The fragile blue wall: analyzing geographies of the 2020 US presidential election

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Abstract. US presidential elections are peculiar contests based on mediation by an Electoral College in which votes are aggregated on a state-by-state basis. In 2020, as in 2016, the outcome was decided by a set of states where the two candidates were equally competitive: Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Two geographical stories tend to dominate accounts of what happened in 2020. The first story is based on red (Republican) versus blue (Democratic) states, and the second story relies upon rural versus urban biases in support for the two parties. After showing how and where Donald Trump outperformed the expectations of pre-election polls, we consider these two geographical stories both generally, and more specifically, in relation to the crucial swing states. Through an examination of the successes of Joe Biden in Arizona and Georgia, two states long thought of as "red", and the role of the suburbs and local particularities in producing this result, we conclude that the polarization of the United States into two hostile electorates is exaggerated.

Keywords: Donald Trump, suburbs, electoral geography.

Only once in the past forty years has a US president been denied a second term in office. In 2020, President Donald Trump's 46.8 percent of the vote share was surpassed by the 51.3 percent for Joe Biden. Despite desperate social media efforts, public denials, legal actions, his refusal to concede, and the incitement of a violent and deadly insurrection, President Trump lost the election. Only the Electoral College's bias towards states with a knife-edge polarization between the two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, in which rural voters have a heavier weight in the outcome saved Trump from a crushing defeat. The US presidential election is an indirect election with votes aggregated individually by state to determine the outcome. It was arguably an existential election in the sense that Trump did not compete on policies as much as proposing himself alone as a representative of "true" Americans, and the 1950s America he was in the process of resurrecting, like he had done for himself after his own bout with Covid-19 and his miraculous "cure" in early October 2020 (O'Toole 2020).

Trump is a national-populist who portrays himself as an outsider, even though his entire business career in New York commercial real estate had

been dependent on lobbying politicians and exploiting the income-tax code. He appeals to possible voters more as a Christian nationalist and scourge of the federal government than as a conventional politician, even as his main legislative accomplishments in office were very much in line with conventional Republican party positions – tax cuts for the wealthy and appointing ultra-conservative federal judges – since the 1990s (e.g. Jones 2020; Lozada 2020).

The Democratic candidate Joe Biden represents a volatile coalition of groups held together by a loose ideology of inclusion, a commitment to active government, and a horror of Donald Trump. Biden was possibly the perfect candidate to both paper over the cracks in the Democratic coalition, given his moderate bona fides, and to bring back the voters in the swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, the so-called "blue wall", who had voted for Obama in 2008 but then had drifted away from the Democrats in 2016 (Peters 2020). After all, he had been Obama's vice-president and had been born in Scranton, Pennsylvania. In the face of a once in a generation pandemic and in the aftermath of his impeachment for inappropriate pressure placed on the president of Ukraine, Trump was seen as the underdog. A state-by-state predictive model using presidential approval ratings and the condition of state economies estimated a rather accurate outcome (with a reasonable allowance for error) in which the election would come down to the usual suspects: Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, with Biden as the likely winner (Enns and Lagodny 2020).

Long before the election Trump laid out a scenario in which if he lost he would claim the election was "rigged". He would then have his allies in crucial states, and in the courts, decide the election in his favor. He was particularly hostile to the use of mail-in ballots, used to a much greater extent in many states than typical given that a pandemic was raging, suggesting that they were both more subject to fraud and more beneficial to Democrats than had in fact ever been the case on either count in previous elections (Thompson et al. 2020). Trump seemed desperate from long before the election to prepare a fallback for his prospective defeat in which he would be a victim of malfeasance rather than the agent of his own defeat.

The heterogeneous state-by-state way in which federal elections are organized in the US leaves open the suspicion that any innovations, such as early or mail-in voting, could be compromised. Trump took advantage of this to avoid conceding defeat and to raise funds for his future either in or out of national politics. Including Michigan in the strategy proved especially reckless, however, given that Trump lost that state by more than 154,000 votes (Alberta 2020). Recounts only yield a few thousand votes at most and typically only a few hundred. Trying to have state election boards and courts make up for lost votes turned out to be more farcical than he could have anticipated, as his "personal lawyer", Rudy Giuliani, made a fool of himself and his client in multiple failed court filings and in disastrous press conferences in the aftermath of the election (Shubber 2020). The attempt at reversing the verdict of the electorate was based entirely around the notion that the election had been "fixed" by the Democrats in the largest cities in the swing states. Trump went so far as to claim that Biden had to prove that he had indeed won the election (*Fox News* 2020). America was "a place where there is no such thing as defeat, only broken scoreboards" (Schwartz 2020).

To highlight the peculiarities of contemporary U.S. presidential elections, and to complement the often narrow and complex methods used to study electoral outcomes and political behavior, we offer an accessible approach that blends political inquiry with a few simple maps. Rather than provide incremental confirmations of accepted models of political behavior, our approach frames the 2020 election geographically to show how and *where* Trump lost, and why he lost. For instance, we show that the big cities were exactly *not* the places where the election was decided in terms of shifts since 2016, despite Trump's anti-urban rhetoric, and the rediscovery of the urban-rural divide by political scientists (Alberta 2019; Hohmann 2020a; Rodden 2019). We also discuss how the typical framing of voters and the American electorate, from the blind acceptance of census categories to the persistence of the red-state/blue-state dichotomy, in fact contribute to increasingly inaccurate polling, and propagate and perpetuate rather basic and limited understandings of American politics, voters and electoral outcomes. By identifying the limits to such approaches, a more complete understanding of the 2020 U.S. presidential outcome is achieved, as is the possibility of advancing electoral studies beyond ascribed individual voter characteristics.

THE 2020 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In an earlier paper we adopted a geographical approach to assessing the likelihood that Donald Trump could win again in 2020 by tapping into the places in the swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin that he had switched from supporting Barack Obama in the majority in 2008 and 2012 to his side of the elec-

toral ledger in 2016 (Agnew and Shin 2020). These were what we called "the counties that counted." In this paper we revisit the argument of that paper in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. First, we review briefly the fact that Trump did much better than the polls predicted both nationally and in the crucial so-called swing states of 2016. We then describe the two main geographical stories about the 2020 election and their respective limits to understanding what happened. This leads us to discuss where in the country Trump "over-performed" in 2020 compared to 2016. Even in defeat levels of support for Trump increased significantly in some places across the United States with respect to both red-and-blue state and rural-urban geographical dimensions discussed previously (Fessenden et al. 2020). As an incumbent president this is perhaps not that surprising, but Trump was a very polarizing figure and never really appealed much beyond the so-called base that he conjured up in 2016 (da Vinha and Ernst 2018).

Voter turnout was also up considerably compared to previous elections from which both presidential candidates benefited, but Biden more than Trump. Biden benefited in 2020 from an anti-Trump boost in voting particularly in the suburbs where Trump had done better than expected in 2016 (Burn-Murdoch and Zhang 2020; Bump 2020a). This was particularly important in Michigan and Pennsylvania where suburban voters were crucial in awarding those states' electoral votes to Biden along with some in places that had swung Trump's way in 2016 but left him in 2020 (Peters 2020; Witte 2020). But these were not so much former Trump voters as they were newly mobilized voters against Trump (e.g. Thomas et al. 2020).

This matters above all in terms of the final determination in the Electoral College. The Electoral College is undoubtedly biased, as is the US Senate, to favor the contemporary Republican Party with its reservoir of support in smaller, more homogeneously white and rural states (Millhiser 2021. This is partly why Trump could almost pull off the feat of winning again even in the face of a massive popular vote deficit. It is *where* the votes are, more than *how many* there are, that matters in a US presidential election. This is more so today than at any time since the late nineteenth century.

More specifically, medium-size states that have comparable numbers of the polarized on both sides and a pool of non-polarized voters are crucial to the outcome (Smidt 2017). Inevitably, the red/blue state divide is institutionalized even as the processes that produce it are lodged at the more local levels like counties in which the urban-rural divide is not just predominant but in 2020 seemed even more so than previously (e.g. Kolko 2020; *Economist* 2020a; Thompson 2020a). We should not forget, however, that Trump could not win with rural votes alone. Rural voters only accounted for 14 percent of American voters in 2018. Trump's vote in Los Angeles County, for example, containing a city Trump had decried by saying it "looks like a third-world city," was 1.1 million. This number is equivalent to the same share of his popular vote as the 633 most rural counties combined (Van Dam 2020). Trump also still did well with higher-income voters, particularly men, in rich suburbs (Zhang and Burn-Murdoch 2020). Such voters are a segment of the traditional Republican Party's base that might be uncomfortable with Trump's rhetorical populism but supported his tax cuts and environmental deregulation.

After the review of where Trump over-performed we turn to what exactly happened in the three swing states that mattered most in 2016 and again in 2020 at the scale of counties. We call this the "fragile blue wall" because much of the media buzz about the election referred to the three states as the "blue wall" that Biden needed to rebuild. It turned out to be a fragile one. The purpose is to see which counties switched between the elections and the extent to which it was those counties or other ones that determined the electoral outcome. Younger voters seemed to show up in larger numbers than in 2016, particularly in counties with large universities, and this may well have been crucial for Biden because, if anything, Trump managed to increase his vote with older, white, and non-college educated voters in economically declining areas, with whom he had been most successful in 2016 (Siddiqui and Ngo 2020; Orr 2020).

Again, it was a fairly close run election in the Electoral College, particularly in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, so Trump's over-performance, particularly in light of pre-election polling results, remains our focus. Perhaps Trump's very active campaigning by way of big rallies, despite a raging pandemic, particularly in these swing states, made a difference. In close races, such as those in the swing states, campaigns do seem to matter, if not more generally, because they tend to favor deepening of partisan polarization and stimulating turnout from targeted groups (Nickerson and Rogers 2020). Yet, in most counties where Trump campaigned immediately before the election turnout went up and his share of the vote went down suggesting strongly that his rallies mobilized opponents more than they did any "hidden" support on his behalf (Chinni 2020).

Finally, we use the cases of Arizona and Georgia, states Trump had won in 2016 but lost in 2020, to consider the relative weight to put on the red-blue state versus rural-urban narratives in assessing the way the elec-

tion turned out. The suburbs of the largest cities and, in the case of Arizona, increased votes from people living on Native American reservations, proved crucial. How much did the results there, conventionally regarded as red states, conform geographically to those in the three swing states? Perhaps more states are becoming purple or magenta (e.g. Medina and Stephenson 2020 on Arizona)? What do the results across these five states tell us about likely trends in the future for the two political parties in presidential elections? Is the electorate truly as polarized as the two dominant narratives would have us believe?

Though Joe Biden won the presidency, Democrat losses in other races for Governors, Senators and US Representatives suggest that some voters split their votes and/or voted selectively across races (e.g. Hohmann 2020b; Penn 2020; Parti and Day 2020). The parties and their activists seem to be much more polarized than significant portions of the electorate (Hopkins 2017; Muirhead and Tulis 2020). Trump in particular, like he and Clinton both in 2016, tends to be viewed in terms of extreme character traits rather than in terms of partisan polarization per se (see Christenson and Weisberg 2019).

Local issues and candidates can then still surpass party or presidential affiliations, even as Trump himself gained support from new voters more radical than his party or relative to anything he had done in office. Still, some Republican-leaning voters showed up and voted for Biden, even as they also cast votes for down-ballot Senate and Congressional Representatives (Gerson 2020; Rauch 2020; Sargent 2020; Gabriel 2020). Trump was essentially wiped out in California, yet down ballot Republicans did better in 2020 than they had in any election year since 1998 (Siders 2020). This could be good news for liberal democracy in the face of the rise of populist politicians like Trump, and the sectarian politics that has become so evident in contemporary America (Graham and Svolik 2020; Finkel et al. 2020).

Whether or not the Republican Party moves beyond Trump and back towards a more pluralistic view of its role in American politics and away from the populist-authoritarian character it has increasingly displayed remains unknown (e.g. Boot 2020). To an extent, polarization is built into the American electoral system with its emphasis on winner-take-all in the Electoral College and the centrality of two political parties. The two parties become the singular focal points for all manner of social and ideological cleavages that in other countries with different electoral systems (e.g., proportional representation) are spread across multiple parties (e.g. Dimock and Wike 2020; Carothers and O'Donahue 2019).

TRUMP'S "OVER-PERFORMANCE" IN 2020

Arguably, Trump over-performed in 2020, particularly in the so-called swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin but also more nationally (Wilkinson 2020). National opinion polls for months before the 2020 US presidential election showed Democrat Joe Biden well ahead of incumbent Republican Donald Trump. There was much talk about a "blue wave" that would sweep Biden into the White House and the Democrats into a majority in the Senate and increased representation in the House of Representatives. None of this turned out to be true (Tomasky 2020). US presidential elections are mediated by the aggregation of votes at the state level to produce a winner through the Electoral College: the national vote does not matter if a candidate can win by narrow margins in so-called swing states. This is what happened in 2016 when Trump lost the popular vote but won the presidency by narrow victories in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, the swing states of that year. But even in these states and a number of other potential "battleground states", such as North Carolina and Florida, polls showed Biden with substantial leads in 2020 going into the election. In the end, the 2020 election came down to much the same scenario as 2016 but with Biden winning the crucial states plus a couple of others (Arizona and Georgia) that Trump won in 2016, but with huge nationwide increases in turnout (66.7% turnout in 2020 compared to 59.2 % of eligible voters in 2016). The increased turnout may suggest a collective sense of anxiety about the future of the country, plus the fact that so many people were at home during the pandemic, rather than a sudden explosion of democratic sentiment (Spence and Brady 2020).

The polls of 2016 were wrong as well. They supposedly corrected their sampling methods to tap more potential "shy" Trump voters, and include more respondents from the demographic categories supposedly more Trump-friendly like non-college educated white men and women. In the aftermath of the election exit polls were even more unreliable than the opinion polls, with different ones producing totally different pictures of the electorate, both nationally and at the state level (Drezner 2020). Contemporary polling fails to do what it is supposed to do: predict the outcome of the election with a reliable narrative of why it turned out that way.

The problem is twofold. On the one hand, the demographic categories used in polling do not capture very well the different meanings they have for people living in different places. For example, Latinos in Florida helped win the state for Trump but in Arizona they helped Biden win, white Catholics in swing states swung

to Biden but less so elsewhere, and Trump did even better with more affluent voters than in 2016 but less so in the crucial swing states of Michigan and Pennsylvania (Alcantara et al. 2020).

Consider, more specifically, the term Latino applied to a wide range of ethnic and national groups with very different histories across the United States. Why should we be surprised when Cubans in south Florida vote differently than people of Mexican and Salvadoran ancestry in California, or Mexican-Americans in south Texas than Mexican-Americans in New Mexico (Yglesias 2020; Rathbone 2020)? Similarly, Asian Americans in Georgia, though small in number, may have tipped the balance against Trump but elsewhere the net drift was probably in his favor (Wang 2020). Much of this difference may be attributed to the relatively high social status and dispersed residence patterns of this ethnically mixed group (Indian, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) in suburban Atlanta when compared to clusters of co-ethnics such as Vietnamese in southern California.

If in 2016 Trump had provided an obsessive focus on "illegal" immigrants and the southern US border, in the 2020 election campaign these issues were largely eclipsed by concerns about the economy and the pandemic. The gender and education categories also display considerable spatial variance in meaning that cannot simply be taken from census reports. A college-educated, professional woman in Arkansas, for example, is scarcer than a similar one in Massachusetts. This has consequences for self-image and possibly for political outlook. Even though there was a massive gender gap in 2020 with women voting net Democratic, as they had done increasingly since 1996, the reasons for this are not the same everywhere given gaps in education, race, ethnicity, and local histories (Zhang and Fox 2020; Maxwell and Shields 2019). White women, particularly in red states but also net nationally, still favored Trump, suggesting that the gender gap has all sorts of contingencies built into it (Lenz 2020).

On the other hand, polling itself has become increasingly unreliable because of the over-reliance on fading technologies like landlines, dishonest or disingenuous respondents, or a lack of willing respondents. Moreover, with the increasingly polarized population wherein the crucial swing voters are a smaller share of the total electorate, their relative turnout is probably what determines the final accuracy of the polls compared to actual votes cast for a given candidate (e.g. Hill 2020; Stephens-Davidowitz 2017). A plausible example of this in 2020 was the clear "evidence" from polling that states and local areas with higher levels of Covid-19 fatalities were going to be less likely to support Trump and other Republican candidates (Warshaw et al. 2020). This turned out to be problematic on two grounds. First, by the time of the election, the epicenter of fatalities moved to high Trump-supporting areas and away from areas where Trump was much less popular irrespective of the pandemic (like New York and New Jersey). Second, Trump supporters did not consider the pandemic to be a central issue in the election nor did they assign Trump any responsibility for its tragic outcomes (Florko 2020; Stacey 2020). The lack of areal sampling, and the assumption of a rational nexus between a pandemic and voting, were crucial errors. More generally, it seems that voters are unaware of the specific policy positions of candidates, and their responses cannot be trusted even when an issue is as visceral as a pandemic in which respondents may know someone who has tested positive or even died (Guntermann and Lenz 2020).

Subsequently, many commentators turned by necessity to considering more aggregate or ecological explanations for what had happened. Of course, survey aficionados warn that this is probably to engage in the ecological fallacy: making inferences about individual persons from aggregates or groups. What they fail to recognize, beyond the problems with polling and surveys noted previously, is the danger of the individualist fallacy which lies in regarding people as isolated individuals, independent from each other, who identify perfectly with ascribed census categories. People, and more specifically voters, are social beings embedded in relationships with each other, and the places in which they live. It is well known, for example, that human health challenges tend to cluster geographically, and lifetime prospects for social mobility tend to depend heavily on where you live and work more than just on adding up individual or household traits (Agnew 2018). Thus, there is a strong argument for grounding survey data and/or engaging in analysis of aggregate conditions in themselves not just because of the dilemmas of polling, but because the causal pathways to explaining voting behavior cannot be adequately examined solely in terms of the putatively national demographic traits of individual persons (Agnew and Shin 2020; Davis 2020).

TWO GEOGRAPHICAL STORIES OF THE 2020 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Two dominant geographical stories of the 2020 presidential election prevailed as syntheses or nationwide framings of various sorts of empirical data. The first story is the continuing allusion to a fundamental division between "blue" (i.e., Democratic) and "red" (i.e.,

Republican) states (see Hopkins 2017). Hence, the election is determined by what happens in a few "purple" states. This narrative privileges the historical analysis of the two political parties, their relative embedding in different regions over time, the correlation between their incidence and the distribution of different ethnic groups, and the cultural-economic history of different states in terms of industrialization, labor organization, and social attitudes. Accordingly, southern states tend to be more conservative ideologically than others on a range of issues because of the history of slavery, evangelical religiosity, and hostility to the federal government as a result of being on the losing side in the Civil War.

If at one time these states were heavily Democratic, since the Nixon presidency they have moved inexorably in presidential elections towards the Republican Party as that party became increasingly based around positions on issues attractive to southern whites. As the ethnic complexion of America has shifted, the nexus of attitudes long associated solely with the South has nationalized through the Republican Party to whites across the entire United States (Maxwell and Shields 2019). Of course, this diffusion has met with differential reception across the country because of local and regional contingencies such as degrees of urbanization, patterns of recent economic growth, and religious affiliations of various sorts. Nationalizing the white electorate to the benefit of Trump thus proved more difficult than this story might suggest.

The second story, has become more popular than the first, particularly in the aftermath of this election, but is still hardly novel (see Rodden 2019). This is the notion that the polarization of the electorate into two opposing camps is essentially a rural-urban divide. Trump-supporters are overwhelmingly located in the more rural-small town areas of the country, and Biden-supporters reside largely in those areas of the country that are more urbanized, dynamic economically, and outward looking. Given the majoritarian character of US elections, large numbers of Democrats pooled up in cities are outvoted by the smaller margins needed for Republicans to win in elections in rural areas. Thus, the Republican Party benefits in squeezing more Representatives and better presidential outcomes from the relative bias against cities with their large "wasted" majorities compared to tighter elections where Republicans have the edge in rural areas.

Drawing electoral boundaries to put Democrats in fewer districts makes this even more the case in congressional elections. Of course, the urban bias of the Democratic vote also makes it harder to develop positions on economic and cultural issues that travel well outside their strongholds (Thompson 2020b). This poses a major challenge to a party that is already more a congeries of groups with different interests and identities, unlike the Republican Party with its ideological consistency and overwhelmingly white base (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). An analysis of counties at the scale of the United States leaves the impression that the long-running trend of denser places with respect to population becoming more Democratic, and less dense ones becoming more Republican, has in fact increased. In 2020 voters in the least dense counties (i.e., bottom 20% by population density) favored Donald Trump by 33 percent, up from 32 percent in 2016, whereas voters in the most urban counties favored Joe Biden by 25 percent compared to 25 percent for Hillary Clinton in 2016 (*Economist* 2020b).

Two strands of the rural-urban argument are apparent (Agnew and Shin 2019). One emphasizes the largely economic forces in play with the so-called rural areas seen as lagging or "left behind" in terms of economic growth and employment prospects. These areas also suffer from aging populations and outmigration, as younger people move to more dynamic metropolitan centers. In 2020, counties that gave Biden a majority of their votes together account for fully 70 percent of US GDP (Muro et al. 2020). On the other side of the ledger, so to speak, Mansfield et al. (2019), for example, show that attitudes to trade in places with import challenged industries, became more negative towards trade and international trade agreements in the aftermath of the 2008-9 financial recession. But they also suggest that increased "ethnocentrism" was also involved. A second focuses on the status anxieties of people who are overwhelmingly white, and who live in rural and declining industrial areas. Their declining economic condition and limited fortunes seem to correspond closely with the real or perceived increase in the number of immigrants, and unwanted cultural changes that are being forced upon them. This is what explains the popular anger, resentment, and racism that Donald Trump has tapped into since he descended the escalator in his office tower in New York City in 2015 to declare his candidacy for the US presidency. It is President Trump who would rescue the country from the "carnage" (largely associated with urban areas and their populations) he himself identified as undermining the imaginary country represented by his people in the "heartland" (e.g. Wuthnow 2018; Agnew and Shin 2019; Bartels 2020; Hohmann 2020a).

MAPPING TRUMP IN 2020: RED VERSUS BLUE AND RURAL VERSUS URBAN

The Electoral College places a premium on so-called swing states in which the likely voters of the two major

parties are evenly split, and there is a significant number of inactive and indifferent voters who move one way or another between the parties in subsequent elections. In 2016 the presidential election came down to narrow vote advantages for Donald Trump in the three states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, but he lost the national popular vote to Hillary Clinton. Though Joe Biden squeezed out narrow wins in the states of Arizona and Georgia, and also enjoyed a massive victory in the national popular vote, 2020 came down to the same three states again. Nevertheless, what we emphasize is that irrespective of the popular vote victory for Biden, largely attributable to massive majorities in California and New York, Trump actually over-performed relative to expectations nationally and in these three crucial states.

Examining Trump's electoral performance in 2020 compared to 2016 across all US counties is a good way to begin examination of the geography of the 2020 presidential contest (Fessenden et al. 2020). In this way we can identify the places with the greatest shifts and speculate on the processes that produced this map. We then examine one of the most important forces behind Trump's over-performance in 2020: the surprising increase in votes as a result of an average 7.5% increase in turnout nationwide between the two elections. Of course, this increase did not accrue to Trump alone: far from it. He lost the election nationwide and in the crucial swing states. But along with some critical shifts in groups typically more supportive of Democrats than Republicans (some Latino voters particularly in Texas and Florida), this is what made the election closer than pre-election polling and punditry suggested.

Three features stand out on the map of swings between 2016 and 2020 (Figure 1). The first is the relative stability of the counties. Very few show shifts of more than a few percentage points in either direction. This fits the conventional wisdom that the country as a whole is fairly fixed in its partisan orientations, and using the county as the basic unit of analysis makes it clear (Sances 2019). Second, though there are swaths of the country in light blue or light pink, there is also considerable geographic variation beyond the simple red versus blue at the scale of the states. Third, there are also some significant regional and local effects in swings between 2016 and 2020. Several of these reflect peculiarities of the 2016 election. For example, the relatively high swings to Trump

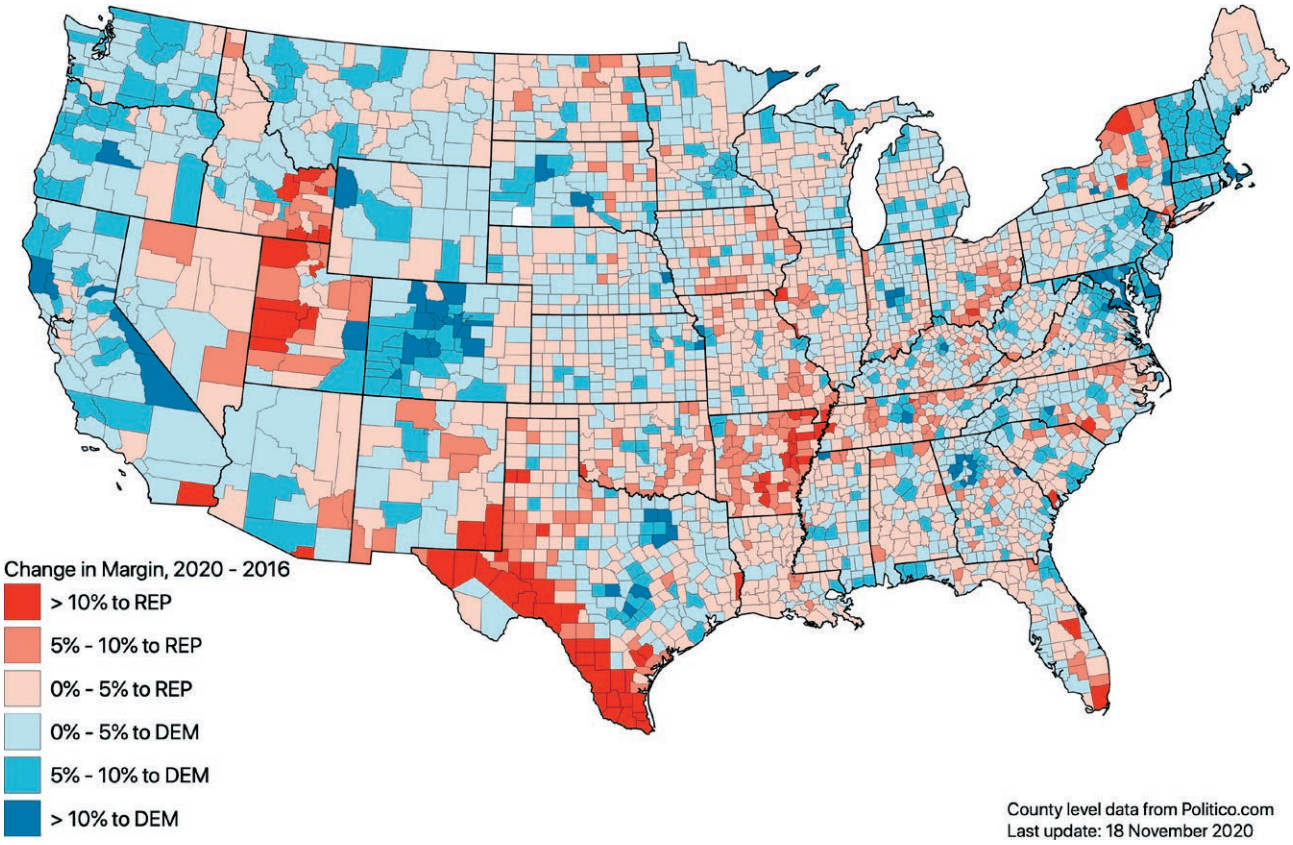

Figure 1. Change in vote margin, 2020-2016.

in Utah and southern Idaho are down to the fact that in 2016 a third-party candidate from Utah did well in precisely these areas. But others reflect real swings to Trump as opposed to Biden. This is the case in the Rio Grande Valley counties of Texas, and in Miami-Dade County in south Florida. These swings were crucial in keeping the states in question in Trump's column in the Electoral College even as in Texas, for example, the Dallas-Fort Worth urban area swung to Biden and Jacksonville and some rural parts of Florida went in that direction too.

The main story of the map, however, given that it is not weighted by population, is that Biden did much better in most of the major suburban areas of the country where most of the national population now lives, particularly around Atlanta in Georgia, Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, Denver in Colorado, and Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas-Fort Worth in Texas. Added to Biden's large majorities in most of the cities in question (although the city of Philadelphia shows a swing to Trump) and elsewhere (particularly all along the west coast) this accounted for his large national popular majority of votes. The impression given by the map undoubtedly overemphasizes the rural areas of the Midwest, Prairies and the Mississippi Valley where swings to Trump were large in percentage terms but small in overall numbers given the low population densities of these regions (*Le Monde* 2020). This leaves an impression of a larger red/blue gap then may actually be the case when population distribution is taken into account.

Donald Trump received around 10 million more votes in 2020 than he did in 2016. He lost because Joe Biden received even more votes, and already had an edge in terms of Hillary Clinton's total in 2016. What is most noticeable, however, is that although Trump did pick up more votes in predominantly rural America relative to Biden, he also picked up most of his new votes in urban areas (Figure 2). With the exception of Florida where Trump was the net winner of new voters across the state, Trump was the narrow loser across much of the rest of urban and suburban America. So, even as he lost, Trump picked up significant votes in and around Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, Houston, and Salt Lake City. His problems with respect to turnout were, above all, in Michigan and, to a lesser extent, in Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin where suburban voters in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Milwaukee proved critical in turning out in greater numbers for his opponent. So, it was not in the cities or the countryside that the 2020 US presidential election was decided but in the suburbs of the largest cities in the three swing states. Neither the red/blue state nor the rural/urban narratives as outlined adequately accounts for this reality; being "in-between" was determining (Badger and Bui 2020; Burn-Murdoch and Zhang 2020).

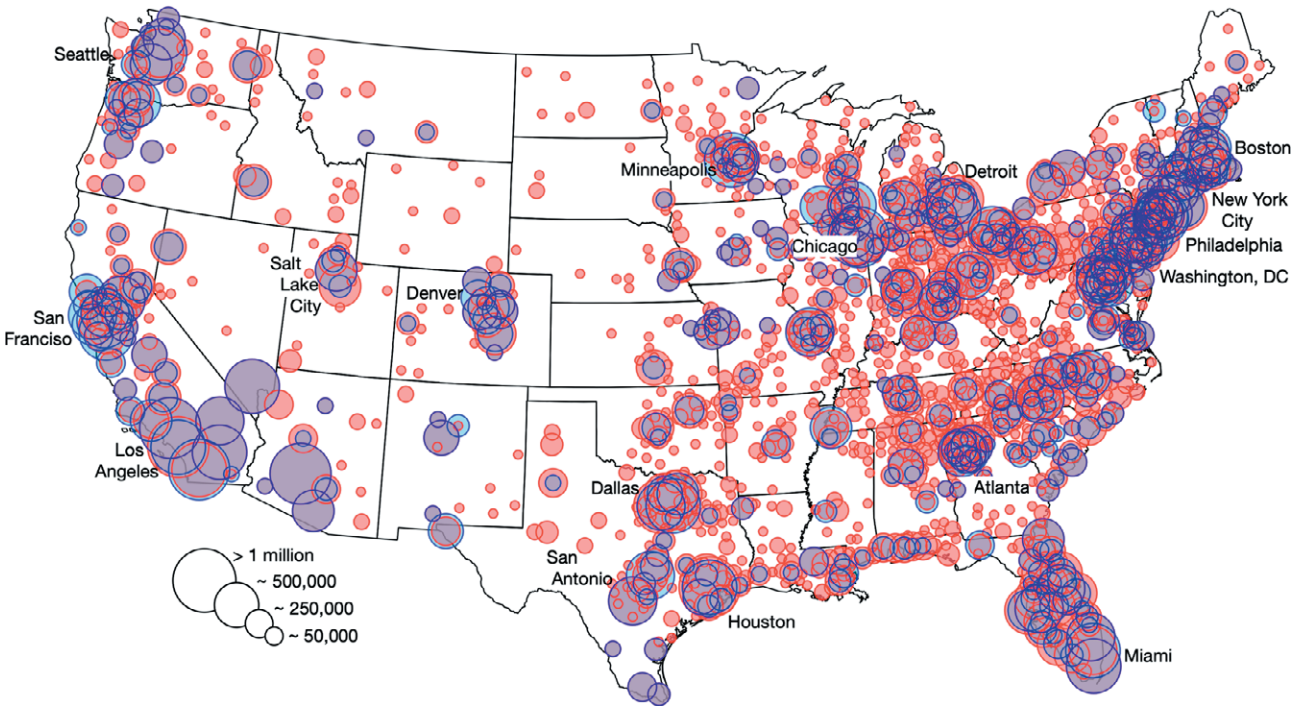

Figure 2. Total votes for Donald Trump (red) and Joe Biden (blue) in the 2020 US presidential election.

THE FRAGILE BLUE WALL

In 2016 the story in the three swing states was somewhat different. As we argued previously (Agnew and Shin 2020), the 2016 story was one of Trump taking over rural and declining industrial areas in the three states that had historically been volatile electorally but had voted for Obama in 2008 and 2016. According to *Ballotpedia* (2017), 206 counties nationwide voted for Trump in 2016 that had voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012. The 206 counties were spread over 34 states. It was where their numbers were concentrated in key states, however, that was crucial. Michigan had 12 "pivot" counties, Pennsylvania had 3, and Wisconsin had 23 (Figure 3). This is where the voters who allowed Trump to eke out his victory in the Electoral College were located as he was losing the nationwide popular vote to Hillary Clinton.

In 2016 Trump won the three states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin by net 77,744 votes, mostly concentrated in a number of largely rural and exurban counties in the three states. These voters seem to be mainly white working-class voters who never obtained college degrees. Like their peers across the country, having supported Obama's campaigns, they turned away from Hillary Clinton and voted for Trump. Thus, a key element in the outcome of the 2016 presidential election were those voters largely in the Upper Midwest and Pennsylvania who had backed President Obama in 2008 (and 2012) but then reversed course to support Donald Trump in 2016. Nationally about 9 percent of Obama voters went for Trump in 2016, about 5 percent of the total electorate (Sides et al. 2018).

So, what happened to the role of the swing counties in the swing states that we identified as crucial to Trump's victory in 2016? By and large they stayed with him in 2020. Economic stasis, plus the federal mismanagement of the pandemic, might have led to some questioning of the prior move to Trump (e.g. Casselman and Russell 2019; Warshaw et al. 2020; Dawsey 2021). In fact, the pandemic did not seem to be a major factor in undermining Trump's support (Bump 2021). Trump's trade disputes with China and other countries certainly did not help these beleaguered places, but neither did they seem to harm him politically (e.g. Langevin 2020; Brown 2020; Tita and Mauldin 2020). As we argued previously, much of Trump's appeal in 2016 was emotional rather than cognitive, and based on anxiety about the future (Agnew and Shin 2020).

Perhaps the street protests and urban violence of summer 2020 magnified on social media and on right-

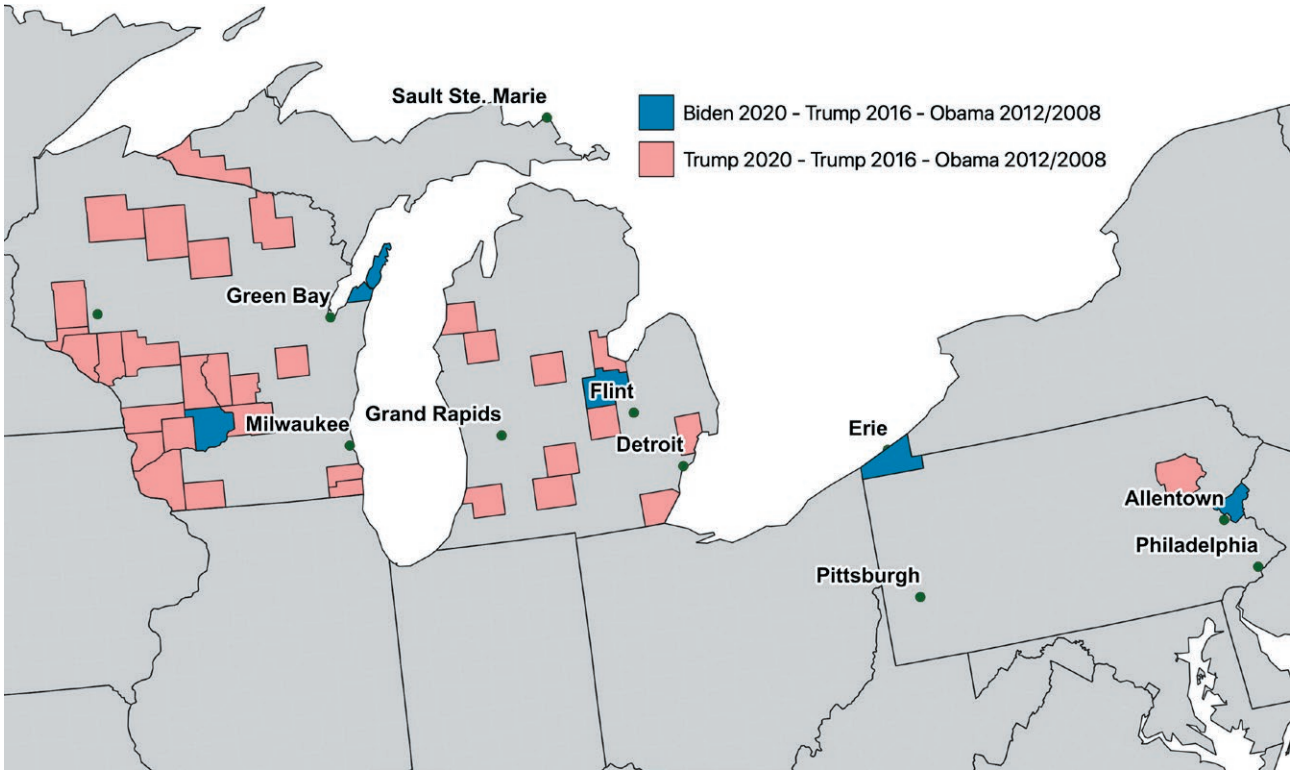

Figure 3. The Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania counties that counted in 2020.

wing radio and television played some role in keeping fearful residents of many of the rural and exurban counties in Trump's column. This did not seem to be the case in advance of the election in the Detroit suburbs, however (Jamerson 2020). Unemployment as a result of measures taken to deal with the pandemic seems to have had longer lasting effects in areas that voted more for Biden than for Trump except in the case of Michigan where the counties with the highest rates voted net for Trump (Koeze 2020). In 2020 only two counties in Pennsylvania and one in Michigan flipped back to Biden after having gone to Trump after Obama in 2016 (Bump 2020b). Erie County was one of those in Pennsylvania. The outcome there in 2020 was remarkably close (Maher and Zitner 2020).

In 2020 the counties of 2016 no longer counted. What happened was that in a race to tap increased turnout Biden beat Trump in the suburbs of the main urban areas, particularly around Detroit and Philadelphia, while holding on to majorities, although diminished in Philadelphia, in the big cities across the three states. Biden built up large majorities of votes in the same counties that Clinton won in 2016, but enjoyed larger majorities that gave him the narrow margins he needed at the state-level. There had been some signs of this trend in the 2018 Midterm elections, particularly in southeastern Michigan (Sarbaugh-Thompson and Thompson 2019). What was more surprising was Biden's relative success in the Milwaukee suburbs (see, e.g. Weichelt 2021). At the same time, and suggesting a powerful suburban anti-Trump vote more than a repudiation of the Republican Party tout court, some of the suburban districts that gave Biden his victory across the three states also elected Republicans to Congress and to state legislatures (Gabriel 2020). This blue wall is indeed fragile, and in future presidential elections it could crumble.

EXAGGERATING GEOGRAPHICAL POLARIZATION?

One of the takeaways from the three swing states is that the hold of candidates of both parties across all of them is tenuous at best. These states remain purple. At the same time, two other states, Arizona and Georgia, came over to Biden in 2020 after being consistently red states for many years. They too are at least now light purple. In both of them Trump's vote held up, particularly in white rural areas, but was outweighed by swings to Biden in the more urbanized-suburban counties and minority-majority counties (Native American in Arizona and African American in Georgia). In terms of mobilizing likely voters in 2020, Biden managed to outdo Trump in these two states even as he lost in other states, like Florida and North Carolina, that many commentators thought were more likely to turn blue this time around.

The stories of the two states seem different beyond the elemental role of the suburbs in producing the outcome in each: the suburbs of Phoenix in the first and those of Atlanta in the second. There is a definite distance decay effect in Trump votes with the largest percentages at the county level in the places most distant from city centers, ceteris paribus. Only in heavily minority counties do we see the exceptions to the rule. Of course, most Trump voters are still in the major urban and suburban areas. They were just outnumbered there in 2020 (e.g. Medina and Stephenson 2020). This explains the continuing success of down-ballot Republicans in those areas even as Trump was losing.

In Arizona, Biden's relative success in 2020 can be explained by three factors. One is the massive in-migration into the main urban-suburban areas of people from west coast states like California and Washington, who bring with them different political sensibilities from those of long-term residents in the state (Balk 2020). The second is the reaction against Trump's toxic personality, particularly because of his personal attacks in 2016 on the popular, late-Senator from Arizona, John McCain. McCain's widow, a lifelong Republican, endorsed Joe Biden in 2020. Finally, although perhaps exaggerated around the time of the election, turnout among Native Americans in Arizona was much higher in 2020 than previously, and this undermined the simple rural-urban dimension as fundamental in this particular state (Caldera 2020). Much of this increase could be put down to negative appraisals of the role of the federal government under Trump in addressing the pandemic as it affected life profoundly on the state's native reservations, specifically in the northeastern and central southern regions of the state.

In Georgia a massive registration campaign, directed primarily at African American voters, but also more generally in the aftermath of a controversial governor's election in 2018 when many African Americans were disenfranchised, was undoubtedly one factor in producing a much larger turnout in the Atlanta metropolitan area than in recent presidential elections (Kim 2020; McWhirter 2020). As with Arizona, recent immigration from the Northeast and California (including Asian Americans), as well as from Latin America has created a more complex electorate than the historic black-white bifurcation, and its tendency to reproduce the blue-red polarization. Thus, in Georgia suburban districts are now much more likely to produce wins for Democrats across all offices up for election than previously was the case (Badger 2020). Only either voter suppression of

groups likely to vote Democratic, legitimized perhaps by Trump's unsubstantiated but rallying charge of "massive fraud" denying him victory in 2020, or a shift in the character of the Republican Party from a white nationalist to a more inclusive if still conservative party could undermine this trend (Corasaniti and Rutenberg 2020).

The overriding geographical message from the 2020 presidential election is twofold. The first is that the red state-blue state distinction oversimplifies and minimizes the complexity of the American electorate. Shades of purple are the new colors of, and within, many states. Yet it seems clear that many Trump voters do live in places and in relation to media that limit their access to people who do not think like them compared to many Biden supporters (Bump 2020c; Andrews and McGill 2020). But the evidence from 2020 is also that the vote was less polarized geographically at the state level than in 2016 (Kolko and Monkovic 2020). The accession of Arizona and Georgia into the ranks of the swing states is clear evidence for this conclusion. The fact that Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin were once again on the front lines of the 2020 election reinforces this view. Vote mixing up-and-down the ballot in many suburban areas, as well as vote switching from one party to the other everywhere, is further evidence against seeing an absolute red versus blue story at the state level as having permanent value. The second message is even clearer. The 2020 US presidential election was won and lost in suburban areas; not as a result of a fixed rural-urban opposition. Whether this is down to the relative unpopularity of Trump among voters who might otherwise vote Republican in presidential elections remains to be seen. The presence of so many non-polarized voters, however, even in the presence of Trump as a presidential candidate, suggests that not all is as bleak or as dire as the stories of a terminally polarized America suggest.

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Issue characterization of electoral change (and how recent elections in Western Europe were won on *economic* issues)

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Abstract. Results of the last electoral season in Western Europe have been mostly seen in the light of the success of challenger, anti-establishment parties. According to this narrative, past elections have been overwhelmingly dominated by cultural issues such as immigration and the EU. However, these accounts suffer from several limitations. First, they generally focus on the determinants of the static component of electoral results (i.e. vote choice) rather than the factors leading to vote change (i.e. the individual-level component of aggregate electoral change). Second, relying on party manifestos and programmatic platforms, they usually offer a party-based reconstruction of the general climate of elections. As a consequence, they provide only an indirect, at best limited, overview of the actual political issues that might have driven electoral results. To overcome these limitations, in this paper we introduce a new methodological strategy to characterize electoral results in comparative perspective. To do so we leverage an issue-rich public opinion dataset to estimate individual-level vote change towards each party as a function of issue-based party-voter affinity measures in 6 European countries. Relying on 38 logistic regression models (one for each party), our results contradict many current interpretations of electoral results in Western Europe, in fact showing that economic issues, rather than broad cultural ones, emerged as the most relevant predictors of vote inflows. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the relevance of "cross-ideological" mobilization across all the 6 countries covered in this study.

Keywords: electoral change, electoral results, issue politics, economic issues, cultural issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social science, and political science perhaps even more, is characterized by its inevitable engagement with different *audiences*. Results of social science are first and foremost aimed to their scientific community; but another often relevant audience is also a broader cultural community (politicians, the media, active citizens) looking at social science for empirical knowledge and interpretations of social reality, with arguments that often become relevant in the public debate (Pizzorno 1993, 31). This is obviously the case for elec-

tion studies, particularly at the occasion of general elections. In this regard, elections not only perform their basic democratic function of allowing the formation of governments that inherently respond and correspond to *citizen preferences* (Dahl 1971; Thomassen 2005; Mair 2013), but also represent key occasions where actors involved in the public debate are offered the possibility of *gauging actual citizen preferences*, in a more reliable and representative way than offered by poll-based public opinion analyses. As a result, the immediate aftermath of a general election is usually characterized, on the media, by intense debates – often fuelled by empirical analyses – about the interpretation of the election result. This is a process we might identify as the *characterization* of election results, i.e. a collective construction of a (relatively shared) general interpretation of the election outcome: starting from the relatively easy identification of winners and losers (perhaps less easy, when drilling down to geographical disaggregation of results), up to – most importantly – the identification of a more general "popular will" emerging from the vote. All this process revolves around the answer to a key, but often understudied, question: what were the elections about (Shamir and Shamir 2008)?

In this regard, the term *interpretation* appears particularly appropriate. While relatively simple statistical analyses usually allow to identify winners and losers of an election, it is much harder to identify a general "popular will" from an election result. The reason is simple: while e.g. in referenda voters are called to express themselves on actual policy choices, elections see them casting votes to parties that take positions on dozens of different issues, so that it is not easy to identify which actual issue stance determined the fortune of a particular party. And the actual information available for this interpretation is mostly indirect: party platforms, election campaigns, exit-polls estimating the behaviour of particular social groups; geographical results providing more suggestions about the behaviour of the same groups; perhaps even ecological-inference-based estimates of vote turnover tables that try to reconstruct which winning parties attracted votes from which losing parties (albeit both these latter are always prone to even severe ecological fallacy). None of these pieces of information in fact includes *direct* information about *issue* determinants of election results. Even when extensive survey data are available (but often not immediately after the election), these frequently only include a relatively limited set of items measuring voter attitudes on few specific policy issues. As a consequence, all these pieces of information only allow a quite *indirect,* at best *limited* reconstruction of the actual political issues that might have driven the election result, so that in fact little can be reliably known about actual *citizen preferences* which, in principle, represent the very core of democratic representation.

Such limited-information reconstruction is vulnerable to a number of biases (even more, when attempted in comparative perspective). To begin with, issue drivers of electoral change are oftentimes indirectly inferred from party platforms and campaigns of winning parties, while in fact there is little guarantee that the actual drivers correspond to the most defining (or visible) campaign issues of each party. And in comparative perspective, commentators often employ even stronger simplifications, by lumping together (based on party families) parties that in fact might even be significantly different in terms of party platforms, not to mention the actual issue drivers of their success.

This paper introduces a novel methodology for characterizing electoral results which, in our view, represents a significant improvement in this regard. In general terms, our proposal consists of three key choices: (a) use of issue-rich public opinion data; (b) focus on issue-related predictors, and in particular on *issue-based party-voter affinity measures*; (c) focus on *vote change* (rather than on vote *choice*) as the outcome to be modelled. By modelling, for general elections, individual vote change (i.e. the individual-level component of aggregate electoral change) through issue-related predictors, we in fact are able to identify the key issues that produced electoral change for each party (and thus for the whole party system), providing an effective *issue characterization* of electoral change that provides substantive (and potentially unbiased) information about the citizens preferences that drove such change.

We apply this methodology to general elections in six Western European countries in 2017-18 (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, UK), relying on survey data from the ICCP – Issue Competition Comparative Project (De Sio et al. 2019; De Sio and Lachat 2020a); thus, we not only demonstrate our methodology's ability to issue-characterize a single election, but exemplify its ability to support a broader issue characterization of an electoral season across multiple countries. And our results confirm the relevance of our methodology, with findings partly in contrast with most extant literature relying on a *party-based* characterization of the same elections. While such party-based characterization has so far emphasized the emergence (and key relevance) of a transnational, cultural "cleavage" in Western Europe in recent years, our issue characterization of the same elections suggests an enduring relevance of *economic* issues, along with diverse non-eco-

nomic, "cultural" issues, which however are only marginally related to a broader transnational conflict (e.g. over EU integration); and – most importantly – which do not appear to cluster together (in a consistent overarching dimension) in their predictive ability of individual-level vote change.

The paper is organized as follows. After this introductory section, we discuss the main purpose of this paper, introducing the relevance of issue characterization of an election. We then review existing literature to set out theoretical expectations for issue characterization of the elections under study, following then two sections describing our novel method, research design, data and empirical strategy. Presentation and discussion of findings are then offered, followed by conclusions.

2. CHARACTERIZING ELECTION RESULTS

Virtually all citizens of any democratic country will have experienced the media coverage and citizen reactions that immediately follow a general election. This is not simply because of the ritual importance of elections as the key process of democracy (such that non-democratic regimes rely on elections to claim democratic status: see e.g. Zakaria 1997), but most importantly because elections, among their many other functions, represent the fundamental occasion for ascertaining *citizen preferences* on issues facing the future government. It is needless to say that the very core of democracy lies precisely in its ability to provide governments that respond (and corresponds) to these citizen preferences (in fact through the "party government" model: see Thomassen 2005; and Mair 2013 for its crisis).[1] Hence it is not surprising that, in the immediate aftermath of the election, politicians, commentators, the media, and citizens themselves (e.g. on the social media) all engage in a public discussion towards a shared interpretation of the election result, ultimately aimed at identifying some kind of "popular will" (i.e. citizen preferences) emerging from the result (Hershey 1992). We call this process *characterization* of the electoral result; a process which in principle should strive for a genuine *issue characterization*, where actual *citizen preferences* (key for democratic responsiveness) are somehow ascertained.

Most scholars will have experienced how their contribution to this process is relatively marginal, compared to that of political commentators and the media (Gelman and King 1993; Hale 1993; Hershey 1992; Shamir and Shamir 2008). This is not surprising, considering that: (a) serious scholars usually only make claims based on empirical material that properly justifies such claims; and (b) empirical material available in the immediate aftermath of an election usually hardly justifies specific claims on *citizen preferences* emerging from the electoral result. In fact, such material mostly consists of three types of sources: aggregate official electoral results; polls (and exit-polls); party platforms and campaign information. From these materials, typical post-election comments and analyses usually include:

a) identification of winners and losers (and of gaining and losing parties) on nationwide aggregate totals (and in terms of seats);
b) analyses of geographically disaggregated results, aiming to infer (from geographical patterns) party choices of particular social groups (and these analyses are extremely vulnerable to ecological fallacy: see King 1997);
c) (where very low level, polling station data are available), estimations (through ecological inference methods) of vote transition matrices, describing vote flows among parties from the previous to the current election;[2]
d) poll and exit-poll data: being usually restricted (for cost reasons) to few items on socio-demographics and vote intentions, these mostly provide no more information than the party choices of specific socio-demographic groups.

This should clarify the problem. Except for the case of referenda, where actual policy choices are at stake,[3] none of the above empirical materials really allows a direct *issue* characterization of the result. In fact, what takes place is an *indirect*, tentative process of issue characterization, which however cannot identify with great precision the actual issue drivers of a party's success. This process in fact is a *party-based* process of characterization: to infer some issue information, winning (and losing) parties are first identified with their party platforms. Considering that party platforms include dozens of issues, usually commentators focus on a selection of issues which they deem having been particularly impor-

[1] Albeit of course while preserving the rule of law and fundamental rights and liberties, so that responsiveness will be also possible in the future (Dahl 1971).

[2] Italy developed a venerable tradition in this regard, due to the availability of polling station data and to the early development of appropriate techniques (Barbagli et al. 1979; Corbetta and Schadee 1984; Corbetta, Parisi, and Schadee 1988; Mannheimer 1993; De Sio 2008).

[3] And even in this case, sometimes referendum results might not so obviously reveal citizen policy preferences. Research on the Italian 2016 constitutional referendum clearly showed the effect of referendum politicization on the final outcome, with a sizable group of voters appreciating the referendum proposals but voting "No" as a result of referendum politicization by the then prime minister Matteo Renzi (e.g., Ceccarini and Bordignon 2017).

tant in the campaign; and sometimes data about the behaviour of specific social groups (see above) helps supporting some of these issue characterizations. However, this process is clearly *indirect*, and potentially vulnerable to a number of biases. First, because political commentators (and politicians) in fact inevitably highlight as key drivers of electoral success those issues that resonate with their political stances (Hershey 1992); secondly, there is even no guarantee that the issues stressed most by a party campaign were in fact the real drivers of the party's success.

Regarding the contributions of social science scholars, even these are often unable to provide a clear and reliable *issue characterization* of an electoral outcome, due to methodological choices and practical constraints.

First and foremost, comparative analyses of electoral change often rely on party-based characterizations of the electoral outcome, meaning that change is seen in terms of the emergence of new parties (and party families), focusing on their strategies and entrepreneurial efforts. This is for example apparent in the literature about the emergence of new cleavages which cross-cut the traditional left-right dimension of political competition (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008) and the success of challenger parties (de Vries and Hobolt 2020).

The problem here is that any indirect, party-based issue characterization of an election outcome potentially suffers even severe biases, as a result of the fundamental *issue aggregation* function of political parties. Mass democracy is unthinkable without political parties (Schattschneider 1942) because one of their main functions is to limit the inconsistencies and disequilibria of democratic representation that emerge in a multidimensional *issue space* (Condorcet 1785; Arrow 1951). Parties indeed package together positions on many different issues, so that voters are presented with a relatively small set of party choices in a much simplified (ideally unidimensional) *party space* (Black 1948; Downs 1957). However, this simplification process involves collapsing an enormous amount of issue information into few party choices: as a result, any indirect inference of citizen preferences from these enormously simplified party choices is a potentially dangerous operation, given the number of possible biases in the process. Thus, we argue that any issue characterization of an electoral outcome that only relies on party platforms and party performance should be handled with great caution.

But even research employing survey data usually suffers cost and length constraints that limit the measurement of issue attitudes to an often quite small set of issues, usually meant (again) to act as "representative" issues of a simplified, low-dimension space. A prominent example in this respect is the EU integration issue. As the EU has become an increasingly salient issue, its electoral importance has grown as well (Franklin and Wlezien 1997), with voters casting their votes also on the basis of their preferences about the EU, i.e. EU issue voting (e.g. de Vries 2007, 2010). To analyse this phenomenon, most survey studies have indeed relied on measures that capture respondents' positions on an overarching pro/anti EU dimension, thus focusing on general attitudes towards the integration process, but without specific items concerning the actual content of policies decided at the EU level (Angelucci, De Sio, and Paparo 2020; Weber 2009). And the limitations of this approach become more visible as a by now extensive literature on EU politicization and EU issue voting suggests that the degree of contentiousness of the EU varies significantly across EU specific policy domains (Angelucci and Isernia 2020; de Wilde, Leupold, and Schmidtke 2016) and that different EU-related policies matter with different importance (and in different directions) for voting behaviour (Angelucci, De Sio, and Paparo 2020). And the problem is even bigger for traditional issue dimensions (such as the classic two-dimensional representation of issue attitudes defined by "economic" and "cultural" issues): campaigns and vote choices are in fact never about such general issue dimensions, which only exist for scholars, so that the (often inevitable) strategy of including, in a survey questionnaire, few items aimed at "sampling" a general issue dimension hardly allows to get a more nuanced issue characterization of the results.

In addition, a large part of research on individual-level political behaviour mostly focuses on predicting *vote choice* rather than *vote change*, so that its ability is mostly in describing the profiles of winning and losing parties (even on specific issues), rather than focusing on which issues drove individual-level *change*, the mechanism producing aggregate electoral change.[4]

As a result, we mostly lack a rigorous and unbiased possibility for a genuine *issue characterization* of an electoral outcome. This is unfortunate, as the question is of great relevance for the quality of democratic representation, allowing to clarify *what voters want* from elected officials the day after the elections (Hershey 1984, 1992).

We now move to proposing a methodology aimed to address this problem, leveraging an exceptionally issue-

[4] A notable exception is the literature on *economic voting*, which – initially only relying on aggregate data, but then increasingly employing individual-level data – has consistently focused on *change* as the outcome (see e.g. Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2011, also for a review). However, this has implied restricting the focus to a single issue (the state of the economy), and mostly in a "valence" framework (Stokes 1963).

rich dataset and an innovative model of vote change, allowing to reconstruct a precise issue characterization of an election. However, as we also offer here an example of an empirical application of this novel methodology, we first need to set broad expectations about the key issue drivers of electoral change in the countries and elections we analyse. We do so by briefly reviewing the scientific literature focusing on the turbulent electoral and party system changes that have invested Western Europe in the last decade.

3. RECENT PARTY DEVELOPMENTS IN WESTERN EUROPE

Recent years have seen turbulent electoral change. The election of Donald Trump in the US and the Brexit referendum in 2016 are just the most prominent outcomes of a sort of perfect storm (De Sio and Lachat 2020a) in which multiple crises (the financial crisis and, in Europe, the refugee crisis) fuelled the rise of challenger parties throughout the Western world (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos 2020; Matthijs Rooduijn et al. 2019).

Coming more specifically to Western Europe, the large amount of literature analysing the electoral success of challenger parties both on the right and the left (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos 2020; Matthijs Rooduijn et al. 2017; Matthijs Rooduijn and Burgoon 2018; de Vries and Hobolt 2020) leaves a still open debate. In particular, with most of this literature focusing on the determinants of vote for radical right and radical left parties, many have argued that while these parties are the expression of a generalised political discontent towards the political establishment, a feature that unites these parties under the "populist" label (Bélanger and Nadeau 2005; Dalton and Weldon 2005; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Ivarsflaten 2008; Pauwels 2014; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013), their electoral fortunes do not appear linked to common long-term socio-structural factors (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos 2020; Matthijs Rooduijn and Burgoon 2018). On the one hand, radical left parties (such as Podemos in Spain or Syriza in Greece) have leveraged economic issues on their opposition towards the capitalist organizations of contemporary societies (March 2013); on the other, radical right parties have instead leveraged an allegedly new demarcation/integration cleavage, not subsumable under the traditional left-right economic division and rather articulated on a cultural dimension (Kriesi et al. 2008).

This new "cleavage" has been labelled in different ways (Bornschier 2010; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008; de Wilde et al. 2019), but authors do agree on both the origins and the electoral implications of its consolidation as a source of political contestation (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos 2020). First, this cleavage originated from the widespread consolidation of the globalization process and, in Europe, of the process of EU integration. Both phenomena produced new challenges (e.g. more intense immigration flows) and policy constraints to established political elites, especially in the economic field (Mair 2013). Secondly, all this produced a new social conflict (and new alliances as well) pitting losers against winners of globalization. Thirdly, there is consensus in considering this cleavage articulated, in Europe, on two key issues: immigration and EU integration. The result of these processes has been a reinforcement of the relevance of a cultural dimension within the bidimensional, economic-cultural space that has been documented organizing citizen attitudes in Western Europe for a long time (Middendorp 1978; see also Kitschelt 1994; Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002).

While still acknowledging the relevance of the traditional economic dimension of competition, scholars have also suggested that this new cleavage has probably become the main dimension of political competition in Europe, suggesting that this cultural dimension is key for understanding the success of challenger parties and the recent dynamics of electoral politics. In a recent comparative study across (then) 28 EU countries, Emanuele et al. (2020) found that the demarcation cleavage has been massively politicised throughout Europe, with major exchanges of votes occurring across parties politicizing such demarcation issues. De Vries and Hobolt (2020) also argue that the success of challenger parties (both on the left and the right) should be attributed to their entrepreneurial strategies on new issues (such as immigration, EU integration, and the environment) which do not fit into the traditional economic left-right dimension. Analogously, Green-Pedersen and Otjes (2019) referred to societal organization and immigration as by now key electoral issues. Finally, Norris and Inglehart (2019), following on the seminal study on post-materialism (Inglehart 1977), argue that if the rise of social-liberal values motivates the rise of libertarian populists "when the rising tide of social liberalism among the younger, college-educated population is combined with deep disillusionment with the performance of mainstream political parties and leaders" (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 43), it also spurs the counter-reaction of authoritarian-populist parties and leaders, mobilising voters on culturally conservative and nationalist stances.

In addition, increased relevance of cultural issues on electoral competition has not affected challenger parties

only: there is evidence of a counter-reaction on the side of mainstream parties (although in a not always certain direction). Several scholars (Abou-Chadi 2016; Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Han 2015; Wagner and Meyer 2017) provided, for example, evidence of contagion effects – on immigration – of radical right parties' positions to mainstream parties; Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) also showed the relevance of what they call the second (cultural) dimension for social-democratic parties, confirming that mainstream parties too are dragged to compete on the new demarcation cleavage. Carrieri (2020) provides evidence of an integration-side response to the politicization of the demarcation side of the cultural cleavage by challenger parties, showing how Europhile parties in fact reacted to Euroscepticism by mobilising a pro-EU electoral front, and no longer silencing the EU integration issue as previously expected (De Sio, Franklin, and Weber 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018). Finally, Turnbull-Dugarte (2020) also reports evidence of how the demarcation-side politicization in Germany triggered an integration-side reaction, again supporting the idea that this new cultural dimension of competition is becoming a relevant structuring source of electoral competition (de Vries and Hobolt 2020).

In electoral terms all these dynamics were clearly reflected in a high level of electoral volatility and in the relevance of cultural demarcation parties in driving these shifts (Emanuele, Marino, and Angelucci 2020). On this backdrop, we can advance broad expectations about key predictors of vote change and issue characterization of electoral results. In terms of general propositions, we expect that: (1) change should be dominated by *cultural* issues, with particular reference to immigration and EU integration, and with a less important role of economic issues, perhaps confined to the radical left or to left-wing populist parties; (2) if the demarcation/integration cleavage represents a truly new dimension of contestation, then we expect to find that key cultural issue drivers of vote change should cluster together consistently in predicting the electoral fortunes of parties. In other words, we expect that voters' preferences and voter's party evaluations on demarcation policy goals should be consistently combined.

4. OUR PROPOSAL

As said previously, we observe that most issue characterization of election outcomes is performed either indirectly (*party-based* characterization) or relying on an over-simplification of the issue space. We propose instead, based on appropriate and issue-rich data, to perform an actual *issue characterization* of election outcomes.

In methodological terms, and differently from most past literature, our focus is on the *individual-level* mechanism behind aggregate electoral change: individual vote *shift*, i.e. a change in vote choice towards another party. Along with turnout dynamics (also included here, in terms of change from abstention), this is in fact the key mechanism producing electoral success or failure. In particular, we rely on three choices:

a) use of survey data to model voting behaviour at the *individual* level;
b) focus on issue-related predictors, and in particular on *issue-based party-voter affinity measures*; this requires using a survey dataset with items concerning a large and comprehensive set of issues, and also including explicit measurement of party-voter issue affinity (see below);
c) focus on *vote change* (rather than on vote *choice*) as the outcome to be modelled. By modelling individual vote *change* (i.e. the individual-level mechanism behind aggregate electoral change) through issue-based party-voter affinities, we are able to identify key issues behind electoral change, providing an effective *issue characterization* of electoral change that provides substantive (and unbiased) information about those citizen preferences that determined such change, leading to victories and defeats for different parties. Hence, our main dependent variable will be vote choice *change*, i.e. a change in the voted party compared to the previous election (see the next section).

In particular, our strategy is as follows. Separately for each party, we estimate a model of vote change towards the party (joining the party) based on issue-related voter-party affinity measures, modelling which issues led voters to join a particular party. We then present results of all these models (in terms of issues that drove change towards each party).

For presentation reasons, we also rank parties on their electoral performance, arranging them along a winner-loser dimension that allows quick identification of issues that drove success of the most important winning parties. However, attraction of new votes is not limited to winning parties: the actual gain or loss balance of a party in fact hides much more complex patterns of inflows and outflows, so that – very often – even overall losing parties still attract inflows, perhaps in specific constituencies. This is why we assess issue predictors of vote inflows for *all* parties (including overall losing parties). Of course, for losing parties vote inflows will be less important than vote outflows; but – in issue terms – inflows mean that

perhaps there is some particular issue stance that – while unable to counterbalance the outflows produced by other "losing" issue stances – indeed produced a positive impact, able somehow to limit overall losses.

This ability of modelling the "winning" side even for losing parties, allowing the inclusion of all parties in the analysis, opens up extremely interesting possibilities. On the one hand, this grounds issue characterization of a particular election on a much larger basis of data; on the other hand, this identifies, in general, all issue goals that drove vote inflows to any party, regardless of each party's final winning or losing status. Compared to party-based characterization (which categorically distinguishes between winners and losers, and mechanically identifies entire party platforms as some popular mandate), such issue-based characterization is in fact able to identify "winning" issues even among losing parties; thus providing an effective and unbiased issue characterization of electoral change.

5. DATA AND METHODS

We rely on individual-level data from the voter component of the ICCP (Issue Competition Comparative Project) dataset (De Sio et al. 2019). The project fielded pre-electoral CAWI surveys to samples designed to represent voting age population (N≈1000 in each country) before general elections in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and UK between 2017 and 2018. These six elections came perhaps in the season that saw the most striking success of challenger parties, right after Brexit and the election of Donald Trump.[5] A distinctiveness of these surveys lies in the large number of issues included (approx. 30 in each country) and in the country-specific issue operationalization: for each election, country experts identified issues expected to be relevant in the campaign, and developed corresponding items aimed at capturing the actual, country-specific issue framing at campaign time in both general (positional/valence) and specific (question wording) terms (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2020).

Goal credibility items as issue-specific voter-party affinities, generalizable across positional and valence issues

Perhaps the key distinctiveness of ICCP surveys lies in the adoption of homogeneous measurement of respondent issue attitudes across both *positional* and *valence* issues. This is achieved (see D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2020 for details) by first introducing a reconceptualization of political issues in terms of the more general concept of *political goal* (Parsons, Bales, and Shils 1953), with positional and valence issues simply differentiated by the number and opposition of goals involved (two rival goals for positional issues, one shared goal for valence issues; see Stokes 1963). This reconceptualization also affects the related notion of *respondent-party affinity* on a given issue. Classic operationalization of such affinity differentiates between items capturing *party competence* on valence issues, and party and respondent *positions* on positional issues (allowing to compute respondent-party *proximity* as a measure of issue affinity). This leads to party affinity measures that clearly differ across the two types of issues in question wording and in their construction process. ICCP instead introduces the more general notion of party *credibility* to achieve a particular *goal*, arguing that, unlike the notion of "competence" (appropriate for technical, a-partisan shared goals, but not for divisive, controversial goals defining positional issues) the notion of "credibility" can more appropriately capture the attitudes that a respondent (R) has towards the ability of a certain party to achieve a certain goal, be it divisive or shared, and the issue-related motivations that might drive R to vote for that party (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2020; see also De Sio, Mannoni, and Paparo 2020).

In measurement terms, this allows to achieve almost full homogeneity across the two types of issues. The only difference is that, for positional issues, respondents are additionally first asked to select one of two rival goals.[6] After this point, the same instrument is employed in both cases: a goal label (reporting either the default shared goal – for valence issues – or the R-selected rival goal – for positional issues), followed by a multiple-choice question, asking – for each party – which parties R considers credible to achieve the goal (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Franklin 2020). This item generates a set of party-specific, respondent-assessed issue credibilities, capturing a general notion of issue-specific voter-party affinity across goals, applicable to both positional and valence issues.

Party-specific vote change as dependent variable

Coming to our analysis strategy, its first distinctive element lies in the dependent variable (individual

[5] For details see D'Alimonte, De Sio and Franklin (2020) and the specific country analyses included in the ICCP special issue of *West European Politics* (De Sio and Lachat 2020a).

[6] They are asked to position themselves on an even-numbered (6-point) scale, which allows dichotomous identification of a preferred rival goal, but also offers flexibility for traditional proximity applications.

vote *change*). Separately for each party, this is computed based on two dummy variables (past vote; vote intention) that code, respectively, whether R voted the party in the last general election and whether she intends to vote it in the coming general election.[7] These two variables easily allow to compute whether R has actively *joined* the party (+1) or has stayed neutral (0), i.e. whether R has contributed an inflow to the party. It is important to stress that this *vote change* (rather than vote choice) is the genuine micro-level phenomenon producing the aggregate *electoral change* (increases and decreases for each party) that decides an election. In other words, we argue that studying vote *change* (rather than vote choice) provides a direct insight into the factors that decide an election result. [8]

Predictors and modelling choice

As control variables, we adopt rural/urban residence (4 levels), sex, age class (5 classes), education (3 levels), political interest (1-4 scale), self-assessed living standards (1-7), and intensity of party closeness (from 0=no party closeness to 3=very close). Coming to our focal predictors of vote change, they are represented by the aforementioned, party-specific dichotomous *goal credibility* predictors (whether R considers a party credible to achieve an issue goal). In general, we expect attraction of a voter towards a party (vote change=1) to be associated with a perception of party credibility on key issues. In addition, it is important to note that, for positional issues, these credibility dummies are *unsigned*, i.e. they do not include *which* of the two rival goals (e.g. pro- vs. anti-EU) was selected by the respondent, and thus used as reference for assessing party credibility. This is by design, and it allows to: (a) avoid theoretical assumptions about the perceived issue orientation of a particular party, leaving this to empirical determination (even parties without official issue positions are often clearly perceived on one of two rival sides); (b) estimate a model that includes all issues (and all inflows for that party) without the complexity of separately managing rival issue orientation predictors across multiple issues; (c) avoid collinearity issues that might inappropriately assign "wrong" signs to some significant effects.[9] As a result, our models simply identify, in the first place, which issue credibilities significantly predict inflow towards a party. Then, to determine which of the two rival issue sides drove such inflow, we perform a simple post-hoc analysis: we build a *signed* version of the issue credibility variable (e.g. -1 for deeming the party credible on the anti-EU side; 0 for not deeming the party credible on the chosen EU goal; +1 for deeming the party credible on the pro-EU side) and simply run a

[7] Ideally, the most appropriate choice would imply: (a) using (relatively reliable) last vote, election-specific vote recalls in a long-term panel dataset; or (b) when dealing with a single-election pre-post panel dataset (as in the ICCP case) a comparison between past vote and post-electoral vote *recall* rather than pre-electoral vote *intention*. However, the ICCP dataset – while offering a two-wave, pre-post panel design, with the post-election survey including vote recall – features a lower number of respondents in the second wave of the panel. While acceptable for most applications, this limitation appears particularly problematic when modeling vote change as a function of approx. 30 issues (plus controls), as in fact the effects of this large number of issues would be estimated on a relatively low number of respondents who changed their party in between the two elections. At the same time, we argue that individual vote change is still largely captured already at pre-electoral time (few weeks before the election, when most ICCP surveys were fielded), as it is also the result (aside to short-term factors such as the electoral campaign) of longer-term factors related to the whole experience of the legislature and whose effects are already crystallized in the last weeks before the vote. As a consequence, vote intention should be able to already capture a significant part of the actual electoral change about to come (as indeed confirmed by the large number of effects we detected). As a consequence, we decided to employ vote intentions from the pre-electoral wave, rather than vote recall from the post-electoral, to maximize the number of respondents and estimate more robust effects; and we deem that these advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

[8] In practice, our approach implies relaxing the assumption (implicit in standard models of vote choice) that factors attracting new voters are the same preserving the existing constituency. Indeed, our model of vote change (1 for joining the party, 0 for not joining the party, excluding stable party voters and party quitters) can be considered a binary model of being part of set JP (joining the party) vs. being part of sets JO (joining other parties) or NJ (not joining any). A separate model of party loyalty would instead model being part of S (stable party voters) vs. QP (quitting the party). The two models cover fully separate subsets of the sample, and they jointly cover the whole sample. At the same time, pooling cases from the two models together in a single model would yield a third model of JP+S vs. JO+NJ+QP; but this is in fact a model of voting the party vs. not voting it: a standard model of vote choice. This effectively shows that, indeed, estimating a standard model of vote choice is equivalent to the assumption that the determinants of party loyalty are the same determinants of joining a party. But this assumption is clearly untenable: not only (for obvious reasons) for predictors such as party identification, but also for issue-related predictors. Indeed, the literature (see De Sio and Weber 2014) already distinguishes between pamper issues (aimed at pampering and cultivating the existing party base) and bridge issues (aimed at building bridges towards new voters); moreover, we performed separate estimations of S vs. QP models (available upon request) which clearly show how issue predictors of party loyalty are different from predictors of joining the party. This reinforces even more, we argue, the relevance of our innovative focus on vote change.

[9] Such collinearity issues occasionally happen when including a large number of signed issue predictors in a model: issue predictors that have a theoretically meaningful (and significant) effect in a single-issue model (with controls) occasionally end up with a significant, reversed sign in a model with many issue predictors, especially when other predictors from the same issue domain are included in the model. Using the unsigned version prevents this problem, by simply identifying issue relevance without sign (i.e. no political direction). Also, for these unsigned versions a directional hypothesis applies (a positive effect is expected: issue credibility associated with joining the party) so that we always consider negative coefficients non-significant, as they fail a one-tailed positively-signed significance test.

single-issue model (with controls) of joining the party: the sign of this single issue effect allows to characterize the issue effect with an ideological sign (progressive/conservative orientation)[10]; in the few cases where this single-issue effect is not significant (usually for small or losing parties, i.e. with a low number of joiners, or when party joiners are evenly split across rival goals) we leave the characterization unsigned.[11] The final result of our analysis is then the identification of the issue goals that drove vote inflows for each party;[12] and the final combined reading of relevant issues for all parties provides an effective issue characterization of the elections under analysis.

6. FINDINGS

We summarize results for all our binary logistic regression[13] models (one for each party[14]) in Table 1. Each row, showing results for one party model, reports logit coefficients for statistically significant issue credibility predictors of joining each party, with significance levels. Each coefficient is also prepended by a letter denoting the goal orientation (P for the "progressive" side, C for the "conservative" side) that significantly predicts joining that party (see above); thus, for example, the "P" labelling the significant coefficient for "Economic policy" for GroenLinks in the Netherlands, means that: deeming GroenLinks credible on the *progressive* side on an issue regarding economic policy[15] had a significant effect on joining the party. C is instead reported where credibility on the *conservative* side of an issue predicts joining a party, while a V is reported for valence issues, where credibility on the single "shared" goal is a significant predictor of joining a party.[16]

Given the amount of information reported (the table summarizes significant effects for 38 models of vote change, one for each party, with effects grouped by 10 policy domains), a first overall issue characterization of the whole election season (across six countries) is facilitated by summary rows at the bottom. These report counts of parties presenting significant issue effects in a particular policy domain (first summary row), followed by the balance of conservative vs. progressive goal effects (along with a count of valence goal effects). These summaries are then calculated separately for challenger parties, to provide more detail on these latter.

This first piece of information already provides key evidence for assessing (indeed disconfirming) the first proposition we derived from the literature, i.e. a clear predominance of non-economic, broadly "cultural" issues. This clearly does not appear supported by the data: if we look at the total number of parties rewarded by different issue domains, we clearly see that dominant issue domains (by party impact) are clearly economic. Issue goals related to welfare significantly rewarded 21 of the 38 parties, while economic policy rewarded 19 parties. The first non-economic issue domain (the EU) ranks third (13 parties affected), followed however by immigration, institutional reforms, and another economic domain (the job market) with 9 parties significantly affected. All other cultural issue domains impacted electoral inflows for less than 9 parties (the environment for 7 parties, individual liberties and law and order for 5 parties). All in all, what appears is a clear prevalence of economic over non-economic, broadly "cultural" issues. And this prevalence is also essentially confirmed when looking at the subset of the largest winners (i.e. the top 10 parties/candidates by performance): among these, welfare issues rank first, with 6 top 10 parties affected; followed by the EU (5 parties affected) and the job market and the environment (4 parties affected).

Of course, after the identification of relevant issue domains, actual issue characterization of these elections

[10] For each issue, we assigned the two rival goals to a progressive or conservative side based on the ideal typical conceptualization of 20th century ideological views introduced by Middendorp (1978). See De Sio and Lachat (2020b) for details.

[11] To avoid significant loss of cases, we recoded missing credibilities to no credibility for a party. Also, "stable" voters (voting for the party both in the past and intending to vote it in the coming election) were excluded from the analysis, as they would alter the characteristics of the "zero vote change" rows that act as comparison for nonzero rows in the estimation of the likelihood function.

[12] In principle, one could estimate models of both *inflows* (joining the party) and *outflows* (leaving the party), thus identifying issue drivers of both components. However, while issue determinants of outflows might be of interest for assessing individual party strategies, this is not the focus of this paper; we only analyse determinants of inflows in order to characterize the election through issue determinants of electoral *success*.

[13] Alternatively to our party-specific binary logistic models, one could estimate one multinomial logistic regression model per country, where the dependent variable codes joining one of multiple parties vs. not joining any. However, as our main predictors (issue credibilities) are party-specific, they cannot be used in a multinomial logistic model: a party-specific setup is required.

[14] We excluded from estimation all parties and candidates below 3% in the last general election, to avoid potential numeric instability issues due to a very low number of party joiners.

[15] In this case, the issue of income differences, defined by the two rival statements "Reduce income differences" vs. "Don't reduce income differences". See the Appendix for actual country-specific issue statements with significant effects for each party.

[16] No orientation is reported when – while issue relevance is significantly detected – the *signed* version of the issue predictor does not yield a significantly-signed goal orientation (see the previous section). In substantive terms, this can be due to: (a) low number of party joiners; (b) a potential issue stance ambiguity, when different voters deem the party credible, but projecting (their own) rival positions on an ambiguous party. We do not explore this further in the paper.

requires assessing the prevailing (if any) policy *direction* (conservative/progressive) of these effects. Indeed, assessment of this balance of effects across policy domains provides interesting insights, especially showing differences across economic and cultural issues. First and foremost, economic issues clearly show an overwhelming dominance of *progressive* issue goals. This is clearly the case for economic policy (11 progressive vs. 0 conservative effects) and welfare (7 vs. 0). Some of these effects are best understood with more detail about the actual issue statements in each country (see the Appendix for a full list): in general, significant effects in the economic policy domain are all from statements on *income redistribution* (thus observed orientations are *pro* income redistribution), while those in the welfare domain (both for valence and positional formulations) typically concern aspects such as preserving pension age, public healthcare systems, and schooling. Regarding the job market, although the progressive vs conservative balance is 1 to 1, we also observe that most of the significant effects on vote inflows derive from valence goals: these are mostly concerned with the reduction of unemployment, thus with positions clearly, again, asking for more protection in the economic arena.

Interestingly enough, credibility on the dominant progressive stance across economic domains rewarded not only left-wing parties, but also parties such as Geert Wilders' PVV in the Netherlands (supporting reduction of income differences) and even Marine Le Pen in France (supporting reduction of income differences and preservation of pension age against possible increases): these parties, to some extent unsurprisingly, clearly appear to capture a demand for *protection in the economic arena*. We deem this point important. On the one hand, this presence of same-sign effects across parties of different families confirms the emergence of post-ideological strategies combining credibility on both classically (in traditional 20th century ideologies) *progressive* and *conservative* policy goals (De Sio and Lachat 2020b); on the other hand, this unexpectedly simplifies the overall interpretation of citizens preferences across multiple countries. While success and defeat hit different party families in different countries (depending on party platforms influenced by country-specific patterns of party competition), issue drivers of vote inflows appear instead more similar, thus – paradoxically – providing an issue characterization that is even more parsimonious than a party-based characterization (more on this point later).

This clear dominance of one policy side is, however, not mirrored on non-economic issues, which appear more controversial and polarized. First and foremost, the EU integration domain shows a 8/6 balance, with vote inflows driven in 8 cases by conservative (anti-EU) positions and in 6 by progressive positions. This anti-EU prevalence becomes much stronger when looking at challenger parties only, turning into a 6/1 balance, confirming that the conflict over EU integration is strongly related to the mainstream/challenger distinction. Indeed, this clearly reminds of the original intuition by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), where political conflict emerged out of *opposition* to the policy orientations (on various issues) of the nation-building political elites. Also, this polarized pattern only partly applies to other non-economic domains. Indeed, in the immigration domain we observe a prevalence of conservative effects (9 vs. 1), while for the remaining policy domains, progressive stances prevail, although with different degrees. For individual liberties we find 2 progressive issues against 1 conservative; for the environment the balance is 2 progressive issues against 0 conservative; while the institutional reform domain sees a balance of 3 progressive positions against 1 conservative. Finally, we find only valence statements for what concerns security, and "law and order" (4). Overall, such evidence about cultural, non-economic issues allows an (again, negative) assessment of our second proposition: indeed, the fact that dominant cultural issue stances clearly have different signs across different issue domains, combined with the frequently separate relevance of different cultural issue domains for different parties, suggests that these issues – in empirical terms -hardly combine in an overarching dimension dominating party competition.

While detailed effects and country-specific issue goal statements are reported in the Appendix, this general birds-eye view at significant effects (across issue dimensions) fueling vote inflows for 38 parties suggests that the overall issue characterization of the 2017-18 electoral season in these six Western European countries appears quite different from what expected based on the literature. Despite expectations of a clear dominance of cultural issues (and perhaps of conflicts related to a "transnational cleavage"), party inflows – when properly analyzed at the individual level – appear instead mostly driven by *economic* issues. And these express identifiable policy demands, with parties rewarded by being perceived credible on traditionally progressive goals related to income redistribution, preservation of regulations in the job market (and fight to unemployment), and reinforcement of welfare services. On the contrary, cultural issues show a more controversial picture on both EU integration and immigration (with conservative stances dominantly rewarded on immigration), while environmental issues show more homogeneous prevalence of pro-environmental stances. In a way, this latter hetero-

Table 1. Summary of significant issue effects on vote inflows for parties and candidates (above 3%), listed by electoral performance (binary logistic model estimates, with controls listed in main text; one model per row; see Appendix for full models and N).

Party/candidate ("challengers" in italics)	Electoral perf. vs previous election	Significant issue effects: economic policy domains (with Prog/Cons/Valence orientation)			Significant issue effects: "Cultural" policy domains					
		Economic policy	Job market	Welfare	Immigration	Individual liberties	Security, law and order	Environment	EU	Institutions
PILZ (at)	∞ (new)			V 1.403**						
Macron (fr)	∞ (new)		C 1.719*** V .722*	V .935**					P .977**	
Più Europa (it)	∞ (new)			V 1.829*				V 2.496**		
Lega (it)	+324%				C 1.603*		V 1.235*		C 1.251*	
GroenLinks (nl)	+296%	P 1.272***		P 0.744*			0.868*	V 0.999**	P 1.018**	
AFD (de)	+168%				C 1.662** C .932*					
Dupont-Aignan (fr)	+161%								5.266*** V 3.808*	
FDP (de)	+123%		V 1.162*		C 1.463**			V .989*		
FdI (it)	+120%		V 5.207***	V 3.529**						
Mélénchon (fr)	+76%		2.544***	V 1.229**				P 1.084**	P 1.248**	V 1.484***
PvdD (nl)	+68%	P 2.286***				P 1.112*				1.527*
50plus (nl)	+63%	P 1.907***		V .820* P 1.161**						
D66 (nl)	+53%	V .726* P 2.054***								
CDA (nl)	+46%	1.036*	V 1.182**							
ÖVP (at)	+31%			V .657*	C 1.034***					P .604*
Lab (uk)	+31%			P 1.113**						V 1.074**
PVV (nl)	+30%	P 1.470***			C .994** C .955*				C .816*	
M5S (it)	+29%			V 1.827**						V 1.349*
FPÖ (at)	+27%			V 1.045*					C 1.592***	P 1.200**
Le Pen (fr)	+19%	P 1.071*	1.412** V 1.090*	P 1.085*		V 1.145**			V .773* C 1.323***	
Cons (uk)	+15%								C .900* C 1.203**	V 1.279***
CU (nl)	+10%					C 2.614**				
NEOS (at)	+6%	P 1.445*						1.751*		
B90/Grünen (de)	+6%	2.738**		P 2.371*						P 1.581*
LeU (it)	+3%			P 2.174*			V 2.554*			
SPÖ (at)	+0%	1.240**		V 1.248*	1.168**				P 1.056*	
SP (nl)	-6%	P 2.043***					V .883*			
LibDem (uk)	-6%	P 1.242*		V 1.970**					P 1.577*	C 1.279*
SPD (de)	-20%	P 1.301**		V 1.087*						
CDU-CSU (de)	-20%				P .914* C .997*			P .986**		
VVD (nl)	-20%	2.156***		V 1.411*						
Fillon (fr)	-26%	3.043*	4.327**		C 3.718*	V 3.557*				
PD (it)	-29%	V 3.562*	V 3.819*						P 4.413*	
FI (it)	-36%			P 1.712* V 2.002*			V 2.687**			

Table 1. (Continued).

Party/candidate ("challengers" in italics)	Electoral perf. vs previous election	Significant issue effects: economic policy domains (with Prog/Cons/Valence orientation)			Significant issue effects: "Cultural" policy domains					
		Economic policy	Job market	Welfare	Immigration	Individual liberties	Security, law and order	Environment	EU	Institutions
Grüne (at)	-69%	2.465**		V 1.789*					2.729*	
PvdA (nl)	-77%	V 2.310**	P 1.815*			2.234** 1.798*				
Hamon (fr)	-78%	V 1.729* P 1.902*					P 1.543*			
UKIP (uk)	-86%			V 1.926*						C 1.484* C 1.259*
Total parties affected (of 38 parties)		19	9	21	9	5	5	7	13	9
Cons/prog effect balance (and valence effects)		0/11 (4)	1/1 (6)	0/7 (16)	9/1 (0)	1/2 (2)	0/0 (4)	0/2 (3)	8/6 (2)	1/3 (4)
Challengers affected (of 11 challengers)		3	3	6	3	1	2	1	7	3
…and cons/prog balance		0/3 (0)	0/0 (2)	0/1 (5)	5/0 (0)	0/0 (1)	0/0 (2)	0/1 (0)	6/1 (2)	0/1 (2)

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

geneity across cultural issues gives us, indirectly, a further relevant finding: there appears no evidence of a clearly polarized common "cultural" dimension on non-economic issues, as electorally rewarding stances are mixed across conservative and progressive positions in these different, "cultural" issue domains.

This finally resonates with an observation about the ideological consistency of different parties. Evidence from Table 1 clearly shows the relevance of "cross-ideological" mobilization, i.e. the ability of some parties to attract voters across the board, leveraging credibility – on different issues – on a combination of traditionally progressive and traditionally conservative stances. This argument appears clearly visible in examples such as Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron: the former is rewarded both by conservative stances on the EU and progressive stances on economic policy and welfare; while the latter's success appears driven by – mirrored – progressive stances about the EU, but conservative stances on the job market; both appear exemplifications of two ideal types of cross-ideological mobilization previously labeled "welfare nationalists" and "free-market cosmopolitans" (see in detail De Sio and Lachat 2020b). This point is relevant for the scope of this article, revealing the inadequacy of a simple *party-based* characterization of electoral change that ignores the actual *issue* determinants of vote change. Without issue-based, individual-level findings, it is impossible to understand cross-ideological appeals such as the case of Marine Le Pen (usually simply portrayed as a radical right-winger). Furthermore, compared to classic party-based characterization, relying on party families or party types, our issue-based approach surprisingly proves more parsimonious. As party platforms reflect country-specific party competition patterns, this inevitably leads to country differences making hard to characterize election results across multiple countries. To some extent surprisingly, our party-family-agnostic unpacking of individual-level issue determinants of party success reveals that indeed there are common policy orientations that rewarded parties across the board in multiple countries, making paradoxically easier to determine the pattern of citizen preferences that fueled electoral change in six Western European countries between 2017 and 2018. Indeed, these patterns reveal a common demand for economic protection and for limiting

immigration, albeit combined with progressive stances on environmental protection, and with EU issues more plural and controversial, rewarding parties on both rival sides of this conflict.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we identified the issue of the substantive issue characterization of electoral change, i.e. the aim (of great importance for democratic representation) of identifying specific configurations of citizen preferences that drive a particular electoral change. Looking in perspective, we identified how, in most cases, this effort is pursued based on only indirect information (e.g. the party platform of a winning party, without knowing what actual issue stance drove the success of the party), with a potential for significant biases emerging in the process. Relying on the innovative, issue-oriented ICCP dataset (featuring rich measurement of issue attitudes across a large number of issues, captured in their country-specific framings), we proposed a novel methodology for modelling issue determinants of electoral change at the appropriate individual level, estimating models of individual vote change (towards a party) based on respondent-perceived party credibility on specific issue goals. This allowed us (pooling together different country-specific issue statements into common issue domains) to estimate issue determinants of vote inflows across all relevant parties in six Western European countries in 2017 and 2018 (both winning and losing parties, as these latter also attract vote inflows). Results indeed showed the relevance of this methodology, by clearly contradicting many current interpretations of recent electoral change in Western Europe, which – based on the visibility of cultural issues in many "challenger" parties – claimed a dominant relevance of these non-economic issues. In fact the opposite appears to be true: when properly analysing electoral change at the individual level, a clear dominance of the effects of economic issues emerges (in terms of parties affected), with a large prevalence of rewards for credibility on progressive stances, clearly voicing a demand for economic protection. Non-economic, "cultural" issues matter, but affecting a smaller number of parties; rewarding conservative stances on immigration, but progressive stances on the environment (thus disconfirming the expectation of a common, polarized cultural dimension), and finally with more polarization on the EU dimension. Perhaps this polarization (rewarding both pro- and anti-EU stances) explains the visibility of the EU issue in political comments and the literature; but this visibility – and this, we argue, is an important contribution of this paper – should not be misunderstood for an actual relevance of the issue in driving electoral change. The fact that parties adopt different stances (thus with a publicly visible debate) does not necessarily mean that this issue is a dominant dimension for vote choice; in comparison, economic issues clearly dominated vote inflows, thus appearing definitely more relevant for electoral change across different Western European countries.

This distinctiveness of our findings demonstrates, in our view, a first important result in terms of the broader methodological aims of this paper, along with its implications for future research: individual level, issue-based characterization of electoral change matters. It does so as it removes a number of biases in the actual reconstruction of the configurations of citizen preferences that determined electoral outcomes. But there is a second aspect to which we argue this methodology contributes: the possibility of parsimonious characterization of electoral change across multiple countries. Somehow surprisingly, we found that – beyond the idiosyncrasies of specific party systems – similar issue determinants fuelled the success of parties from different party families in different countries. While, on the one hand, this demonstrates how many parties by now adopt cross-ideological strategies, on the other hand this demonstrates how, beyond the party labels they reward, the demands of citizens in different European countries might have more in common than usually thought. We deem this a promising finding, paving the way for parsimonious and effective identification of citizen demands, and – hopefully – for appropriate, effective policy responsiveness.

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APPENDIX – FULL MODELS' SPECIFICATION IN EACH COUNTRY

Austria

Table A1. Binary logistic models of joining a party, based on issue goal credibilities, with controls (excludes stable party voters)

	FPO	Grune	OVP	NEOS	Pilz	SPO
Rural/Urban (1-4=Urban)	-0.233	0.694	0.0379	-0.0779	-0.0272	-0.0611
Sex (1=Woman)	-0.407	0.720	-0.0772	0.279	-0.259	0.555
Age class (1-5=65+)	-0.153	-0.378	-0.294**	-0.734**	-0.155	-0.376*
Education (1-3=Tertiary)	-0.460	-0.149	-0.297	-0.191	0.493	-0.323
Political interest (1-4=Very interested)	-0.529*	-0.595	-0.320*	0.332	0.659*	0.357
Living standards (1-7=Rich family)	0.0800	0.459	0.100	-0.0536	-0.0218	-0.181
Party closeness (0-3=Very close)	2.024***	1.838	1.082***	2.217*	*-a*	0.460
V! Providing affordable homes	1.026	1.789*	0.133	0.0320	0.367	0.107
V! Fighting poverty of Elderly People	0.564	-1.789	0.290	-0.632	0.302	0.459
V! Protect Austria against terrorist attacks	0.882	-0.175	-0.123	0.339	-0.121	-0.817
V! Fight unemployment	0.193	0.775	0.399	0.678	0.330	-0.208
V! Support economic growth	-0.405	0.795	0.185	0.0279	0.228	0.651
V! Protect the environment	0.433	-2.727*	-0.0149	0.863	-0.0244	0.849
V! Fight crime and keep our communities safe	-0.789	0.0541	0.311	-0.689	0.777	-0.665
V! Providing Social Justice	1.045*	1.920	0.657*	-0.208	1.403**	1.248*
V! Control immigration	-0.0321	-0.00409	0.127	1.138	-0.427	0.114
V! Fight corruption	0.209	-0.189	-0.0924	0.725	0.428	-0.361
P! Keep current pension age or increase it	-0.173	0.466	0.262	0.312	-0.905	0.612
P Reduce income differences or not	0.297	-2.149	0.0405	1.445*	0.908	0.295
P Taxes or social services	-0.177	0.173	-0.0694	0.811	-0.208	-0.490
P Increase the minimum wage or not	-1.200*	-0.975	0.220	-0.869	-0.638	0.359
P Deregulate the job market or not	-1.066	-0.244	0.376	1.131	0.640	0.715
P Abolish the obligatory membership in trade associations or not	0.562	0.637	-0.177	0.0858	0.485	-0.772
P! Decrease unemployment at the expense of high national debt or not	-0.774	1.690	0.0113	-3.067**	0.745	0.293
P Extend surveillance measures or not	0.133	-0.737	0.0822	0.768	0.491	0.659
P Austria should have a property tax on inheritance or not	0.702	2.465**	0.408	0.424	0.227	1.240**
P Introduce stronger direct democracy measures or not	1.200**	-0.196	0.604*	1.220	0.757	0.755
P Promoting sustainable energy or not	0.318	2.729*	-0.376	1.751*	-0.806	-1.022
P Diesel cars should be banned or not	-0.0649	-0.558	-0.295	-0.388	-0.230	0.356
P! Stay in the EU or leave it	1.592***	-1.291	0.343	0.798	0.173	1.056*
P! Keep current asylum rules or make them more restrictive	1.536	0.131	0.471	0.330	0.375	-0.0568
P! Restrict access to welfare benefits for immigrants or not	-0.219	0.825	0.290	-0.488	0.453	0.783
P! Foreigners should fully adapt to Austrian culture or not	-0.268	-0.553	1.034***	0.578	0.116	1.168**
P! The EU has to enforce refugee quota or each country should decide by its own	0.872	1.632	-0.392	-0.571	-1.344*	0.148
P End or allow freedom of movement from the EU	0.0917	0.188	-0.212	-0.801	-0.0789	-0.0512
P Politics should implement gender quota or not	0.109	-0.387	-0.156	-0.291	-0.289	-0.122
P Allow gay marriages or not	0.0368	1.822	-0.438	0.0591	0.216	0.0815
P Introduce a comprehensive school for all children until 14 or not	-0.324	-0.0211	0.122	0.304	-0.868	-0.523
Constant	-2.533*	-7.867**	-2.093**	-4.958**	-6.857***	-5.344***
Observations	814	943	907	989	1037	855
Pseudo R^2	0.519	0.513	0.301	0.444	0.308	0.436

P = positional issues, V = valence issues, ! denotes above-average aggregate issue saliency
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
-a Variables omitted for multicollinearity issues

France

Table A2. Binary logistic models of joining a party, based on issue goal credibilities, with controls (excludes stable party voters)

	Fillon	Hamon	Le Pen	Macron	Mélenchon	Dupont-Aignan
Rural/Urban (1-4=Urban)	0.249	-0.161	-0.0962	-0.150	0.172	0.563
Sex (1=Woman)	1.504	0.282	0.141	0.261	0.337	1.197
Age class (1-5=65+)	-0.487	-0.128	-0.0650	-0.0928	-0.0466	0.334
Education (1-3=Tertiary)	2.203*	-0.499	0.298	-0.0466	-0.569*	0.295
Political interest (1-4=Very interested)	-0.991	0.0320	-0.579**	-0.351*	0.0499	-1.467*
Living standards (1-7=Rich family)	0.144	-0.395	-0.0562	0.199	-0.114	0.459
Party closeness (0-3=Very close)	0.688	1.575***	0.876*	*-a*	0.870*	2.196*
V Make France count more in Europe	1.244	-0.779	0.773*	0.323	0.125	3.808*
V Make EU more democratic	-0.293	0.940	0.427	-0.442	1.484***	0.360
V! Support economic growth	0.983	1.729*	0.415	0.320	0.0942	0.385
V! Fight corruption	-1.452	0.928	0.434	0.507	0.173	-0.563
V! Protect the environment	-0.738	-0.108	-0.706	-0.991*	-0.569	*-a*
V! Protect France om the terrorist threat	-0.632	-0.294	0.365	0.0758	-0.707	1.249
V Make women's role in society more important	3.557*	-2.024*	1.145**	-0.435	-0.154	1.908
V! Fight unemployment	1.139	-0.0919	1.090*	0.722*	0.649	-7.361*
V! Improve the quality of education	1.828	1.594	-1.385*	0.935**	1.229**	-3.234
P! Deregulate the job market or not	4.327**	1.153	1.412**	1.719***	2.544***	1.882
P Lower or increase pension age	-1.754	0.853	1.085*	0.0815	0.0872	3.720
P! Reduce income differences or not	3.043*	-0.157	1.071*	0.524	0.565	-4.899
P Limit or encourage economic globalisation	0.949	1.902*	-0.576	-0.215	-1.053*	-0.881
P! Stay in the EU or leave it	-2.778	0.693	1.323***	0.977**	-0.757	5.266***
P! Leave the Euro or not	1.444	-0.287	-0.142	0.199	1.248**	-0.0864
P Abandon nuclear energy or not	-0.765	-1.217	-0.769	-0.00459	1.084**	-6.601*
P Restrict access to abortion or not	1.158	-0.371	0.783	0.371	0.224	*-a*
P Legalise euthanasia or keep it illegal	1.171	-0.529	-1.562*	0.0752	-0.177	*-a*
P Repeal gay marriages or keep them	0.252	0.675	-0.361	0.0511	0.0622	3.508
P Legalise soft drugs or not	1.269	1.543*	-0.729	0.172	0.359	1.911
P! Keep current immigration rules or restrict them	0.581	0.412	0.384	0.152	-0.264	2.254
P! Restrict welfare for immigrants or not	-7.283**	-2.151*	0.345	-0.315	-0.116	0.567
P! Accept more refugees or limit them	3.718*	0.344	0.258	-0.328	0.107	0.539
P Forbid or authorise Islamic veil in public spaces	-2.740	0.627	0.400	-0.0108	-0.302	-1.963
Constant	-11.01***	-2.710	-3.225***	-2.896***	-3.724***	-8.634*
Observations	923	878	901	1096	1040	1015
Pseudo R^2	0.616	0.447	0.457	0.376	0.474	0.612

P = positional issues, V = valence issues, ! denotes above-average aggregate issue saliency
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
-a Variables omitted for multicollinearity issues

Germany

Table A3. Binary logistic models of joining a party, based on issue goal credibilities, with controls (excludes stable party voters)

	AfD	B90/ Grünen	Cdu/Csu	FDP	SPD
Rural/Urban (1-4=Urban)	0.0760	0.0368	0.0985	-0.157	0.0340
Sex (1=Woman)	-0.439	1.794*	0.317	0.588	-0.596
Age class (1-5=65+)	-0.105	-0.328	-0.303*	0.113	-0.114
Education (1-3=Tertiary)	-0.365	1.529**	0.0804	-0.00473	-0.290
Political interest (1-4=Very interested)	-0.535*	-0.712	-0.212	-0.0874	-0.201
Living standards (1-7=Rich family)	-0.0349	0.00718	-0.383**	0.333*	-0.105
Party closeness (0-3=Very close)	1.318*	0.809	0.591*	1.255***	1.728***
V! Providing affordable homes	-0.248	-0.511	0.700	-0.498	0.439
V! Fighting poverty of elderly	0.993	0.183	-0.0183	-0.217	-0.000556
V Maintaining infrastructure	1.396	-0.178	-0.657	0.435	0.0193
V! Protect from terrorism	0.719	-0.252	-0.154	-0.563	0.0690
V! Fight unemployment	0.879	-0.555	0.703	1.162*	0.281
V Support the economic growth	-1.144	-0.136	0.276	0.159	-0.490
V! Protect the environment	-1.223	-1.222	0.143	0.989*	-0.180
V! Support for families and children	0.212	-1.689	0.469	-0.375	-0.309
V! Fighting crime	0.0645	0.356	-0.0545	0.355	-0.591
V! Providing social justice	1.017	1.281	-0.105	0.207	1.087*
P! Limit the number of refugees or accept more of them	1.662**	0.416	0.997*	0.485	0.323
P! Make immigration rules more restrictive or not	0.906	-0.886	0.0724	1.463**	0.322
P! Keep the decision of nuclear power phase-out or withdraw from it	0.899	2.192	0.986**	0.883	0.481
P! The EU has to enforce refugee quota or each country should decide by its own	0.217	1.008	0.914*	-0.752	-0.286
P! Stay in the EU or leave it	0.596	-0.464	0.0748	0.173	0.0669
P! Use the current budget surplus for reducing taxes or for infrastructure	0.722	2.738**	0.238	0.695	1.301**
P! Increase pension age or keep it at current levels	-0.984	-0.374	0.504	-1.163*	0.214
P Politics should implement gender quotas or not	0.577	-2.107*	0.489	-0.452	0.168
P Reduce income differences or not	-0.850	-0.419	-0.454	-0.126	0.380
P In order to maintain the EURO, Germany should transfer money to poorer countries	0.529	-0.235	-0.0662	-0.0965	-0.426
P! Minimal wages should be increased to 10 EUR or they should be abolished	0.230	2.371*	-0.363	0.595	0.788
P Deregulate the job market or keep current regulations	-1.281	0.0793	-0.184	-0.165	0.284
P Building more wind turbines or not	-0.951	-0.712	-0.865	0.538	-0.213
P Diesel cars should be banned or not	0.418	1.589	0.532	0.184	0.343
P Foreigners should adapt to national culture or not	0.932*	1.625	-0.175	0.703	0.249
P Repeal gay marriages or keep them	-2.270**	-0.357	-0.141	-0.715	0.236
P Introduce possibilities for binding referenda or not	0.369	1.581*	0.246	-0.293	-0.342
Constant	-2.210*	-9.101**	-1.945*	-5.588***	-3.045**
Observations	946	902	722	947	791
Pseudo R^2	0.538	0.494	0.287	0.322	0.349

P = positional issues, V = valence issues, ! denotes above-average aggregate issue saliency
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Italy

Table A4. Binary logistic models of joining a party, based on issue goal credibilities, with controls (excludes stable party voters)

	FdI	FI	Lega	Leu	M5S	PD	+ EU
Rural/Urban (1-4=Urban)	-0.822	0.689*	0.218	0.0856	0.0973	-0.692	-0.265
Sex (1=Woman)	1.907*	1.089	0.110	-0.0401	-0.987*	0.995	0.291
Age class (1-5=65+)	-0.739	-0.552*	0.249	0.110	0.0862	0.842	-0.108
Education (1-3=Tertiary)	-1.346	-0.479	-0.534	0.533	0.309	0.190	0.596
Political interest (1-4=Very interested)	1.233	-0.0679	-0.126	0.335	-0.0953	0.427	-0.313
Living standards (1-7=Rich family)	0.905	-0.317	-0.0260	-0.858	-0.314	-0.899	-0.594
Party closeness (0-3=Very close)	3.133***	2.289***	2.515***	3.867***	2.120***	3.542***	2.198***
V! To fight unemployment	5.207***	1.478	-0.352	0.146	0.328	3.819*	0.302
V! To fight corruption	0.351	0.272	1.235*	2.554*	0.354	-4.315*	-1.878
V! Support economic growth	-1.386	-0.565	-0.460	-0.0200	-0.264	3.562*	-0.0115
V! To protect <COUNTRY> against terrorist attack	0.380	-0.117	-0.121	-2.441	-0.340	-1.811	-0.239
V! To make <COUNTRY> count more in Europe	-2.157	0.283	-0.602	1.571	0.322	0.939	0.861
V! To fight poverty	-4.601*	-0.772	-0.210	-1.620	0.360	-1.476	0.520
V! To Fight crime and keep our communities safe	1.811	-0.885	0.872	1.088	0.621	0.409	-2.361
V! To reduce costs of politics	0.293	2.687**	-0.299	-0.689	-0.0445	-0.00203	-0.0686
V! To improve NHS	0.195	2.002*	-0.392	1.165	-1.547*	1.094	1.541
V! To protect the environment	-0.984	-0.133	0.852	1.092	-0.658	-0.232	2.496**
V! Improve the quality of education	3.529**	-0.270	0.0908	-0.904	1.827**	1.156	1.829*
V! Renovate Italian politics	1.179	-0.0417	0.385	1.698	1.349*	1.570	1.130
P Reduce income differences or not	0.558	-0.377	-0.225	-1.373	-0.903	0.496	-1.513
P Increase freedom of enterprises or not	1.139	0.274	-0.163	0.642	0.209	-1.748	0.227
P! Maintain actual law on pension age or reduce pension age	-3.610	1.171	0.527	-2.591	0.0259	1.607	0.291
P Abolish university tuition fees or not	2.222	-0.712	0.245	2.174*	0.974	-2.919	1.657
P! Maintain actual tax progressivity or introduce flat tax	-1.120	-0.191	0.711	-0.651	0.407	0.822	0.915
P Do not introduce minimum wage or introduce it	1.762	1.149	-0.520	-0.543	0.472	-2.101	0.189
P Introduce a citizenship income or not	-4.017*	-0.263	-0.285	-0.00337	0.857	-0.475	-0.627
P! Increase fight against tax evasion or not	0.674	-1.069	0.408	-3.261*	-0.0686	2.101	-0.845
P Increase economic benefit for families with children or not	-1.634	1.712*	0.600	1.067	-0.368	-0.642	-0.285
P Limit or encourage economic globalization	0.700	-0.564	-0.0939	1.413	1.110	2.539	-1.139
P Stay or leave the Euro	1.856	-0.223	1.251*	2.454	0.663	-1.577	2.124
P! Stay or leave the UE	0.861	0.179	-0.536	1.499	-0.813	4.413*	0.239
P Make political economic of UE more flexible or not	0.891	0.770	0.172	1.145	0.448	-0.0911	-2.317*
P Ius soli or not	0.917	-2.361*	-0.230	1.060	0.699	1.656	1.404
P Reduce access to welfare benefits for immigrants or not	-0.371	-0.0130	0.303	-2.198	1.224	-2.939*	-0.752
P! Continue to accept refugees or limit refugees	1.433	0.263	1.603*	1.091	0.149	2.565	1.274
P Maintain biological testament or abolish it	-4.039	-0.576	-0.422	-0.492	-0.719	-0.0463	-1.883
P Abolish same-sex unions or maintain them	0.776	0.144	-0.0793	1.411	-0.707	1.892	-0.00478
P Legalize soft drugs or not	-1.105	0.406	-0.714	-1.499	-0.811	-0.465	1.639
P! Maintain vaccines compulsory or not	-1.325	1.117	0.592	0.521	0.607	-3.101	0.614
P Legalize prostitution or not	1.011	-0.640	0.706	0.134	0.654	-3.677	0.337
P Decriminalize excess of legitimate defense or not	1.855	0.693	0.158	0.280	-0.787	2.216	0.260
Constant	-10.68**	-4.647*	-5.944***	-6.876*	-3.921**	-9.404*	-4.928*
Observations	979	892	940	951	786	716	997
Pseudo R^2	0.693	0.584	0.605	0.712	0.617	0.760	0.675

p-values in parentheses
P = positional issues, V = valence issues, ! denotes above-average aggregate issue saliency
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Netherlands

Table A5. Binary logistic models of joining a party, based on issue goal credibilities, with controls (excludes stable party voters)

	50 plus	CDA	CU	D66	GL	Pvda	PvdD	PVV	SP	VVD
Rural/Urban (1-4=Urban)	0.117	0.158	-0.229	0.202	-0.214	0.401	-0.00969	-0.0430	0.190	-0.406
Sex (1=Woman)	0.0638	0.257	0.696	-0.297	0.605*	1.120	0.203	0.113	0.0514	0.0138
Age class (1-5=65+)	0.286*	-0.0855	-0.0799	-0.346**	-0.302**	-0.135	-0.614***	-0.0427	-0.196	-0.610**
Education (1-3=Tertiary)	0.302	0.131	0.134	0.142	0.132	0.545	-0.189	-0.102	-0.691***	0.313
Political interest (1-4=Very interested)	-0.696**	-0.142	-0.446	-0.106	-0.207	-0.449	-0.427	-0.349	-0.400*	0.105
Living standards (1-7=Rich family)	0.0709	0.126	-0.0412	-0.00164	-0.162	-0.602*	-0.189	-0.273*	0.183	0.104
Party closeness (0-3=Very close)	1.650***	1.579***	1.827***	1.603***	1.672***	2.127	1.593***	1.380***	1.950***	1.676***
V! Protect the Netherlands against terrorist attacks	-0.255	-0.136	-0.747	-0.157	-0.217	-2.669*	0.0855	0.107	0.883*	-0.231
V! Maintain the current economic growth	0.125	0.152	0.292	0.726*	-0.654	2.310**	-0.255	0.537	0.324	0.601
V! Further reduce unemployment	-0.289	1.182**	0.238	0.621	0.224	-1.315	-0.830	-0.420	0.0248	0.229
V! Fight environmental pollution	0.459	-1.037*	1.561	0.151	0.999**	-1.773	-0.0483	-0.346	-0.226	-1.087
V! Improve care for the elderly and the disabled	0.820*	0.107	-0.0261	0.608	-0.700*	-1.085	-0.420	0.377	0.224	1.411*
P Reduce income differences or not	1.907***	1.036*	1.738	2.054***	1.272***	-0.458	2.286***	1.470***	2.043***	2.156***
P! Fixed term contracts or not	0.445	0.637	0.990	0.551	-0.0998	1.815*	0.182	0.227	-0.578	0.418
P Maintain or restrict welfare benefits for immigrants	-1.095	0.648	0.750	0.0856	0.157	2.234**	1.006	0.112	0.353	-0.930
P! Maintain or reduce the number of refugees	-1.771*	0.580	0.0416	0.506	0.694	-0.612	-0.995	0.955*	0.315	0.743
P! Completely close the Dutch borders to immigrants or not	0.333	-0.583	0.676	-0.0699	0.0339	0.482	0.736	0.994**	0.167	0.905
P! Foreigners can preserve their own culture or not	0.536	-0.307	0.565	-0.817	0.395	1.798*	-0.240	0.174	-0.787	0.707
P! Abolish the deductible in health insurance or not	-0.0790	-0.0981	-1.450	0.227	0.744*	-0.679	0.0758	0.234	0.256	-0.0227
P! Reduce the pension age to 65 or not	1.161**	0.435	0.907	-0.877*	0.0905	-0.0359	0.561	0.603	0.666	-0.421
P Allow elderly to be assisted in ending their life or not	0.00860	0.0139	2.614**	0.419	0.379	-1.578	0.160	-0.564	-0.0682	-0.148
P Maintain the current weed policy or legalise it	0.406	0.411	-0.602	-0.270	0.0594	-0.220	-0.283	0.112	-0.611	0.0764
P Abolish or maintain the student loans	0.165	0.345	-0.798	-0.0188	0.0316	1.241	-1.943	0.510	0.0360	0.878
P Allow binding referenda or not	-0.475	-0.359	0.333	-0.00787	-0.126	0.827	1.527*	0.241	-0.0415	-0.293
P Increase defense spending or not	0.153	0.0332	-0.966	0.302	0.868*	0.989	1.441	-0.185	0.151	-1.047
P! Leave the EU or not	0.149	-0.161	-2.491	-0.0548	1.018**	-0.142	0.154	0.816*	-0.846	0.0703
P Increase tax on meat or not	0.957	0.516	0.124	-1.073*	0.131	-0.252	1.112*	-0.564	0.201	-0.0315
Constant	-5.557***	-5.431***	-5.180*	-3.914***	-3.291***	-5.814**	-1.539	-2.827***	-2.870***	-4.407**
Observations	1947	1892	1941	1893	1920	1732	1934	1670	1740	1725
Pseudo R^2	0.405	0.379	0.522	0.441	0.504	0.391	0.448	0.566	0.453	0.414

P = positional issues, V = valence issues, ! denotes above-average aggregate issue saliency
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

United Kingdom

Table A6. Binary logistic models of joining a party, based on issue goal credibilities, with controls (excludes stable party voters)

	Cons	Lab	LibDem	UKIP
Rural/Urban (1-4=Urban)	-0.152	0.311*	-0.419*	-0.530
Sex (1=Woman)	0.492	-0.255	0.668	0.338
Age class (1-5=65+)	0.172	-0.241	-0.247	-0.451*
Education (1-3=Tertiary)	0.361*	0.0742	0.246	-0.648
Political interest (1-4=Very interested)	-0.0413	-0.382*	-0.168	-0.199
Living standards (1-7=Rich family)	0.00817	-0.0620	0.256	-0.332
Party closeness (0-3=Very close)	1.319*	1.782***	1.418*	2.610
V! Protect the UK from terrorist attacks	-0.157	0.501	0.330	-1.020
V! Reduce unemployment	0.640	-0.472	-0.510	0.497
V! Improve the NHS	0.111	0.747	0.287	0.644
V Protect the environment	0.378	-0.176	1.037	-3.147
V! Improve the quality of schools	0.0851	0.0861	1.970**	-0.519
V! Control immigration	0.337	-0.399	0.00492	0.283
V! Fight crime and keep our communities safe	-0.277	0.601	-1.769*	-0.490
V! Protect pensions	0.213	-0.0602	0.722	1.926*
V! Boost economic growth	-0.247	-0.419	0.876	0.923
V! Provide leadership for the country	1.279***	1.074**	0.187	1.280
P! Stay in the EU or leave it	1.203**	0.588	1.577*	1.259*
P! Taxes or social services	0.699	1.113**	0.0551	0.402
P Maintain or dismantle Britain's nuclear weapons	0.518	0.339	-1.277	0.400
P Expand or limit the provision of grammar schools	0.462	0.169	0.376	0.0353
P Ban or allow Islamic veil in public spaces	-0.376	-0.212	-1.038	0.539
P! End or allow freedom of movement from the EU	0.355	0.259	0.320	1.484*
P Public or private money to build affordable homes	-0.248	0.351	1.242*	-0.474
P Increase the minimum wage or not	0.0936	0.281	-0.644	0.219
P! Remain or leave the European Single Market	0.900*	-0.125	0.694	0.261
P Reduce income differences or not	0.106	-0.251	-0.802	-0.542
P Allow Scottish referendum on independence or not	-0.0159	-0.238	1.279*	0.387
P Maintain or scrap the cost of university tuition fees	-0.365	0.620	-0.376	-0.219
P Allow or prohibit the use of fracking	-0.302	-0.273	-0.854	-0.612
P Ban or maintain zero hours contracts	-0.0141	-0.445	-0.347	0.823
P! Restrict or maintain welfare benefits for immigrants	-0.133	-0.0322	-0.235	-0.441
P Foreigners should fully adapt to British culture or not	-0.0546	0.575	-0.584	0.0647
P Keep or repeal gay marriages	-0.521	-0.491	0.747	-0.638
P Nationalize Britain's railways or not	-0.0555	-0.0262	0.845	0.0244
Constant	-4.767***	-2.674**	-4.820***	-0.526
Observations	665	687	888	843
Pseudo R^2	0.406	0.350	0.390	0.438

P = positional issues, V = valence issues, ! denotes above-average aggregate issue saliency
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A7. Summary of significant issue effects on vote inflows for parties and candidates

	Total parties affected (of 38 parties)	Significant issue effects on vote inflows		
		Conservative	Progressive	"Valence"
Economic issues:				
Welfare	21	0	7	16
Economic policy	19	0	11	4
Job market	9	1	1	6
Cultural issues:				
EU	13	8	6	2
Immigration	9	9	1	0
Institutions	9	1	3	4
Environment	7	0	2	3
Individual liberties	5	1	2	2
Security	5	0	0	4

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Looking through the mirror: representativeness of the Italian party system before the 2018 General Election

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Abstract. The use of the Internet and communication technologies has dramatically increased in recent times. This change has affected every aspect of political life, with electoral campaigns and parties making no exception. One of the most significant advancements on the theme is the spread of Voting Advice Applications (VAAs). These tools are developed before elections to match users' policy preferences to those of the parties running. By looking at the dataset created with the answers of the users of an Italian VAA, *Navigatore Elettorale*, this study aims at understanding the representativeness of the six main parties running in the 2018 General Election. Through the development of a Representative Deficit Index, the study will also assess the key policy areas in which each of these parties performed best in the eyes of the electorate. The finding shows a diversified pattern of (in)successes for each of the parties, with some unexpected results.

Keywords: representation, electoral campaigns, Voting Advice Applications, political parties.

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, political parties entered a path of decreasing trust and confidence. Many reasons contributed to this decline, with the results that, today, the decline of these organisations can be seen from many different points of observation (Ignazi 2020). One of the reasons behind this drop in confidence has been explained by a process of detachment of parties from voters' social bases, whereas parties have progressively become similar to public agencies, losing their linkage with society (Mair 2013).

Political representation is usually referred to as the relationship between voters (or citizens in general) and their elected counterparts (Pitkin 1967), where the former are acting in the name or in trust of the latter. This relationship is often mediated through parties, which are supposed to act as the main link between voters and candidates or elected representatives, and when parties fail to perform this role, the whole representative circuit

is affected. For this reason, the theme of representation, and representation of opinions and policy preferences in particular, becomes of particular interest for the understanding of this complex process of party change and party decline.

Departing from this strand of literature, the present work will assess the representativeness of parties running in the 2018 Italian General Election through a partial innovation of the methodology originally proposed by Alvarez et al. (2014) and further discussed by Bright et al. (2020). As a matter of fact, the theme has not been systematically assessed in the previous literature, while still being of great interest for the understanding of the Italian party system and politics. The Italian case is of particular interest since it has been often referred to as an important example of the decay of democracy and representation. Italian parties are fragile and, since the beginning of the so-called "Second Republic", they tend to suffer from an increasing distrust, which is reflected in membership numbers, turnout rates and party system fragmentation (Pizzimenti 2020). Trust in political parties decreased to a point that in 2018 only 5% of Italian voters declared they trusted them. In this scenario, Italy has become the first Western country where populists gained a majority and formed a coalition government together (Garzia 2018), capitalizing on their discourse highlighting a division between the "good people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde 2018). Under this setting, the study of the distance between voters and parties becomes of particular interest for the understanding of the Italian party system.

Thanks to the dataset generated from the Italian Voting Advice Application (VAA) *Navigatore Elettorale*, we were able to calculate an index that measures the distance from each potential voter from its best-matching party or, in other words, a representative deficit. This representative deficit can be considered an indicator of the state of the Italian democracy, and as such it will help to shed some lights on the reasons behind this lack of representativeness of Italian parties in terms of issues covered during the electoral campaign.

The contribution is structured as follows. The first section will be dedicated to a discussion on the meaning of representation and the main challenges related to its analysis and conceptualization. Then, after an analysis of the advantages of using VAA data for assessing congruence between parties and voters, the second section will be devoted to a recognition of the Italian case and a discussion of some of the expectations which will guide our analysis. The third section will be dedicated to an explanation of the data and methods which we used, after which we will present our results. Our findings show a diversified pattern of congruence between parties and voters on different themes, with some unexpected results.

VOTING ADVICE APPLICATIONS AND REPRESENTATION

The term "representation" is perhaps one of the most frequently used words in political writings, but the discussion over what representation actually means came extremely late. In her archetypical work "The Concept of Representation" of 1967, Hannah Pitkin defines political representation as:

> acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. The representative must act independently; his action must involve discretion and judgement; he must be the one who acts. The represented must also be (conceived as) capable of independent action and judgement, not merely being taken care of. (Pitkin 1967, p. 209)

This means that a representative must not represent only its electorate or constituents, but rather behave as a trustee taking care of the public interest and his or her understanding of what is good and what is not. Based on this theoretical framework, there is a continuous tension between the "trustee" model and the "delegate" model of representation, with the former acting in the name of the public interest and the latter acting in the name of those who directly elected him.

Pitkin's seminal work traced the path for almost all following studies on the idea of representation, with no substantial innovation on the core concept, but rather expanding on some aspects of it, providing additional arguments in favour of Pitkin's idea or building on the need for accountability for representatives.

What is important to note, as many studies demonstrate (for a review see for instance Ashworth 2012), is that this tension between the two models of representation can result in important differences in the way voters tend to evaluate the performances of the candidates, as some could appreciate more congruence between citizens' preferences and the policies put forward by the elected politicians, while others might prefer to look at outcomes rather than at the policies themselves (Fox & Shotts 2009).

Many scholars seem to converge on the idea that political representation traditionally conceptualized is in crisis (see, for instance, Conti et al. 2018). Some of the indicators usually taken to assess the extent of this crisis are voter turnout, party membership, party fragmentation, levels of engagement with politics in citizens, levels of trust in politics, and many others. Since modern

democracies have their roots in parties and representation in general, this crisis has often been referred to as a crisis of democracy in general.

The common assumption of these studies is that the ongoing decline in party membership, voter turnout, satisfaction with democracy and the recent success of anti-establishment parties are all symptoms of an ill democracy. This anti-democratic trend has recently led many scholars to talk about a "Democracy Disfigured" (Urbinati 2014), to predict the "end of representative politics" (Tormey 2015) or the "hollowing of Western Democracies" (Mair 2013).

In this scenario, most modern parties suffered a downfall of membership (Van Biezen et al. 2011), and their role has shifted from representing society to governing the state (Katz & Mair 1995). Moreover, the growing tension between responsibility and responsiveness, and its consequent increase in the "cost of ruling" (Mair 2009), resulted in the crisis of democracy taking the form of a crisis of democratic representation.

This decline in trust in democracy and parties affected most western countries, with Italy making no exception. Indeed, the decline of confidence in parties in Italy stemmed from many different reasons but resulted in the same distrust observed elsewhere (Morlino 1996). However, the Italian case is of particular interest for the study of party representativeness, since the structural weaknesses of the party system, along with some systemic deficiencies, caused Italian parties to be generally more fragile and dynamic (Pizzimenti 2020).

However, there are indeed some clues indicating that citizens' interest in politics has not abated. The growing success of VAAs in Italy and abroad suggests that many citizens are seeking information on parties and elections and are willing to spend time to make an informed decision.

One of the ways VAAs could help to contrast the crisis of democracy is their explicit aim of matching the opinion of citizens with parties' policy positioning. This way, VAAs can help voters gather the information they need in an easy and engaging way, perhaps facilitating their vote and convincing them to cast it (Garzia 2010; Kamoen et al. 2015).

Given their way of delivering information, VAAs are useful tools for assessing the representativeness of parties and party systems. Nonetheless, the study of representation through Voting Advice Applications is not as popular as other fields of research on VAAs. On the other hand, some interest has sprouted recently and some works have been published on the matter.

In order to study representation, a flourishing body of literature takes as a source of information party manifestos before elections, and then compares them with surveys of public opinion on salient issues (e.g. Ezrow et al. 2010; Adams et al. 2004). The most important source for the positioning of parties through their manifestos is with no doubt the "Comparative Manifesto Project" (CMP). However, recently some scholars started to drop the classical CMP dataset in favour of VAA datasets, where users and parties are directly confronted on the same issues, with the same words and with no relevant discrepancy between parties and voters, overcoming an important limitation of the research with the CMP.

When working with VAAs and representation, the question of the validity of such studies is paramount. These applications look at party manifestos, leaders' declarations, party websites and expert surveys before the elections, and therefore they mainly focus on promises and pledges done by parties and candidates rather than policy outputs.

Voting Advice Applications suit well within most of the classical conceptualizations of representation. They deliver easy to understand information about political parties, candidates and their positions with a reliable source, which is usually accessible to all users. This is fundamental for monitoring and eventually sanctioning elected representatives with an *ex-post* control (the link between pledges and parliamentary behaviour), but also for a proper evaluation of candidates through an *ex-ante* control (Ladner 2016). Through the information they provide, they foster political representation and the whole democratic process (Fivaz & Schwarz 2007).

As shown, the *ex-post* control has been thoroughly studied through VAAs, but the way through which VAAs foster an *ex-ante* control is still underrated and has not seen any significant work.

The link between electoral participation and engagement on the one hand, and VAA usage on the other hand, was made more clear by a work by Alvarez et al. (2014), who argued that the degree to which this relationship is true for any election utilising a VAA can be measured through what they called "representative deficit", defined as "the degree to which the party list produced by the VAA fails to match the demand: the lower the match, the higher the representative deficit, i.e. the worse a voter's issue preferences are reflected by the political supply" (p. 229). In more practical terms, the deficit is measured by calculating the degree to which the best-matching party fails to match voters' preferences: for example, if the congruence with the best-matching party is 70%, the deficit is 30%[1]. In this vision, VAAs are useful

[1] It should be noted that, since representation is not based only on opinions (which is the only aspect that can be measured through a VAA), it would be more accurate to call the "representative deficit" as "opin-

tools not only to inform citizens about the positioning of parties, but to create personalised pieces of advice as well, giving users both the ranking of parties who match best (and worse) with their opinion, and the degree to which this match is present. Thus, data obtained through VAAs can be useful to scholars and academics to better understand party system representativeness.

Unfortunately, the concept of representative deficit has not been exploited to its potential, since it has only been utilised in a handful of studies to understand to what degree VAAs can be useful. In particular, it has been argued that VAAs are more effective to bring citizens to vote when there is a lower representative deficit (i.e. when citizens' preferences better overlap with party positions). On the other hand, a high representative deficit might foster abstention of VAA users, who might feel demotivated by their distance from every party running (Alvarez et al. 2014; Dinas et al., 2014).

The concept of representative deficit has also been used in a rather theoretical way as a means to advocate for a transnationalisation of the European voting space, because if citizens could vote for any party of any country, the representative deficit would drop by almost a quarter, helping citizens to feel closer to the European Parliament and to overcome the vision of EP elections as second-order elections (Bright et al., 2015).

With all of this in mind, this work will try to assess the representativeness of the Italian parties before the 2018 General Election through data obtained from the VAA "*Navigatore Elettorale*". This VAA was successfully developed in February 2018 by the Observatory on Political Parties and Representation (OPPR) from the University of Pisa in collaboration with the Dutch *Kieskompas*, which developed their self-titled VAA in The Netherlands and many other countries around the world. This way, the expertise of the OPPR on the Italian party system and representation was combined with the experience of *Kieskompas* in developing and creating VAAs, producing an instrument which was used more than half a million times by around 350.000 unique visitors.

The project gave the chance to gain access to a large anonymised dataset that could be used to study many interesting aspects of the Italian political system. By creating a Representative deficit Index (RDI) and breaking it down into different components based on the policy area, we will be able to understand how much the Italian party system was representative to the electorate as a whole.

After a short presentation of the Italian case and the dataset used for this study, we will thoroughly discuss our methodology and describe what we would expect to find through our analysis. Then, our expectations will be confronted with our data in the final chapter, along with some considerations.

THE ITALIAN CASE

On March 4th 2018, almost 33 million of Italians cast their ballot to elect the new Parliament during the General Election. These elections are very interesting to study, as they produced a quite different picture from the elections of 2013 (for a discussion, see Chiaramonte et al. 2018).

The Parliament was elected with a new electoral law, commonly referred to as "*Rosatellum*", which adopted a complex mechanism. The two chambers of the Parliament were elected through a mixed system: around one third of the representatives were elected on first-past-the-post plurality seats, while the remaining ones through proportional representation by constituents. Both houses of the Parliament were elected with a single ballot with a closed list system. Parties could form electoral coalitions and propose a shared candidate for the majoritarian seat. The parties which obtained less than 3% of the votes could not elect any representative, and the same was for the alliances which didn't reach the 10% quorum.

The elections saw two coalitions and a major standalone party. The centre-right coalition was formed by four parties (Fratelli d'Italia, Forza Italia, Noi con l'Italia and Lega), which reached 37% in total, making it the most voted coalition. On the other hand, the centre-left coalition was composed of one bigger party, Partito Democratico, three smaller parties that didn't make it to the Parliament for the proportional seats, and SVP, a small autonomist party of Südtirol. This coalition only got around 23% of the votes. The most voted party was the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle), with more than 32% of the total votes. The only other party which managed to elect some representatives within the proportional quota is Liberi e Uguali, a left-wing federation of parties born after some splits from Partito Democratico.

The VAA created for this election, *Navigatore Elettorale*, was designed by taking into account the most salient issues put forward by the parties running. These issues have been broadly covered by the media and were present, in one form or another, in most platforms and/or leaders' declarations. Among them, the most discussed ones were those of *Reddito di Cittadinanza* (a

ion representative deficit" or even "policy representative deficit" instead (Soroka & Wlezien 2009). However, in order to follow the same path as the previous work on the matter, we decided to keep the original name created by the authors.

form of universal basic income), put forward by the M5S, immigration management, with a request of tightening border control by the two main right-wing parties, and a defence of Europe and Euro from the centre-left coalition led by the PD (D'Alimonte 2019; Emanuele et al. 2020).

Previous research on representation and congruence between parties and voters on policy preferences in Italy is rather scarce. The existing literature has noted that Italian parties and their voters tend to have similar positions on the left-right scale and on single policy positioning (Bellucci & Pellegata 2017), while the ideological congruence is less noticeable on the left side of the political spectrum (Pedrazzani & Segatti 2021). At the same time, in line with previous research, the presence of new challenger parties seem to reduce representation shortcomings only partially and only on some specific aspects (Ignazi 2020). Other studies investigated the congruence between Italian MPs and citizens, finding that legislators pay close attention to public opinion shifts and preferences of the citizens they represent, especially those in government (Visconti 2018). Nonetheless, to date the theme of representation of Italian parties has not been researched extensively yet, with most studies focusing either on the left-right spectrum, without assessing representation on single policy issues or clusters, or by taking into account MPs instead of parties as a whole. We believe that VAAs offer the chance to overcome these shortcomings, making it possible to estimate the representativeness of parties before elections on single policy issues and on thematic clusters.

The next section will introduce some of our expectations on the saliency of each of the issues we identified for the parties under analysis, which we will then try to assess based on the data we collected.

Expectations

Before looking at the data, it can be useful to express our expectations towards the data to guide us through the empirical research.

For what concerns the centre-right coalition, most of the statements of the VAA for these parties were coded based on their same common manifesto. It could be interesting to verify whether this has been a good choice for all of the parties and if they still managed to differentiate enough to represent the whole centre-right political spectrum. Thus, we want to understand whether the centre-right coalition has proved to be solid, with similar RDI scores overall, yet differently distributed among its components, as each party was aiming to a slightly different share of the electorate.

Moreover, we expect this coalition, especially FdI and Lega, to better represent its potential voters on the issues of immigration and moral issues, being these the two themes which were stressed both in all leaders' declarations and in the common manifesto. For this reason, we are interested in assessing the levels of our representative deficit for these two fields.

On the other hand, the other winner of this election, Movimento 5 Stelle, is commonly referred to as a populist party (Mosca & Tronconi 2019). One of the main proposals of M5S was about wealth redistribution, through the creation of a "Citizens' Income", which should grant unemployed people an income from the State. It would be necessary, then, to test whether the Five Star Movement represented its potential electorate on the theme of the redistribution of wealth.

Furthermore, Liberi e Uguali, a federation of parties born only a few months before the elections, received a lot of attention from the media, without managing to have a satisfying result. The party was born following some splits from PD, mostly as a result of divergences on the theme of economic policy. For this reason, a key issue of the party was that of economic policy and wealth redistribution, over which we will focus to assess the performance of this party.

Lastly, the Democratic Party scored its lowest electoral results ever, and its coalition allies did not even make it to the 3% quorum. The party focused most of its campaign on attributing relevance mainly to the themes of European Union and moral issues. Therefore, our fifth and last expectation is this party's representative capacity on the themes where it focused most during the 2018 campaign, the belonging to the EU and moral issues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data

Before the 2018 General Election, the Observatory on Political Parties and Representation (University of Pisa), in collaboration with the experienced Dutch team of *Kieskompas*, developed a Voting Advice Application under the name of "*Navigatore Elettorale*". The questionnaire was composed of 32 statements against which users could express five choices on a Likert scale, ranging between "fully disagree" and "fully agree", with the chance of not expressing any opinion about the statement as well. On the other hand, party positioning was obtained through the analysis of party manifestos, parties' official websites and leaders' declarations. Missing sources for the positioning of parties were coded as "no opinion", since expert surveys have

not been considered as reliable as the raw data obtained directly from party sources: this way, the coding process for parties could be checked in every part by all users, as each extract of text used to justify the party coding was made available to all users, whom could check the positions of all the parties and the reliability of the application.

The statements have been selected autonomously by the academic team developing the VAA, with no influence from parties or candidates. This approach differs from the one used for many other VAAs, as the statements and the coding are often proposed by parties and candidates themselves and then validated and decided by the experts. However, abstaining from asking parties directly about their opinions can have a positive effect on the validity of the research, since otherwise parties could distort their actual opinions to gain a more popular position within the VAA (Gemenis 2013).

By comparing the answers given by the users and the coding of party positions, the users received a graphical representation on a two-axis graph, where a pointer indicated their localization and the party logos indicated party positioning. The two axes of the graph represented two ideological continuums, public intervention VS free market and progressivists VS conservatives (Fig. 1). The users could also see their congruence with each party through a ranking representation, based on an Euclidean distance model (Fig. 2).

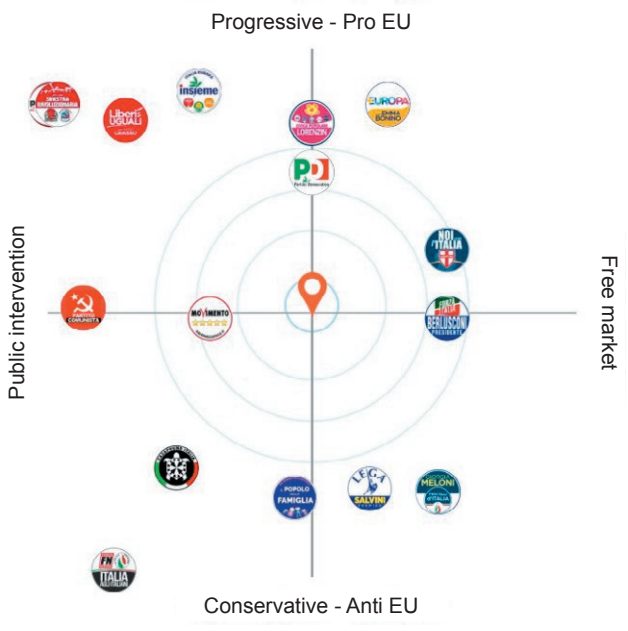

Figure 1. The graphical representation of parties and user positioning in the Navigatore Elettorale.

The congruence between users and parties was assessed by comparing the users' answer with the parties' answers for each question, and then adding or subtracting a certain number of points to the score based on the eventual proximity of the two (Table 1). The table was constructed following four rules: first, perfect agreement (e.g. both party and voter answered "agree") was considered a sign of strong congruence, thus assigning a score of 2; second, opposite answers (i.e. "completely agree" vs "completely disagree") were coded negatively with a score of -2; third; combinations of positions with the same orientation from both ends, whether positive or negative, were coded with a score of 1 (i.e. "completely agree" vs "agree" and "completely disagree" and "disagree"); last, all other cases were coded with a negative score of -1, including those where one between the party or the user selected "neutral" as their answer. We did so because neutrality over an issue is hard to position on a scale, and we do not know whether this neutrality was due to lack of knowledge, lack of interest, inability to judge or even if this was due to disagreement with the way the question was posed. Either way, we feel like a neutral answer against a "full" answer should not be considered positively in assessing congruence, but rather a sign of distance between voter and party, whatever the reason behind it might be. Another option for coding neutral answers would have been to score "0" to every instance of neutrality both from parties or from citizens, but for the same reasons explained above, we decided not to do so. Lastly, it should be noted that even though the difference between the combinations of "agree" with "disagree" and "completely disagree" respectively are qualitatively different (and the same can be said about the combinations on the other side of Table 1), we chose to code them with the same score of -1 to make complete disagreement between parties and users (which is coded as -2) more relevant in the overall weighing of combinations.

After calculating the congruence, the score was then transposed on a 0-100 scale, in order to have a

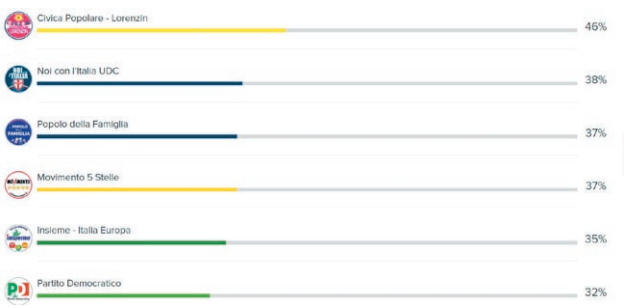

Figure 2. The ranking representation of congruence with parties in the Navigatore Elettorale.

Table 1. Combination table for creating the Representation Deficit Index.

User position	Party position				
	Completely agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Completely disagree
Completely agree	2	1	-1	-1	-2
Agree	1	2	-1	-1	-1
Neutral	-1	-1	2	-1	-1
Disagree	-1	-1	-1	2	1
Completely disagree	-2	-1	-1	1	2

percentage of the voter-party congruence. Even though we derived the concept of "representative deficit" from Alvarez et al. (2014), we used a different methodology than the one originally used by the authors, because this requires to consider only users who answered the Propensity To Vote (PTV) questions, which in our case were only around 5% of our respondents. We used a methodology, similar to the one used by Bright et al. (2020), which takes into account only the distance between the positions of the user and of the parties. Moreover, the choice seems to be justified by what Golder & Stramski (2010) discussed about the appropriate formula for calculating congruence between a government (in our case, a single party) and citizens (i.e. what they called Many-to-One), where they suggest to calculate the distance between the single citizens and the government and calculating the mean results for an aggregate measurement. We performed the same process for each party and for each of the policy clusters we identified, assessing distances by following the rules illustrated in Table 1 as we described above.

The application gained a great deal of success and was advertised for free in many local newspapers, blogs, social media and websites. From February until the day before the election (March 3rd), the VAA registered more than 350.000 unique visitors. Previous VAAs in Italy for the general and European elections of 2013 and 2014 received similar numbers of visitors. The dataset was cleaned by eliminating all the cases when the user was accessing the application from outside of Italy (assessed through a geo-location variable automatically generated), respondents born from 2001 on, users who did not answer to all the questions, users who took less than 60 seconds to answer all of them (suggesting it was either a bot or a person straight-clicking through the questionnaire) and entries with the same answer for all the questions, since the questionnaire was designed to make it necessary to change the answer to some statements to have some coherence (for a discussion on the reasons for cleaning VAA data, see Andreadis 2014). After the cleaning, the dataset comprised 307.991 cases, which is still a number heftily higher than any traditional survey in Italy.

One limit of Voting Advice Applications data used for statistical research is the representativeness of their samples, since some categories tend to be over-represented (Marschall 2014). *Navigatore Elettorale* is not an exception: from the opt-in questions of the VAA, which were answered by less than a third of the users, there is an over-representation of males, younger people and high school graduates (Table 2). A solution for this would be to weigh cases based on census data. However, in order to maintain the larger sample of more than three hundred thousand respondents, we decided not to do so. Moreover, only around 89.000 users answered the optional demographic questions, making them only a small subset of our dataset, which could be more prone to answer these questions because of their characteristics, making it a non-representative subset as well.

The *Navigatore Elettorale* included 16 different parties running for a seat in both chambers of the Italian Parliament. However, in this analysis, we will be considering only the parties who managed to gather more than 3% of the total votes, which was also the threshold for gaining at least one of the proportional seats. These are also the only relevant parties in the Italian parliament today, since the other parties got just a handful of candidates elected through the majoritarian constituents[2]. Thus, the considered parties are (with their percentages of votes for the *Camera dei Deputati*) Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, 32,68%), Lega (L, 17,35%), Forza Italia (FI, 14,00%), Fratelli d'Italia (FdI, 4,35%), Partito Democratico (PD, 18,76%) and Liberi e Uguali (LeU, 3,39%). In total, the users for which one of these parties was the one with the lowest representative deficit index were 211.479, around 69% of the total users. The remaining users were closest to a party included in the VAA which is not considered in the present study, and are only con-

[2] These parties are *Noi con l'Italia – UdC* (1,30%, 4 seats), *SVP* (0,41%, 4 seats), *Civica Popolare* (0,54%, 2 seats), *+Europa* (2,56%, 2 seats), *Insieme – Italia Europa* (0,58%, 1 seat).

Table 2. Distribution of users of the Navigatore Elettorale.

Gender		%
	Male	61,4
	Female	38,2
	N.	89062
Education		%
	Middle school or lower	9,3
	High school	47,2
	Bachelor's degree	16,0
	Master's degree	23,2
	PhD	3,1
	N.	88628
Year of birth		%
	1990-2000	49,5
	1980-1999	22,8
	1970-1989	12,4
	1960-1979	9,5
	1959 or lower	5,8
	N.	89504

sidered for the calculation of the general RDI in the last column of Table 4.

In the next sections, we will analyse the congruence and proximity of users with their best-matching party to understand if the Italian party system as a whole fits well with citizen preferences. Moreover, we will examine which section of each party's pre-electoral positions gained more consensus among the users who resulted closer to them. In the end, this study will be helpful to better understand present cleavages and salient issues in the Italian society and which party, if any, managed to better represent them.

Method

The *Navigatore Elettorale*, with its extensive coverage of all the political issues debated during the Italian electoral campaign of 2018, can be used as a very helpful tool for analysing the Italian party system.

The application contained a set of 32 statements on different topics, which are listed in Table 3. Thanks to the comparison between users' and parties' placements in all of these questions, it was possible to obtain the agreement of each user with every party or, in other terms, the representativeness of each party in terms of political opinions.

Following what Alvarez et al. (2014) defined as "representative deficit", we will hereby use such concept to create a "Representative Deficit Index" (RDI), which could be defined as the degree to which parties fail to match citizens' policy preferences and is calculated as the missing percentage from the single best-matching party of each user.

After calculating the Representative Deficit Index between each user and every party, we then split the users based on their best-matching party, and calculated the mean for each group in order to look at the mean RDI for each party. This way, we are not assuming that the best-matching party will necessarily be the party that the user will vote (as would do the selection bases on PTV questions), as we are only interested in the extent to which the Italian party system falls short in representing the range of opinions of the electorate. This enables us to compare one party to the other in terms of representativeness of opinions and pledges, shedding some light on the (non-) prevalence of issue-voting among their respective potential electorate.

To look at the matter with a potentially deeper explanatory reach, we will divide the 32 statements from the VAA into 8 clusters: immigration, European Union, regional affairs, public security, economic policy, wealth redistribution, moral values and public services. This division is illustrated in Table 3. After that, the Representative deficit index is recalculated for each cluster of statements. While recalculating the deficit, we will be still considering as the best-matching party for each user the one with the lowest overall RDI. By doing this, we hope to find a significant oscillation within each party based on the clusters. The relevance of these differences is then used to test our expectations. Such differences will explain the strengths and weaknesses of each party.

Finally, in order to understand the most salient issues and cleavages of the 2018 election and who managed to better utilise them, we will confront the results of the elections with the outcome of the analysis, offering a potential explanation for the bad results of some parties and, on the other hand, for the great results of others which did fairly good.

RESULTS

The first finding of our research is the Representative Deficit Index for the users of our VAA. By looking at the first line of Table 4, we can already note some interesting results. First of all, the RDI of LeU is around 10 points lower than average, while, on the other hand, the resulting RDI for PD is sensibly higher than the others. This means that LeU has a strong average opinion congruence with the VAA users who had LeU as their

Table 3. VAA statements and cluster subdivision (author's translation).

	Statements	Clusters
1	Regular immigrants, even if not Italian citizens, should have the same rights and duties as other Italians	Immigration
2	All children born in Italy have the right to become Italian citizens	Immigration
3	Immigration significantly contributes to Italy's prosperity	Immigration
4	Islam is a threat for Italian values	Immigration
5	Italy should abandon the Euro	European Union
6	Overall, being EU members is a disadvantage	European Union
7	Overall, the adoption of the EURO represented a disadvantage	European Union
8	Free circulation of goods and capitals within the EU is of vital importance for the Italian economy	European Union
9	The free circulation of people within the EU should be limited	European Union
10	The economic autonomy of Regions with a special statute should be extended to the other Regions as well	Regional Affairs
11	Taxes collected by each Region should be entirely kept by that Region	Regional Affairs
12	Restrictions to personal freedom or privacy are acceptable in order to fight crime	Public Security
13	The government should spend more on law enforcement	Public Security
14	Citizens should always be free to use weapons to defend their own house and/or commercial activity	Public Security
15	Public expenditure for defence and armed forces should be significantly raised	Public Security
16	The State should intervene the little as possible in economic issues	Economic Policy
17	The number of public employees should be lowered	Economic Policy
18	Companies should be freer to lay off their employees	Economic Policy
19	The government's priority should be debt reduction, even at cost of cutting public services	Economic Policy
20	A minimum hourly income should be introduced	Economic Policy
21	The retirement age should be lowered	Economic Policy
22	Wealth should be redistributed from the richest citizens to the poorest citizens	Wealth Redistribution
23	Fiscal progressivity should be abolished in favour of a single rate	Wealth Redistribution
24	A citizenship minimum income should be introduced	Wealth Redistribution
25	Taxes on major private patrimonies should be increased	Wealth Redistribution
26	Parents should be granted free choice on following the public vaccination plan	Moral Values
27	All women should be granted freedom of choice on abortion	Moral Values
28	Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual ones	Moral Values
29	It is right for Fascist symbols to be prohibited by law	Moral Values
30	Public healthcare should be more open towards the private sector	Public Services
31	Public education should be free at all levels	Public Services
32	Public expenditure for research should be significantly raised	Public Services

Table 4. Representative deficit index scores of the main parties of the 2018 Italian elections (standard deviation between parentheses).

RDI	Party						
	FdI	FI	L	LeU	M5S	PD	General
General	35,33 (6,12)	38,81 (5,21)	34,55 (6,45)	28,93 (7,00)	37,06 (5,41)	41,44 (6,71)	35,37 (6,20)
Immigration	23,91	40,14	30,47	30,79	41,85	40,94	36,39
EU	35,42	27,11	28,14	19,40	33,65	31,63	28,56
Regional Affairs	26,86	35,87	23,31	33,98	30,93	32,39	37,86
Public Security	34,46	38,68	30,67	39,16	41,07	44,04	42,20
Economic Policy	37,13	41,94	36,38	30,04	32,77	54,66	37,15
Wealth Redistr.	40,42	44,33	41,23	35,59	44,02	47,60	40,97
Moral Values	30,71	41,65	37,44	19,40	46,52	32,02	33,71
Public Services	51,49	47,61	53,22	24,05	28,54	35,82	32,60

closest party, while on the other hand the link between the opinions of PD and its potential voters is quite loose.

Other parties, such as Lega, Movimento 5 Stelle and Fratelli d'Italia, have average RDIs. Forza Italia scored an RDI around 3 points higher than that of its allies and, given the fact that most of the coding for these three parties was based on the coalition manifesto, this difference may be caused by a rather different potential ideal voter for FI and the other two members of the coalition.

When splitting the Opinion Representative deficit into clusters, the situation appears more transparent and it is not hard to see the differences between parties. The most interesting case is probably that of the centre-right coalition composed by Lega, Forza Italia and Fratelli d'Italia.

The centre-right coalition

Overall, it is not a surprise that Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, which made the issue of immigration a key one in both their campaigns, scored a relatively low RDI when looking only at immigration-related issues. Also, with FdI putting immigration at the core of their campaign, their RDI for immigration is the lowest of all parties. The same applies to the regional affairs questions, with Lega registering a quite low RDI in this matter: to understand this, it should be recalled that one of the historical political battles of Lega is that for regional autonomism and, previously, federalism (for a discussion on the evolution of the federalist agenda in the Lega, see Albertazzi, Giovannini & Seddone 2018).

In general, Forza Italia, Lega and FdI have different deficits in all the dimensions considered, with a complex pattern of similarities and differences in all of the areas analysed. For instance, both Forza Italia and Lega have a low RDI on the matter of the EU, but for opposite reasons: the former being a pro-Euro and pro-EU party, while the latter was in favour of exiting the Euro and proposed Eurosceptic policies. On the other hand, the moderately Eurosceptic positions of the shared manifesto seem to be less liked by the FdI potential electorate in our VAA and more appreciated by the Lega's instead.

Moreover, the position of Forza Italia within the centre-right coalition is rather ambiguous, and, apart from the case of the European Union RDI, where it is in line with Lega's deficit, in all the other cases FI has a notably high deficit, especially as far as immigration is regarded (around 10% more than Lega and 16% more than FdI).

The case of European Union mirrors the cautious approach – without refraining from criticism – of the manifesto towards the EU, which is mainly the idea that led the previous centre-right governments supported by the Lega-FI coalition. In general, the centre-right common manifesto does not seem to have had a positive effect on Forza Italia in terms of representativeness. Based on this data, the overall RDI for all the three parties can be explained by a different cluster of issues and for different reasons, meaning that the coalition managed to represent different portions of the electorate in different sets of issues.

Interestingly, the issue of immigration has been liked by FdI's and Lega's potential voters in our VAA, but we surely cannot tell the same for Forza Italia. On the theme of moral values, the coalition's potential voters proved to be even more heterogeneous. In the end, the whole coalition resulted to be rather heterogeneous even in these key areas.

In conclusion, it is also interesting to look at the last three clusters, with the wealth redistribution RDI registering a strong disagreement for all the three parties of the coalition, where their manifesto had a general aversion towards redistribution of wealth, also because of the main proposal of the manifesto, the flat tax: in the end, based on our data this position does not seem to have been a key issue for the success of the coalition, as some evidence already suggested (Emanuele et al. 2019). The case of moral values is rather interesting, as FdI has a low deficit, indicating a strong agreement of its potential voters on the key questions of forbidding abortion, not recognising homosexual marriage and so on, which is one of the main aspects of a party which is constantly recalling the "Christian roots" of Italy. On the other hand, Forza Italia has adopted a cautious approach on the theme – which is not considered within the coalition manifesto – by not taking a stance in most of the questions analysed, with a resulting high RDI.

In the field of public services, the whole coalition manifesto is vague apart from the statement on increasing funds for the military. This vagueness resulted in a high deficit, with a peak of more than 53% for Lega.

Movimento 5 Stelle

The Movimento 5 Stelle is perhaps the most interesting party to study after the centre-right coalition: its relevance has rapidly grown since its creation less than ten years ago and it is considered by many as a populist party. However, contrary to what we could expect from a populist party, the general RDI of M5S is not far from average, with the smallest Standard Deviation among all parties after Forza Italia.

The M5S's most liked positions were those in the field of public services, with a complex – yet well explained – pattern of positions in all the statements composing the cluster. The field of regional affairs was composed of only two questions, of which the party answered only one: it would be unsafe to hazard some explanation on the whole question, but it is interesting to note that for that single question (n. 11) the agreement is quite high.

It is the key area of M5S's manifesto, wealth redistribution, to be one of the least appreciated by the party's potential voters in our VAA. This could be because of an ambiguous positioning on the big picture, with a full appreciation for a minimum "Citizens' Income" and a tepid agreement on the introduction of a flat tax, while defending the need for redistributing wealth from the richest part of the population to the poorest one. However, given the nature of the party, being a populist protest party with a great focus on the opposition between the people and the elite, it is possible that the actual proposals offered by the party were not so relevant for the decision to vote of their electors (Caiani 2019).

Similarly, a weak positioning (actually close to the one of PD) in the field of public security resulted in a high RDI, and a comparable effect is found in the cluster of immigration.

Liberi e Uguali

When looking at the representative deficit for Liberi e Uguali, it is clear that the issues of the European Union and moral values played a vital role in the support of the party.

In particular, a firm stance on the European Union as a whole, whilst not taking a stance on the Euro, has had very positive effects on the deficit, which is around 9 points lower than the general RDI. Similarly, a bold position for all the statements regarding moral values has had comparable effects on the overall agreement of the potential voters of the party.

Conversely, the party's weak positioning on matters of public security has had detrimental outcomes for the party.

In the field of economic policy, the RDI for LeU is in line with the general deficit, with no substantial gains or losses. On the other hand, wealth redistribution has an unexpectedly high RDI compared to the overall score of the party, indicating a weak congruence between the party and its potential voters on the theme. However, even if this cluster scored a RDI slightly higher than the average RDI, it should be noted that the PD has a value of more than 55 on the matter, around 15 points higher than LeU's. Therefore, we can still observe that the reasons for the split from PD were justified. The next paragraph will clarify the question even further.

Partito Democratico

The last party to analyse is the one with the higher representative deficit, Partito Democratico. This party was the main supporter and partner of the government before the election, with several internal divisions, which also led to the exit of the members of what later became Liberi e Uguali.

The main cause of the deficit is surely the economic policy, where the deficit reaches almost 55 points. In this field, the party's positions were in line with the former government, with the only significant new proposal of a minimum income. The need for limiting public expenditures and to reach higher flexibility on the job market, endorsed by the party, has not been seen positively by its most close VAA users.

A similar dynamic can be seen when talking about redistribution, where the party opposed a decrease in the retirement age and has not taken a firm stance on the redistribution as a whole, apart from the opposition to the proposals of a flat tax and the Citizens' Income. Also, the PD's positions on public security have been judged negatively by many users.

On the other hand, the party managed well in the key areas of its campaign, the EU and the moral values, over which most of the PD's campaign were made both by claiming the government's results on the matter and by proposing a better engagement in the future. For this reason, it is safe to assume that the party positioning on the matter has been appreciated, contrary to that on redistribution.

Clusters

Overall, if we focus on issues rather than on parties, it is clear that the issues of immigration have been best capitalised by Fratelli d'Italia, and the same goes for the European Union and the moral values themes for Liberi e Uguali, where the party recorded a surprisingly low RDI. Conversely, some themes have been badly interpreted by some parties, and an interesting example is the theme of economic policy, where PD scored an RDI 13 points higher than the second-highest, Forza Italia. Similarly, the whole centre-right coalition has a quite high representative deficit, with 12-18 points more than PD, on the theme of public services.

Saliency

By only looking at these data, it is not clear yet why some parties with a generally lower RDI have had worse electoral results than others with a higher one. This is probably due to saliency reasons: not all parties are interested in the same issues in the same way. Some parties tend to emphasise certain themes, while other ones tend to blur them.

By looking at the parties' electoral results, we can try to hypothesise which were the main issues and cleavages of Italian politics in 2018 and who best managed to interpret them. However, it should be noted once again that the data we are analysing, while comprising an unprecedentedly large dataset of respondents, is still not completely representative of the overall population, so that the hypothesis we are now putting forward should be further tested and analysed in subsequent studies on the matter.

First of all, a key role for all the parties apart from Fratelli d'Italia has been played by the theme European Union, which registered the highest variation from each parties' general RDI. For example, both PD, LeU and FI have a representative deficit around 10 points lower than their average RDI. The debate over the European Union, then, certainly played a central role in all parties' campaigns.

Another important theme has been that of moral values, where all the parties have had significant shifts from their general RDI. Differently from the case of EU, however, the shifts have not always been positive, with the M5S registering a more than 9 points higher deficit.

On the other hand, the great winner of these elections has been Lega, with a growth of 13 points from the 2013 elections, becoming the unpredicted leader of the centre-right coalition. For this party, the themes of immigration, regional affairs and the EU (especially the Euro, where the party proposed to leave the common currency) have been key areas to gain their success.

On the other hand, the party that has had a major drop of voters since 2013 was Partito Democratico, which lost more than 6% from the last elections. Looking at the RDI, the themes of economic policy and wealth redistribution, together with public security, certainly had a role in the failure of the party, with the good results in the European Union issues and moral values not being enough for achieving a better result in the 2018 electoral campaign.

However, it should be noted that these relationships are still to be proved, while our data can only suggest what subsequent studies could and should build on.

CONCLUSION

The usage of VAAs around the world is spreading fast, and today at least one of them is developed for most democratic elections. The popularity of these tools made them an interesting source of data for research purposes. These applications are used by a large number of citizens, with positive effects on political knowledge, mobilization and voter turnout. The high number of VAA users makes a valid substitute for traditional surveys available, with an extremely higher number of respondents.

The usage of these tools, their effects and the data they provide has been long analysed through many different aspects. There are many angles from which scholars could potentially look at VAAs, and some of them are still to be discovered or sufficiently developed. What we looked for in this study, was indeed one of these angles: that of representation. The concept of representation is one of the most debated and difficult of political science. Following the main definitions of representation, we managed to draw a picture of political representation where the representative must act in place of someone else, while still needing to be responsive to them. Following this approach, we investigated the peculiar aspect of opinion representation, where what is important is the congruence of opinions between parties or candidates and voters. Opinion representation is fundamental for every democratic system since it is the propeller of every electoral campaign.

In order to study representation through a Voting Advice Application, we utilised data obtained from *Navigatore Elettorale*, a VAA launched for the 2018 Italian General Election. By matching users' policy preferences with the opinion of parties on the same matters through a VAA, we managed to shed some lights on the representativeness of the six major parties of the 2018 election and the system as a whole.

The present work tried to use this dataset to scrutinise the health of the Italian democracy and its party system. Italy is often taken as an example of an unstable party system due to its unusual number of new parties emerging rapidly and because of the rapid decline of others. At the same time, as in most Western democracies, the abstention rates are growing election after election, parties are facing a decline in membership and, more in general, citizens' trust in politics is low. Even though we need to verify whether and to what extent the Italian democracy is in crisis, we can still affirm that most of the symptoms of this illness are present.

The usage of VAAs could become in the future one of the antidotes to this crisis, as they are believed to have

many benefits on turnout and voting behaviour in general. However, the spread of these instruments in Italy is still slow compared to some other countries, and the alleged positive effects are still to be seen on a larger scale.

On the other hand, data retrieved from VAAs can be used to assess the state of health of the Italian democracy through the analysis of how parties managed to represent the electorate opinions.

The congruence between voters' and parties' opinions was calculated based on the positional distance between the two in each question and resulted in what we defined as "Representative Deficit Index" (RDI). This deficit indicates the degree to which the best-matching party fails to represent the user over the issues considered. By splitting this deficit based on the best-matching party, we obtained the general RDI for every party, making it possible to compare one party to the other. The results indicated that one party, *Partito Democratico*, scored a surprisingly high deficit, while the other centre-left party, *Liberi e Uguali*, had a significantly low deficit instead. The other parties all had average scores, but it is worth mentioning the fact that the centre-right coalition did not have similar deficits for every party, with Forza Italia having a generally higher RDI. This indicates that promoting a common platform among the three allies had different effects on *Forza Italia* on the one hand, and *Lega* and *Fratelli d'Italia* on the other hand. Potential voters of the former felt less represented by the manifesto than voters of the latter.

Furthermore, to understand the reasons behind such differences in the representativeness of opinions for each party, we split once again the deficit for each party into eight different clusters of issues to address some of our expectations.

First of all, the centre-right coalition proved to be rather heterogeneous, with the deficit for Forza Italia being quite different from that of the other two parties in almost all the clusters. Moreover, what seemed like the main issues of the coalition's campaign, moral values and immigration, actually didn't meet a high opinion congruence with the parties' potential voters.

Similarly, the Five Star Movement scored a high Representation Deficit in its' main campaigning area, that of wealth redistribution, and the same happened for *Liberi e Uguali*. On the other hand, *Partito Democratico* scored a low RDI in the key areas of its electoral campaign, European Union and moral values, this time as expected.

Lastly, we laid the foundation for a subsequent study on the representativeness of the Italian party system after the 2018 elections by comparing the final percentages of *Lega* and *Partito Democratico*, the two biggest surprises of the elections, to their Representation Deficits, in order to put forward some hypothesis about which themes made their success and failure respectively.

On a more general level, past research has shown that a lower representative deficit shown by VAAs leads to a change of the party for whom one will vote in a relevant share of the users (Alvarez et al. 2014). We believe that if such a deficit is high for all parties, the user could, for the same reasons, decide not to vote at all instead of just switching party. Indeed, we can hypothesise that this is what happened for Forza Italia and Partito Democratico, whose voters in previous elections could have abstained this time due to their fairly high representative deficit.

In the last section of this study, we tried to understand what were the driving forces of a low or high representative deficit by breaking up our index based on clusters of issues, giving us the chance to gain a deeper explanatory reach.

In the end, we can see the ongoing crisis of Italian parties due to the lack of representativeness of many of them, especially the biggest ones. Even the Five Star Movement (M5S), which managed to achieve a great result both in the 2013 and 2018 elections, showed a high score in our index. This can be explained by its nature of populist party, which grew its fortune thanks to an opposition to "the elites", but can also expose the fragility the Italian party system and the whole representation mechanism in this country is.

We understand that this model, and especially the hypotheses we put forward in this last section, need further research and should be clarified through the help of more data, but we believe that the proposed methods can help to understand the current state of the Italian democracy and of any other democracy for which the data might be available. The main limitations of the present work come from the representativeness of VAA data, as some categories of voters are most likely to use them than others, impacting the external validity of any study pursued on this kind of data. Moreover, the data available made a sample stratification too costly, as the opt-in demographic and PTV questions were optional and had been answered only by a small minority of users. Nonetheless, the large dataset used in this study can be hardly found with other standard methodology, making it still worth using for explanatory analysis as this article.

In conclusion, the study of representation through VAAs proved to be a useful tool to better understand party systems, thanks to their characteristics and their reach, which is far wider than any other traditional survey. We hope that in the future more studies on the mat-

ter will be available, since this kind of methods seems to be one of the easiest and most efficient ways to quantitatively study representation up to this day.

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