

Changes in party structure and effectiveness of cues on the EU^a

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Abstract

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

3.1 Party cues and the European Union

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

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

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

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

Even outside the realm of EU studies, few studies have taken into account the role of party familiarity in moderating the effect of party cues (Merolla et al., 2008; Coan et al., 2008; Brader et al., 2013; Brader and Tucker, 2012). Moreover, these studies focus on a single country (Merolla et al., 2008; Coan et al., 2008) or analyse party cues in more than one country but on different issues (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Brader et al., 2013). In this regard, the study of party cues on views of European integration can improve the current state of knowledge on the role of party familiarity, by relying on party data from different countries (EU member states) on the same issue (European integration). This means that it is possible to rely on the analysis of a higher number of parties while keeping the political issue and the confounding factors associated with it constant.¹

3.2 Party reputation and cues effectiveness

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

¹ The analyses of party cues in different countries on the same issue helps to keep constant some confounding factors like the domestic/foreign nature of the issue or, to a lesser extent, citizens' knowledge about it. However, other issue characteristics, such as saliency in the political debate, are strongly dependent on the national context and for this reason cannot be kept constant across countries.

political parties persuade citizens to follow their line? Jackman and Sniderman (2002) use a metaphor to show how citizens choose which shortcut to use when developing political attitudes or elaborating electoral decisions. They imagine the ordinary citizen in front of two doors; she has to decide in which of the rooms beyond them she will find the key (i.e. the heuristic) that she is looking for in order to make her political choice. However, ‘one room is *close* by, its content *familiar* (our ordinary citizen has found useful things there before), perhaps even friendly; the other room is *further away*, relatively *unfamiliar*, perhaps even threatening. Where, then, do we think our “ordinary citizen” will search?’ (p. 219).² This quote suggests that, apart from party attachment, the acceptance of party cues requires additional factors to take place. Voters also need to be *familiar* with the ‘room’ they choose; they need to have previous experience with it to know that beyond that door they can find ‘useful things.’ In Lupia and McCubbins’ (1998) words, ‘brand names and party labels are valuable to consumers and voters only if the brands have strong and consistent connections to particular outcomes’ (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998: 36). A similar point is also stressed by Coan et al. (2008). They show that cues are weaker when they come from minor parties than when they come from major ones, the reason being that ‘the lower visibility, inconsistency, and lack of office-holding experience characteristic of minor parties may make their ‘brand names’ vulnerable to a lack of familiarity and trust among the general public which, in turn, should make their labels less useful to citizens looking to employ cognitive shortcuts’ (Coan et al., 2008: 391). In short, people need to know the source of the cues they follow.

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

² Italics added.

identify which are the core values and interests that a political party serves to use its cues. Therefore, to shape the preferences of their voters, it is important for political parties to have the possibility to present a clear and consistent ideological image. Indeed, Brader and his colleagues find that party cues are more likely to affect the attitudes of partisan voters when they come from longstanding political parties, exactly as one would expect if previous experience with the party label helped citizens to understand its ideological outlook. Along the same lines, the authors also find that, compared with incumbent parties, opposition parties can more easily influence voters' attitudes because of their clearer ideological image. Incumbent parties, in fact, have to face all sorts of problems when implementing promised policies. This will inevitably make them deviate to some extent from their original purposes, debilitating in this way the clarity of a party's image.³ Woon and Pope (2008) are even more precise in establishing a link between clarity of party ideological brand and previous party behaviour by demonstrating that 'uninformed voters use party labels as informational shortcuts, and it is the congressional parties who produce the information in party labels through their legislative activities' (p. 823). In other words, voters' experience with a particular party helps them to understand the ideological values that inspire the party activity, and therefore improves the likelihood of cue acceptance.

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

³ The effect of party longevity on party cues disappears when introducing party incumbency status and a more direct measure of party ideological clarity to the model.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3 Data

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

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

The dependent variable of my analysis is voters' support for the European Union, while the main independent variable is their party's position on the same issue. Both variables are operationalised through an index that takes into account attitudes toward integration in some specific policy areas. In the IntUne dataset, the following question is asked for both citizens and MPs: 'Thinking about the European Union over the next ten years or so, can you tell me whether you are in favour or against the following:' 'A unified tax system for the EU,' 'A common system of social security in the EU,' 'A single EU foreign policy toward outside countries,' 'More help for EU regions in economic or social difficulties.' The five answer options range from 'Strongly against' to 'Strongly in favour.'⁴ The voters' general support for the EU is obtained by summing, for each individual, the score he or she has on the four items. A similar operation is done on surveyed MPs. For each party, I calculated the mean value among MPs on each item.⁵ Afterward, I calculated, for each party, the sum of the four mean values. In this way, I have an index of parties'

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

⁵ For each country, the MPs' sample design was proportional by seniority, gender, age, party, and tenure in parliament. The number of MPs surveyed for each country ranges from 46 to 94, while the number of MPs surveyed for each party ranges from 1 to 50.

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

The other dataset to be used for the analysis has been created by Dani Marinova and refers to the instability of parties (Marinova 2013). Marinova has built an index of electoral instability in parties (EIP) based on the changes in their electoral structure and independent from election results. The EIP index has been computed starting from detailed data on six categories of electoral change in parties: the emergence of new parties, the disbanding of existing parties, party mergers, party splits, and party entry into and exit from joint lists. Marinova documents changes in these six categories, in each party organization between two consequent elections (at time $t-1$ and t) at the party level of analysis. All parties that had at least five percent of the vote in the lower-house parliamentary elections have been included in the dataset. The result is a dataset of 1100 parties from 148 elections and 27 European democracies (seventeen West European and ten Central and East European). EIP is obtained by summing, for each election in each country, all the changes documented at the party level. In this way, Marinova obtains the electoral instability in parties experienced by a specific party system in a specific election.⁶

These indicators, at both the election and the party level, are particularly suitable for the purposes of this paper. This paper focuses on how changes in the party system's

⁶ In the EIP index, the number of mergers and joint lists are recorded regardless of the number of parties comprising each. Otherwise, merger, joint list entry and joint list exit would weight more than the other categories because, by definition, they involve more than one party.

stability affect the reputational value of party labels and, in turn, parties' ability to shape the attitudes of their voters. To this end, an index that takes into account changes of the electoral structure of parties between elections is likely to capture the loss of familiarity among voters that parties experience when changing their image. Therefore, I used Marinova's dataset to obtain two kinds of moderator variables. On the one hand, I will use the six-category EIP index measured at the elections level for testing if a chaotic party system debilitates the effectiveness of party cues. In other words, I will use the index to test H1. On the other hand, I will take into account some of the changes recorded at the party level to test H2 and discover if the instability in the image of a single party prevents its voters from using party cues. In particular, I will examine if new parties, parties that resulted from a merger, and parties that resulted from a split are less likely to persuade their voters than parties with a more stable structure. I focus on these specific party changes because, unlike the entries and exits from joint lists, they create new and permanent party organizations.⁷

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

⁷ Note that two out of three moderators at the party level (new party and party resulting from a split) are present in Marinova's original dataset, whereas the third (party resulting from a merger) has been created for the present analysis.

3.4 Results

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

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

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

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

covering almost 30% of the scale.

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

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

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

Without a payed job		-0.08 (0.17)	-0.09 (0.17)
Perceived changes in national economic situation		0.13* (0.05)	0.14** (0.05)
Gender		-0.48*** (0.11)	-0.47*** (0.11)
Left-Right position		-0.09** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)
Party closeness		0.15 ⁺ (0.09)	0.16 ⁺ (0.09)
Constant	11.20 (0.17)	8.23*** (0.50)	5.47*** (0.67)
<i>Random-effects</i>			
2 nd -level variance	1.45 (0.32)	1.06 (0.25)	0.56 (0.15)
1 st -level variance	10.69 (0.25)	9.72 (0.23)	9.72 (0.23)
Observations	3681	3681	3681
Number of groups	64	64	64

LR test for the null model

LR test vs. linear model: $\text{chibar2}(01) = 353.71$ Prob \geq $\text{chibar2} = 0.0000$

LR test for the random intercept model (level-1)

LR test vs. linear regression: $\text{chibar2}(01) = 254.46$ Prob \geq $\text{chibar2} = 0.0000$

LR test for the random intercept model (level-1 and -2)

LR test vs. linear model: $\text{chibar2}(01) = 115.90$ Prob \geq $\text{chibar2} = 0.0000$

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

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

Standard errors in parentheses

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

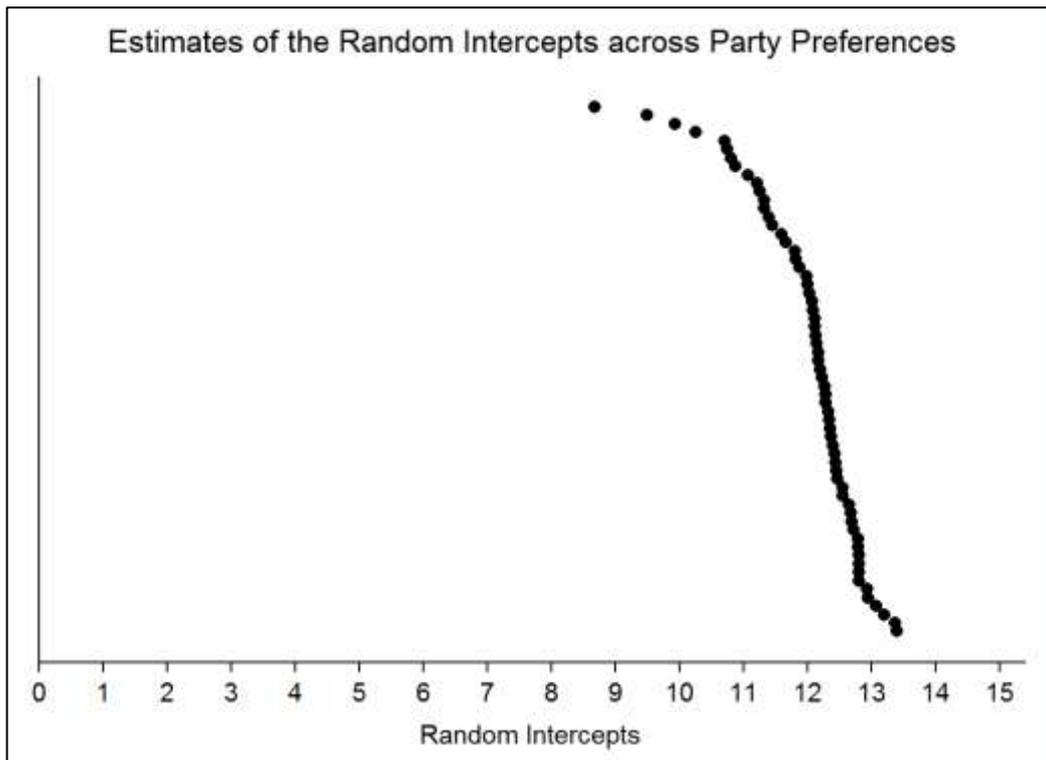


Figure 3.1. Random Intercepts. *Note:* The figure shows the spread in intercept values of support for the EU across groups of voters that feel close to the same party.

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

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

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

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

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

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

systems, political parties are less able to shape their voters' attitudes than in party systems where parties do not change their electoral image. Figure 3.2 shows the marginal effect of party position on voters' attitudes across different values of EIP.⁸ It seems that when there are three or more changes in parties' electoral structure between two elections, political elites are no longer able to shape voters' preferences. Moreover, it is also possible to observe that the level-2 variance for this model is substantially lower than in the previous ones, meaning that the interaction between party position and EIP accounts for a relevant part of the intercept variation.

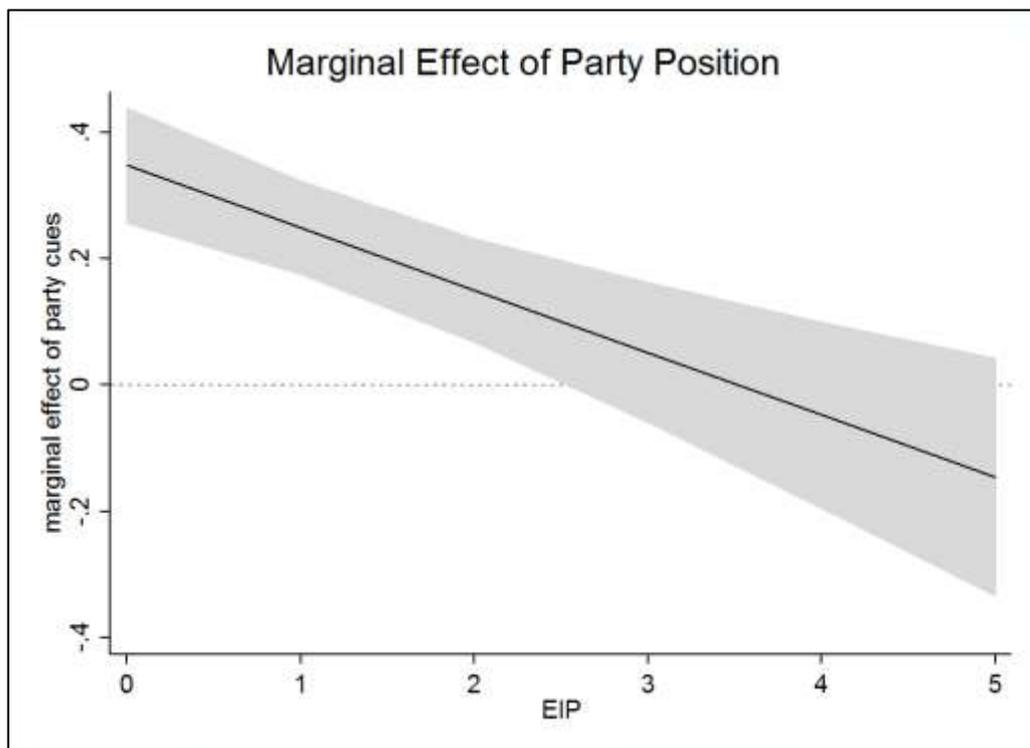


Figure 3.2. Effect of party position across different levels of electoral instability in parties (EIP).

⁸ Bulgaria is excluded from the graph because it is the only country that has an EIP higher than 5 (see Table C5 in the Appendix) and as a strong outlier it drags the line into negative values. Excluding Bulgaria from the regression does not change the results concerning the interaction term.

The second hypothesis aims understand whether, apart from a systemic effect of instability, it is also possible to find an effect from the instability of single parties. In other words, the objective is to discover if when a party experiences a change in its electoral structure, its voters are less likely to use party cues than voters of more stable parties are. To test this hypothesis, I replicated the previous model three times, but instead of using the interaction with the EIP at the party system level, I used interactions with three changes at the party level from Marinova's dataset. In particular, I examined if new parties, parties that resulted from a merger, and parties that resulted from a split have fewer effective cues than more stable parties do. These party changes refer to the last elections held before the IntUne survey.⁹

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

⁹ Results that refer to party level changes, however, need to be interpreted very cautiously and only as a clue of the effect of party changes on cues' effectiveness. In fact, only a very low number of respondents in the sample actually felt close to a party that experienced some sort of organizational change (see Table C2 in the Appendix for the frequencies).

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

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

national parliament, government/opposition status of the party¹⁰. Table C3 shows that the results concerning the interactions between party position and instability do not change even if I take into account the possibility of reverse causality.

The results of Tables 3.2 provide evidence of a clear effect of instability at the system level and a somehow less robust effect of instability at the party level. These results suggest that the effect of instability at the party system level is not the simple sum of the effect of instability at the party level. It seems that if the party system is unstable, voters do not use party cues, irrespective of whether their party is experiencing changes in its structure. It is possible to test this mechanism by looking at the effect of party system instability while controlling for party level changes. Table 3.3 presents the results of this analysis. Models 1 to 3 replicate Model 1 of Table 3.2, controlling for each of the changes in the party structure that I took into account for the analysis, whereas Model 4 controls for all of them.¹¹ These models show that in an unstable party system, a party is less likely to affect its voters' positions on EU issues even if it does not experience any permanent change in its electoral structure. In other words, even if the reputation values of a party remain unchanged, a chaotic context can affect its capacity to shape voters' political opinions. In other words, when the party system is unstable, voters are more likely to look to political actors different from parties as a source of cues.

¹⁰ For calculating party extremity, I first calculated the mean left-right position among the MPs of each party; afterward, I used these values to calculate the mean national left-right party position for each country. Finally, I calculated party extremity as the absolute ideological distance of each party from the national mean.

¹¹ Given that the EIP index is measured at the national level, Table C4 in the Appendix replicates all the models with the EIP using country as second level of analysis. The models also use instrumental variables to account for the reverse causality. The results are not substantially different from results presented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

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

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Fixed-effects</i>				
Party position	0.35*** (0.05)	0.35*** (0.05)	0.35*** (0.05)	0.35*** (0.04)
EIP	1.27*** (0.28)	1.27*** (0.28)	1.27*** (0.28)	1.30*** (0.28)
Party position*EIP	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)
Political sophistication	0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)
Satisfaction with national democracy	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.07)
Personal benefit	0.77*** (0.11)	0.77*** (0.11)	0.77*** (0.11)	0.77*** (0.11)
Attachment to country	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.08)
Trust in people from the EU	0.18*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.03)
Satisfaction with European democracy	0.80*** (0.08)	0.81*** (0.08)	0.80*** (0.08)	0.80*** (0.08)
Occupation				
Employee	-0.54** (0.17)	-0.55** (0.17)	-0.54** (0.17)	-0.55** (0.17)
Manual worker	-0.72** (0.26)	-0.72** (0.26)	-0.72** (0.26)	-0.73** (0.26)
Without a paid job	-0.10 (0.17)	-0.10 (0.17)	-0.10 (0.17)	-0.10 (0.17)
Economic situation changes	0.13* (0.06)	0.13* (0.06)	0.13* (0.06)	0.13* (0.06)

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

Standard errors in parentheses

The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-Employed'

+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.00

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Appendix

Table C1. Control variables' coding

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

Table C2. Supporters of changing parties

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

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

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

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

Standard errors in parentheses

The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-Employed'

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

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

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

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

Standard errors in parentheses

The reference category for the variable 'Occupation' is 'Self-Employed'

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

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

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