

**A too complicated Europe? Lack of information
and parties' cues in citizens' Europeanism. A
heuristic process.**

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THIS PAPER IS A FIRST DRAFT. ANY KIND OF SUGGESTION IS
MORE THAN WELCOME.

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to analyze the relation between information and parties' influence on public opinion. The focus is on a heuristic process: the European Union is a political system that people can perceive as distant, compared with the national one, because of its complex functioning and of the less direct influence that citizens have on it. Therefore, it is likely that people lack the relevant information for autonomously constructing their own idea of the integration process; because of this, they rely on their preferred party's stance on EU.

Following this reasoning, political information should play a big role in determining the level of "independence" of electors' judgment: people with more information do not need to rely on party positions and for this reason are more autonomous in expressing their level of support for European Union. The need for heuristics, however, can be measured not only based on voters' level of political sophistication, but also according with the level of complexity of the issue they are asked about: if people have to express their opinion on a complex issue, they will need more information and, consequently, they will be more likely to use party heuristic. Given its complex functioning and its perceived distance from citizens' life, the European Union represents an issue where national political parties can be really influential in shaping people's political attitudes.

The paper uses experimental as well as cross-sectional data to investigate the relation between information and effectiveness of parties' cues. The results of both kind of analysis show that party influence is moderated by voters' level of political sophistication, and that the use of party heuristics for more complex issues is not higher than for less complex ones. However, the complexity of the issue is fundamental for the moderating role played by political sophistication: people with high level of political sophistication are able to resist the party cue if the issue is "Easy", but they have to rely on heuristic when facing a "Hard" issue.

Heuristic: why does party's position matter?

Why the position of a party on a particular issue influences its electors' position on the same issue? There is an abundance of evidence that the average citizen knows little about politics, and public opinion researchers agree on the fact that ordinary people tend to pay only occasional and then usually superficial attention to politics (Sniderman et al. 1991); so they lack factual information about politics (Hobolt 2007). The phenomenon is so broad that "the widespread ignorance of the general public about all but the most highly salient political events and actors is one of the best documented facts in all of the social science" (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Because of this, when citizens have to express an opinion on political issues, they usually rely on what the literature calls "heuristic", that is "judgmental shortcut, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice" (Sniderman et al. 1991, p. 19). This means that, because of lack of information among electors, "cues offered by informed actors can influence the opinion of less informed individuals on complex issues" (Hellström, 2008, p.1130). Among the different kinds of heuristics that people can use (see, for example, Lau and Redlawsk 2001), the position of the party they vote for or they feel closest to is obviously a popular choice, given they have in common ideological predispositions (Zaller 1992). Moreover, this influence of parties' stances is not limited to a particular issue, but has been demonstrated in different kinds of economic, foreign, administrative and immigration policies (see Coan et al. 2008, Brader and Tucker 2009, Kam 2005). In sum, the position of a party on a particular issue offers a judgment shortcut that allows the electors to infer their own position without having detailed information on the issue at stake (Hobolt 2007).

In the European context, the need for using party heuristics can be even higher because people can perceive the EU as a more distant political system, compared with the national one, given its complex functioning and the less direct influence that citizens have on it. As already said, people are not well informed about national politics; but their level of knowledge of EU politics is even lower (see Hobolt 2007, Hooghe and Marks 2005, Anderson 1998). Moreover, "Political contestation in Europe is essentially framed by political parties (...)" (Hobolt 2007, p.160). And in fact the

influence of parties' positions on public's attitudes toward European Union has been demonstrated in several studies (Ray 2003, Steenbergen et al. 2007, Wessels 1995, Gabel and Scheve 2007).

Political Sophistication

Given what we said above, we know that, thanks to a heuristic process, the positions of political parties affect their electors' stances on the same issue. But what strengthens this influence? In the literature on EU support, the attention of the scholars has been sometimes attracted by the contingent nature of this cueing process. In particular, some authors focused on national contextual factors (e.g. electoral law, referendum occurrence, etc.) or on political parties' features (e.g. salience of European issue in the party, level of intra-party dissent on European issues, etc.) to discover under which conditions the leading role played by political elite is more powerful (Ray 2003, Steenbergen et al. 2007).

However, a more fundamental characteristic has been underestimated: the amount of information that people possess in relation to the issue². If what we want to analyze is a heuristic process, it is very important to focus on the reasons that make cognitive shortcuts useful. In sum, if we say that people use heuristics when they are not informed on the issue, we should check if the amount of information that they possess has an impact on their degree of independence from the party's positions. We need to do it also for being sure that what we are observing is an actual heuristic process, and not another phenomenon. The positions of parties and their electors could be related, for example, also because they share the same political values and therefore they give the same judgments on political issues. On the contrary, if the level of information is proved to be a moderator of this relation, we can be relatively sure that what we are observing is a heuristic process.

² The moderator role played by political sophistication is better analyzed in the literature that examines the effect of heuristic on political behavior, as, for example, vote in European Union referendum. However, in this case the heuristic process is conceptualized in a different way: people use the party position not for constructing their own idea of the integration process, but for deciding for which option to vote.

However, this task can be more complicated than it appears. Measuring citizens' level of information has its technical and theoretical problems that can produce unclear results. Zaller (1992) provides a good overview of them, concluding that "the effect one attributes to political awareness can depend greatly on how one goes about measuring it" (p. 333). Political sophistication³ can be measured in many different ways, and each of them has some shortcomings. According to Zaller, the use of proxies like level of education, exposition to media, or political participation can be misleading given the unclear relations that these indicators have with the actual amount of information that people possess.

The best measure of political sophistication, for Zaller, is what he calls "factual knowledge": an index composed of different questions on politics that check the level of political knowledge of the respondents. This kind of index does not use proxy for political sophistication, but "capture political learning that has actually occurred – political ideas that the individuals has encountered, understood, and stored in his head. This is exactly what we want to measure" (Zaller 1992, pp. 335). That is, it actually measure how much respondents know about politics. Moreover, measures of factual knowledge do not have the problem of social desirability: one cannot *pretend* to know something; he knows it, or he does not. For this reasons, Zaller conclude that "neutral factual information is, on both theoretical and empirical grounds, the preferred measure of political awareness (...)" (*ibid.* pp. 336).

Also the use of factual knowledge indexes, however, can be problematic. As Zaller himself note, "granting that political knowledge is the best available measure of political awareness, there remain several questions about how knowledge itself should be measured" (*ibid.* p.336). In particular, the point is if, when measuring one's political sophistication, it should be done through question that check the respondent's knowledge of politics in general, or his knowledge of the particular issue analyzed. An example can help in clarifying this point: if I'm interested in the influence that political parties' positions on EU have on their electors' idea of the integration process, and I suppose that this influence vary according with the level of political sophistication of the respondents, how should I measure it? Should I use questions that measure factual knowledge about politics, or about politics of the EU? Zaller's answer is that "although domain-specific measures would be preferable, the loss from not having them is

³ As Zaller (1992) says, there are a many different names used for referring, more or less, to the same idea: political sophistication, political awareness, political interest and involvement, cognitive ability, etc.

apparently slight”, (*ibid.* pp. 337), given that “as a practical matter, people who pay attention to one facet of politics tend to pay attention to other facets as well” (*ibid.* pp 336).

There are few studies that take into account the moderator effect that the amount of information can have on the parties’ influence on citizens Europeanism. But they always treat it as a fringe factors and the results are quite contradictory. If, in fact, for Gabel and Scheve (2007) the level of political awareness does not affect parties’ influence, for Wessel (1995) and Ray (2003) people that are more attentive to politics are more likely to have the same position of their preferred party (see also Hobolt 2007)⁴. Moreover, if we have a look also to the literature that analyzes the power of parties’ cue on other issues (not just the EU), we can find studies were electors’ political sophistication is negatively related with parties’ influence (Cobb and Kuklinsky 1997, Kam 2005).

In the cited studies political sophistication is operationalized in different ways and, therefore, the authors underline different aspect of this individual characteristic. Wessel (1995) and Ray (2003), for example, build indexes using questions that measure the frequency of political discussion of the respondents. From this point of view, it appears quite normal the positive relation between political sophistication and parties influence, given that people that discuss more about politics are more political active and, therefore, usually closer to parties.

On the other hand, Cobb and Kuklinsky (1997) use a self-reported measure of interest in politics, while Kam (2205) uses some questions for checking the political factual knowledge of the respondents. These indexes, compared with the previous ones, seems more suitable for measuring the respondent’s actual knowledge; therefore, it is not surprising that in that case the political sophistication indexes are negatively related with the use of parties’ cues. In these cases the authors are measuring the knowledge (or the interest) that respondents have in politics, and not their political activity; they are measuring the amount of information they have, and therefore their need for heuristic. In this case, the relation is naturally negative: people that are more sophisticated (have more information) are more independent form parties’ position (use less heuristic).

⁴ Actually, even if their starting hypothesis states exactly the opposite, Gabel and Scheve (2007) demonstrate that less sophisticated citizens are more affected by party positions, “accidentally” confirming the existence of a heuristic process. However, this study does not take directly into consideration parties’ positions, but their degree of polarization.

So we can say, with Zaller (1992), that the effect of political sophistication on party's influence depends on how scholars operationalize it. In particular, in the literature concerning parties' influence on citizens' Europeanism, the few studies that take into account individual political sophistication use indexes of political discussion's frequency. These indexes show a positive relation with party's influence (with the partial exception of Gabel and Scheve 2007 that, however, do not take directly into account parties' positions). However, the suspicion is that these indexes do not capture in a proper way the amount of information that people have, and therefore their need for heuristic. The problems are two: on one hand, they seem more suitable to measure people's tendency to express their opinion than the degree of information they possess. On the other hand, these indexes do not say anything about how much respondents know about the topic at stake: European integration.

Complexity of the issue

Problems exposed above need to be analyzed better than I am doing here. But what I want to underline in this section is that when scholars analyze the effect of information on party cue on EU, they always rely on measure at the individual level; they always check if the different amount of information that people possess determines the level of influence that they experience from their party's position. In sum, they check if persons with higher level of information are more or less influenced by their party when they have to express a judgment on EU.

But if our aim is to analyze the role of information, the peculiarity of EU allows to check also for another factor. The need for heuristic can be measured not only according with respondents' political sophistication, but also according with the level of complexity of the issue they are asked about. Using political sophistication indexes allows us to check the role of information looking at to what extent people with different levels of political knowledge have different degree of independence from parties' position. But the role of information can be analyzed also looking at the influence that party have on the same persons when they are asked about their opinion on different political issues with different level of complexity; if the party influence in

the more complicated issue was higher than in the easier one, also in this case we should conclude that information play a role in cueing process. In sum, if we are looking at a heuristic process, we should find on one hand that more sophisticated people are more independent from parties' positions than less sophisticated, and on the other hand that within each level of political sophistication people are more likely to use heuristic when are asked about complex issues than when they have to express an opinion on an easy one.

From the theoretical point of view, Carmines and Stimson (1980) provide the framework that could be used for differentiating among different kinds of issues. In their study the authors define an easy issue as one that is symbolic rather than technical, that deals with policy ends rather than means, and that has been on the political agenda for enough time for being familiar to the general public. On the other hand, a hard issue is technical because does not deal with abstract values, but with concrete policy measure, and is relatively new on the political agenda. These differences have important consequences given that "(...) technical policies require knowledge of important factual assumption to be appreciated. Symbolic issues may be presented *and understood simplistically*⁵" and "(...) preferences about policy ends can arise from the common prejudice of the mass culture. Normative premises are not by definition informed; neither do they need to be articulated" (Carmines and Stimson 1980, pp.80). In sum, for dealing with hard issue, citizens need a greater cognitive effort than for expressing an opinion on an easy one.

Carmines and Stimson (1980) use this categorization for demonstrating that the individual position on hard issues is a determinant for the vote of more sophisticated people. I will use it in a different way: given the technical nature of hard issues, I expect citizens will rely more on party heuristic when they have to express an opinion on them, given the higher cognitive effort this kind of issue require compared with an easy one. In other words, given that a person require more information for expressing an opinion on a complex issue, he is more likely to rely on the party heuristic than when he has to express an opinion on an easy topic.

I am aware of the apparent contradiction of this last point: if the issue is hard, it can be harder for people to understand party positions and therefore using it as heuristic. But, as it will be clearer in the next pages, I am not interested in whether or not people

⁵ Italic in the original text.

are able to understand the complex reasoning that makes their party take a stance on a particular issue. Actually, what I am supposing is exactly that they cannot: given the technical nature of the issue, people will “delegate” the cognitive demanding task of taking an informed position to their party; they will just “imitate” it when they will be asked about their own opinion.

The influential role played by parties in complex issue has been underlined in some studies on heuristic (see Lau and Redlawsk 2001, Coan et al 2008). However, it has never been taken into account in the literature concerning European Union; scholars that have studied parties’ influence on citizens’ attitudes toward EU focused on different factors. Nonetheless, the difference between easy and hard issue seems relevant in the European Union context: EU is an intricate political system, with a functioning more complex than the national one; the issues on the agenda are usually quite technical given their economical connotation; also the discussion on policies is usually complex given the different levels in which the political debate take place. In sum, European Union politics is characterized by a high concentration of hard issues, and for this reason can be a context in which political party can be rally influential on their electors’ opinion.

Hypotheses

According with the theoretical framework exposed in the previous pages, same hypothesis can be formulated. First of all, we have seen how people rely on their parties’ position as heuristic when they have to express an opinion on political issues. The first hypothesis, therefore, is the following:

H1: parties’ position on European integration has an impact on their electors’ position on the same issue.

If the influence of parties on citizens is due to a heuristic process, however, we should observe a relation between this influence and the amount of information that people have on European Union. Consequently, the second hypothesis is the following:

H2: political sophistication is a moderator of the influence of parties on their voters. The higher the political sophistication of a voter, the lower will be the influence of party's position on him.

However, individual political sophistication is not the only way in which we can check the role of information. The individual need for information can be measure also according with the level of complexity of the issue citizens are asked about. It follows that:

H3: the influence of parties' position on citizens' attitude will be higher on hard issues than on easy ones

All together these hypotheses seek to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of the relation between information and parties' influence on citizens' attitudes.

ANALYSIS

The hypotheses exposed in the previous section will be tested using two kinds of data: experimental and cross-sectional data. The reasons I need two kinds of analysis are essentially two. On one hand, the use of experimental methodology solves the problem of the reverse causality: there is the possibility that my main DV (parties position) is endogenous to the model, given the influence that voters can exert on the positions of their parties. In the literature concerning the support for European Union it is possible to find evidence for both a "top-down" (see Hellström 2008, Ray 2003) and a "bottom-up" (see Carruba 2001) dynamic of the relation between political parties and their electors. If the former find his theoretical justification in an heuristic process, the latter is based on the idea of parties as vote-seekers; in other words, given the fact that the European Union is becoming a more salient issue in politics and voters can now observe the practical consequences of the integration process, rational political parties try to

intercept the preferences of the citizens for maximizing their share of votes; for doing it, political parties try to adopt positions on the European Union that are reasonably similar to their potential voters' positions. In this perspective, therefore, the influence would run from the public opinion to the political elites. Moreover, the literature does not lack of studies that claim for a bi-directional dynamics in which both a "top-down" and "bottom-up" influence are present and get stronger or weaker according with some contextual factors (Steenbergen et al. 2007, Wessels 1995).

Given this controversial nature of the link between Europeanism of public opinion and political elites, the risk in my analysis is to overestimate the heuristic process. I cannot a priori consider the possible congruence between these two levels of Europeanism as the consequence of the only "top-down" process. My concern is, therefore, to be able to measure the influence of political elites on public opinion, net of the opposite process. In this sense, the use of experimental data perfectly suits the needs of this kind of analysis given that the different values of the DV will be only the result of the researcher's manipulation.

However, experimental results lack external validity. For this reason I will also perform an analysis of cross-sectional data. The point of this analysis is to demonstrate that the heuristic mechanism detected in the experimental data is observable also in the "real world", outside of the experimental setting.

Experimental Data

The experiment was embedded in the seventh wave of an on-line panel study carried out by the research group "Democracy, Elections and Citizenship" of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). The survey was completed by 1014 Spanish citizens older than 17 and younger than 50 years of age. Only respondents that declared to be supporters of PP, PSOE, or Podemos were included in the experiment; therefore the number of the experiment's participants is 410.

The internet survey was administered between the 27th of April and 8th of May 2015, shortly before the 2015 Regional and Municipal Elections and before the electoral campaign started.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups. In both groups participants were presented with four different political issues. Two of the issues concerned the national political level, while the other two were related to the European Union context⁶. For each issue, participants were asked to select their preferred policy option among three different proposals. In the treatment group these proposals were labeled with the name of the three political parties (PP, PSOE and Podemos), while respondents of the control group were presented with the same options but without the endorsement by political parties. The policy options used in the experiment are the real positions that each party has on each political issue⁷. For the European level the issues used in the experiment are “European austerity policies” (easy) and “Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)” (hard). Membership in the control or treatment group is the same for the four issues: if a respondent received policy options with party labels for one issue, he also got them in the other three (likewise, respondents in the control group received party labels for neither of the four issues). The order of the issues in the survey was random, and so was the order of the policy options for each political issue. Participants’ partisanship was ascertained by the question “Which of the following political parties do you like the most or you feel closest to your ideas?”. It is possible to find the wording of the experimental treatments in the Appendix.

Results for Experimental Data

Given the focus of the present paper, the following analysis will concern only the two European political issues. As already said, I used “European Austerity policies” as an easy issue and “TTIP” as a hard one. The biggest difference between these two issues is their saliency in the Spanish political agenda. Austerity policies at both national and European level have been broadly debated in Spain and PP, PSOE, and Podemos have clear position about them. Each of these parties also has a position on TTIP, but the trade and investment partnership between EU and USA has received much less attention

⁶ In this paper only the two European issues will be taken into account.

⁷ The positions of each party are taken from their electoral manifestos or public speeches.

in the political debate. Moreover, positions on austerity policy have for sure a more symbolic meaning compared with party positions on TTIP: they are linked with current ideological debate and conflict over different visions of European integration, and, at least in the case of Podemos, these positions also constitute part of the *raison d'être* of the party itself. Therefore, also the second criterion used by Carmines and Stimson (1980) for distinguish between hard and easy issues is met. The chosen experimental design, however, does not allow to fully accomplish also the third criterion, that is the difference between ends and means; it is unlikely that political parties take clear positions on such a general and abstract thing like “ends”; and also if they do, these positions are hardly different among different political parties. However, as already said, party positions on European austerity policies are often linked to the idea that each party have of the integration process; from this point of view, they have more to do with “ends” than positions on TTIP. All this considerations point to the fact that for Spanish citizens the TTIP is a more complex issue than European austerity policies.

We also have different indicators that can help us to understand if our categorization of TTIP as a hard issue and Austerity policies as an easy one is correct. In the internet survey I used a manipulation check that asks respondents about their personal assessment of the complexity of the different issues. The question is as following “We would like to know, for you, to what extent are complex the following issues. (1) Not complex at all, (2) A bit complex, (3) Quite complex, (4) Very complex”. In Graph 1 are presented the mean values corresponding to Austerity and TTIP issues. As we can see, for experiment’s participants the TTIP is a more complex issue than austerity policies. The difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$, two-tailed).

[Graph 1 around here]

[Graph 2 around here]

We can also rely on a more objective indicator of issues’ complexity: the percentage of people that answered “Don’t Know” when asked about their opinion on the issue. We can assume that “questions that are more difficult will be those that evoke higher levels of uncertainty from the pool of respondents” (Coan et al. 2008) and for

this reason they will have a higher rate of DKs. The idea is that a more complex issue is the one where more people are not able to express an opinion about. As we can see in Graph 2, in the austerity issue the percentage of people that could not express an opinion was significantly smaller than in the TTIP issue ($p < 0.0001$, two-tailed).

Moreover, Graph 3 shows that the higher complexity of the TTIP issue holds for different levels of political sophistication. I used six items of factual knowledge about European Union politics present in the survey for creating an index of political sophistication ranging from 0 (people that gave the wrong answer to all the questions) to 6 (people that always gave the right answer)⁸. Afterward, I dichotomized this index separating the less informed 43% of the population from the more sophisticated 57%⁹. As we can see in the graph, on one hand the likelihood to answer to each particular issue is clearly related with the level of political sophistication (higher sophisticated are always more likely to answer than lower sophisticated); on the other hand, both higher and lower sophisticated are more likely to answer to the Austerity question than to the TTIP one, meaning that, for both group of respondents, to express an opinion on the latter issue is a more demanding task than to express an opinion on the former. All the differences (both within and between groups) are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, two-tailed).

Now that we know that our classification of Austerity and TTIP as easy and hard issues was correct, we can focus on the analysis of the treatment effect of the experiment. Are political parties able to affect their voter's attitudes on European political issues? In Graph 4 is presented the percentage of people that selected the policy option from their party for both treatment and control groups for the easy and hard issue. As we can see, for both Austerity and TTIP the percentage of people that showed support for the position of the preferred party is higher when the position is endorsed by the party (treatment group) than when parties are not mentioned (control group). This means that the same political position receive a higher level of support when it is linked to the preferred political party than when the party label does not appears. The party label provides to voters a cue for selecting their preferred option.

[Graph 3 around here]

⁸ The six items that form the index of political sophistication are described In the Appendix

⁹ Given the distribution of the political sophistication index, it was not possible to create a dichotomous variable were the cut point was exactly the 50% of the population.

[Graph 4 around here]

The difference between control and treatment group are both statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$, two tailed). We can accept our H1: parties' positions on European integration have an impact on their electors' position on the same issue.

We can now analyze the relation between party cues and voters' level of political sophistication. In Table 1 are presented two OLS regression models, one for each issue. In these models the DV is a dummy that distinguish between respondents that selected the preferred party's option from respondents that selected another option or answered "Don't Know". The main IV is a dummy for the experimental treatment. In the models is also present an interaction between the treatment dummy and the 0-6 index of EU political sophistication.

As we can see in the table, political sophistication has a negative effect on party cues: in both Austerity and TTIP issue the sign of the interaction term is negative, meaning that the effect of the party endorsement is lower for people with higher level of political sophistication. Even if the interaction term is not statistically significant in the case of TTIP issue, results clearly point to the fact that the more a person is informed about European Union the less his preferred party can influence his opinions on the integration process. Also our H2 can be accepted. Graphs 5 and 6 show the marginal effects of the experimental treatment for different levels of political sophistication. For the easy issue (Graph 5), the role of political sophistication is clear: there is a relevant difference between the influence that political party can exert on people that do not have any information about EU and people that on the contrary are well informed about European integration. Indeed, people with the highest levels of political sophistication are "independent" from the influence of political parties (the confidence intervals cross the 0 line for people with level of political sophistication equal to 5 or 6). In Graph 6 we can see that for the hard issue the relation between party influence and political sophistication has the same direction (negative); however, in this case the slope of the line is much smaller, and indeed, as shown in Table 1, the interaction term is not statistically significant. This means that when respondents have to face a hard issue, their level of political sophistication cannot moderate the influence of political parties on their opinions. We can look at what happens, for example, to respondents with level 5 of political sophistication: in the easy issue these persons cannot be influenced by

political parties, while when they have to express an opinion on the hard issue they rely on party cues (in Graph 5 the confidence intervals at level 5 of political sophistication does not cross the 0 line)¹⁰.

In sum, what we can infer from the analysis of the interaction terms is that in the case of the easy issue the level of political sophistication can make the difference from relying or not on party cues. In the hard issue, on the contrary, the complexity of the issue prevents political sophistication to have the same “emancipating” effect that it has in the case of the easy issue: given that expressing an opinion on TTIP requires a bigger cognitive effort, also people with higher level of political sophistication have to rely on party cues.

However, we cannot accept our H3. Party influence on the hard issue is not higher than on the easy one. This is evident first of all from the results of Graph 4: even if in both hard and easy issue we have a significant treatment effect, it does not change with the complexity of the issue (the distance between treatment and control group is constant).

Cross Sectional Data

The results of the experiment tell us that political parties have an influence on voters’ positions on easy as well as hard issues. This influence is moderated by the level of political sophistication (the higher the political sophistication, the lower the party’s influence). On the contrary, the complexity of the issue does not seem to play a moderator role: parties’ influence in the hard issue is not different from parties’ influence in the easy one. However, issue complexity seems to matter for the interaction between treatment and political sophistication: well informed people do not need to rely on party positions when asked about the easy issue, but they have to use party heuristic when asked about a complex issue like TTIP. These results, however, are circumscribed to the experimental setting and to the Spanish political context. The following analysis

¹⁰ Moreover, if we use 90% confidence intervals, also people with the maximum level of political sophistication appears to rely on party cue when they have to express an opinion on the hard issue. For the easy issue, on the contrary, the party effect on people with level 5 or 6 of political sophistication would not be significant neither with 90% CI.

with cross-sectional data is aimed to improve the external validity of the previous findings, showing that the heuristic mechanism detected in the experimental data is observable also in the “real world” and in different European countries.

For the analysis on cross-sectional data I will rely on two dataset. The first one refers to political parties: it is a Chapel Hill experts survey from 2006; for each country is asked to some experts to provide the position of the main political parties on some political issue, included European Union. The second database refers to public opinion: it is a survey from IntUne project of 2007; this survey was especially designed for checking people’s attitudes toward EU, so it is particularly suitable for this analysis. So, we have two datasets with the position on EU of political parties and their electors. The countries in this sample are 16, and all of them are member of the EU¹¹.

I am going to use, for each sample, two indicators of Europeanism, one concerning a more general and easy issue, and the other related to a more concrete and complex topic. For the parties’ sample, the questions asked to the experts are “How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2006?” for the easy issue and ““What position did the party leadership take over the course of 2006 on the following policies? - EU cohesion or regional policy (e.g. the structural funds)” for the hard one. For the public opinion survey, the questions chosen for building the indexes are “Some say European unification has already gone too far. Others say it should be strengthened. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 10-point-scale” and “Thinking about the European Union over the next ten years or so, can you tell me whether you are in favor or against the following: More help for EU regions in economic or social difficulties”. As we can see, the pairs of questions respect at least two out of three of the criteria of Carmines and Stimson (1980) for differentiating among hard and easy issue. The questions used for the former are symbolic rather than technical because they ask about the general support for European integration and not for a specific policy; the questions do not encourage to take into consideration a complex reasoning, but rather they push for a global judgment of the European Union based also on affective remarks. Moreover, the two questions on easy issue ask about ends (European integration), and not about means (specific policies) as required by Carmines and Stimson (1980) criteria. We can say exactly the opposite for the two questions regarding the hard issue: they ask

¹¹The countries included in the study are: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Austria.

to experts and citizens to express a (party) opinion on a particular policy of the EU, that is the redistribution of funds among different regions; this is an hard issue because is technical and does not concerns ends but concrete means through which to reach the European integration. The third criterion regards the political agenda: for Carmines and Stimson (1980) a hard issue should be unfamiliar to the general public and therefore relatively new to the political debate compared with an easy one. My study, however, take into account 16 different countries, where the different salience of different issue can be quite different; it is therefore complicated to affirm that our easy issue is more familiar than the hard one. Nonetheless, it does not seem too risky to affirm that political parties are more likely to express their position on a general political principle (European integration) than on a specific policy measure (cohesion policy).

Another possible critic to the chosen survey questions can concern the level of complexity of the hard issue. It can be noted that the redistribution policy, after all, is not a so complicated topic on which people can find a lot of problem for expressing an opinion. This is true, but we need to do two consideration: first of all, even if the issue is not really complicated, it still require more information and cognitive effort than a simple opinion on the integration process in general. Secondly, we should note that here the need is to have a balance between the complexity of the issue and people's possibility of knowing their party's position. If an issue is too technical and/or too complicated, it is also possible that it is not on the public agenda and therefore the electors are not informed about the position of their party. In this case the heuristic process could not take place. For this reason the choice of cohesion policy as a hard issue seems to me an acceptable one.

For solving the problem of reverse causality also for cross-sectional data I will use Instrumental Variables. This is a tool that has already been used in this field for analyzing both the impact of public opinion's preferences on the elites (Carruba 2001, Steenbergen et al 2007), and the influence of political elites' attitudes on the electors (Ray 2003, Gabel and Scheve 2007, Steenbergen at al. 2007). The idea is that, for avoiding the endogeneity problem, we do not use the independent variable (the positions of political parties) in its "natural" form, but in a version that is purged of the possible effect of the dependent variable (the voters' positions). I will use values predicted by a set of instruments (Instrumental Variables) that can predict the independent variable but are not correlated with the dependent one. In this way I will be

sure that the values that I am using as independent variables are determined just by the instruments and not by the dependent variable.

The study of Marks et al. (2002) identifies different characteristics of a party that are related to political strategy and are able to predict the party's position on the European issue. The point is, basically, that mainstream parties will tend to have a level of support for the European integration higher than peripheral/extreme parties. The European Union constitutes a new issue in all the political systems of the member states; any new issue could transform the political competition and change the power relations among the existing parties; for this reason, the mainstream parties will try to defuse the salience of the European issue for do not changing the structure of the political competition that allowed them to have an higher portion of power within the political system, and therefore they will take a median position; accordingly, the peripheral parties will try to change these power relations for gaining a better position, and for this reason they will attempt to stress the new issue taking extreme position. Therefore, mainstream parties will support the UE, and peripheral parties will refuse it.

There are different manners to translate in practical terms the concept stated above. First of all we can say that parties that have a higher share of votes will tend to have a level of Europeanism higher than that of parties with a lower share of elector's preferences. Secondly, we can consider the relation between the parties' position on the European issue and their position on the left-right scale: this relation has the shape of a reversed U, with the extreme parties showing a lower level of Europeanism (on this point see also Hooghe et al. 2002): in the period after the Second World War, the integration process was basically a creation of center, center-right, and, to a less extent, center-left governments; the product is a European Union mainly characterized by the free market mitigated by some measure of regulated capitalism; this type of organization is very far from the preferences of extreme left parties (that think the EU as irremediably biased by the role of the capital) and extreme right parties (opposed to all diminution of the national sovereignty) (Marks et al. 2002, Hooghe et al. 2002); for this reason we can consider that the more extreme a party is, the less likely it is to support the European integration.

These two instrumental variables represent my choice for this work. The share of party's vote is operationalized with a variable that reports the percentage of vote received by the party in the national elections most prior to 2007. The extremity of the party is operationalized calculating the absolute value of party's distance from the

national mean on left-right axis. All the regression models in the next pages are 2SLS, while the results of the first stages can be found in the Appendix¹².

Results for Cross-Sectional Data

In Table 2 we can see a regression model (Model 1) in which the dependent variable is the level of respondents' support to EU (our index of easy issue). The independent variable is the level of support of respondents' party (predicted by the IVs, as in all the other regression models). As controls we have the classic factors that the literature indicates as predictor of citizens' attitudes toward EU. Even if we control for all the independent variables in the model, the position of the political party is still a strong predictor of their level of Europeanism.

[Table 2 around here]

[Table 3 around here]

In Table 3 (Model 1) we can see the same model of Table 2. The only difference is that, in this case, the dependent variable is the respondents' position on hard issue, while the main independent variable is the position of their preferred party on the same issue. Also in this case the position of the party is a strong predictor. We can therefore consider confirmed once again our H1: parties' positions influence their voters' positions.

But does party's influence depend on the level of information that citizens have on Europe? Are European citizens using political parties' positions as cognitive shortcuts to compensate their lack of information? Are we looking at a heuristic process? Following Zaller (1992), I decided to measure also in this case respondents' political sophistication with questions on factual knowledge on European Union. In the IntUne dataset there are

¹² When using instrumental variables, two conditions have to be met. First of all, the instruments have to actually predict the endogenous regressor. Tests of this assumption can be found in the tables showing the first stage results in the Appendix. The second condition is that the instruments have not to be endogenous in the main regression, otherwise they would suffer from the same problem they try to solve. Tests of this assumption can be found in the tables that show the results of the second stage in the results section.

three questions that can be used for this purpose: they ask to respondents whether or not three countries (Netherlands, Malta, and Croatia) are members of EU. I created an index of political sophistication that ranges from 0 (people that gave the wrong answer to all the questions) to 3 (people that gave always the right answer). For checking H2, I performed two regression model (Model 2 in Table 2 and Table 3) equal to the previous ones, but with an interaction between political sophistication and party' position¹³. The results are very similar to the ones of the experimental analysis. As we can see, on both easy and hard issue our expectations are confirmed: in both model the interaction term has a negative direction (meaning that the effect of parties' position decreases when political sophistication increases).

[Graph 7 around here]

[Graph 8 around here]

The results of an interaction can be better and more accurately interpreted if we graph the marginal effects as in Graph 7 and 8. As we can see, H2 is confirmed: in both cases party's influence decreases if political sophistication increases. This confirms us that we are looking at a heuristic process: when people are more sophisticated, they rely less on party position because they already have the information they need for expressing an opinion. Differently from experimental analysis, in this case the interaction term is statistically significant for both easy and hard issue, meaning that political sophistication play e moderating role of party influence also when the issue is particularly complex. However, Graphs 7 and 8 depict a situation very similar to the one we observed for experimental data: the difference between the two interaction terms is really small, but is enough for making people with level 2 of political sophistication be "independent" from party's position in the easy issue and not in the hard one (in Graph 7 the confidence interval at level 2 overlap with the 0 line, while in Graph 8 it does not). Again, the "emancipating" effect of political sophistication seems to be bigger in the easy issue, given that for expressing an autonomous judgment on hard issue people will need more information. This is evidence that, as happened for the experiment, when the

¹³ In this case the endogenous regressors are two: party's position and its interaction with political sophistication. For this reason, also the latter has to be instrumented: following Gabel and Scheve (2007) I used as instrumental variables the interaction of the instruments of party's position with political sophistication (Party vote*Political sophistication and Party extremity*Political sophistication).

issue is more complex, even people with high levels of political sophistication need to rely on party cues.

We cannot ignore, however, that in lines with our experimental results, party influence does not change depending on issue complexity. The two lines in Graph 7 and 8 are quite similar and their confidence intervals (the dot lines) overlap. Moreover, regression coefficients that refer to party's position in Table 2 and 3 (Model 1) are really similar. These results are not consistent with our H3.

Conclusions

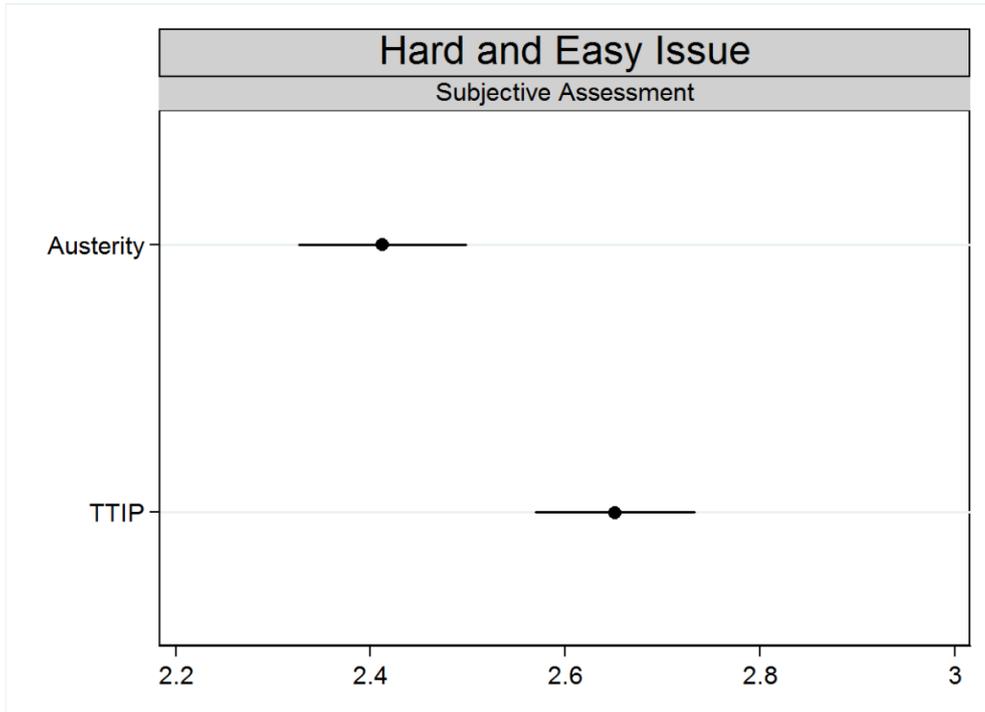
The aims of this paper was to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of the relation between information and parties' influence on citizens' attitudes toward European Union. Given its complex functioning and the really limited knowledge that the average citizen has on it, I supposed that European Union politics was a particularly favorable topic where a heuristic process could take place: people use their party's position as a cognitive shortcut for expressing an opinion on issues on which they have few or no information. The results confirm that information play a big role in shaping the level of influence that political party can exert on their electors. In general, people with a higher level of political sophistication seem to be more able to resist to party cues. On the other hand, this relation between cues and political sophistication depends on the complexity of the issue: higher levels of political sophistication make voters to be more "independent" in their opinion on an easy issue; however, when facing a complex issue, also voters with higher level of political sophistication need to rely on party cues for expressing their opinion.

We also have to say that, contrary to our expectations, the influence of political parties does not change with the complexity of the issues; that is, party cues are not more effective on hard issues than on easy ones. We can propose two competing explanation of these results. On one hand, we could just assume that the complexity of the issue does not make any difference: voters always follow the party cues to the same extent. On the other hand we could also think that the European context is so complex,

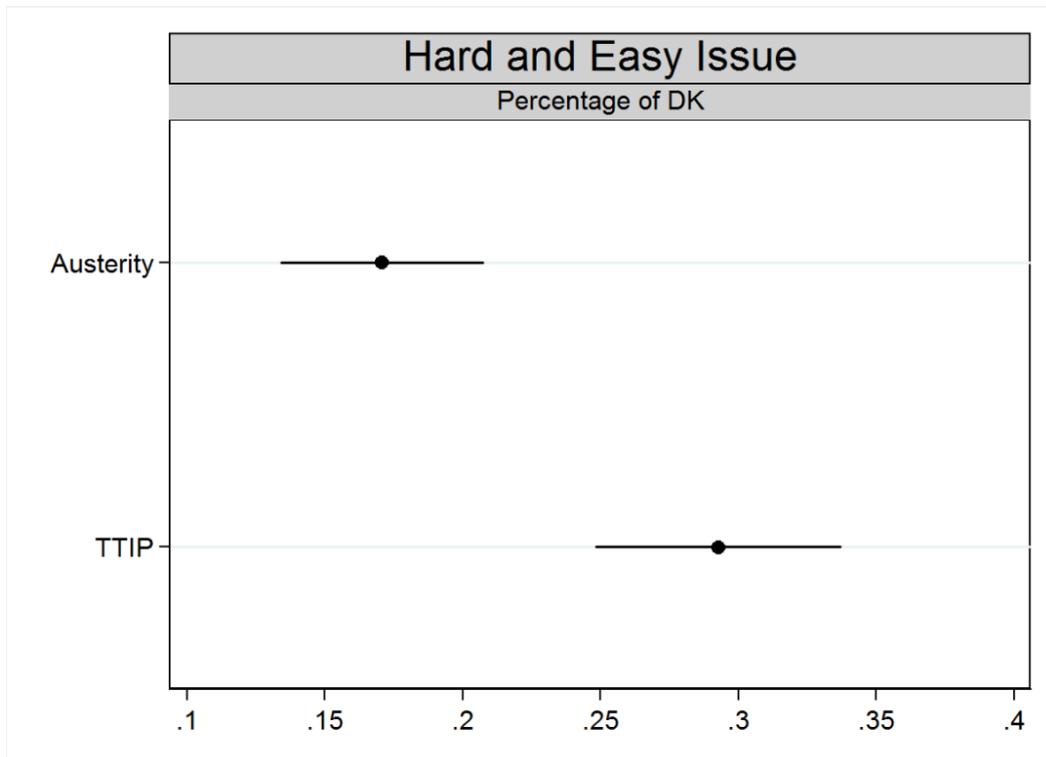
and people have so few information about it, that voters consider the majority of the European issues as hard.

In any case, European Union politics represent a good context where to test the existence of a heuristic process. The issue debated at the European level are particularly complex, for both their economic connotation and the articulated functioning of the European institutions. Moreover, European citizens are on average uninformed about EU, and they show low levels of political sophistication in this topic. If we add also that European parties are basically weak in structuring the European political debate, it is clear that national parties can play a big role in influencing citizens' attitudes toward European integration. The low tendency of citizens to be informed about European politics, and the high complexity of the issues debated keep electors "dependent" to parties' positions.

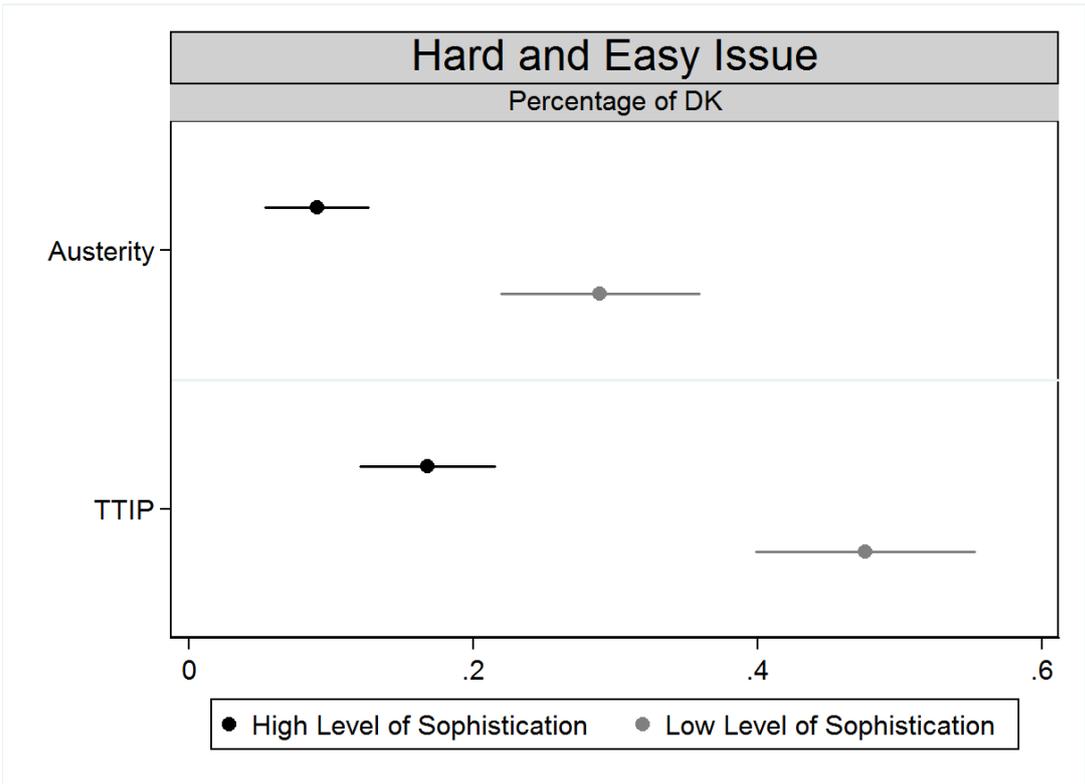
Graphs and Tables



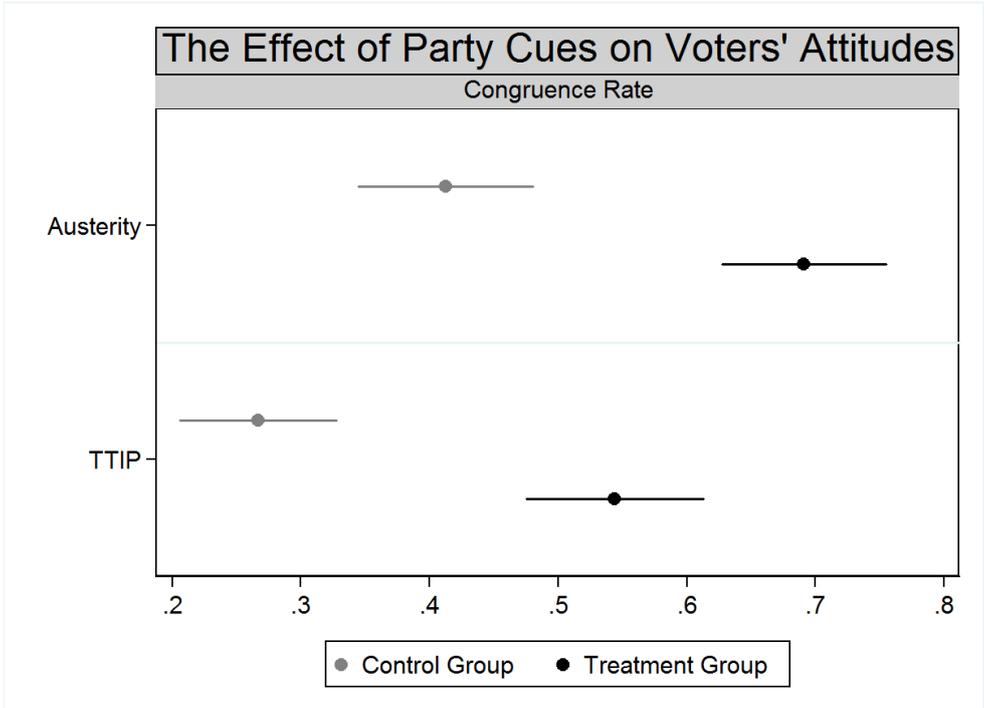
Graph 1 - Subjective assessment of issues' complexity



Graph 2 - Objective assessment of issues' complexity



Graph 3 - Objective assessment of issue's complexity for different level of political sophistication



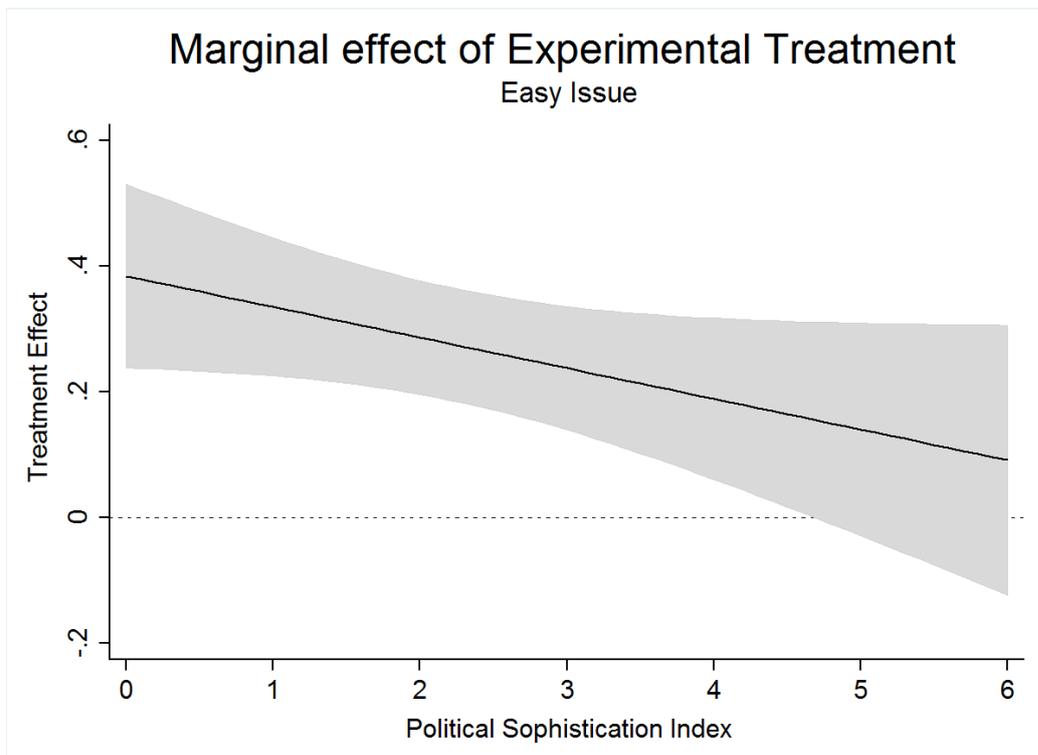
Graph 4 - Percentage of respondent that selected the preferred party's policy option

Table 1 – OLS Regression analysis

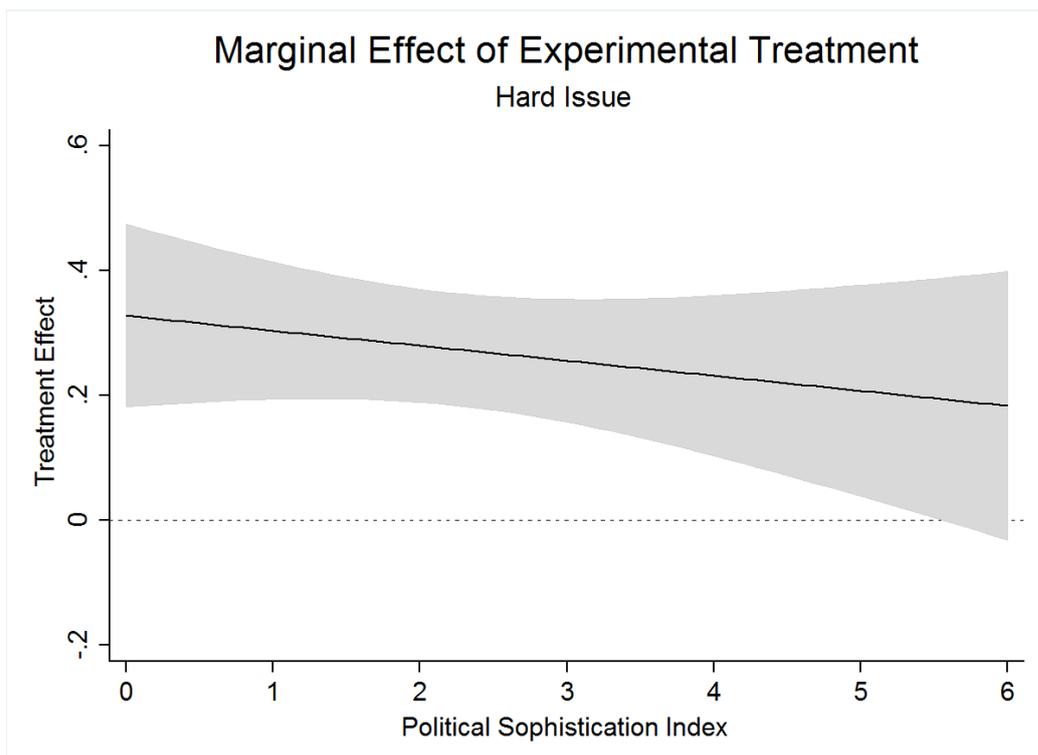
	Austerity	TTIP
Treatment	0.38*** (0.07)	0.33*** (0.07)
Pol.Sop.	0.09*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
Treatment X Pol.Sop.	-0.05 ⁺ (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)
Constant	0.21*** (0.05)	0.12* (0.03)
Observations	410	410
R ²	0.1453	0.1217

Standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001



Graph 5 - The Effect of Party Cues for Different Level of Political Sophistication (Easy Issue)



Graph 6 - The Effect of Party Cues for Different Level of Political Sophistication (Hard Issue)

Table 2- Determinants of Citizens' Position on the Easy Issue

Determinants of Citizens' Position on the Easy Issue		
	Model 1	Model 2
Party's Position	0.10*** (0.03)	0.39*** (0.07)
Political Sophistication		0.11*** (0.03)
Political Sophistication X Party's Position		-0.16*** (0.04)
Satisfaction with national democracy	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Personal Benefit	-0.07*** (0.00)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Attachment to Country	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Attachment to Europe	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)
Moreno Question	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)

Trust in people from EU	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Trust in European Commission	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Job		
Employee	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Manual Worker	-0.03* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)
Without a payed job	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Visits in other European Countries	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00** (0.00)
Country Economic Situation	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Gender	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)
Left-Right Position	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.58*** (0.04)	0.38*** (0.07)
Sargan's X^2 test	0.00753 (p= 0.9309)	0.37565 (p = 0.8288)
Basmann's X^2 test	0.00750 (p= 0.9310)	0.374352 (p = 0.8293)
Observations	6023	5967
R2	0.1886	0.1861

* p<0.1. ** p<0.05. *** p<0.01

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

Table 3 - Determinants of Citizens' Position on the Hard Issue

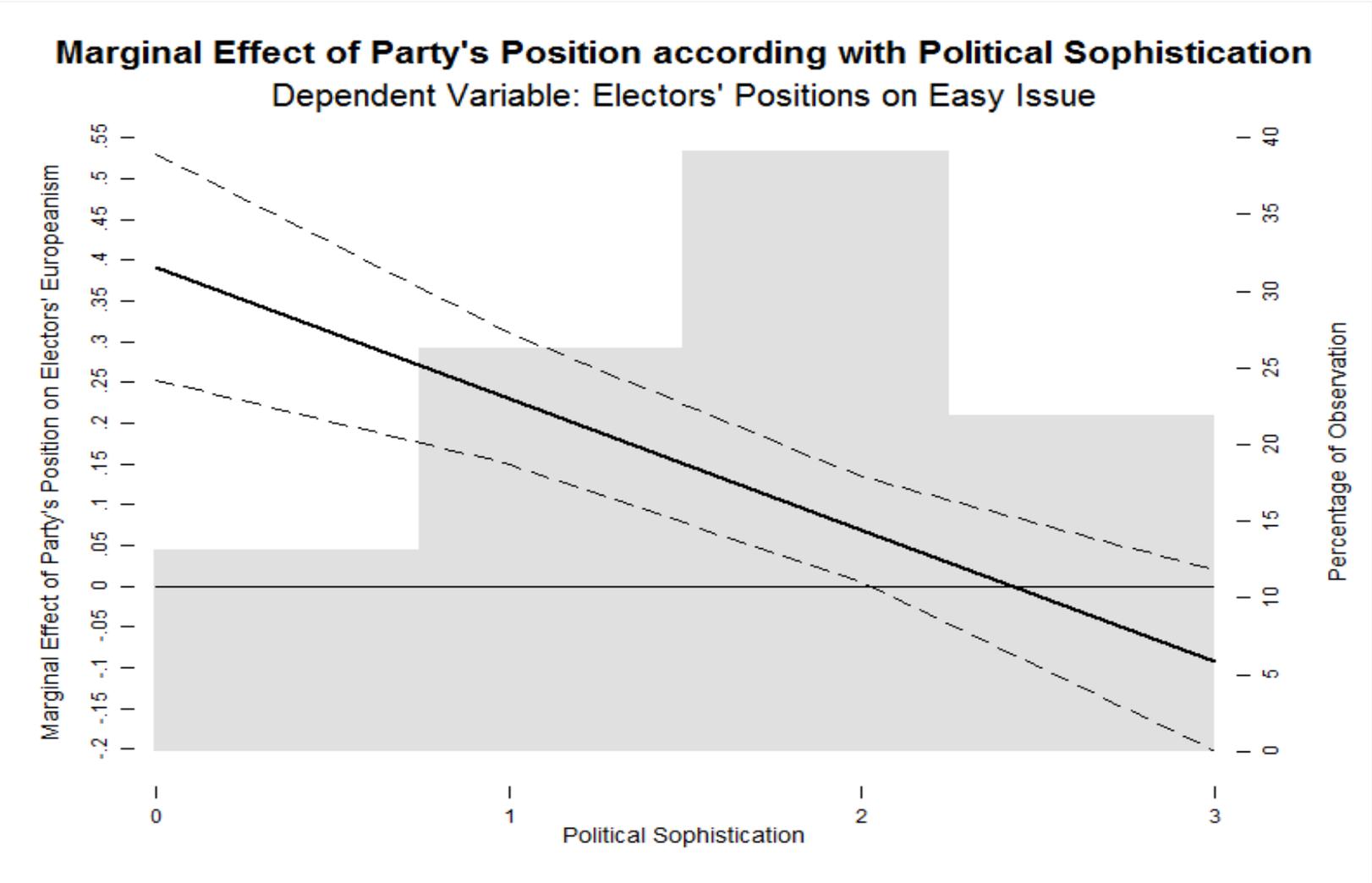
Determinants of Citizens' Position on the Hard Issue		
	Model 1	Model 2
Party's Position	0.14*** (0.05)	0.39*** (0.11)
Political Sophistication		0.11** (0.05)

Political Sophistication X Party's Position		-0.14**	(0.06)
Satisfaction with national democracy		-0.01***	-0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Personal Benefit		-0.04***	-0.04***
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Attachment to Country		-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Attachment to Europe		-0.01***	-0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Moreno Question		0.01***	0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Trust in people from EU		0.00**	0.00**
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Trust in European Commission		0.01***	0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy		-0.03***	-0.03***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Job			
Employee		-0.01	-0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Manual Worker		-0.03**	-0.03**
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Without a payed job		-0.00	-0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Visits in other European Countries		-0.01***	-0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Country Economic Situation		-0.01**	-0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender		-0.02***	-0.02***
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Left-Right Position		-0.01***	-0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant		0.93***	0.72***
		(0.06)	(0.01)
<hr/>			
Sargan's X^2 test		0.099305	0.355863
		(p = 0.7527)	(p = 0.8370)
Basman's X^2 test		0.099	0.354591
		(p = 0.7530)	(p = 0.8375)
<hr/>			
Observations		5828	5773
R2		0.1221	0.1226
<hr/>			

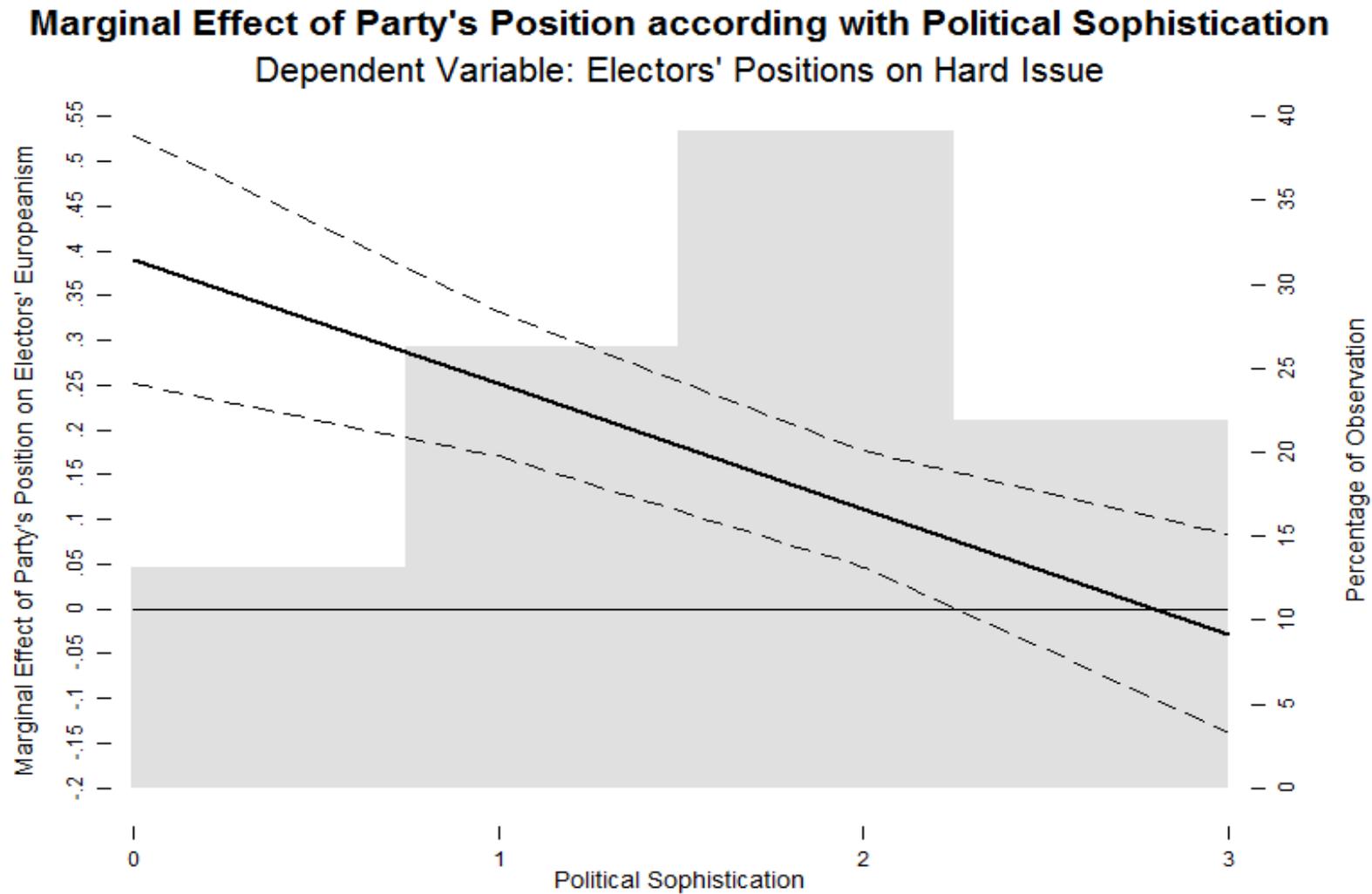
* p<0.1. ** p<0.05. *** p<0.01

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

Graph 7 - Marginal Effect of Party's Position on Citizens' Position according with Political Sophistication (Easy Issue) with 2SLS



Graph 8 - Marginal Effect of Party's Position on Citizens' Position according with Political Sophistication (Hard Issue) with 2SLS



Appendix

Table4 – First stage’s results of 2SLS in Model 1 of Table 1

Determinants of Parties’ Position on the Easy Issue	
Share of party’s votes	0.01*** (0.00)
Party’s extremity	-0.06*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.00 (0.00)
Personal Benefit	-0.01*** (0.00)
Attachment to Country	-0.00 (0.00)
Attachment to Europe	-0.01*** (0.00)
Moreno Question	-0.01*** (0.00)
Trust in people from EU	-0.00** (0.00)
Trust in European Commission	0.01*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	-0.01*** (0.00)
Job	
Employee	-0.01 (0.01)
Manual Worker	-0.02 (0.01)
Without a payed job	-0.00 (0.00)
Visits in other European Countries	0.01*** (0.00)
Country Economic Situation	0.01*** (0.00)
Gender	0.00 (0.00)
Left-Right Position	-0.00* (0.00)
Constant	0.76*** (0.02)
<hr/>	
R ²	0.3444

Adjusted R ²	0.3426
Partial R ²	0.3016
F-statistic for test if excluded instruments	1296.39
<i>F</i> p-values	0.00
<hr/>	
Observations	6023

* p<0.1. ** p<0.05. *** p<0.01

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

Table 5 – First stage’s results of 2SLS in Model 2 of Table 1

Determinants of Parties’ Position on the Easy Issue and its Interaction with Political Sophistication

	Party Position	Party Position * Political Sophistication
Share of party’s votes	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)
Party’s extremity	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
Political Sophistication	0.03*** (0.01)	0.81*** (0.01)
Share of party’s votes * Political Sophistication	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Party’s extremity * Political Sophistication	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.01** (0.01)
Personal Benefit	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Attachment to Country	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
Attachment to Europe	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.01)
Moreno Question	0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.01)
Trust in people from EU	-0.00** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)
Trust in European Commission	0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.01)
Job		
Employee	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)

Manual Worker	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)
Without a payed job	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Visits in other European Countries	0.00*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Country Economic Situation	0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Gender	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)
Left-Right Position	0.00* (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)
Constant	0.76*** (0.02)	-0.06 (0.05)
<hr/>		
R ²	0.3497	0.8614
Adjusted R ²	0.3475	0.8610
Partial R ²	0.3054	0.2786
F-statistic for test if excluded instruments	653.55	574.207
F p-values	0.00	0.00
<hr/>		
Observations	5967	5967

* p<0.1. ** p<0.05. *** p<0.01

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

Table 6 – First stage’s results of 2SLS in Model 1 of Table 2

Determinants of Parties’ Position on the Hard Issue	
Share of party’s votes	0.00*** (0.00)
Party’s extremity	-0.03*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.02*** (0.00)
Personal Benefit	-0.02*** (0.00)
Attachment to Country	0.01*** (0.00)
Attachment to Europe	-0.00 (0.00)
Moreno Question	-0.01*** (0.00)
Trust in people from EU	-0.00***

	(0.00)
Trust in European Commission	0.01***
	(0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	-0.01***
	(0.00)
Job	
Employee	-0.01**
	(0.00)
Manual Worker	-0.01**
	(0.01)
Without a paid job	-0.01**
	(0.00)
Visits in other European Countries	-0.01***
	(0.00)
Country Economic Situation	-0.01***
	(0.00)
Gender	0.00
	(0.00)
Left-Right Position	-0.00***
	(0.00)
Constant	0.94***
	(0.01)
<hr/>	
R ²	0.3114
Adjusted R ²	0.3094
Partial R ²	0.2158
F-statistic for test if excluded instruments	799.446
F p-values	0.00
<hr/>	
Observations	5828
<hr/>	

* p<0.1. ** p<0.05. *** p<0.01

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

Table 7 – First stage’s results of 2SLS in Model 2 of Table 2

Determinants of Parties’ Position on the Hard Issue and its Interaction with Political Sophistication		
	Party Position	Party Position * Political Sophistication
Share of party’s votes	0.00***	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Party’s extremity	-0.02***	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)

Political Sophistication	0.01** (0.00)	0.83*** (0.01)
Share of party's votes * Political Sophistication	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)
Party's extremity * Political Sophistication	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)
Personal Benefit	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Attachment to Country	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
Attachment to Europe	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)
Moreno Question	0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Trust in people from EU	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Trust in European Commission	0.00*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Satisfaction with European democracy	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)
Job		
Employee	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.02 (0.01)
Manual Worker	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Without a payed job	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.02* (0.01)
Visits in other European Countries	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Country Economic Situation	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Gender	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)
Left-Right Position	-0.00*** (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)
Constant	0.93*** (0.02)	0.27*** (0.03)
<hr/>		
R ²	0.3161	0.9257
Adjusted R ²	0.3137	0.9255
Partial R ²	0.2182	0.1924
F-statistic for test if excluded instruments	401.38	342.649
F p-values	0.00	0.00
<hr/>		
Observations	5773	5773

* p<0.1. ** p<0.05. *** p<0.01

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

Experimental Treatments

Two of the issue concerns EU politics, while the other two concern the national political debate. The parts between square brackets just appear in the treatment group version.

We are interested in your opinion about some political issues.

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

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

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

1. It is necessary to put order in the public finances in order to achieve economic growth [as proposed by the PP]
2. It is necessary to apply budget's discipline but adding a plan for investments [as proposed by the PSOE]
3. It is necessary to block the austerity policies [as proposed Podemos]
4. DK

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

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

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

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

1. It is necessary to protect people failing to meet their mortgage obligations not for a miscalculation, but because of the loss of their job [as proposed by the PP]
2. It is necessary to provide mechanisms for the protection against evictions and to allow *dación en pago* [as proposed by the PSOE]
3. It is necessary to establish conditions for the moratorium, restructuring or removing of the families' debt produced as a result of the asymmetrical power of financial institutions [as proposed by Podemos]
4. DK

Political Sophistication index

The index of political sophistication in European Union politics used in the experimental analysis is composed by the following 6 items:

- 1) What position is currently occupied by Jean-Claude Juncker?** (1) President of ECB (2) President of European Council (3) President of Eurogroup (4) President of European Commission (5) I Don't Know
- 2) Who form part of the European Council?** (1) The Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the EU (2) The MEPs elected in the European elections (3) The presidents of European parties (4) The finance Ministers of member states of the EU (5) I Don't Know
- 3) How many countries of EU use the Euro as the official currency?** (1) 13 countries (2) 15 countries (3) 19 countries (4) All member states of EU (5) I Don't Know

- 4) What institution sets interest rates?** (1) The Spanish Government (2) The International Monetary Fund (3) The European Central Bank (4) The Bank of Spain (5) I Don't Know
- 5) Regarding the public debt of Spain, about what percentage of GDP is it now?** (1) Less than 60% of GDP (2) between 60% and 90% of the GDP (3) between 90% and 120% of GDP (4) more than 120% of GDP (5) I Don't Know¹⁴
- 6) If the euro depreciates against other currencies, you think that...** (1) Our exports outside the euro area will be damaged (2) Our exports within the euro area will be favored (3) Our exports outside the euro area will be favored (4) Our exports within the euro area will be damaged (5) I Don't Know

¹⁴ This item does not strictly measure European Union knowledge. However, the debt/GDP ratio is important information for understanding the current debate on Euro crisis, Fiscal compact, and austerity.

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