Politically Competent Citizens: The Role of Predispositions and Political Context in Comparative Perspective

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Declaration

I hereby declare that no parts of this dissertation have been accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. This dissertation contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Abstract

Both normative democratic theories and empirical research strive to identify a set of basic competences that should help ordinary citizens to make political decisions that are in their best interest and thus help realizing the democratic ideal. It is by now axiomatic that citizens need to possess at least some basic political competences for them to be able to live up to the role assigned to them in democratic theory. Therefore this dissertation focuses on identifying a set of essential political competences and the factors that favor the development of such competences. Based on existing research I identify the three political competences which received the most attention in the political behavior literature: the level of political knowledge, the capacity to develop a coherent and consistent set of attitudes (i.e. attitude constraint) and the capacity to cast a vote that best represents ones interest (i.e. "attitude-congruent" voting) . I investigate both the "stable" factors that lead to inherent inequalities in political competences (e.g. socio economic status), but I also point to those factors that would lead to an increase in political competence across all groups (e.g. use of heuristics, political institutions, political elites). Furthermore, I show that at least in some cases the factors in this latter category have the potential to reduce inherent inequalities in the level of political competences that stem from differences in individual factors.

After a brief introduction and overview of the existing literature I examine separately the factors that favor the development of each of these competences. In Chapter 3 I focus on the capacity of political parties to supply their supporters with cues and thus increase their level of political knowledge. I show that support for parties that have stronger incentives to fight the *status quo* (i.e. opposition, a smaller and/or a right-wing party) is, either directly or in an interaction with individual characteristics, related to higher levels of political knowledge. These

results suggest that by relying on cues coming from such parties even the less educated and those who are not frequent media users can find alternative tools to acquire political knowledge. In Chapter 4 I confirm the role that political knowledge has for generating attitude constraint, but at the same time I show that citizens can effectively rely on constrained political elites to supply them with information that can effectively increase the level of attitude constraint. All in all Chapter 4 confirms that citizens can at least partly rely on political elites in order to acquire political competences. In Chapter 5 I concentrate on the quality of electoral decisions by developing an operationalization, i.e. "attitude-congruent" voting, that improve on existing measures. Contrary to prior research I find no empirical support to confirm a positive impact of political knowledge. Instead, Chapter 5 reveals consistent positive effects of what are generally regarded as substitutes of political knowledge in the development of more complex political competences. To be more specific Chapter 5 reveals an optimistic picture since the quality of electoral decision does not seem to be influenced by political knowledge. Instead, citizens can rely on heuristics and make use of a more simple and stable institutional structure to effectively choose the representative that best matches their interests.

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1. Introduction

Navigating through the intricate world of politics is by no means an easy task for citizens. It might be true that politics is no rocket science, but the task that citizens have to face when trying to understand the complex political environment is not trivial. Believing that ordinary citizens can somehow navigate the same issues for which full-time public officials have at their disposal ample technical assistance "betrays a disconnection from reality" (Weissberg, 2001: 276). This does not mean that one should just accept that citizens are disengaged from politics; in fact, both normative democratic theories and empirical research strive to identify a set of basic competences that should help ordinary citizens to make political decisions that are in their best interest and thus help realizing the democratic ideal. Although there seems to be no clear agreement about what these exact skills are or should be (Weissberg, 2001), it is now axiomatic that citizens need to possess at least some basic political competences for them to be able to live up to the role assigned to them by democratic theory (Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Elkin, 1999; Hamilton et al., 1961; Schumpeter, 1942). Defining a narrow set of specific political competences is by no means an easy task, mostly because it seems almost impossible to find out what a "necessary" and/or "sufficient" level of political competences ought to be so that democratic societies can properly function (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001; Weissberg, 2001). In the realm of politics evaluating the performance of individuals is not as straightforward as for example sports, where one can easily measure the parameters that define a good athlete or even if an athlete is "good enough" to enter a competition. Defining the objective criteria that would qualify somebody as "sufficiently" politically competent implies identifying empirical indicators to validly measure those criteria. If in the case of sports one could easily do so (e.g. we know

what time an athlete needs to have in order to be considered a competitive 100 m runner), this becomes less evident in the case of politics for at least three reasons. First in politics identifying the right decision is almost impossible, hence empirically measuring the performance of individual is problematic. Second, the "performance" of separate citizens is not necessarily the ultimate criterion that serves as the base for the evaluation of political competences. The standard for evaluating the necessity and/or sufficiency of political competences is constituted by the collective performance of the society. Third, not even the collective performance of the society is subject to a fixed interpretation as there are a number of indicators used to rank democratic achievements of societies (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001: 286–289). All in all choosing the criteria, and their adequate indictors, according to which the essential political competences of the general public will be evaluated seems a frivolous endeavor and so does establishing the necessity and sufficiency of such elements. Therefore this dissertation will not follow any of these two paths. Instead I focus on identifying a set of essential political competences and the factors that favor the development of such competences. Once we are aware of the factors that lead to higher level of political competence, one can imagine manipulating these factors in order to improve the functioning of democratic societies.

1.1. Conceptualizing Political Competences

Political competences are generally viewed in the political science literature as civic virtues and capabilities that citizens should have to allow democracy to flourish. They can be understood as those "attitudes and skills required for effective governance", which can ultimately improve the functioning of institutions in a democratic society (Soltan, 1998). It is important to distinguish between two types of competences that can impact the functioning of democratic institutions:

moral competences and instrumental political competences. Moral competences include values such as tolerance, sense of justice, fairness and altruism and respect for the views of others; they are moral traits of the human character that are deemed to be worthy (Elkin, 1999: 386). This dissertation however only focuses on instrumental political competences, which refer to political actions that are in one's best interest (Elkin, 1999: 386), a standard that is recurrent in the political behavior literature and implies rationality or rational decision making as the common denominator (Alvarez, 1997; Downs, 1957; Elkin, 1999: 387; Key, 1966; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2008; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin and Dimock, 1999).

Instrumental political competences (from now on simply referred to as political competences) can be better understood by assessing the actions of citizens in the polling booth. Politically competent citizens are those who are able to identify their preferences, have the capacity to assess the electoral alternatives, identify reasonably well the one that best matches their preferences, and support candidates accordingly (Converse, 1964; Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Elkin, 1999; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006: 8–11; Popkin and Dimock, 1999; Weissberg, 2001). Following such a rationale implies that political competent citizens follow the democratic ideal of a voter that is "fully informed" about all the conditions influencing his choice (Dahl, 1989: 180–181; Popkin and Dimock, 1999: 117; Weissberg, 2001: 263). By being able to promote the policy consequences that they truly prefer (Alvarez, 1997; Downs, 1957; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997) such citizens have at least the capacity to shape the democratic institutions according to their preferences. Of course in a context where multiple groups have competing interests supporting the candidate that best matches ones view cannot automatically be transposed in the desired outcome, in this regard political competences are more about being able to promote democratic conflict than about shaping institutions (Weissberg, 2001). Nevertheless

even if reaching the desired outcome is not an automatic consequence of being political competent, such voters are still better off that the less competent voter who are by far less likely to shape democratic outcomes according to their policy preferences. A less competent voter is less likely to make informed choices between parties/candidates and thus she/he is more like to choose a candidate based on "personal character instead of their political performance" (Popkin and Dimock, 1999: 142).

But the role of politically competent citizens is not limited to the voting booth. During an electoral cycle, such citizens should be able to judge the broad dispositions of lawmakers (Elkin, 1999: 393) and check the behavior of public leaders (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 50). Only by fulfilling such requirements political competent individuals can ensure the proper functioning of democratic institutions outside the electoral arena. In the absence of citizens possessing such competences political elites could more easily drift away from public opinion and even pursue goals that are not in line with democratic norms. Therefore political competences are not only evaluated by focusing on voting decisions; citizens also need to develop other skills and capabilities in order to be effective political actors. Previous works also pointed to political knowledge and/or the capacity to develop a coherent and consistent set of attitudes (i.e. attitude constraint) as valuable political competences that should improve the functioning of democratic societies (Converse, 1964; Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Friedman, 2006; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 286; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985; Popkin and Dimock, 1999; Weissberg, 2001).

Although, based on the above, the normative role of political competences seems straightforward, the term "political competence" is not traditionally used by democratic theorists (Smiley, 1999), instead the more common choice is to define political competence in negative

terms by pointing to the deficiencies of a "politically ignorant" citizenry (Page and Shapiro, 1992: 1). In a nutshell, the politically ignorant are viewed as incapable of effectively participating in the democratic process (Mill, 1958). The opinions of ill-informed, ignorant and unreliable citizens cannot be taken into account by policy makers, which would effectively make democracies "ungovernable" (Crozier et al., 1975; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 2). According to such views, citizens who lack basic political competences are ill fitted for the political process because they cannot discern their real interest and are unlikely to take the appropriate actions to pursue those interests and choose representatives that would act in their best interest (Alvarez, 1997; Dahl, 1989; Downs, 1957; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2008; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin and Dimock, 1999). Such a depiction challenges theories of representative and participatory democracy that argue for an active involvement of the public in the democratic process (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Pateman, 1976; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003). Moreover, such depictions make elitist democratic theorist doubt the ability of citizens to rule themselves and thus propose to limit the direct participation of citizens in the decision making process (Adams, 1778: 7; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 24–40; Hamilton et al., 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 3–4; Schumpeter, 1942).

Another fundamental normative problem arises when we consider the inequalities in political competences. Most problematic here is that even if most people are not politically ignorant, certain well defined societal groups may generally have lower levels of political competences and thus are less capable better to use democratic processes to pursue their interests contributing to the development inherent political inequalities (e.g. unequal representation) between societal groups (Bartels, 2008: 252–254; 275–277; Converse, 1990; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 268–272). These inequalities may originate either in the cognitive capacities of

individuals or in their socio-economic status, both of which are extremely difficult to manipulate (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 272–282; Weissberg, 2001). As a result, we are faced with inherent inequalities in the political competences that can impact the capacity of a large part of the populous to effectively participate in the political arena. Such inequalities can ultimately hinder the possibility of elections to accurately reflect the aggregated preference of individuals according to the one person-one vote principle. To be more specific, if less politically competent voters are not capable of expressing their preferences/interests through their vote, we can expect a gap in representation between the competent and less competent. This is again conflicting with democratic ideals that demand that individuals should be accurately represented according to the one person-one vote principle, irrespectively of what societal groups they belong to (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Pateman, 1976; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003). The issue represents cause for further concerns when we consider that (at least in some countries) such groups (i.e. citizens with low cognitive capacities and having a lower socio-economic status) could constitute the majority of the population. In this light, discovering what facilitates the formation of a politically competent citizenry becomes essential. In other words, egalitarian principles require and presume identifiable mechanisms that can benefit the most disadvantaged groups and have the potential to reduce the inherent inequalities in political competences. Among such mechanisms, cognitive heuristics, elite cues and/or specific institutional settings are generally regarded as having the potential to help even citizens with lower personal resources (e.g. those having lower cognitive capacities or a lower socio-economic status) to navigate in the complex political world (Gerber and Lupia, 1999; Lupia and McCubbins, 2000; Popkin and Dimock, 1999; Popkin, 1994; Zaller, 1992).

In this light the aim of this dissertation it to point to the essential factors that favor the development of political competences. By relying on previous wok to establish the political competence citizens ought to have, I investigate both the "stable" factors that lead to inherent inequalities in political competences (e.g. socio economic status), but I also point to those factors that would lead to an increase in political competence across all groups (e.g. use of heuristics, political institutions, political elites). Furthermore, I show that at least in some cases the factors in this latter category can reduce inherent inequalities in the level of political competences that stem from difference in socio-economic factors. This dissertation concentrates on the three facets of instrumental political competences: the level of political knowledge, the capacity to develop a coherent and consistent set of attitudes (i.e. attitude constraint) and the capacity to cast a vote that best represents ones interest (i.e. "attitude-congruent" voting). In fact, these are the aspects that probably have received the most attention in the political behavior literature. Still, this is by no means a comprehensive list; previous studies have also examined political competence from the perspective of citizens behavior in direct legislative elections, such as referendums (Gerber and Lupia, 1999; Lupia, 1994), while others are concerned with the capacity of voters to effectively provide checks for the executive during the electoral cycle (Elkin, 1999: 393). But such perspectives received far less attention.

Political knowledge is probably the political competence that has received the most attention in the political behavior literature. This is not surprising given that informed political choices require at least basic levels of political knowledge about policies and candidates (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Elkin, 1999: 392; Popkin and Dimock, 1999). All in all, citizens who possess higher levels of political knowledge have, presumably, an increased capacity to understand politics. Thus, more knowledgeable citizens can assure both responsiveness and

accountability from governments and elites (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 55–61; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 393–396; Pande, 2011; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Vicente, 2014; Wantchekon, 2003), two essential characteristics of democracy (Andeweg, 2000; Dahl, 1975; Powell, 2000: 20–46, 122–157; Roberts, 2009; Shapiro, 2012: 200–201). Such individuals are also better able to identify their preferences and own interests and thus are better able to understand politics and are better fitted to act in the political realm (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 223; Downs, 1957, pp. 79–80; Kroh, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Somin, 2005; Sturgis, 2003). This does not mean that the practical utility of political knowledge escaped criticism. In fact, the impact of political knowledge on political decisions has been downplayed by the belief that citizens can effectively employ cognitive heuristics to compensate for low levels of knowledge, and hence act as if they were informed (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994; Sniderman et al., 1991; Zaller, 1992). But even such critics admit that basic levels of political knowledge are still needed for citizens to be able to effectively perform political tasks (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Lupia and McCubbins, 2000; Lupia, 2006; Popkin and Dimock, 1999; Popkin, 1994). In this regard, a politically informed public can be regarded as the "giant tortoise" on the shell of which democracy rests upon (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 61).

Political knowledge is also considered the base for the development of further political competences. It is an essential factor in forging attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting, while it also the main source of inequality behind these two more complex political competences (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Federico and Hunt, 2013; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Sturgis, 2003).

The role of attitude constraint as a political competence was first pointed out by Converse (1964), who showed its centrality for structuring the political behavior of individuals and thus for developing a coherent belief system. To be more specific high attitude constraint helps individuals understand how different facets of an issue/policy domain relate to each other. Thus, as it allows citizens to make sense of particular political issue domain, attitude constraint is viewed as an essential political competence, (Converse 1964). This basic function lead to the belief that attitude constraint is also necessary for the functioning of democratic societies (Weissberg, 2001: 265). Furthermore, as on the supply side policy proposal and issues are most of the times packaged together in legislative proposal or electoral pledges; low constrained from the part of the electoral raises further normative concerns. For example projects regarding the extension of public services are often tied to increases in taxes[1]. In the context where the more constrained elites (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Converse, 1964; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996) representing, for example, a social democratic party can easily package the two issues under the same legislative proposal; the inability of citizens to understand that extensive public services and low taxes are most often mutually exclusive (a clear depiction of low attitude constraint) generates uncertainty regarding the most preferable outcome. It is exactly this uncertainty that hampers the capacity of citizens to make rational and/or meaningful political choice (Friedman, 2006; Jacoby, 1995; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985; Weissberg, 2001). At the same time the uncertainty regarding the most preferable outcome, which is associated with low levels attitude constrain, also makes it more difficult for elected

[1] Of course this is not a universal rule, for example states that can rely on natural resources can provide public expenses even without increasing taxes. But at least in the case of the countries analyzed in this dissertation such scenarios are rather the exceptions than the rule.

officials to serve as trustees that effectively represent their constituencies (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002), thus decreasing the chances of the electorate to acquire proper representation.

The last but certainly not least facet of political competence which this dissertation investigates is "attitude-congruent" voting. To a certain extent, this represents the ultimate aspect of political competences as it evaluates the quality of electoral decisions. "Attitude-congruent" voting describes a normative concept that is in accordance with democratic ideals, and it refers to the capacity of voters to make electoral decisions that are congruent with promoting the policy consequences that they prefer. It reflects a long standing concern of democratic theories that is concerned with the "competence of citizens to make informed choice between political candidates" (Downs, 1957; Popkin and Dimock, 1999: 117; Weissberg, 2001: 263). The idea of "attitude-congruent" voting (although under different names, often called "issue voting", understood as a synonym for "rational voting"- see Dalton and Wattenberg's (1993) for overview of voting behavior research) has been considered a normative benchmark that represents fully conscious decisions made by citizens to maximize their political utility, i.e. vote in accordance with their policy preference (Alvarez, 1997; Downs, 1957; Key, 1966; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006).

As mentioned before, the task at hand is neither to evaluate if these three facets of political competences are indeed necessary for the functioning of democratic systems nor to evaluate if citizens need to attain certain levels in order to be effective citizens. The above presented literature seems to agree that a minimum level of competences is necessary (Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Elkin, 1999; Hamilton et al., 1961; Schumpeter, 1942), at least if we follow the guidelines drawn by representative and participatory democratic theories (i.e. an active involvement of the public in the democratic process and the representation of all

societal groups) (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975; Pateman, 1976; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003).At the same time, identifying the exact level seems to be an impossible task (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001). Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to bring together these three facets of political competence and investigate the factors that favor their development. I pay special attention to the importance of those factors which can help increase the political competences irrespective of one's cognitive ability or socio economic background (e.g. cognitive heuristics, elite cues and institutional setting) and thus also have the potential to reduce inherent inequalities in the level of political competences. These concerns are vital if democratic societies are expected to function according to the principles of representative democracy, one of these being: one person one vote.

It is important to note that even if political knowledge, attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent are generally regarded as important political competences that improve the functioning of democratic societies, they cannot be regarded as a unitary concept. They should be considered as three separate facets of the broader concept of political competences, and this is obvious when we consider the separate skill necessary to attain each of them. Political knowledge requires "factual-knowledge about politics stored in the long term memory" (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 10), while attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting pay less emphasis on the ability of citizens to store information and are more cognitively demanding in the sense that their development is more dependent on the analytical skills of individuals. Attitude constraint requires individuals to understand how different issues relate to each other, while "attitude-congruent" voting obliges individuals to evaluate their issue and ideological stances as well as the stances of all relevant parties in a given system. Of course the three facets are related, and this is obvious when we take into account that political knowledge is generally

seen as one of the main factor explaining both attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Federico and Hunt, 2013; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Sturgis, 2003), but even in this case its impact is far from being deterministic. All in all it is clear that these three separate facets cannot be summed up into a unidimensional index of political competences. Such consideration might have le0ad previous empirical research to analyze the factors that favor their development separately. But in a context in which political knowledge, attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting are all generally regarded as essential political competences one of the merits of this dissertation is that it brings them together under the same theoretical framework and present a coherent analysis of the factors that favor their development.

1.2. Structure of the Dissertation

In the next chapter I present a review of previous research focused on the importance of political knowledge as the basic political competence and its impact of the development of "issue constraint" and "attitude-congruent" voting. The empirical analysis will focus of the three aspects of political competences discussed above, i.e. political knowledge, attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting. As each of these competences is conceptually different it comes normal to expect that each of them will be influenced by a subset of specific factors. Therefore in each chapter a separate set of independent variable that facilitates the development of the respective facet of political competences will be discussed and analyzed. Table 1.1 presents of brief overview of the three empirical chapters by pointing to: the main facet of political competences that will be analyzed (first column), the individual level factors that lead to

inequalities in political competences (second column) and the factors that have the potential to reduce these inherent inequalities (third column). Furthermore Table 1.1 also details the way in which both the dependent and independent variables used in each of the three empirical chapters are operationalized.

I start the empirical analysis by looking at what I consider the base for political competences, i.e. political knowledge. I present a (re)examination of the factors that facilitates the acquisition of political information and propose an innovative approach centered on how parties can impact a specific democratic competence of their supporters, the level of political knowledge.

For decades, scholars have been paying attention to individuals' political knowledge and its determinants (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Zaller, 1990). There is substantially less research investigating cross-country differences in the level of knowledge, but it is clear that the institutional setting can have a direct impact on the level of political knowledge, and also moderate the impact of individual level factors on knowledge (Fraile, 2013; Gordon and Segura, 1997). Still, previous research ignored the role that parties have in informing the public. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I investigate how parties can influence the level of political knowledge by evaluating their ability to supply information to their supporters. I build on a theoretical framework provided by the Michigan school of thought, according to which one of the most important roles of parties is to supply citizens with cues that help them evaluate the complex and remote political environment (Campbell et al., 1960; Weisberg and Greene, 2003). I focus on the political environment of post-communist societies, where parties played a key role in helping citizens understand the rapidly changing political environment that followed the democratic transitions (Enyedi and Toka, 2007).

I present two mechanisms through which parties can influence the level of sophistication of their followers. On the one hand, during their effort to mobilize support (e.g. electoral campaigns, party congresses), parties shape their supporters' views about the political arena (Converse, 1964; Craig and Hurle, 1984; Field and Anderson, 1969; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie et al., 1979), thus raising the political sophistication levels of the above-mentioned supporters. On the other hand, I also expect that the increase in the level of sophistication of party followers is also a secondary consequence of the mobilization process. To be more precise, I expect that parties which are more motivated to mobilize their followers will also do a better job in providing them with political information. Therefore, given that parties with higher incentives to challenge the *status quo* should be the most active in the process of mobilization, we should record higher levels of political knowledge among their supporters.

Results from a series of multi-level models using cross-national data from 12 post-communist countries suggest that the three characteristics related to parties' motivation to mobilize the electorate against the *status quo* impact individual levels of political knowledge. To be more precise, I show that supporting a non-incumbent, smaller and/or right-wing party is, either directly or in interaction with individual characteristics, related to higher levels of political knowledge. These findings shed light on how looking at political parties can help us better understand the differences in the levels of political knowledge among citizens.

In the framework of the dissertation Chapter 3 emphasizes the capacity of political parties to impact the political competence necessary for the functioning of democratic systems and also to reduce inequalities stemming from the individual difference between their supporters. While confirming that the level of education and media attention are some of the most important predictor of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990), and thus also an

important source in inequality, I show how supporting specific parties can reduce these inequalities. As depicted in Table 1.1 the chapter will focus on the potential of parties that have the incentive to fight the *status quo* (i.e. opposition, small and rightist parties) to increase the level of political knowledge (conceptualized in the chapter as a basic political competences) of all their supporters and especially on their potential to reduce inequalities in political knowledge stemming from the levels of education and media usage. Finally, by highlighting the role of parties in informing their supporter, the chapter also illustrates that party identification cannot only act as a substitute for political knowledge, but also plays a role in the acquisition of political knowledge[2]. Consequently, explaining the role that party ID has in reaching optimal political decisions and contrasting it to the role of political knowledge becomes even more interesting.

Having this in mind, in Chapter 4 I study a first facet of more complex political competences related to the quality of political behavior, i.e. a coherent attitude structure or attitude constraint (Converse, 1964). High issue constraint is regarded as an important political competence that allows citizens to make sense of a particular political domain (Converse 1964), as it is instrumental for citizens and their capacity to make rational political decisions(Friedman, 2006; Jacoby, 1995; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985) and facilitates the role of representatives as trustees (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002). As depicted in Table 1.1 the main focus of Chapter 4 is on how political knowledge, conceptualized now as a basic political competence, represents the main source of inequalities for the development of a more complex political competence, i.e. attitude constraint. Furthermore the chapter also emphasis how heuristics and political elites (see column three in Table 1.1) can contribute to reducing the inequalities in attitude constraint stemming from individual difference in political knowledge.

[2] This seems to go against findings anchored in US context show the possible shortcoming of party cues in the capacity to correctly answer factual questions about politics (Dancey and Sheagley, 2013).

Political knowledge, a basic political competence is one of the important factors which was showed to be positively related to attitude constraint (Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse and Pierce, 1992; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Jacoby, 1995; Sturgis, 2003; Visser et al., 2014; Zaller, 1992) and thus also the main source of inequalities in attitude constraint. Considering that attitude constraint is structured by elites (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992) and keeping in mind the important role that parties have in informing their supporters (see Chapter 3), the role of partisanship is also carefully examined in Chapter 4. Additionally, the clarity and coherence of the messages coming from political elites are also hypothesized to impact the level of attitude constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Levendusky, 2009; Niemi and Westholm, 1984; Zaller, 1992) and hence act as possible substitutes of political knowledge.

The major contribution of this fourth chapter is twofold. First, attitude constraint is operationalized both at country level and individual characteristic, thus allowing a proper test of its determinants. Second, by using the 2009 European Election study, it explains both individuals and cross country differences in the level of attitude constraint.

The empirical analysis shows that, as expected, political knowledge plays an important role in explaining the level of attitude constraint. Furthermore, while the effect of polarization and partisanship is at best limited, the constraint of elites has a positive effect on the attitude constraint of citizens. Thus, Chapter 4 emphasizes the important role of political knowledge for the further development of those political competences associated with more efficacious political behavior. At the same time Chapter 4 also shows that even low informed citizens can rely on political elites to reach higher levels of attitude constraint. Therefore developing complex

political competences can at least theoretically be achieved even among those who have lower levels of political knowledge.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the "ultimate" manifestation of political competences in the realm of political behavior, i.e. the competence of citizens to choose between competing political parties measured as the quality of their electoral decisions. As in the previous chapter political knowledge is regarded as a main source of inequalities for the development of citizens' electoral competences and heuristics are viewed yet again as the alternative individual level mechanism that can stimulate the development of electoral political competence in the absence of political knowledge (see Table 1.1). Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the relationship between political knowledge and party ID as a simple heuristic, on the one hand, and "attitude-congruent" voting (i.e., voting for the party/candidate that best matches one's own existing policy attitude) as an indicator for the quality of electoral decisions, on the other. Although conceptually similar to "correct voting", a measure developed by Lau and Redlawsk (1997, 2006) to operationalize the quality of electoral decisions, I propose an improved operationalization. My formulation actually reflects a normative concept about how individuals should vote under the fully informed conditions and thus avoid bias from empirical generalization about observed information-gathering strategies and determinants of the vote among citizens, which is typical of Lau and Redlawsk's measurement procedures (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006).

By making use of data from 27 EU[3] countries I also test whether contextual factors can substitutes for low levels of political knowledge and help individuals reach "optimal" political decisions. My basic assumption is that certain institutional settings could directly impact the

[3] It needs to be noted that Chapter 5 also makes use of the data generated by the 2009 European Election study a time when the EU had 27 member states and not 28 as in present days.

capacity of voters to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote and thus make them appear more politically competent. At the same time I expect that the institutional system can moderate the effect of knowledge and party identification. To be more specific a more simple and stable instructional system should not only have an unconditional impact but also diminish the impact of political knowledge and/or party identification on "attitude-congruent" voting. The two aspects of the institutional structures that are expected to both increase the level of political competences for all citizens and also compensate for inequalities stemming from individual level factors are: the characteristics of the party system and institutional stability (see Table 1.1 for an overview).

Although surprising, I find no empirical support to confirm a positive impact of political knowledge. I do however find that a simple heuristic (i.e. party identification) has a positive impact. Also, party system volatility, polarization, the number of parties, government stability and the age of democracy, all play a substantial impact on how the quality of electoral decisions varies across countries and therefore make it easier for citizens to appear politically competent.

The key finding of Chapter 5 is that that normative concerns related to the low levels of political knowledge among citizens seem unjustified given that the impact of political knowledge on the quality of electoral decisions is effectively zero. To put it in the framework of the dissertation, complex political competence can be developed even in the absence of political knowledge On the other hand, a simple heuristics like having a party ID, living in contexts that offers more alternatives for voters (higher number of parties), a simplified political arena that offers clear differentiation between options (higher polarization) and more stability (lower levels of volatility, longer living governments, longer periods of uninterrupted democracy) provides the most encouraging conditions for citizens to choose the outcome that is most favorable to them. In

such systems, citizen appears to be more politically competent irrespective of their individual attributes.

Table 1.1: Variables and measurement

	Political competence (DV)	**Individual-level factors that lead to inequalities in political competences (IV)**		**Factors that can increase political competence across all societal groups and reduce inequalities (IV)**	
Chapter 3	**Operationalization**		**operationalization**		**operationalization**
Political knowledge	Summation of quiz type questions.	Education	Primary, secondary and tertiary	Role of political elites, i.e. parties that are challenging the *status quo*	Incumbent, small and rightist parties
Political sophistication	Index: political knowledge, political interest and opinionation.	Media attention	TV and newspaper use		
Chapter 4	**Operationalization**		**operationalization**		**operationalization**
Attitude constraint	1. Average correlation across the issue domains in a given country. 2. Within individual variance of issue positions.	Political knowledge	Correct answers to quiz type questions	Heuristics Role of political elites: -clarity of elite cues -coherence of elite cues	Partisanship level of ideological polarization and attitude constraint among political elites
Chapter 5	**operationalization**		**operationalization**		**operationalization**
Quality of electoral decisions	"attitude-congruent" voting	Political knowledge	Correct answers to quiz type questions	Heuristics Complexity of the institutional structure: -party system characteristics -institutional stability	Partisanship -number of parties, electoral volatility, ideological polarization -government stability, regime stability

2. State of the Art

2.1. Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is probably one of the most normatively charged concepts in the political science literature. Citizens who possess higher levels of political knowledge have an increased capacity to understand the political system (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 223; Downs, 1957: 79–80; Kroh, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Somin, 2005; Sturgis, 2003). Thus more informed citizens can ensure both responsiveness and accountability from governments (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 55–61; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 393–396; Pande, 2011; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Vicente, 2014; Wantchekon, 2003): two essential characteristics of democracy (Andeweg, 2000; Dahl, 1975; Powell, 2000: 20–46, 122–157; Roberts, 2009; Shapiro, 2012: 200–201). Therefore, it is not surprising that political knowledge is considered, basic political competence that is essential for the functioning of an ideal democratic system (Crozier et al., 1975; Dahl, 1989: 180–181; Elkin, 1999; Popkin and Dimock, 1999; Watler Lippmannn, 1925: 20, 36–37; Weissberg, 2001).

Downs (1957) was among the first to acknowledge the centrality of political knowledge for the quality of electoral decisions as he pointed out it is only under the condition of perfect knowledge that citizens can make unambiguous decisions about who they should vote for. The "Michigan school", through Converse (1964), highlighted the role of political knowledge for the general structure of political thinking by arguing that consistent ideological values and issue positions (i.e. thinking in ideological terms) can most likely be found among highly-sophisticated voters. After a period during which the impact of political knowledge on political decisions was downplayed, either by the belief citizens can effectively employ cognitive heuristics to

compensate for low levels of knowledge (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994; Sniderman et al., 1991; Zaller, 1992), or by the credence that the shortcomings of a less well-informed citizenry tend to be cancelled out at the aggregate (i.e. societal) level (Page and Shapiro, 1992), from the mid-1990s a number of works (re)emphasized the role of political knowledge.

In 1996 Bartels showed that an increase in the level of information among the US public would have important consequences for the electoral outcome, while Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) published their seminal book that emphasized both the sources and consequences of political knowledge. The virtues of a more informed public where accentuated once more in the context of the emergence of deliberative democracy and deliberative polling, as supporters of this normative view consider that citizens, after participating in the deliberative processes, become more informed and will be more like ideal citizens, which may in turn affect their policy preferences(Brady et al., 2003; Fishkin and Luskin, 2005; Fishkin, 1997, 2003; Fishkin et al., 2000). Political knowledge was also shown to be the most important predictor of "correct voting", a normative concept developed by Lau and Redlwask that is used to evaluate the quality of electoral decisions (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Lau et al., 2014) . Alvarez and Brehm (1995; 2002) stress the importance of political knowledge by showing that an increase in information will reduce uncertainty and, hence, lead to higher levels of attitude constraint. Political knowledge was also shown to influence a series of political and policy attitudes that were relevant to voter choice (Althaus, 1998; Gilens, 2001), to help voters distinguish between real and fictitious issues (Sturgis and Smith, 2010) and even shift electoral preferences (Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014). More recently, Singh and Roy (2014) have pointed to the fact "proximity voting is most likely among political knowledgeable individuals". Last but not least,

a series of field experiment in low-income countries has shown that the acquisition of political information can positively impact the quality of governance and electoral accountability by reducing such electoral malpractices as clientelism and vote buying (Banerjee et al., 2011; Pande, 2011; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Vicente, 2014; Wantchekon, 2003). Although not as normatively charged as previous studies that consider a high level of political knowledge as a prerequisite of a functioning democratic society, these later studies clearly demonstrate the importance of political knowledge for the quality of a large array of political activities and its importance for the quality of political behavior in particular and the quality of democratic processes in general. Their central point is that that people with higher levels of political knowledge are better able to identify their preferences and own interests and are therefore better able to understand politics and better fitted to act in the political realm (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 223; Downs, 1957, pp. 79–80; Kroh, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Somin, 2005; Sturgis, 2003).

Against this background, this dissertation provides a comprehensive evaluation of political knowledge as a basic political competence and of its impact on the quality of political behavior. On the one hand, in Chapter 3 the dissertation provides a re-evaluation of the factors leading to the acquisition of political knowledge by proposing an innovative approach that focuses on the role of political parties in providing information to their supporters. On the other hand it, Chapters 4 and 5 emphasis the role political knowledge has in the development of the more complex political competences that were previously used as benchmarks for evaluating the quality of the political behavior of individuals. While the above mentioned studies clearly point to the important role of political knowledge in the political realm, they almost exclusively refer to the specific environment of US elections and rarely focus on more than a single country at a

time. Recently, Lau et al. (2014) claimed to show that the impact of political knowledge on the development of other political competences (i.e. "correct voting") holds true across a large number of democracies[4]. But the added value of this dissertation goes beyond documenting those factors that influence the acquisition of political knowledge and its role in a cross-country perspective. Its central aim is to investigate whether other factors – individual and institutional – can compensate for the notoriously low levels of political knowledge (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Popkin, 1994; Zaller, 1992). To be more specific, one of the central puzzles this dissertation seeks to address is whether citizens can develop more complex political competences (i.e. attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting) even if they possess low levels of political knowledge. Of course, the dissertation also helps clarify the role of political knowledge beyond the specific environment of US politics, which is not a trivial endeavor given that making successful use of political knowledge is more difficult where politics is much more complex than is the case in a two-party system. However, against the backdrop of normative problems springing from the gap between informed and uninformed voters,[5] revealing those factors that can act as a substitute for political knowledge is a more important task.

2.2. Political Knowledge: Concept, Measurement, Sources, and Shortcomings

The concept of political knowledge must be clarified before going any further. The most widely used definition of the concept is provided by Delli Carpini and Keeter: "factual knowledge about institutions and process of the government, current economic issues and social conditions, the

[4] Still these finding might be severely biased as one needs to note that in several cases they use the level of education as a proxy for political knowledge, which is, to say the least , a less than perfect operationalization

[5] Given that poorly informed voters (representing the vast majority) find it more difficult to develop meaningful policy preferences, which are aligned with their own interest, and express these preferences through their vote, the gap between informed and uninformed voters implies elections do not reflect accurately the aggregated preference of individuals according to the "one person, one vote" principle. Bluntly put, democratic representation suffers if the objective interests of low informed individuals are not be accurately represented.

major issues of the day, and stands of political leaders on those issues" (1996: 1). Even if this definition provides a clear conceptualization of what people should know about politics, terms such as political knowledge, political sophistication, political awareness, and political information are used interchangeably in the public opinion literature to refer to the same concept (Zaller, 1990). The reason for this seeming confusion in the use of the concept stems from the number of measures used to assess how much individuals know about politics. For example, even recent research uses the level of education of respondents as a less-than-perfect proxy of political knowledge (Lau et al., 2014), in the context in which education is only considered one of many factors that explain the acquisition of political knowledge that can by no means be equated with political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). Resorting to measures that are generally accepted to be valid and reliable, Bartels uses a very simple measurement, the evaluation of each respondent's level of information (ranging from very high to very low) made by interviewers at the end of an interview[6] (Bartels, 1996: 203; Zaller, 1992). The ability of citizens to correctly place parties on the left-right scale has also been used to assess political knowledge (Gordon and Segura, 1997; Toka and Popescu, 2008; Toka, 2008). But the most widely employed indices use the aggregate of correct answers to factual questions (e.g. Barabas et al. 2014; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Gilens, 1996; Luskin 1990; Somin, 2005; Zaller 1992), and while such questioning seem to be the norm for measuring political knowledge, there is considerable debate regarding the type of question (i.e. true/false, multiple item or open-ended) that should be used (Mondak, 2001; Prior and Lupia, 2008); the topical

[6] Although it might seem surprising, this indicator of information was shown to be "single most effective information item" in the ANES as it is highly correlated with relevant criterion variables (Bartels, 1996: 203)

(issue specific versus general knowledge) and temporal (static facts versus recent developments[7]) dimensions that they should cover (Barabas et al., 2014) and whether they should also include visual components (Prior, 2013). Going even further, some consider that quiz-type questions are an imperfect measure, hence political interest and political cognitions should also be included in operationalizing political knowledge if a researcher wishes to measure accurately the extent to which individuals pay attention to and understand political events(Lau and Erber, 1985; Zaller, 1990): however, the common denominator behind this is the explicit or implicit assumption that the search for politically-relevant information is guided by the same principle: the "ability-motivation-opportunity triad" (Luskin, 1990).

Most of the public opinion studies that focus on political knowledge argue that the ability-motivation-opportunity triad is the basis for the acquisition of political information by individuals (Luskin, 1990: 334). Each of these three elements influences the acquisition in particular way. Ability refers to cognitive competences and determines how easy information learning is for individuals (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 179; Luskin, 1990) . Motivation determines to what degree individuals seek information and how much attention they pay to it (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). Finally, opportunity influences how easy it is for citizens to learn in a certain environment, based on their motivation and ability (Baum and Jamison, 2006; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Zukin and Snyder, 1984). To sum up, it is easier for those who are more capable of finding, retaining and understanding information (those with higher level of formal education), who are more motivated to do so, and who find themselves in an environment in which information is easily accessible, to acquire

[7] Static facts refer to well established facts that rarely change such as the number of judges in the US Supreme court. Dynamic facts refer to element that are subject to change across time, for example the name of the Prime Minister.

political information (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Prior, 2005). Given the common sources of politically-relevant information among the general public, we can safely assume that all these measures, and particularly those based on quiz-type questions, are in generally accurate in assessing individual political knowledge.

This is not to say that these measures do not have shortcomings. The first set of possible problems refers to what type of question (open-ended, multiple choice, or true/false questions) is better at capturing the underlining concept. Concerns have been raised regarding the increased bias that might be introduced by the extent of guessing component present in true/false and multiple choice questions (Mondak, 2001; Nunnally, 1978; Prior and Lupia, 2008). However, empirical analysis shows there is no penalty from using any specific type of questioning, as they are similarly represented in best and worst performers (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993). It was also noted that, independently of the type of knowledge questions asked (i.e. true or false, multiple answers and open-ended question), the regression coefficients in several models using political knowledge as both a dependent and independent variable are the same as when controlling for the guessing component and regardless of the type of scale used (Weith, 2011). Overall, this suggests that in operationalizing political knowledge the type of question (i.e. open ended, multiple choice, or true/false questions) is not as important as some of the literature implies (Florida, 2011; Kubinger and Gottschall, 2004; Miller and Orr, 2008; Prior and Lupia, 2008).

The second line of criticism addresses the inherent gender bias stemming from the way factual question about politics are asked (Dolan, 2011; Hannagan et al., 2014). This is, at least partially, a results of the fact men have a higher propensity to guess in response to survey questions, which makes them appear to be more knowledgeable (Lizotte and Sidman, 2009;

Mondak and Anderson, 2004). However, it was also pointed out that women and men might know different things about politics (Fraile et al., 2014; Hannagan et al., 2014) as the gender gap is substantially reduced when the topic of the question refers to government services and programs (Stolle and Gidengil, 2010) or to women's representation in national government (Dolan, 2011). Related to the previous point, recent research indicates that the content of the questions might not only be biased against women. Varying the topical (issue specific versus general political knowledge) or temporal (static facts versus recent developments) nature of political knowledge items might lead to very different findings related to the impact that factors such as the socio-economic status or media use have on the development of political knowledge (Barabas et al., 2014).

All in all, the above mentioned works suggest obvious shortcomings in operationalizing political knowledge, but none can claim to have established a "golden standard" for the measurement of political knowledge, and it is by no mean the purpose of this dissertation to do so. As with most researchers, this author is not in a position to choose the ideal survey items that should offer the "perfect" measure of political knowledge. This dissertation makes use of factual question present in existing surveys in order to operationalize political knowledge. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the different items used to measure political knowledge here are theoretically grounded and the results always demonstrate a unidimensional construct that should reflect the same underlying concept: "factual knowledge about politics that is stored in the long-term memory" (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 10).

2.3. Political Knowledge and the Development of Further Political Competences

Irrespective of the way in which it is measured, the influence of political knowledge for the development of future political competences is well documented. Most of the studies highlighting the virtues of a knowledgeable citizenry focus on the influence of political knowledge on two specific political competences: the ability to develop a coherent and consistent set of attitudes (i.e. attitude constraint), and the ability of citizens to make an informed choice between political candidates (i.e. "attitude-congruent" voting) (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Sturgis, 2003). The importance of political knowledge for both of these is linked to the increased ability of informed individuals to better identify their own interests, which in turn helps them act in the political realm (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 223; Downs, 1957: 79–80; Kroh, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Somin, 2005; Sturgis, 2003). Concretely speaking, more knowledgeable individuals who are better able to identify their own interests are also more capable of linking specific issue stances to basic values and orientations, which leads to higher levels of constraint between specific issue stances (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 230–237; Federico and Hunt, 2013). Even if uniformed individuals might also recognize there are different facets to specific issues and/or issue domains, they are less able to understand and resolve the possible conflicting facets of these issues and/or domains. In this context, more information will reduce the uncertainty associated with conflicting issue stances, and hence lead to higher levels of attitude constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002).

In relation to the quality of voting behavior, the role of political knowledge is even more important given the fact "fully informed" voters are considered a democratic ideal (Dahl, 1989: 180–181; Popkin and Dimock, 1999: 117; Weissberg, 2001: 263). More knowledgeable individuals are able to make better political decisions as they are better able to identify their own interests and to know who is best able to address their concerns (Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Downs, 1957; Kroh, 2009; Moore, 1987; Somin, 2005). Therefore, the probability of voting for the candidate that best represents their policy preference, and hence the ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, substantially increases among the more knowledgeable section within the electorate (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1980; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Lau et al., 2014; Palfrey and Poole, 1987).

Given both its intrinsic value (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Elkin, 1999: 392; Popkin and Dimock, 1999) related to increased capacity of knowledgeable citizens to assure both responsiveness and accountability from governments (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 55–61; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 393–396; Pande, 2011; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Vicente, 2014; Wantchekon, 2003), and its role for the future development of other political competences, political knowledge is clearly an essential democratic virtue. Yet the importance of knowledge also brings undesired consequences. Inequalities in the level of political knowledge can have damaging consequences for the functioning of democratic systems (Bartels, 2008: 252–254, 275–277; Converse, 1990; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 268–272). Once we take into account the fact that less-knowledge individuals are both less likely to form coherent attitudes that would allow them to identity their most preferred policy outcome (i.e. low attitude constraint) and, more importantly, less likely to vote for the candidate that best represents their policy preference

(i.e. low levels of "attitude-congruent" voting), inequalities in the level of political knowledge clearly impact the capacity of citizens to act in the political arena. Most problematic from this respect is the fact that in a context in which inequalities in the level of political knowledge are a given, elections are in danger of failing democratic standards by not accurately reflecting the aggregated preference of individuals according to the "one person, one vote" principle (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Pateman, 1976; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003). Thus, the obvious question arising is: are inequalities in the level of political knowledge automatically translated to further inequalities in the development of political competence, with obvious normative implication for quality of democracy, or can other factors compensate or even substitute for low levels of political knowledge?

2.4. Substitutes for Political Knowledge

As mentioned above, given that political knowledge is considered important for a variety of behaviors associated with desirable democratic practices (Althaus, 1998; Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Gilens, 2001; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Lau et al., 2014), the gap between informed and uniformed citizens has important normative implications for the operation of democratic systems. The implications of this gap are further exacerbated when we consider that the majority of voters have low levels of knowledge about politics (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Popkin, 1994; Zaller, 1992).

Still, democratic societies function even under these seemingly unpromising circumstances. For example, even if the ignorance of the US public is widely acknowledged, it was shown that around 75% of ANES respondents can make a "correct" electoral decision (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997). This result is in accordance with other studies that show that, at least at the

aggregate level, an increase in political information will only slightly change the outcome of elections (Bartels, 1996; Sturgis, 2003: 472) (or have a slight impact on a series of political attitudes [Popescu et al., 2010]). Althaus's (1998) comprehensive study of attitudes in the US also shows that when it comes to policy preferences, increases in information produce an aggregate shift in political attitude of up to 9% at the societal level. Furthermore, using a deliberative poll experiment that should theoretically result in an increase in the level of political sophistication (Brady et al., 2003; Fishkin and Luskin, 2005; Fishkin, 1997, 2003), Sturgis et al. (2005) showed that under most circumstances the deliberation process did not contribute to any increase in the internal consistency of participant attitudes.

Modest shifts in aggregate election outcomes can clearly prove decisive in close elections and produce major changes of policy (Grossback et al., 2006). Thus, the literature offers rather mixed evidence. Even if we accept that at the aggregate level information does not cause much variation, Sturgis shows that around one-quarter to one-fifth of respondents switch sides on issues when they obtain somewhat more political knowledge (Sturgis, 2003: 474) (incidentally, this figure coincides with Lau and Redlawsk's 1997 estimate for how many US voters would change their voting choice with a similarly modest change in information level). All in all, while political knowledge is desirable, the less politically informed seem to do well enough in the political realm.

Consequently, the obvious puzzle concerns the mechanism that can enable poorly-informed citizens to act as if they are politically knowledgeable. This dissertation will concentrate on two complementary explanations and show how as a simple cognitive heuristic, such as partisanship, and contextual factors can act as substitutes for low levels of political knowledge.

2.4.1. Partisanship as a cognitive heuristic

Previous research shows that using heuristics can compensate for the lack of political knowledge most voters face when making political decisions and lead to them voting as if they are well informed (Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994). These voters are even able to recognize the significance of new policy-relevant facts and adjust their policy preferences accordingly, but most of the time they respond to new information using cognitive shortcuts or the rule of thumb (Page and Shapiro, 1992: 17).

Popkin similarly argues that most people use low information rationality or "gut" reasoning as the type of practical thinking about politics and government (Popkin, 1994). A common list of heuristics includes: party affiliation, ideology, endorsement, candidate appearance, representativeness, availability, and adjustment (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Popkin, 1994; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). These are all useful tools for citizens who have only limited knowledge of basic facts about politics and government, especially when evaluating and choosing candidates, and they can even be a substitute for information. Popkin (1994) finds that even educated people rely on similar tools when making their choice: they use shortcuts and calculation aids in assessing information and finally assemble them into scenarios; they process information in the same way. An important advantage voters who use information shortcuts have is that it reduces the cost of information acquisition without influencing the final decision: voters who use this mechanisms act as if they have encyclopedic information (Lupia, 1994). In turn, this may lead voters to think that the actual acquisition of encyclopedic information is not a worthwhile activity.

Zaller supports the theoretical claims by bringing evidence that less well-informed voters still have the capacity to reject candidates who go against their policy preferences, such as

incumbents who preside over recessions and candidates who support extreme policies. Consequently, they know enough to defend their own preferences (Zaller, 2004). One possible explanation for the important role of heuristics lies in the facts that while people can theoretically gather enough information to allow them to thoroughly evaluate all possible alternatives, most people have limited cognitive abilities with which to process and understand this information. In this case, while gaining information remains a valuable pursuit, in order to process all the information thus gathered, people have no choice but to adopt some heuristic-based strategy for making political decisions. What is more important is that in many cases the use of heuristics leads to "good enough decisions", which can even be better than decisions based solely on information gathering and processing (Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1994).

In short, everyone uses some kind of problem-solving strategy (often automatically or unconsciously) that serves to "keep the information processing demands on the task within bounds" (Abelson and Levi 1985: 225, cited in Lau and Redlwask 2001: 952), thus low levels of information does not necessarily mean the quality of electoral choices suffer. In this light, the opinions and efforts of those who argue for a more informed voter that is closer to the ideal citizen might fade in importance.

Here the focus is on the impact of one of the simplest and most widely used cognitive heuristic, i.e. partisanship (also referred to as party identification), and to investigate under what circumstances it might improve the political competences of individuals. At the base of partisanship as a cognitive heuristics is one of the first conceptualizations of the concept: "the individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment" (Campbell et al., 1960: 121). According to this view, partisanship provides a sense of "we feeling" that is stronger than other psychological constructs, and which helps individuals evaluate both those

who are similar to them (i.e. the "in-group") and those they perceive to be different (i.e. the "out-group") (Campbell et al., 1960; Goren et al., 2009; Green et al., 2002; Lazarsfeld et al., 1949; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Nicholson, 2012). Thus, we can safely state that partisanship helps individuals understand and navigate in the political world (Bartels, 2002; Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Nicholson, 2012). Some recent examples about how individuals evaluate concrete political objects by relying on their partisan affiliations include: the greater propensity of strong partisans to make a "correct" electoral decision (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; Lau et al., 2008); positive relations between attitude constraint and party cues (Goren et al., 2009); and the role of partisan loyalties in evaluating the economy and responsibility attributions (Evans and Pickup, 2010; Ramirez and Erickson, 2014; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). In addition, partisanship was also shown to be the most important factor helping voters place themselves on the left-right scale (Medina, 2013) and it also "structures political attitudes and behaviors in 'party-averse' electoral environments" (Samuels and Zucco, 2014).

All in all, the role of partisanship as a cognitive heuristic device that helps individuals evaluate a large array of political objects is clear. Furthermore, the benefits of partisanship/party identification were shown in direct connection with the key dependent variable of this dissertation: political competences. To be more explicit, partisans were shown to increase the quality of electoral decisions (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; Lau et al., 2008) and partisan cues were shown to increase attitude constraint (Goren et al., 2009). Given that previous studies tend to focus on the US party system, this dissertation will bring a valuable contribution by documenting the role of partisanship across a large number of democratic systems. Moreover, the main goal is not only to evaluate the role of partisanship for the development of political competences, but also to contrast it with the role of political knowledge.

2.4.2. The context as a substitute for political knowledge.

The role of partisanship as substitute for political knowledge is quite straightforward, given the extensive research done on the role of cognitive heuristics; yet the extent to which the political context (i.e. the role of the political elites and the institutional system) can act reduce and/or compensate for inequalities in political knowledge is less well documented.

A first hint of the possible role of the institutional setting (and this also includes the political) is given by the "new institutionalism" framework. By acknowledging that the macro aggregation of individual preferences cannot explain the political process, or that politics is not just a simple reflection of society (Immergut, 1998; March and Olsen, 1984, 2006), new institutionalism "de-emphasizes the dependents of institutions on society" (March and Olsen, 1984: 738). It allows for relative autonomy and the independent effect of political institutions (March and Olsen, 1984, 2006). To be more specific, by using the "new institutionalism" framework we can talk about interdependence between political institutions and the social, or in this specific case, between political institutions and the quality of political behavior.

"New institutionalism" offers the possibility to go further than the mechanical relationship resulting from reading constitution and electoral laws. The new units of analysis are institutionalized rules, norms, and standard operation. They impact political behavior by influencing the scope of political actors (including individuals). The scopes and capabilities of individuals are shaped by the institutional framework within which the individuals operate (March and Olsen 2004). Institutional characteristics, exogenous from their initial purpose, that are related to the political process may favor and model particular interests and preferences (Immergut, 1998: 8; March and Olsen, 1984: 739). Based on these considerations, it is normal to assume that the institutional setting may determine the way in which individuals develop

political attitudes. Hence, if we consider institutions foster the "ability, virtues, and intelligence of the community" (March and Olsen, 2006), we can also expect a connection between the institutional context and the quality of political behavior.

Recent research shows that the institutional context does impact the level of political knowledge (Fraile, 2013), but contextual factors do not necessarily have to facilitate the acquisition of political knowledge in order to influence the quality of political behavior. This is even more apparent given the scenario in which knowledge has a limited or no impact on the quality of political behavior. It can simply be the case that evaluating the political realm and making political decisions might be just easier in some contexts. In fact, Lau et al. (2014) show that casting a "correct vote" is easier in countries with a high media density, in which there are clear lines of responsibility between political institutions, where voters can chose between clear alternatives (i.e. high levels of polarization), where they have control over the ballot (i.e. where personal vote or open lists are in place), and where they are faced with fewer viable alternatives (i.e. lower number of effective parties). Although the role of contextual factors seems to clearly influence the quality of electoral decisions, here I re-examine the effects of the institutional setting by using a different but related conceptualization of political competences. At the same time the important moderating role institutions have for the two individual characteristics of interest – political knowledge and partisanship – is also highlighted. Furthermore, the context is important both for the quality of electoral decisions and for other political competences. In this dissertation I show how contextual factors that go beyond the institutional setting can influence attitude constraint, an important political competence due to its role as both an individual virtue (Converse, 1964; Downs, 1957; Friedman, 2006; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley

and Hurwitz 1985) and a macro characteristic (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Friedman, 2006; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985).

3. Political Sophistication in Central and Eastern Europe: How Can Parties Help?

Throughout political science literature scholars have been paying a great deal of attention to the individual-level determinants of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Zaller, 1990). Researchers have also provided very little direct evidence of how an important institution, the party, can impact the political sophistication of citizens. More specifically, previous studies have shown that party supporters are generally more sophisticated than non-partisan voters (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Grönlund and Milner, 2006); however, no research has so far examined how *party characteristics* impact the level of partisan political sophistication.

Early studies of voting behavior demonstrated that parties have a specific role in increasing the level of the public's political sophistication of the public by providing their supporters with information and cues that help them evaluate the remote world of politics (Campbell et al., 1960). This role is even more evident when we think of the important linkage functions parties have in society, i.e. creating a substantive connection between citizens and policy makers (Eldersveld and Walton, 2000; Epstein, 1986; Katz, 1990; Merkl, 2005) – this is where the "educating" role of parties is even more noticeable (Eldersveld and Walton, 2000; Katz, 1990). It has also been noted that the degree to which citizens understand politics is dependent on the quantity and clarity of cues provided by political elites(Craig and Hurle, 1984; Jacoby, 1995; Nie et al., 1979). Other than this directly employed mechanism, the impact of the parties on political sophistication can also be viewed as a two-step process. Given that one of their main roles is to mobilize their supporters (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbi, 1994) this will lead to an increase in the level of

citizen participation which, in turn, contributes to an increase in the level of their political sophistication (Bennett, 1975; Junn, 1991; Leighley, 1995; Tan, 1980).

It is therefore logical to assume that, depending on specific characteristics, some parties are better able to provide cues and have more successful mobilization strategies. So the amount and quality of information they provide their supporters – both through direct communication and through the mobilization process – varies across parties. For these reasons it is argued here that bringing political parties into the picture will provide substantial knowledge that can help explain part of the variance in political sophistication.

Here the case is made that political parties can contribute to the level of their supporters' political sophistication. Furthermore, political parties are especially helpful in increasing the level of knowledge for the less well-educated and those with lower levels of media use: two groups that are traditionally considered to have a lower level knowledge of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Prior, 2005). To be more specific, as well as providing information for all their supporters, political parties also have the potential to reduce the knowledge gap resulting from differences in media usage and levels of education.

The causal path between supporting a certain party and the level of political sophistication might be questioned. However, here it is argued that reverse causality is implausible since partisanship is remarkably stable over time and tends to be immune to short-term forces (Back and Teorell, 2009; Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1969; Dalton, 1980; Goren, 2005; Green and Palmquist, 1994; Green et al., 2002; Schickler and Green, 1997; Zuckerman et al., 2007) therefore, it is highly unlikely that changes in the level of political sophistication will lead to a change in partisanship.

Evidence pointing to the fact supporters of a certain party pay attention to elite messages comes from research on voting behavior that shows parties have a significant impact on the policy position of their supporters (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Ray, 2003; Zaller, 1992). If voters respond to shifts in party positions and follow the position of their party, the theoretical possibility of them paying attention to a certain party message and thus becoming more politically sophisticated becomes clearer.

Furthermore, with regards to the post-communist countries included in this study, it is expected that the relationship between supporting a certain party and sophistication will be even stronger, given that in these countries political parties and political elites had an important role in the opinion formation process by providing citizens with information that helped them understand the new rules of a rapidly changing game (Brader and Tucker, 2009; Enyedi and Toka, 2007; Tavits, 2005, 2013: 7–9; Tworzecki, 2003: 241–243). In the words of Enyedi and Toka in Eastern Europe "parties and their politicians were at the forefront of the distribution of information, and they were also active in socializing citizens in the pro-democratic and pro-capitalist beliefs" (2007: 173).

The relationship between supporting a certain party and political sophistication will be tested for 12 post-communist countries from the Euroequal dataset.[8] Through the use of multi-level models, it is possible to show that three-party characteristics (position on the left-right axis, incumbency, and party size) have – through interaction with media usage and education – either an unconditional or a moderating effect on individual-level political sophistication.

[8] The countries are Bulgaria (BG), the Czech Republic (CR), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Moldova (ML), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Russia (RU), Slovakia (SK) and the Ukraine (UA).

3.1. Political Sophistication in a Traditional Perspective

Given that political knowledge, political sophistication, political awareness, and political information are used interchangeably in the public opinion literature (Zaller, 1990), the notion of "political sophistication" needs to be clarified. The concepts of political knowledge/sophistication have been operationalized in a variety of ways that take more specific or general information about politics into consideration. The most widely employed indices use an aggregation of correct answers to factual knowledge questions (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Zaller, 1992). In this chapter a broader operationalization of political sophistication will be used. Political knowledge, as an aggregation of correct answers to factual knowledge questions, is considered an imperfect measure of political sophistication (Zaller, 1990). Thus, in addition to political knowledge, this broader operationalization used in the current study incorporates political interest and political cognitions in the same unidimensional concept (Lau and Erber, 1985; Zaller, 1990). Since all three items reflect the degree to which individuals pay attention to and understand political events (Zaller, 1990), we can expect them to be influenced by the same factors and to have the same theoretical implications.

Political knowledge/sophistication was traditionally analyzed in single country environments that emphasize individual characteristics. Most studies start from the ability-motivation-opportunity triad that promotes any type of behavior, including the acquisition of information by individuals (Luskin, 1990). Ability refers to cognitive competences, and determines how easy information learning is for individuals. Motivation (the desire to learn) determines to what extent individuals seek information and how much attention they pay to it. Finally, opportunity (the availability of information and its form) influences how easy it is for citizens to learn in a certain environment (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 179; Luskin, 1990).

From this basic triad, a series of individual variables have been used in several models that attempt to explain political sophistication. Cognitive capability is operationalized as years of formal education (Luskin, 1990), which is the best proxy for cognitive abilities widely available in large-scale surveys, and is the best single predictor of sophistication (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). Motivation is measured using indicators of political interest, attention to political news, and political discussion. Opportunity, on the other hand, refers to more contextual factors that lie largely outside the individual's control (Luskin, 1990). It is operationalized using variables related to the respondent's information and political environment (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990).[9]

Yet this approach is incomplete, and the most compelling evidence for this comes from the fact that even the most complex models, using only individual-level variables, do not do a very good job at explaining the variation in political sophistication (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Zaller, 1990). Institutional variables therefore need to be brought into the picture to help explain the variation in political sophistication. Here I investigate the role of party characteristics as possible predictors of the variation in individual-level political knowledge and focus on differences in education and media use as a source of inequality in the level of political knowledge/sophistication. This will demonstrate how parties can contribute to reducing the knowledge gap arising from these two individual-level factors.

[9] Other important individual-level covariates of political knowledge are the environment in which individuals are placed (e.g. urban or rural), age, and political discussion. More specifically, older citizens living in urban areas and who often discuss politics are generally better informed. Also, being a woman or a member of a minority group (national, cultural or racial) are important determinants of political knowledge, and have a negative impact on political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Zukin and Snyder, 1984) Here we use some of these covariates as control variables.

3.2. The Effect of Parties on Individual-level Political Knowledge

Previous studies have noted that, especially as a consequence of their linkage function (Eldersveld and Walton, 2000; Epstein, 1986; Katz, 1990; Merkl, 2005), one of the most important roles of parties is to provide information and cues for their supporters, which would in turn help them evaluate the complex and remote world of politics (Campbell et al., 1960; Katz, 1990). Taking this idea into account, it is reasonable to expect that some parties will be better than others at performing this task. This is especially true in post-communist countries where initial partisanship was based on limited political information. There we can talk about "double blind" conditions: where voters have little knowledge of the agenda of competing candidates and parties or about how the rules of competition might affect electoral outcomes; and, at the same time, parties operated without experience of how other voters behaved in the past (Evans and Pickup, 2010; Tavits and Annus, 2006). This process continued through the later stage of the democratic consolidation of Central and Eastern Europe countries as the market economy and the path to EU membership presented new challenges (Enyedi and Toka, 2007; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2006). Here is where parties played an important role in structuring the environment in which they act by (re-)profiling their electorate (Enyedi, 2005; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2006). This implies a process of "(re-)educating" supporters and contributing to increasing their level of political sophistication. Consequently, parties played a significant role in providing the population with precious knowledge, helping individuals navigate in environments characterized by constant economic and political changes (Brader and Tucker, 2009; Enyedi and Toka, 2007; Tavits, 2013: 7–9). What is also significant is that some parties were more successful than others in doing this, e.g. FIDESZ in Hungary (Enyedi, 2005).

Of course, the process described above can be seen as a consequence of the effort parties make in supplying their voters with cues and information. More precisely, as they mobilize support (e.g. election campaigns, party congresses), parties shape their supporters' views of the political arena (Converse, 1964; Craig and Hurle, 1984; Field and Anderson, 1969; Jacoby, 1995; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie and Rabjohn, 1979), thereby raising their levels of political sophistication. More specifically, in the process of political communication (which is more intense during periods of mobilization) parties inevitably provide their followers with information. This information might be biased, as we can expect party supporters to favor information that is aligned with their initial attitudes (Eagly and Chaiken, 1998; Gaines et al., 2007; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Zaller, 1992); however, here it is argued that even this biased information can be useful. For example, when parties criticize the state of the economy (even if on the wrong grounds) by simply mentioning the finance minister's name in the debate, they increase political knowledge. In the same way, whenever parties communicate their message, even if the information is biased, partisans can learn more about who is the leader of that party, familiarize themselves with a particular issue and have at least some vague idea where other parties stand on the matter. When we compare this to a baseline on which most citizens are chronically ignorant about political matters (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Popkin, 1994; Zaller, 1992), it can contribute to an increase of political knowledge and, thus, of political sophistication. Linking this to the idea of the triad, it does show an increase in the opportunities supporters of a party have to be informed and, at the same time, reduces the ability level required for processing the message – considering it is a clear one.

However, as noted above, the increase in the sophistication level of partisans also a secondary consequence of the mobilization process. This can be viewed as a two-step process in

which parties, by playing an important role mobilizing their supporters (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbi, 1994) increase their political participation level, thereby contributing to increasing their sophistication level (Bennett, 1975; Junn, 1991; Leighley, 1991; Tan, 1980). The mechanism is simple – when parties mobilize their followers they inevitably engage them in the political process and raise their level of political interest (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992), which leads to higher political sophistication levels.

Ultimately, when parties put more effort into mobilizing supporters, they provide them with a greater amount of information, raising their political interest level. Therefore, we can expect parties that are much more active in engaging their supporters through mobilization also do a better job of providing them with information and increasing their level of political interest. The general expectation would then be that there is a positive relation between supporting parties that are more motivated to mobilize their followers and the level of political sophistication

As noted above, the causal path between supporting a certain party and the level of political sophistication might be questioned. Previous studies do indeed show that the level of political knowledge has an impact on vote choice (Bartels, 1996; Toka and Popescu, 2008), but we must remember that partisanship and vote choice are two different concepts. Partisanship has broader implications than voting preferences or voting loyalties, as it has a much stronger influence on political attitudes and on how voters think about the political world (Campbell et al., 1960; Lodge and Hamill, 1986). Moreover, while vote choice is influenced by short-term forces, such as economic conditions (Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Powell and Whitten, 1993), and leader evaluations/popularity (e.g. Abramowitz, 1985; Rosema, 2006), partisanship was generally shown to be immune from such forces and therefore more stable (Campbell et al., 1960; Green and Palmquist, 1994; Green and Schickler, 2009; Green et

al., 2002; Zuckerman et al., 2007). Therefore, we can expect the mechanism through which vote choice and partisanship relate to political sophistication is different. In fact, while political sophistication was considered as a predictor for vote choice (Bartels, 1996; Toka and Popescu, 2008), no such relationship seems to have been was established between political knowledge and partisanship.[10]

Moreover, if we accept the reverse causal mechanism, then that would mean an increase and/or decrease in the level of political sophistication would lead to a change in partisanship, but this is unlikely for the following reasons. First, partisanship provides a sense of "we feeling" that is stronger than other psychological constructs and attitudes (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Lazarsfeld et al., 1949; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), and even if we don't accept this identity feeling is based on a "primary" social group (i.e. religion, class, region, etc.) (Lazarsfeld et al., 1949; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), but is based on "secondary" groups (i.e. parties or the partisan group) (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002) we can still deduce that partisanship is the cause and not the consequence of less stable attitudes, opinions, and evaluations (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009: 5).[11] It is therefore not surprising that the stability of partisanship and its immunity to short-term forces was shown to be true not only in a US context (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964; Dalton, 1980; Goren, 2005; Green and Palmquist, 1990, 1994; Green et al., 2002), but also across contexts (Green and Schickler, 2009; Green et al., 2002; Schickler and Green, 1997; Zuckerman et al., 2007), and even in Eastern European countries such Russia (Back and Teorell, 2009: 170). It has also been argued that any findings pointing to the instability of partisanship (e.g. Achen, 1975; Thomassen, 1976) are a result of measurement

[10] On the contrary, the strength of partisanship is considered an important predictor of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Grönlund and Milner, 2006).

[11] Even if we accept the view that partisanship represents an attitude (Greene, 2002; Popkin, 1994; Price, 1992) attitudes towards parties are stronger than towards other political objects with similar influences as identities (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009). Hence, even this view is consistent with the stability of partisanship.

error, and that these findings are rejected once the error has been corrected (Green and Schickler, 2009; Schickler and Green, 1997), and even if fluctuations in partisanship are recorded they are more likely to be changes from partisan to non-partisan (hence, these cases will be excluded from analysis) than switches between parties (Clarke et al., 2009; Neundorf et al., 2011). All in all, it is safe to infer that partisanship is stable and unlikely to be affected by changes in political knowledge. Additionally, given that a large proportion of party supporters "inherit" the partisanship of their parents through the process of early socialization (Dalton, 1980; Kroh and Selb, 2009), it seems implausible that the level of political knowledge leads to support for a certain party.

Another argument against reverse causality lies in the way people process information. It has been argued that individuals tend to favor information that is in alignment with their partisan orientation, a process known as "selective exposure" (Campbell et al., 1960; Stroud, 2007). Studies on information processing show that "motivated reasoning" is crucial to how citizens acquire and incorporate information – in other words, citizens more easily accept and incorporate information that is consistent with their pre-existing views and, at the same time, put substantial cognitive efforts to counter-argue information contradicting these views (Gaines et al., 2007; Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Taber and Lodge, 2006). It is therefore unlikely that a biased increase in information would change partisanship (i.e. mechanism implied if reverse causality were to be true): on the contrary – political learning only tends to reinforce existing partisan predispositions (Highton, 2011; Stroud, 2007).

The level of political sophistication is dependent upon which party one supports, and reverse causality is at best implausible. As explained above, variation in party characteristics affects the motivation of parties to offer cues and mobilize their supporters. Here parties with

greater incentives to challenge the *status quo* are considered to be more motivated to inform and mobilize their followers. Thus I expect that opposition, smaller parties and parties to the right of the political spectrum (this latter one valid only in the context of Central and Eastern Europe), put more effort into mobilizing their supporters, which results in higher levels of political sophistication among their followers. To put it another way, we can expect the supporters of these parties to possess higher level of political sophistication even in the absence of the individual-level characteristics (i.e. high level of education and media use) that are generally positively associated with political sophistication.

The main challengers of the *status quo* are normally non-incumbent parties, that is, the opposition parties. If we consider that the main role of parties is to gain office, these parties are the most motivated to inform their followers and mobilize support in order to (re)gain access to power. Thus they will invest the most in mobilization campaigns, during which they will put the most effort in communicating their message and thereby provide more cues and involve their supporters in the political process that leads to an increase in the political sophistication of their followers. Thus:

H1: Supporters of opposition parties will be more sophisticated.

I expect the supporters of small parties (see Appendix 3 for the operationalization of small parties) are more informed, since in their effort to challenge the *status quo* and enter the become meaningful players on the political arena these parties are motivated to offer cues and mobilize support. In general, they try to do this through direct communication with their followers because, as they are not major political actors, the media does not provide extensive coverage of their message. Thus:

H2: Supporters of small parties are generally more informed.

The third characteristic to be taken into consideration is the position of the party on the left-right axis (see Appendix 3 for description of the party positioning variable). Here I argue that, in the case of post-communist countries, we can expect that after the regime change right-wing parties were more motivated to mobilize support. Rightist parties were the ones that were challenging the supremacy of the electorally stronger leftist parties (Tavits and Letki, 2009: 557), and are therefore the ones challenging the *status quo*. Consequently, they had to educate their followers about the institutional framework of the newly-emerged democratic environment. At the same time, left-wing parties (which generally are the successors of the ruling parties before the transformation, and thus interested in maintaining the *status quo*), could rely on the support of those who remain nostalgic for the old regime (Gryzmała-Busse, 2002; Kitschelt, 1992) and on a strong existing organizational structure (Lewis, 1994; Tavits and Letki, 2009: 556–557), so they feel less motivated to mobilize support and educate their supporters. In other words, while left-wing parties already had the base and organization for their support, in order to attract voters and change the *status quo* right-wing parties needed to make a substantial effort to educate individuals in the new political environment (Evans and Whitefield, 2000). Hence, we can assume that their supporters will be better informed about the new political environment. Or, bearing in mind the framework developed by Page and Shapiro (1992), rightist parties provide patterns of information that favor learning about the democratic political environment and offer their supporters greater stimuli to get informed and to engage with politics. One such example is FIDESZ, the largest right-wing party in Hungary, which while "re-profiling its own electorate" to fit its new right-wing profile, put a great deal of effort into engaging with its supporters (Enyedi, 2005). Hence:

H3: As right-wing parties are more motivated to mobilize supporters, they provide more information and cues, thus their supporters are more politically sophisticated.

In addition to an unconditional effect, we also expect the impact of these characteristics to be conditioned by the individual characteristics of the party's support. In general, the increase in political knowledge provided by supporting parties that challenge the *status quo* should be especially helpful for those who cannot rely on their own resources to gather information about the political environment. Therefore, I expect that the positive impact these parties have on the sophistication level of their supporters should be stronger for those having lower level of cognitive abilities (the less well-educated) and for those who are less motivated to acquire information on their own (the less frequent media users). In this case, the role of political parties goes beyond explaining the variance in political sophistication. Supporting a political party that challenges the *status quo* can act as an effective substitute for education and media use and thus has the potential to reduce the gap in political knowledge.

H 4.1: The positive effect supporting an anti-status quo party has on political sophistication is stronger for less well-educated partisans, thus narrowing the knowledge gap caused by difference in education.

H 4.2: The positive effect supporting an anti-status quo party has on political sophistication is stronger for the partisans with lower levels of media usage, thus narrowing the knowledge gap stemming from difference in the levels of media use.

3.3. Research Design and Variables

The data used in this chapter comes from Eurequal FP6 2007, a project that provides standardized questionnaire items in 13 East European countries. The countries were Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. A clustered random sample of approximately 1,000 respondents was interviewed in each of these countries. It is important to remember that in this analysis only party supporters were taken into consideration (see Appendix 2 for conceptualization of party supporter). The hypotheses outlined above cannot be tested for non-supporters since none of the party characteristics apply to them.

The rich institutional environment in which parties in these countries act and the large variety of parties offers the possibility of extensively studying the effects of party support on individual-level political knowledge. As noted above, the tremendous economic and political changes experienced in former communist countries after 1989 forced citizens to learn a lot in a very short time, and this learning process was largely moderated by political parties (Brader and Tucker, 2009; Enyedi and Toka, 2007; Tavits, 2005, 2013: 7–9; Tworzecki, 2003: 241–243). Hence, in these countries we can expect to see strong evidence of party characteristics on political sophistication.

The dependent variable used in this study is political sophistication. This is operationalized employing three widely used indicators (constructed as an additive scale, see Appendix 1 for details) that reflect the same unidimensional concept: factual knowledge about politics, interest in politics and opinion, as an imperfect proxy for political cognition (Lau and Erber, 1985; Zaller, 1990). For this specific dataset I prefer to use the broader concept of political sophistication instead of the term “factual political knowledge”, since the restricted

choice of two dichotomous knowledge quiz items (resulting in a three point "continuous" variable with a uniform distribution) is in sufficient to accurately evaluate political knowledge. Second, if parties do indeed offer their supporters cues, they should be related to providing a foundation for their attitudes and hence contribute to increasing their level of opinion in at least an equal manner. Third parties engage their supporters in politics during the mobilization process, increasing their level of political interest (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992). The dependent variable, therefore, will capture both the impact of party mobilization on factual knowledge and its effects on the formation of attitudes (opinion) and engagement (interest). Last but not least, it should be noted that political sophistication and political knowledge reflect the same unidimensional concept, and that the results presented here hold true across both operationalizations (see Appendix 6).

The individual-level variables are those described in the previous section and have been widely used in the literature to explain political sophistication. Education will be used as an indicator for cognitive abilities (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990) while media exposure, which generally reflects motivation to become informed, will be operationalized through the usage of newspapers and TV. Other socio-demographic controls that were shown to be relevant for political knowledge – gender, age, minority status, religiosity, income, and type of residence – will also be used (see Appendix 2 for a detailed description).

As mentioned above, three variables are considered for the second level: the position of the party, party size, and whether the party is in government or not (see Appendix 3 for a detailed description).

In order to test these hypotheses I use a multi-level model having individuals at the first level, which will be nested in parties (the second level, units). Due to concerns about biased

parameters and inaccurate confidence intervals, parties with fewer than 20 supporters were excluded from the analysis (Hox, 2010: 235),[12] with the result that their supporters were also excluded.[13] The final sample therefore consists of 4,504 party supporters, nested in 54 parties. In order to ensure that the variation of the second level is a result of party characteristics and not of national characteristics, country dummies were included at the first level. Finally, since the cross-level interactions are the focus of this research, group mean centering was used for individual-level variables and grand mean centering was used for second-level variables (Enders and Tofighi, 2007). The analysis was done using the HLM 6.08 package, using restricted maximum likelihood (REML). Three-level models (supporters nested in parties, parties nested in countries) were run, yielding similar results to the two-level models with country dummies; however, these later models were preferred because the correction for clustered standard errors was not possible for the three-level model due to the small number of level three cases (only 12 countries).[14]

3.4. Empirical Analysis

I will present a series of multi-level models (see Table 3.1) that will test the relationship between the abovementioned party characteristics and political sophistication. Model 1 is the baseline that includes only the intercept and country dummies. This model will be used as the base to evaluate

[12] The general rule of thumb is that a sample of 30 groups with at least 30 individual per group – hence the name "30/30 rule" – will be sufficient for accurately estimating parameters and standard errors (Kreft, 1996). Still, if there is interest in cross-level interactions, as is the case in this paper, Hox recommends 50 groups with a minimum of 20 individuals per group (2010: 325). Including these cases in the analysis leads to similar conclusions (see Appendix 7).

[13] Since all parties in Belarus had fewer than 20 supporters in the survey, this country was excluded from the analysis.

[14] The analysis conducted using the R lme4 package led to very similar results.

model fit. It also shows that the intercept varies substantially across parties, indicating that the level of sophistication differs between supporters of different parties.

In Model 2 all the individual-level predictors of political knowledge are introduced and the slopes of the media usage variable and that of education are left to vary across the nesting units: in this case parties. This model confirms previous findings in the literature – increased media usage, higher levels of education, and being older and male, all have a positive effect on political sophistication, while being a member of a minority and living in a rural area, have a negative impact on political sophistication. Here we note there is also substantial variation in the effect of media usage and education on political sophistication between supporters of different parties. This supports the claim that the cues individuals receive from their party are strongly influenced by their media usage and cognitive abilities. Last, but not least, the fact a substantial part of the total variance of political sophistication is at the second level – the party – not only justifies multi-level analysis, but also makes it necessary.

Models 3 and 4 introduce both the conditional and unconditional effects of the party-level variables. The first thing to be noted about these models is that they perform better than a model with only random slopes, this being shown by the reduction of the AIC and deviance. Model 3 introduces the unconditional effect of the three-party characteristics of interest. Only one of these variables – the position on the left-right axis – is statistically significant and pointing in the expected direction. This confirms the initial expectations that supporters of parties further to the right are more politically sophisticated. As hypothesized above, this can be a consequence of the fact that rightist parties are more motivated to change the *status quo*

Table 3.1: Determinants of Political Sophistication [(a)(b)(c)]

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects:				
Media		1.878*** (0.188)	0.426*** (0.102)	0.441*** (0.160)
Education		0.418*** (0.101)	0.636*** (0.057)	0.375*** (0.096)
Male		0.637*** (0.057)	0.335*** (0.030)	0.337*** (0.030)
Age		0.336*** (0.030)	3.851*** (0.602)	3.804*** (0.607)
Age squared		3.836*** (0.605)	-3.475*** (0.590)	-3.431*** (0.596)
Rural		-3.465* (0.591)	-0.093* (0.042)	-0.097* (0.042)
Income		-0.096 (0.042)	0.031 (0.058)	0.037 (0.059)
Minority		0.031** (0.058)	-0.165** (0.053)	-0.169** (0.054)
Religiosity		-0.176 (0.055)	0.009 (0.043)	0.014 (0.043)
Party-level variables:				
Left-right party position			0.318* (0.144)	0.330* (0.151)
Party size			-0.055 (0.249)	0.100 (0.258)
Opposition			0.079 (0.066)	0.102 (0.068)
Party position*education				-0.513* (0.250)
Size* education				1.173** (0.305)
Opposition* education				0.297** (0.100)
Party position*media				-1.325** (0.475)
Size* media				-0.355 (0.525)
Opposition*media				-0.003 (0.185)
Intercept	2.890** (.025)	1.878*** (0.188)	1.826*** (0.194)	1.822*** (0.195)
Random effects				
Intercept	.053	.044	.040	.040
Education		.021	.026	.013
Media		.112	.104	.045
Residual	.682	.768	.762	.761
Number of parties	52	52	52	52
Number of individuals	2620	2620	2620	2620
Deviance	6492	6139	6132	6127
-2LL	7008	6185	6067	6047
AIC	7037	6129	6124	6121

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. Unstandardized coefficient reported. Standard error in parenthesis

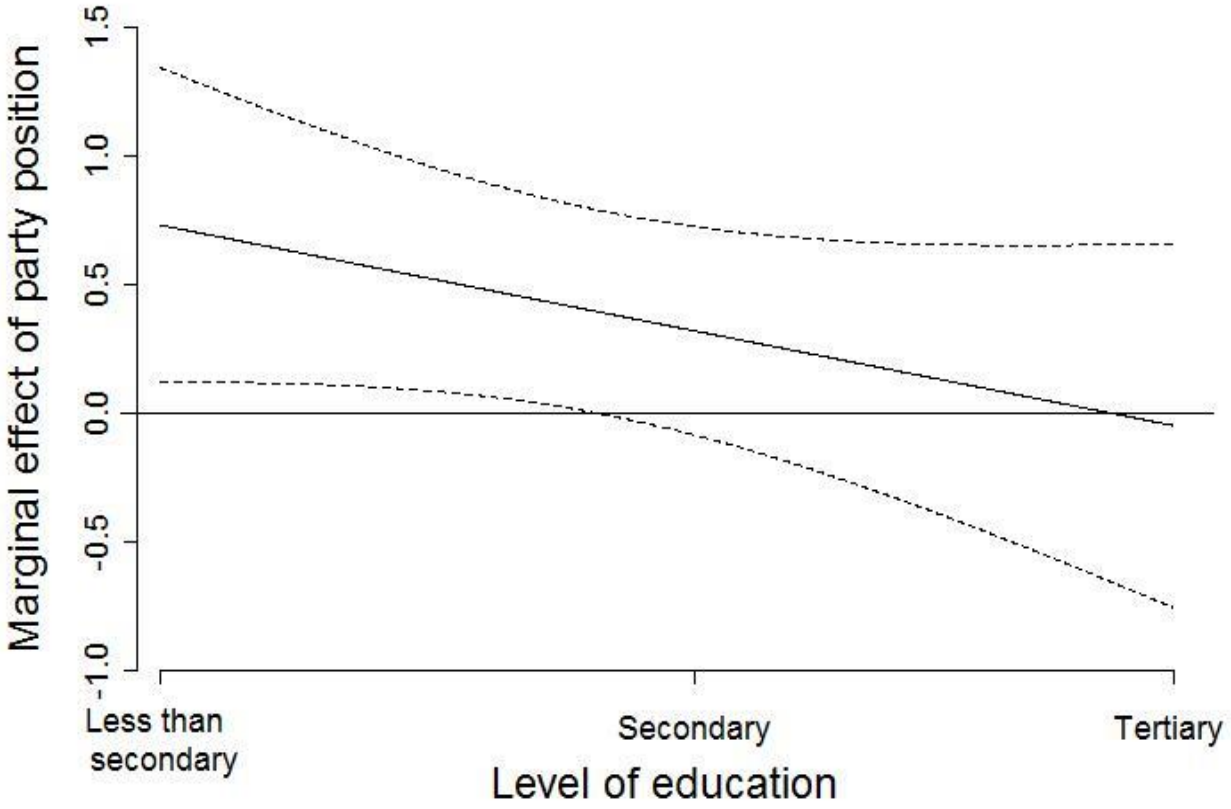
Notes: (a) Models having DV (see Appendix 6) factual knowledge exhibited very similar results, hence they were not reported. When controlling for parties of the extreme right, the position results remained statistically-significant; (b) Coefficients of country dummies can be found in Appendix 4; (c) The result of the AIC ad -2LL are obtained by running ANNOVA tests between models

Looking at Model 4, the interesting findings relate to the significant interaction effects between the individual-level predictors of political sophistication and the party characteristics. This shows that the effect of party characteristics on political sophistication is moderated by how the parties' message and mobilization efforts are perceived by individuals with different levels of education and media use. Furthermore, it is important to note that the random variance on both education and media usage is reduced considerably when adding the cross-level interactions, showing that party characteristics help explain a substantial part of the variance in political sophistication.

Since the main effect was statistically significant, the first set of interactions to be analyzed is that between the position of the party on the left-right axis, education and media use. The interaction between party position and education is statistically significant and moves in a negative direction.

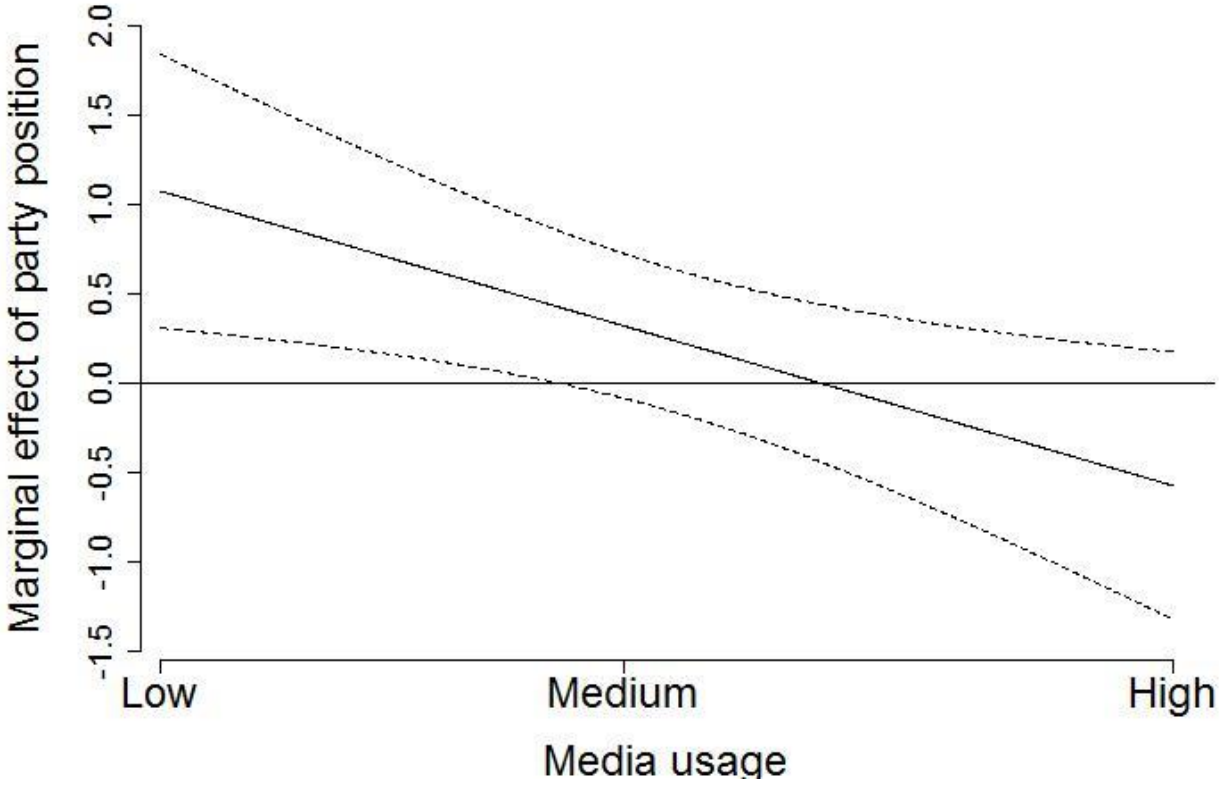
Figure 3.1 helps interpret this effect. In it we can see that the positive effect of supporting a party further to the right is only statistically significant for the less well-educated partisans. As expected, in their mobilization process right-wing parties are more successful in providing information and cues to those who need them most. More specifically, supporting a right-wing party generates an increase in the level of political sophistication for those who do not have the necessary cognitive abilities (i.e. low levels of education) that would help them navigate the complex political environment of post-communist societies without the help of their party. Another thing to be noted is that once the level of education increases there is no difference between the supporters of left- and right-wing parties.

Figure 3.1: Marginal Effect of Party Position Depending on Education



As with the interaction between party position and education, the interaction between party position and media usage is statistically significant, and is in a negative direction. Furthermore, when looking at Figure 3.2 we can see very similar patterns to those in Figure 3.1. Again, the position of the party (i.e. supporting a party that is more to the right) has a positive and statistically-significant effect only for the least-educated partisans. The explanation is the same as previously noted – supporting a rightist party is only helpful to those who are less motivated to acquire information on their own (less frequent media users), and hence rely largely on their party to supply them with information. Also, in this case we note that for heavy media users the position of their preferred party does not have an effect on political sophistication

Figure 3.2: Marginal Effect of Party Position Depending on Media Usage

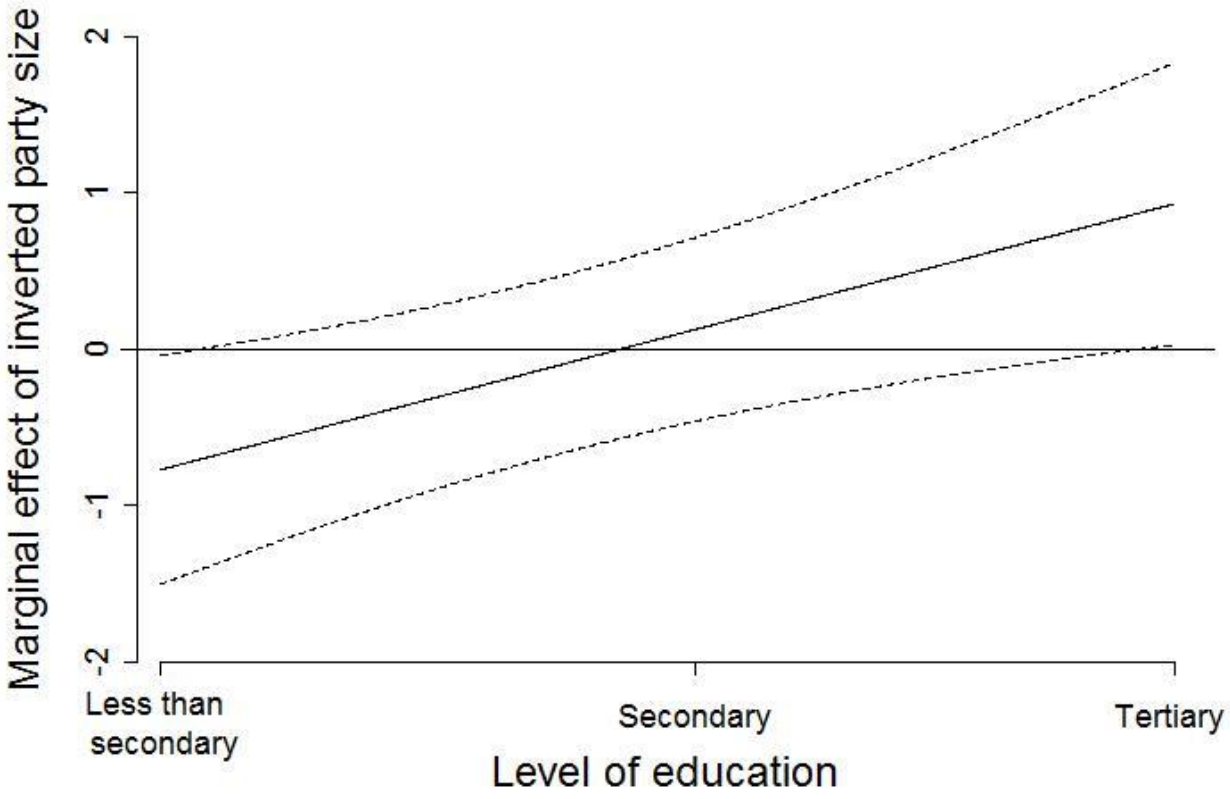


This leads us to conclude that right-wing parties are better than left-wing parties at providing cues for individuals with low levels of education and media usage. This pattern is not surprising given that in the post-communist context right-wing parties are those that need to gain supporters by educating them about the new democratic environment (Evans and Whitefield, 2000) and consequently contribute more to increasing their followers' sophistication level. This is especially true for those supporters who have neither the ability nor the motivation to gather information on their own, and who therefore rely on the information and cues the parties provide during the mobilization process.

If the effect of supporting a party that is further to the right confirmed all previous expectations, the effect of supporting a small party is not unconditional (the main effect is not statistically significant), but it is only significant in interactions with the level of education.

Moreover, the somewhat puzzling positive sign of this interaction is clarified only when looking at Figure 3.3.

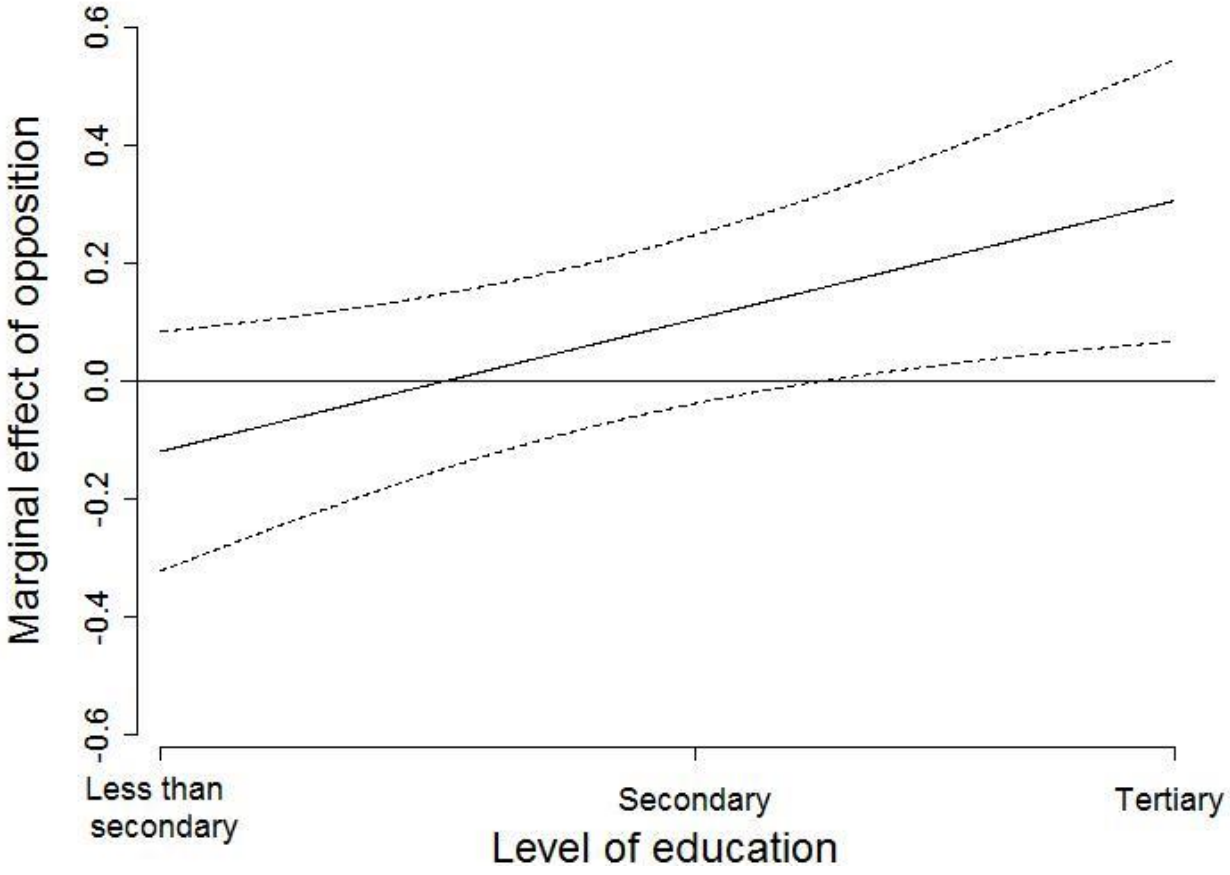
Figure 3.3: Marginal Effect of Party Size Depending on Education



This shows that supporting a small party has a negative and statistically-significant effect only for the least-educated voters. Thus, for the less well-educated the advantage in terms of sophistication comes from supporting smaller parties. This is expected since, as they do not have the necessary abilities, they represent the group that relies on their party's cues and mobilizing efforts in the process of learning about the political environment.

The last interactions to be analyzed are those referring to incumbency – more precisely, to being an opposition party – as a motivational incentive to fight the *status quo* by informing and mobilizing supporters. Looking at Model 3, Table 3.1 shows that while the interactions with media usage are not statistically significant, interaction with education is.

Figure 3.4: Marginal Effect of Opposition Depending on Education



Looking at Figure 3.4 we see that only the sophistication level of the better-educated voters is positively influenced by supporting an opposition party. This goes against our initial expectation that parties that are more motivated to change the *status quo* should also be more successful in providing cues for low-status voters: expectations that were confirmed in the case of right-wing and smaller parties. Figure 3.4 clearly shows that non-incumbent parties are more successful in raising the information level of better-educated voters. One possible explanation for this is that in order to be receptive to the non-incumbent's message, its followers need to be better able to overcome possible obstacles (such as a state-controlled media) placed before them by the incumbents (Djankov et al., 2003). At the same time, for those with lower abilities it is

more difficult to identify the message of their party in an environment that is dominated by the incumbents.

Speaking to the robustness of the findings, the reader needs to be reminded that using factual political knowledge (i.e. the aggregation of factual knowledge questions) as a dependent variable revealed a very similar result pattern (see Appendix 6).

3.5. Conclusions

Here I have explored the link between parties and individual-level political sophistication. I argued that, since one of the most important roles of political parties is to offer information and cues that will help their supporters gain knowledge about the constantly shifting political arena (Campbell et al., 1960; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998), parties should have a significant influence on the level of political sophistication. This should be particularly true in the case in post-communist countries where parties are the main suppliers of knowledge, helping individuals navigate the ever-evolving political environment (Brader and Tucker, 2009; Enyedi and Toka, 2007; Enyedi, 2005; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2006; Tavits, 2005, 2013: 7–9; Tworzecki, 2003: 241–243). The mechanism through which parties fulfill this role can be direct – in which during the mobilization process they constantly supply information to their supporters (Campbell et al., 1960); however, it can also be a consequence of party mobilization which by having an impact on political participation leads to higher levels of political sophistication (Bennett, 1975; Junn, 1991; Leighley, 1995; Tan, 1980).

I argued that the variation in the amount and quality of information parties provide their supporters has an influence on the political sophistication of these supporters. Three-party characteristics (position on left-right axis, incumbency and party size) are considered important

in relation to the level of their followers' political sophistication. Right-wing parties, opposition and small parties are those challenging the *status quo*; hence, they engage in a more intense process of mobilization, resulting in their supporters scoring higher levels of political sophistication.

Assuming political sophistication does not impact what party an individual supports, this chapter has shown that all three characteristics have a systematic effect on political sophistication – either alone (i.e. party placement), or in combination with media usage and education. Here I have shown both how the average level of sophistication varies across supporters of different parties and, more importantly, how the impact of party characteristics is moderated by education and media usage.

The empirical analysis tends to confirm initial expectations. In the case of party placement, being a supporter of parties that are further to the right is associated with higher levels of political sophistication. The interactions reveal that these parties do a better job engaging and informing those who do not have the attributes to seek and process information on their own. Therefore, without having the motivation or the ability to learn about the constantly changing political environment, they rely more on the mobilization efforts of their chosen party. A similar mechanism was shown to be present in the case of small parties that have a positive effect on the level of sophistication only for those who cannot rely on their own cognitive capabilities (i.e. the less well-educated) to gather and process information.

For incumbency the situation is quite different. Here the interaction is only statistically significant for those who are better educated, since they have the abilities necessary to overcome possible obstacles presented by incumbents (e.g. state-controlled media) and gain most from the information and engagement supplied by these parties.

To sum up, this chapter expands on what Campbell et al. (1960) argued all those years ago: one of the most important roles of political parties is to provide information and cues that will help their followers evaluate politics. Not only that, but this relation is expected to be stronger in an environment in which parties have a very important role in informing their followers (Brader and Tucker, 2009; Enyedi and Toka, 2007; Tavits, 2013: 7–9).

Beyond the important contribution of parties in explaining the variance in the level of sophistication, the normative implications of this finding should not to be overlooked. Given that political knowledge/sophistication is generally considered to be an essential political competence for the functioning of democratic systems, the fact that political parties – in this case rightist right-wing parties – can contribute directly to increasing the level of their supporters' sophistication – irrespective of their socioeconomic background – is encouraging, especially in a context in which most of the electorate is largely uninformed (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Zaller, 1992). Probably even more important, however, is the potential of small and rightist parties to reduce the knowledge gap resulting from difference in media usage and education levels. In sum, this chapter emphasizes the capacity of certain institutional factors (in this case political parties) to improve the political competences necessary to ensure the proper functioning of democratic systems while reducing the inequalities between low-status (i.e. the less well- educated with a lower frequency of media use) and high-status voters (i.e. the better-educated with a high frequency of media use).

4. Can political elites help? A Cross-Country Analysis of the Individual and Contextual Determinants of Attitude Constraint.

The importance and implication of having a coherent and consistent set of attitudes was first noted by Converse in 1964. A set of attitudes in which the elements are "bound together by some form of constraint" is the basis of a belief system (Converse, 1964: 3). From this point on issue constraint becomes a central point for structuring the political behavior of individuals.

Constraint was defined as "the probability that a change in the perceived status (truth, desirability, and so forth) of one idea-element would psychologically require, from the point of view of the actor, some compensating change(s) in the status of idea-elements elsewhere in the configuration" (Converse, 1964: 3). High attitude – or issue – constraint implies that attitudes (or issue evaluations) are strongly interdependent; hence, knowing a subset of the attitudes an individual holds would allow us to predict their orientation towards other objects (Converse, 1964). For example, if a person is against the expansion of social security we can expect that them to also favor small government and be opposed to same-sex marriages.

High attitude constraint is considered as both an individual virtue (Converse, 1964; Downs, 1957; Friedman, 2006; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985) and an important macro characteristic(Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Friedman, 2006; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985). From an individual point of view, high attitude constraint is an essential political competence as it allows citizens to make sense of a particular political domain (Converse, 1964) and is instrumental for citizens and their capacity for making rational political decisions (Friedman, 2006; Jacoby, 1995; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985). From a macro perspective, attitude constraint has profound implications for democratic theory for at least two reasons. On the one hand, regarded as a political competence, because it

facilitates the formation of stable political dimensions upon which "a coalition capable of choosing and controlling political leaders in a fully rational and responsible way" can be formed (Krouse and Marcus, 1984), high issue constraint has a strong impact on the quality of the electoral process. On the other hand, the role of representatives as trustees is more difficult when aggregate attitude constraint is low, i.e. when conflicting attitudes shape the opinions of the public (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002). All in all, since political competition is defined by political elites along constrained issue positions, the lack of a coherent attitude structure makes it more difficult for citizens to make meaningful choices and acquire proper representation. Given the considerable normative implication of attitude constraint, the low levels of attitude inconsistency manifested by most citizens are worrisome at best (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988, 1996; Niemi and Westholm, 1984; Zaller, 1992).

Even if most citizens have inconsistent attitudes, we cannot expect that this is equally true for everyone. Indeed, previous research has shown that the level of attitude consistency is higher among the most knowledgeable part of the population (Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Jacoby, 1995; Luskin, 1987; Sturgis, 2003; Zaller, 1992). In addition, we can expect that the less well-informed citizens who use cognitive heuristics can act as though they were well informed (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994), and through this sort of mechanism reach a higher level of attitude constraint.

However, the level of attitude constraint is not only a function of individual-level characteristics. Macro factors are also an important part of the equation, as the level of attitude constraint was shown to vary considerably across contexts (Carmines and Stimson, 1982;

Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie et al., 1979; Niemi and Westholm, 1984). Still, a systematic account of this variation is missing. To fill this lacuna in the present paper I will highlight the important role of national political elites in explaining the degree of attitude constraint manifested by the public. This is evident when we think attitude constraint originates among a "minuscule" number of elites and is subsequently diffused to the public (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). Here, given that previous research noted that clear and consistent cues coming from political elites about where they stand on issues should favor higher level of attitude constraint, two aspects are essential (Niemi and Westholm, 1984; Zaller, 1992). The clarity and consistency of the messages delivered by national political elites is therefore expected to explain a substantial amount of the between-country variance of attitude constraint.

This chapter builds on previous research by testing further how the level of attitude constraint varies depending on the abovementioned individual characteristics and contextual factors. Despite the fact previous works have already studied extensively the determinants of attitude constraint, this approach is not trivial as these previous studies have tended to focus on one country (the US) or, at best, have engaged in two-country comparisons (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Niemi and Westholm, 1984). By performing a cross-country study, I expect that the individual-level of attitude constraint is not only a factor of individual-level characteristics, but that it is also highly dependent on contextual factors – such as the behavior of elites.

In order to test these expectations I make use of two separate operationalizations of attitude constraint. The first builds on a traditional approach – using the average issue correlation at the country level. Unfortunately, this traditional measurement only allows for cross-country

comparison. In order to overcome this obstacle the second operationalization is based on the proximity logic and takes into account the within-individual variance of issue positions. The empirical analysis shows that the level of political knowledge and the consistency of the messages coming from national elites are indeed associated with higher levels of attitude constraint, while the effects of polarization and partisanship are limited, at best.

4.1. Attitude Constraint and Its Determinants

Attitude constraint is a phenomenon that has received attention since the earliest studies of voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964) and refers to the level of consistency between attitudes within an individual's belief system that is based on a combination of logical, social, and psychological factors (Converse, 1964). Its general, conceptualization requires consistency between concrete issue positions (Converse, 1964).Although an alternative conceptualization was based on the consistency between abstract principles and concrete issue positions (Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985) or the consistency between core beliefs and attitudes (Feldman, 1989), here we rely on the initial conceptualization presented by Converse (and which is also used in other studies, e.g. Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988, 1996; Nie and Andersen, 1974; Sturgis et al., 2005).

Converse's initial findings in relation to the average citizen's low levels of consistency are still considered controversial, given that researchers offer mixed evidence about the overall level of consistency within the general population (Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988, 1996; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie et al., 1979; Sturgis et al., 2005). Yet, even if they are controversial, these

findings are especially relevant here because they show there is substantial variance in the level of attitude constraint depending on the selected issues and, most importantly, across different contexts. For example, higher levels of attitude constraint were found in the case of racial issues (Carmines and Stimson, 1982) and important differences in the level of attitude constraint were shown to exist between the US and Sweden (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988, 1996; Niemi and Westholm, 1984).

Less controversial is the positive impact political knowledge should have on issue constraint. People with higher levels of political knowledge are better able to identify their preferences and interests (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 223; Downs, 1957: 79–80; Kroh, 2009; Somin, 2005; Sturgis, 2003). As political knowledge is essential for the development of "meaningful attitudes", better-informed citizens are more capable of linking specific issue stances to basic values and orientations, which leads to higher levels of constraint between stances on specific issues (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 230–237). It is therefore not surprising that the literature on political behavior has identified political knowledge as the primary reason for the variance in issue constraint. The positive impact of political knowledge has repeatedly been demonstrated across time and, more importantly, across countries (Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Jacoby, 1995; Luskin, 1987; Sturgis, 2003; Zaller, 1992).

Political knowledge is expected to reduce the uncertainty associated with the different facets of an issue domain. Although uninformed individuals recognize they might be on opposing sides in a political debate, they are not able to understand and resolve the questions raised by their opponents. In this context, an increase in information will reduce uncertainty and

therefore lead to higher levels of attitude constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002). The lack of constraint, however, does not necessarily stem from uncertainty; it is important to note that low constraint can also originate in conflicting core values, which are sometimes referred to as ambivalence (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). A classic example of ambivalence is the case of attitudes towards abortion, where the conflict between strong beliefs about women's rights and respect for human life can lead to nuanced views on the topic and low attitude constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002). The basic difference between uncertainty and ambivalence as sources for lack of attitude constraint is the role of political knowledge. On the one hand, an increase in political knowledge leads to higher levels of constraint in the case of uncertainty: on the other, it reduces constraint in the case of ambivalence (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 2002). Given this difference, it is important for us to discover whether the source of low levels of attitude constraint is uncertainty or ambivalence.

If it is uncertainty, the normative implication of holding inconsistent attitudes is a matter of concern. Part of problem concerning the quality of democratic representation could be solved by aggregation, i.e. society as a whole could function according to democratic principles irrespective of the quality of the its members (Page and Shapiro, 1992). Yet the (in) capacity of these less knowledgeable citizens (who represent the majority, see Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996) to hold consistent issue positioning remains problematic. This is especially true if we take into account the fact issue consistency is an important standard for assessing an individual's political competences (Krouse and Marcus, 1984), indicating their capacity to make rational political decisions based on their issue preferences (Friedman, 2006; Jacoby, 1995; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985).

Given the above, the quality of representation among less well-informed voters, who were shown to manifest lower levels of issue constraint, remains problematic as political elites are less responsive to those who cannot choose in a rational way and/or hold them accountable. Heuristics can compensate for the lack of information that most voters face in making political decisions and make them act as though they were well informed (Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994). It has been shown that such mechanisms as party affiliation, endorsements, poll results, candidate appearance, representativeness, and framing, are indeed employed effectively by voters when making political decisions (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Hamill et al., 1985; Jervis, 1986; Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Lupia, 1994; Ottati, 1990; Popkin, 1994; Scholz, 1998; Shanto, 1990; Sniderman et al., 1991) and contribute to the proper functioning of democracy – even if most voters work with limited information (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Simon, 1985). So we can expect that by employing the same type of cognitions, individuals could have high levels of issue constraint even in they have lower levels of political knowledge.

Here the effect of a very simple heuristics – partisanship – will be tested. Using an experimental design, Goren et al., (2009) do indeed show that attitude constraint increases in the presence of party cues (i.e. when support for certain issues is attributed to a given party), but it is important to note that these findings have not been replicated outside the specific political environment of the US.

Other than individual-level factors, the behavior of the national political elite is also an important predictor of attitude constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Niemi and Westholm, 1984; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). As noted above, the clarity and coherence of the messages coming from political elites were hypothesized to impact the level of attitude constraint. The general idea is that where elite clarity and consistency are higher, taking cues from political elites

will be much simpler for citizens. Thus, since elites are the source of constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992), we can expect that easier access to elite cues will lead to higher level of constraint. In the context of this discussion, the behavior of political elites is operationalized as a country-level variable that serves as an explanatory factor for the contextual differences in attitude constraint.

It has been argued that there is a substantial variance of attitude constraint across time (Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie et al., 1979) and countries (Converse and Pierce, 1986; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988, 1996; Niemi and Westholm, 1984). Granberg and Holmberg (1988, 1996) point to the fact that cross-country difference in issue constraint and stability could be a function of the "strength" of the party system, yet this assumption is only supported by comparison between the US and Sweden. Also based on a comparison between the US and Sweden, Niemi and Westholm (1984) point to the fact that the quality of party cues is the source of the difference in attitude constraint between the two countries, but they fall short in testing their assumption. A systematic analysis of the causes of this variance is therefore missing. As noted at the very outset, here we are building on the cross-country differences in the behavior of political elites and seek to fill the gap in the cross-county study of attitude constraint.

So we then have to ask: what are the political systems in which we could expect higher levels of elite clarity and consistency? First, the clarity of elite cue has been linked to ideological polarization. In more polarized systems, elites send clearer cues to votes regarding their issue positions (Levendusky, 2009), since in such systems the actors have clearer (i.e. greater ideological distance between parties) and better defined (i.e. more ideologically homogenous) issue positions (Alvarez and Nagler., 2004; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Hetherington, 2001;

Levendusky, 2009; Pomper, 1972). It has also been shown that the clearer differences between elites, characteristic of polarized systems, are also more easily recognizable by citizens, and hence electoral options and issue stances become clearer to them (Alvarez and Nagler., 2004; Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Hetherington, 2001; Levendusky, 2009; Pomper, 1972). In line with previous research, I also expect that the clarity of elite cues, characteristic to polarized systems, would, by making cue-taking an easier task, lead to higher levels of issue consistency (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Niemi and Westholm, 1984; Zaller, 1992). This was shown to be so in the case of an experimental design (Levendusky, 2009), but not in a cross-country analysis.

Second, the consistency of the elite message is related to the consensus among national political elites. Previous research has pointed to the fact that political elites are generally more constrained than regular citizens (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Converse, 1964; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Zaller, 1992). It was also argued that political elites are the "original source" of attitude constraint, which is subsequently diffused to the public (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). Hence, one can naturally assume that if elites have more coherent issue positions (i.e. if there is more consensus among national elites regarding issues) this will also be transmitted to the public, who will subsequently be more constrained. Moving to the cross-country design proposed here, we can expect that in countries in which elites have higher levels of attitude constraint the general public will also be more constrained.

In sum, we need to acknowledge the possibility that higher levels of attitude constraint are not only a function of individual characteristics but that they can also be a result of "favorable" political systems. In this respect, contextual factors can effectively function as substitutes for political knowledge as we can expect that high levels of elite clarity and/or elite constraint will lead to higher level of attitude constraint irrespective of the level of an individual's political

knowledge. If this is the case, the presence of a political system favoring high constraint has positive normative implications since it can minimize the difference in political competences stemming from knowledge inequalities.

4.2. Methodology, Measurements and Case Selection

The data used for the statistical analysis comes from the European Election Survey 2009 (Egmond et al., 2013),a cross-national survey comprising the 27 EU member states. Although this survey happens to be carried out in the context of the EU elections, none of the variables used for the analysis is specific to these elections. Rather, the variables focus on national issues and national parties, with the European Parliament elections providing an opportunity for collecting comparable data (see Appendix 8, 9, and 10). Hence, possible criticism related to second-order elections influencing the behavior of voters (Heath et al., 1999; Hix and Lord, 1997; Schmitt, 2005; Weber, 2011), is of no concern.

Using this data set allows for testing the way in which political knowledge and party ID influence issue constraint across different institutional settings. Consequently, any future findings could be generalized for a large number of electoral democracies because of the large diversity of the cases selected.

The operationalization of issues/attitude constraint used here will be built by using the correlation between policy attitude/policy issues (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Sturgis et al., 2005). The issue questions present in the EES 2009 survey are used to measure attitude constraint. It is important to note that these questions were identical in all 27 countries. The selection criteria for the 11 issue questions was guided by the principle of cross-country

comparability. To ensure that this is the case, the selection of questions was based on the input from country experts who ensured the issues are relevant. Therefore the selected issues cover the ideological core of the countries being studied and which are, at the same time, firm enough to be understood by the survey respondents (Jost, 2006). Last, but not least, research has shown that these issue questions cover similar topics and have a similar wording to the items used by the Chapel Hill expert survey, and that they are also comparable and reflect a similar structure (Mcevoy, 2012). Furthermore, similar issues are also used in other attempts to describe political competition across Europe (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Kriesi et al., 2012). Of course the salience of each issue may vary across countries, but we can safely assume that taken together the issue questions are relevant for the political competition in the countries studied.

While acknowledging that the 11 issues reflect a single axis of competition representing the overarching left-right dimension of political competition (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks et al., 2006; McDonald and Budge, 2005), here we also separate them by taking claims the left-right political competition is structured among two dimensions into account (Bakker et al., 2012; Benoit and Laver, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2002; Kitschelt, 1992; Kriesi et al., 2012; Marks et al., 2006). The first of the two dimensions is the economic one, which generally opposes the view favoring economic equality, redistribution, and state regulation of the economy (also known as economic left or classic socialist policies) with one favoring the free market and individual entrepreneurship (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Cochrane, 2011; Hooghe et al., 2002; Kitschelt, 1992; Kriesi et al., 2012; Marks et al., 2006). The second axis is given by a socio-cultural dimension that opposes those advocating for libertarian values, individual rights, tolerance in favor of minorities (generally associated with the left), with one that is in favor of maintaining traditions, respecting authority, and obeying social orders

(generally associated with the right). The 11 questions were coded on a five-point Likert scale and then recoded so small values reflect left-wing principles and high values reflect right-wing values.

Two different operationalizations of attitude constraint were computed. The first was based on the classical correlation approach (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Sturgis et al., 2005) and measured attitude constraint as the average correlation across the issue domains in a given country. Using this operationalization, the average level of moral, economic, and combined (taking into account the moral and economic issue and the immigration domains) attitude constraints were computed for all countries. However, since it only allows for comparisons between by separately calculating correlations depending on information level (three categories) and party identification (three categories), this measurement is limited in its ability to enable the investigation of individual-level determinants of issue constraint. Yet the approach is nonetheless useful for cross-country comparisons since the average country correlation reflects the level of attitude constraint in a given country. Therefore, in order to test for the macro determinants of attitude constraint (i.e. polarization and elite constraint), an OLS country-level regression is used. At this stage, the average level of political knowledge in a country and the proportion of partisans will be considered as a proxy for the general influence the degree of knowledge and respectively the degree of partisanship on attitude constraint.

The second operationalization should be viewed as a complementary measure, as it has been shown to be a valid indicator of attitude constraint that is suited for capturing individual difference (Barton and Parsons, 1977; Fazekas, 2012; Federico and Hunt, 2013). It is based on a proximity logic and takes into account the within-individual variance of issue positions (Barton

and Parsons, 1977; Fazekas, 2012). Two slightly different versions of this measure exist, both of which are based on computing the variance of placements across issues for each respondent.

Barton and Parsons (1977) suggest either using the actual placement of individuals across issues or standardizing the issues scores before computing the within-individual variance. The downside of using this first version is that an individual who is consistently placed in the middle of the scale will appear to have the highest level of constraint (the within-individual variance of these placements is zero). Still, the middle of the scale does not necessarily represent a centrist position, which is obtained by the population distribution (Barton and Parsons, 1977). True centrists are those who are positioned in the middle of the population distribution, and not those who place themselves in the middle of the scale. This is even more evident in the context of the present analysis, where the meaning of a centrist position varies across the 27 political systems. It is for this reason that here I use the second version, in which issue placements are standardized around country means. This measure is adequate for our purposes in that it recognizes that different (issue) items are accepted into the political culture of the society in varying degrees" (Barton and Parsons, 1977: 189) and also takes into account the fact that the same issues are accepted to different degrees in different countries. Since using the standardized issue placements yields a distribution of attitude constraint that is highly skewed towards the left, here I chose to use the natural logarithm of this measure in order to obtain a normally distributed dependent variable (see Appendix 9 for final distribution of the DV across countries). Finally, since high variance reflects low attitude constraint, I chose to invert the scale so that high values reflect high issue constraint.

In this case the knowledge questions in the survey also provide a reliable measure of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Also, the effect of party

identification/party proximity is considered to be a simple heuristic device that acts as a proxy for both "cues" and "sources" of information (Lau et al., 2008).

For both operationalizations, the level of ideological polarization will be measured based on the placement of parties by respondents to the EES 2009, Voter Study(Egmond et al., 2013). The elite constraint will be operationalized using the classical correlation approach: that is, as the average correlation across issue domains among political elites in a given country, with the measurement based on the data provided by the EES 2009, Candidate Survey (Wessels, 2011).

4.3. Empirical Analysis

It should be noted that, after inverting the scale so that in both cases low values reflect left-wing attitudes, the average cross-country correlations between issues appear rather low (see Figures 1 to 3): yet, when comparing the results to those presented in similar papers they match previous findings (e.g. Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008). Of course, one cannot rule out the possibility that low correlation – and hence low attitude constraint – is at least partly due to measurement error (Ansolabehere et al., 2008), but given the relatively low number of issue areas covered by the current data there is no solution to correct for this possible bias. It should also be noted that there is substantial cross-country variation in all three domains (economic, moral, and combined – see Figures 4.1 to 4.3).

As noted above, the first step of the analysis consists in a series of country-level regressions predicting the average issue consistency in each country. However, before doing this, we investigate how the strength of correlations between the issues of each domain differs across individuals with different levels of political knowledge and across partisans and non-partisans.

Figure 4.1: Average Cross-country Correlations for the Economic Domain (Four Issues)

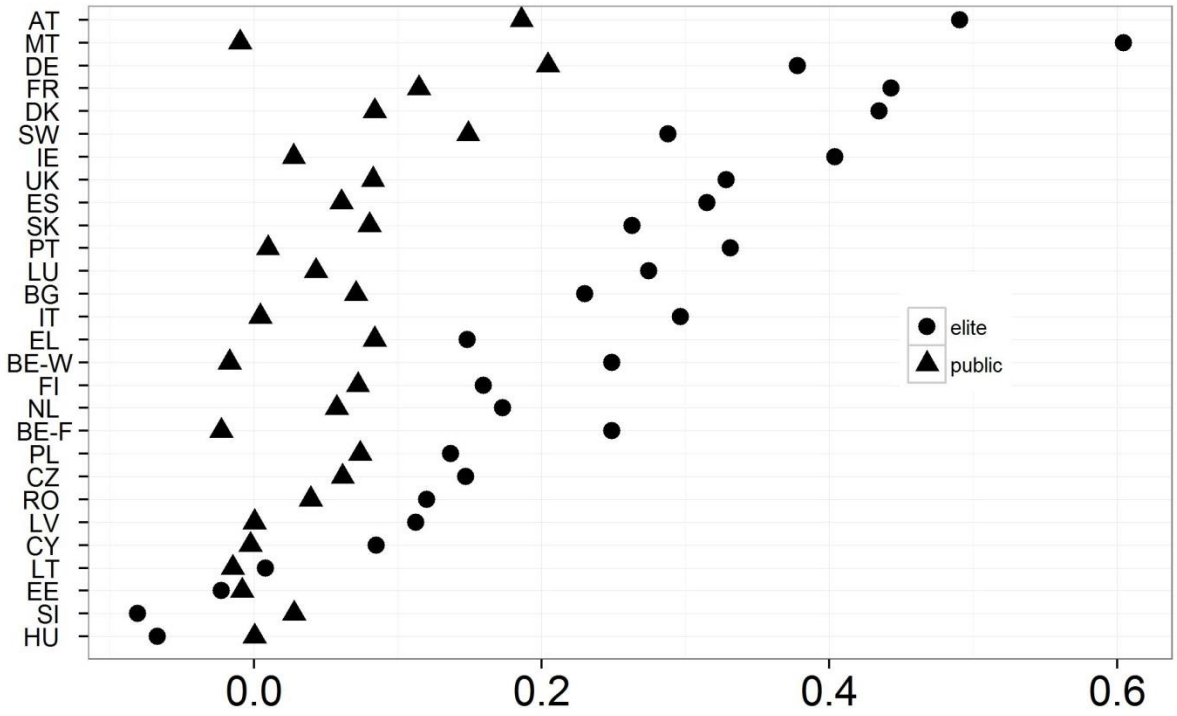


Figure 4.2: Average Cross-country Correlations for the Moral Domain (Five Issues)

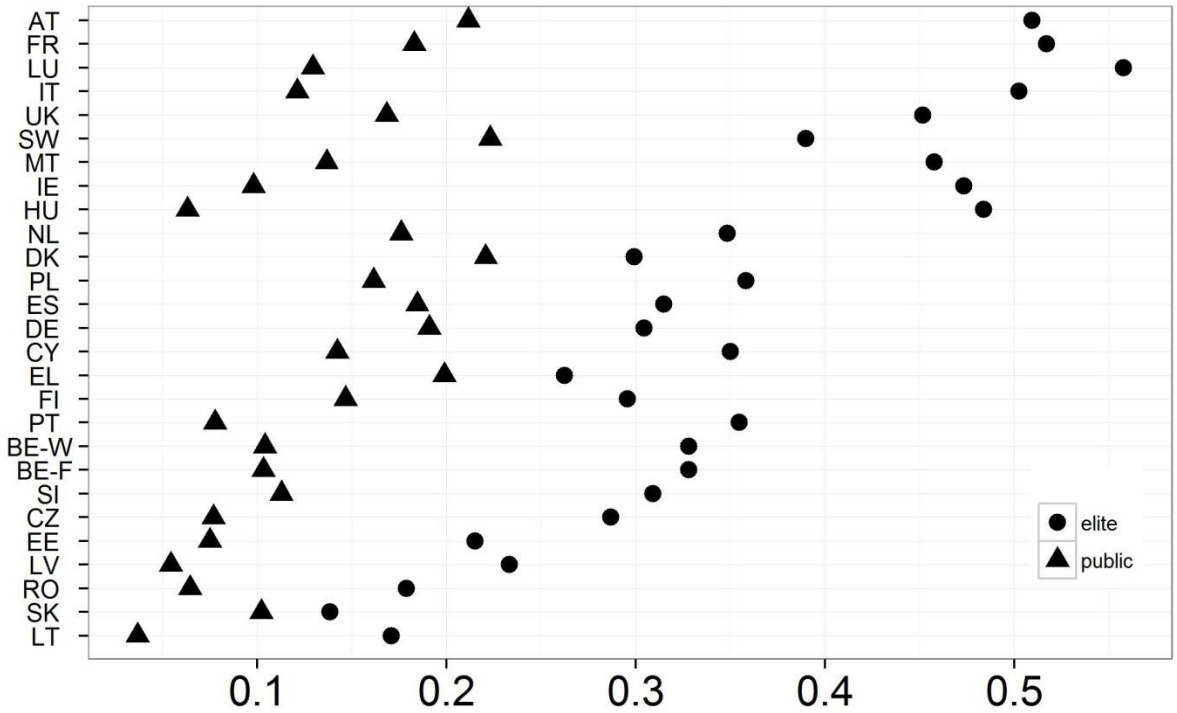
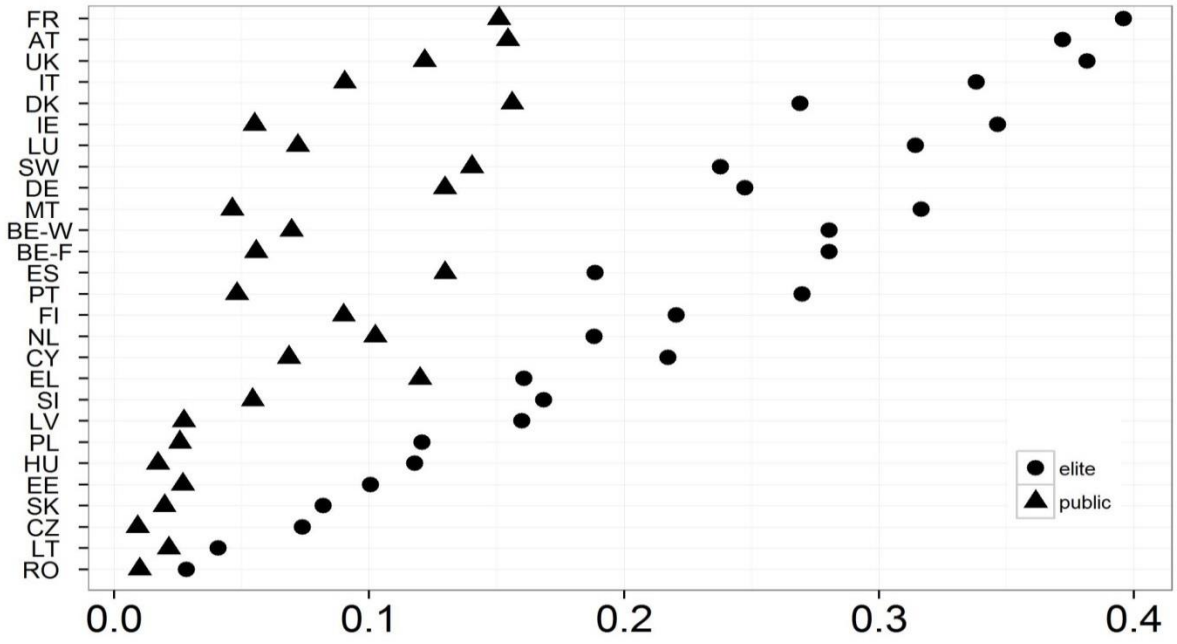


Figure 4.3 Average Cross-country Correlations for the General Left-right Domain (11 issues)



Comparing the attitude constraint (mean strength of the correlation across issue in a domain) of individuals with different levels of political knowledge (see Table 4.1) clearly shows that, across three issue domains, the highest level of attitude constraint is achieved by the most knowledgeable respondents. This supports initial expectations that higher levels of attitude constraint could be expected among highly-informed voters.

Table 4.1 Level of Attitude Constraint Depending on the Level of Political Knowledge.

	Less well-informed voters (answered correctly to maximum 1 out of 7 question)	Entire samples	Highly-informed voters (answered correctly to minimum 6 out of 7 question)
Economic domain	-.035 (-.060, -0.01)	.038 (.027, .048)	.100 (.075, .102)
Moral domain	.090 (.074, .105)	.166 (.160, 172)	.223 (.206, .230)
Left-right	.028 (.021, .035)	.081 (.077, .084)	.119 (.110, .123)

Results from spearman correlations: 95% confidence interval of the magnitude of the correlation in parenthesis [15]

[15] The confidence interval was obtaining by bootstrapping the correlation 1,000 times

A similar situation can be observed in the case of party identification (see Table 4.2). Those who can rely on a simple heuristic, such as having a party identification, generally have a higher level of attitude constraint when compared to both the non-partisans and the entire sample. Across all three issue domains, the difference between groups is stronger in the case of knowledge than in the case of partisanship. While in the case of knowledge the difference between all groups is statistically significant, the same is not true for partisans. In the case of the economic dimension there is only one significant difference between partisans and non-partisans, but neither of the group means is statistically significant different from the entire sample. This suggest that while being a partisan might be associated with higher levels of attitude constraint, political knowledge is the more important factors in attaining high levels of attitude constraint

Table 4.2: Level of Attitude Constraint Depending on Partisanship

Strengths of correlation	Non-partisans	Entire samples	Party identifiers
Economic domain	.015 (.001, .035)	.038 (.027, .048)	.055 (.047, .064)
Moral domain	.124 (.114, 135)	.166 (.160, 172)	.189 (.180, 197)
Left-right	.063 (.057, 069)	.081 (.077, .084)	.094 (.090, .098)

Results from spearman correlations: 95% confidence interval of the magnitude of the correlation in parenthesis

The second part of the analysis concentrates on the contextual factors that can explain the cross-county difference in issue constraint. Together with polarization elite and consistency, the average level of political knowledge and the proportion of partisans in one country were included in the analysis as indicators of the impact political knowledge and party identification have on attitude constraint.

Table 4.3 presents the results of country-level OLS analysis for each issue domain (moral, economic, and a general left-right including the former two together with immigration issues).

Table 4.3: OLS Regression Analysis of Contextual Determinants of Attitude Constraint[(a)(b)(c)]

	Liberal domain	Economic domain	Left-right domain
Elite constraint	.008 (0.117)	.142 (.072)+	.132** (.058)
Polarization	-.030 (.019)	-.019 (.022)	-.017 (.014)
Knowledge	.052* (.022)	.032 (.023)	.027 (.016)+
PID	.096 (.070)	-.042 (.080)	.025 (.049)
Intercept	-.024 (.082)	-.094 (.090)	-.092 (,054)
Adjusted R square	0.191	.116	.361
N	27	27	27

+sig at p<0.1, *sig at p<0.05, unstandardized coefficients, std. errors in parenthesis
Notes: (a) The results are consistent with the ones yielded by an OLS regression (see Appendix 5); (b) The results of a Bayesian analysis leads to very similar results; (c) Bulgaria was excluded from the analysis as no candidates placed themselves on several issues in both the moral and economic domains.

Looking at the results we see that, with the exception of the moral domain, elite consistency has a positive and statistically-significant correlation with attitude constraint, therefore confirming initial expectations that in countries in which elites have more coherent issue positions the overall level of issue consistency among citizens will be higher. Nonetheless, higher levels of polarization – which were shown to make options and issues clearer for voters (Alvarez and Nagler., 2004; Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Pomper, 1972) – do not have a statistically-significant effect.

Looking at the average levels of political knowledge in the country, the results in Table 3 are mixed. In the case of the moral and general left-right domains, as expected political knowledge has a positive and statistically-significant effect; however, while the effect is positive in the economic domain, it is not statistically-significant.

The last parameter to be analyzed is the proportion of party identifiers. The initial expectation is that a simple heuristic device (such as party identification) has a positive impact on attitude constraint (expectation confirmed by the results presented in Table 2). The previous analysis did indeed show that in countries in which the proportion of partisans is higher, the average level of attitude constraint is also higher. However, the results in Table 3 do not support this expectation, since in none of the domains does the effect of partisanship achieve statistical significance.

All in all, using the traditional operationalization of attitude constraint, the analysis shows that – as expected – the level of political knowledge and elite constraint of political elites are positively associated with attitude constraint. The explanatory power of these simple models is quite remarkable, with the general left-right domain the model explaining almost 36% of the cross-country variance in attitude constraint.

Below we present the results of a series of multi-level models. It is important to note that for this step of the analysis, the operationalization of attitude constraint based on the within-individual variance across issue placements is used. Again, three issue domains covering 11 issues present in the EES 2009 were considered: moral, economic, and combined left-right. The results achieved using this operationalization has the benefit of allowing us to test for individual-level differences in attitude constraint.

The results presented in Table 4.4 confirm both initial expectations and previous findings (see Table 4.3) in respect of the positive effect of political knowledge. This clearly shows that, in the European context, the reason for low levels of constraint is the uncertainty surrounding these issues rather than the possible ambivalence resulting from conflicting values . In other words, we

can clearly state that higher level of political knowledge reduce the uncertainty associated with issue positioning and, therefore, increase constraint.

Table 4.4: Multi-level Models Explaining Attitude Constraint[(a)(b)]

	Model 1 Economic domain		Model 2 Moral domain		Model 3 General left-right	
Fixed effects:						
Knowledge	0.016**	(0.005)	0.009*	(0.004)	0.009*	(0.004)
PID	-0.010	(0.016)	0.004	(0.012)	0.004	(0.012)
Union	-0.001	(0.014)	0.007	(0.011)	0.006	(0.011)
TV	-0.002	(0.010)	0.009	(0.007)	0.009	(0.007)
Paper	0.003	(0.010)	0.008	(0.006)	0.008	(0.006)
Web	0.015	(0.012)	-0.007	(0.008)	-0.007	(0.008)
Interest	-0.015	(0.009)	-0.027***	(0.007)	-0.027**	(0.007)
Efficacy	0.018**	(0.006)	0.021***	(0.005)	0.021**	(0.005)
Discussion	-0.017	(0.014)	-0.010	(0.010)	-0.009	(0.006)
Placement	-0.014***	(0.003)	-0.007**	(0.003)	-0.007**	(0.002)
Age	-0.001	(0.002)	0.002	(0.002)	0.002	(0.002)
Education	0.005**	(0.002)	0.001	(0.002)	0.001	(0.002)
Urban	-0.022	(0.014)	-0.014	(0.009)	-0.014	(0.009)
Religiosity	0.008	(0.005)	-0.016*	(0.006)	-0.016*	(0.006)
Female	0.044**	(0.012)	0.059***	(0.014)	0.059**	(0.014)
Minority	-0.003	(0.025)	-0.063***	(0.016)	-0.062**	(0.015)
Age squared	0.001	(0.000)	0.001	(0.000)	0.001	(0.001)
Elite consistency	0.129*	(0.050)	0.645**	(0.217)	0.563**	(0.133)
Polarization	0.031	(0.018)	-0.012	(0.053)	0.027	(0.056)
Intercept	0.560***	(0.061)	0.088+	(0.049)	0.088	(0.045)
Random effects, variance:						
Intercept	0.004		0.035		0.030	
Knowledge	0.001		0.001		0.001	
PID	0.003		0.002		0.002	
Residual	0.565		0.281		0.281	
N of systems	27		27		27	
N individuals	18693		18802		18802	
Deviance	42607		29781		29779	

+ sig at. p<0.1, * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; standard errors in parenthesis

Notes: (a) All models run using HLM 6. Models run using the lme4 package in R yield very similar results; (b) Bulgaria was excluded from the analysis as no candidates placed themselves on several issues in both the moral and economic domains.

Contrary to initial expectations but confirming the findings by using the traditional operationalization of issue constraint (Table 4.3), the effect of partisanship is not statistically different from zero.

Although the rest of the first level predictors in Table 4.4 are mainly used as controls that should isolate the effect of knowledge and partisanship, the effect of at least one of them deserves at least some attention. Across all models we can note that respondents who identify themselves as being more left-wing have higher levels of attitude constraint, suggesting ideology might have an impact. This finding seems to mirror research carried out at the party level, which shows that left-wing parties are more constrained than right-wing parties (Cochrane, 2011). Cochrane also notes the ideological coherence of the left, and especially its commitment to equality as the main factor behind the higher constraint of left-wing parties: in fact, the same mechanism can be employed to explain why left-wing individuals are more constrained. To a certain extent these results might be viewed as contrasting the findings from Chapter 3 where the supporters of leftist parties were found to be less knowledgeable. But, besides the fact that political knowledge and attitude constraint are very different facets of political competences (see discussion at page 11-12); the relation between knowledge and ideological stances found in Chapter 3 is very likely to be context related. To be more specific supporters of rights parties are expected to be more political competent (i.e. more knowledgeable) only to the extent that rightist parties are the ones which have the incentives to change the *status quo*, which is generally true for post- communist countries (see Chapter 3 for an extended discussion) but this is not the case for the more diverse context provided by the 27 EU countries.

When analyzing the effects of the macro variables the same patterns as in the analysis using the traditional operationalization (see Table 4.3) can be seen. The constraint of elites has a

statistically positive effect on the attitude constraint of the respondents. Moreover, this effect is substantive and robust across issue domains, indicating that the consensus among political elites in respect of the structure of the political space (i.e. constraint) occupied by political elites is an important predictor in explaining cross-country difference in attitude constraint.

As was the case when the traditional operationalization of attitude constraint was used, the effect of political polarization does not achieve statistical significance in any of the three domains.

4.4. Conclusions

The overall level of attitude constraint in the population has been raising controversy since the first articles on voting behavior were published. Rather than testing whether the low levels of attitude constraint are indeed a reality facing citizens, and if this impacts the quality of their decisions and ultimately the quality of democracy, here I have concentrated on explaining what factors influence attitude constraint. Two individual-level factors – knowledge and partisanship – and the behavior of elites were studied as possible determinants.

The empirical analysis confirms previous findings in the case of political knowledge. At both the individual- and the macro-level we can expect to find that the highest level of attitude constraint is reached by the more knowledgeable. This indicates that the source for the lack of constraint is the uncertainty surrounding issue positions rather than ambivalence resulting from conflicting beliefs (Alvarez and Brehm, 1998, 2002). On the one hand, this has positive implications, since it shows that more knowledgeable individuals are better equipped to make rational political decisions that are closer to the requirements of representative democracy. But, on the other hand, the low levels of attitude constraint are especially problematic for the lower

informed voters for at least two reasons (Krouse and Marcus, 1984). First knowledge inequalities are translated into important difference in political competences. Lower informed citizens are less politically competent as they have a lower capacity to make meaningful choices since it is harder for them to form meaningful coalitions based on issues. Second the lack of political competence, that is at least in part of results of knowledge inequalities, lead to problems related to the quality of representation as un-constrained individuals are less capable of holding elites accountable, therefore it is harder for their representatives to fulfill their role as trustees (Alvarez and Brehm, 1998, 2002; Krouse and Marcus, 1984). Furthermore, considering the low cross-country variance of the effect of political knowledge, we can conclude that this is a general trend across EU member states. Given the above, the fact that no consistent partisanship effect was found is more concerning, since less well-informed individuals cannot reach higher levels of constraint by relying on heuristic devices.

A more positive aspect is related to elite behavior and its role in explaining the cross-country variance in attitude constraint. While previous studies, which were based only on two-country comparisons, noted that contextual factors are important in explaining this variance (Converse and Pierce, 1986; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Niemi and Westholm, 1984), there is no systematic account of what these factors are. Probably the most important contribution of this study rests in its clarification of this aspect by bringing forward the role of national political elites. As it is generally acknowledged that elites are the source of citizen attitude constraint (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992) it naturally follows that the general level of constraint will vary according to the quality and coherence of the cues elites provide in respect to their issue positions. The empirical analysis shows that this is only partly true. As expected, if the message given by elites is consistent – or, more precisely, if there is consensus among the elites about

how the political landscape is structured – we can expect a higher level of public constraint. At the same time, however, while earlier research has shown that – at least in the case of the US – we can expect clarity to have a positive impact (i.e. ideological polarization) (Levendusky, 2009), I have found no evidence to support this claim. All in all, we can conclude that the higher quality of representation associated with a higher level of constraint is largely a function of the clarity of cues coming from political elites. The coherence of messages from constrained political elites (i.e. political parties) have a positive and substantive impact on attitude constraint by facilitating the cue-taking process (i.e. the transmission of information from elites to citizens), which is fundamental in shaping individual attitudes (Zaller, 1992)Furthermore, in a context in which knowledge inequalities lead to differences in the level of attitude constraint, the fact that even less well-informed citizens can rely on constrained political elites to achieve higher levels of attitude constraint is encouraging as even in the absence of political knowledge individuals can develop political competences.

5. Information, Heuristics, Institutions and "Attitude-Congruent" Voting in Comparative Context.

In the field of voting behavior research a great deal of attention has been paid to the ability of individuals to make political decisions in accordance with their own best interest. One key question is whether more informed voters are, as one might expect, better suited to choose the candidate or party that is best for them, or whether information is not that important in the electoral decision-making processes (Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Downs, 1957; Zaller, 1991, 1992). A possible alternative that compensates for political knowledge could lie with heuristic reasoning, as it has been shown that individuals using such a mechanism make electoral decisions as if they are well informed (Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994).

Here I intend to investigate further the relationship between political knowledge and party identification as a simple heuristic device, on the one hand, and, on the other "attitude-congruent" voting – i.e., voting for the party or candidate that best matches one's own existing policy attitudes. I note that the ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote does not only depend upon individual characteristics. Contextual factors (e.g. effective number of parties, polarization, government stability) in addition to having an unconditional impact on the capacity to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, can also moderate the impact of individual-level variables on the dependent variable.

Of course, the actual empirical reality of electoral decisions may be quite different from that of "attitude-congruent" voting, but from a normative point of view, and in accordance with democratic ideals, voters should make decisions that are congruent with promoting the policy

consequences they prefer. This normative model is fundamentally similar to that proposed by Downs for analytical purposes (1957). Though less clearly articulated, the idea that the choices voters make are partly influenced by a rational calculus of the differential proximity of their own policy preferences to party platforms, and partly by various cues to calculating this proximity and some outright distractions from politically-rational voting behavior, has been consistently present in the literature on voting behavior since the pioneering works of early scholars in the field such as Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) and Campbell et al. (1960). The idea of "attitude-congruent" voting (although under different names, including issue voting, which is understood as a synonym for rational voting – see, Dalton and Wattenberg's [1993] overview of voting behavior research) has been considered a normative benchmark representing fully conscious decisions made by citizens to maximize their political utility: that is, to vote in accordance with their policy preference (Alvarez, 1997; Downs, 1957; Key, 1966; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006).

Following this line of thought, a large proportion of the literature has shown that, at least in the US, the probability of an individual voting for the candidate that best represents their policy preference, and hence the ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, substantially increases among the more knowledgeable section of the electorate (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1980; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987). This is rather normal when considering that the better-informed are able to make better political decisions because they are better able to identify their own interests and to know who is best able to address their concerns (Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993; Downs, 1957; Kroh, 2009; Moore, 1987; Somin, 2005).

However, if higher levels of political knowledge are an important condition for casting an "attitude-congruent" vote, then a fundamental normative problem arises: the large majority of voters have low levels of knowledge about politics (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Popkin, 1994; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). In other words, it is expected that only a very small number of voters are capable of casting an "attitude-congruent" vote. Thus, the normative problem that springs from the gap between informed and uninformed voters is that elections do not accurately reflect the aggregated preference of individuals according to the principle of "one person, one vote", since less well-informed voters are not capable of expressing their policy preferences through their vote.

Given this, the fact that heuristics might compensate for the lack of political knowledge can provide a relief to democratic principles. It has been shown that such mechanisms as party affiliation, ideology, endorsements, poll results, candidate appearance, representativeness, and framing are indeed effectively employed by voters when making political decisions (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1994; Scholz, 1998; Sniderman et al., 1991)(Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1994; Scholz, 1998; Sniderman et al., 1991): more precisely, they are especially useful in evaluating and choosing candidates (Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1994; Zaller, 1992) or in helping citizens recognize the significance of new policy-relevant facts and adjust their preferences accordingly(Page and Shapiro, 1992: 12). What is especially important is that in many cases the use of heuristics leads to "good enough decisions", which can prove better than decisions that are based only on pure information gathering and processing (Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1994).

To sum up, everyone uses some kind of problem-solving strategy (often automatically or unconsciously) that serves to "keep the information processing demands on the task within

bounds" (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001: 952). Being less well-informed, therefore, does not necessarily mean the quality of electoral choices suffer, since heuristics can contribute towards the proper functioning of democracy – even if most voters work with a limited amount of information (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Simon, 1985). Here, therefore, I will test the possibility of using a simple heuristic device, such as having a party identification to help individuals cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. Its effect is especially important, since it acts as proxy for both information "cues" and "sources" (Lau et al., 2008). Party identification is therefore a shortcut that will both help individuals evaluate the party they support and provide them with an anchor to facilitate evaluation of the whole political system.

The actual process of electoral decision-making is quite different from "attitude-congruent" voting; however, throughout the voting behavior literature the idea of "attitude-congruent" voting (although under different names, often called "issue voting", understood as a synonym for "rational voting"- e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg (1993)overview of voting behavior research) has been considered a normative benchmark representing fully conscious decisions made by citizens to maximize their political utility, i.e. to vote in accordance with their policy preference (Alvarez and Nagler., 2004; Alvarez, 1997; Dahl, 1989; Downs, 1957; Key, 1966; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006). As Dahl points out, voting as a utility maximizing process is theoretically possible only if individuals are fully informed of their interests, meaning a person's interest "is whatever that person would choose with fullest attainable understanding of the experiences resulting from that choice and its most relevant alternatives" (1989: 180-1).

The key question to be answered here remains unchanged: are more politically informed voters universally better equipped to make decisions in accordance with their policy preferences,

or can a simple heuristic device like partisanship be enough to facilitate casting an "attitude-congruent" vote?

Building upon the findings described above, this dissertation contributes to our knowledge of heuristics and political knowledge as determinants of "attitude-congruent" voting in a number of important ways. First, it examines "attitude-congruent" voting behavior in a diverse, comparative context. Previous studies on this question have almost exclusively referred to the specific environment of US elections (e.g. Alvarez, 1997) and never focus on more than one country at a time. Comparative studies of whether voters respond to changes in party platforms in ways that seem rational neither establish actual proximity between their preferences and the party platforms (Kroh, 2009), nor look at the impact of citizen knowledge on this proximity (Budge and Farlie, 1983). Therefore, in order to obtain a more generalized picture of the effect of information, one needs to take into account a wider range of cases. Given its varied institutional context and differing information environments, the EU presents the perfect opportunity for a comparative study.

Even if the role of information and party identification seems clear in the US context, within the context of the much more diverse EU one can assume that more complex mechanisms might be at play. As the difference in the institutional setting – especially the difference in party system characteristics – has been shown to be related to attitudinal difference between the US and the European context (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988), this could also happen in the case of "attitude-congruent" voting. In the more complex European institutional setting, which is characterized by multi-party systems, greater degrees of electoral volatility and greater instability at the executive level, a different dynamic between the two variables of interest and the quality of electoral decisions can be presumed.

This dissertation will not only evaluate how universal the role of information and party identification is in "attitude-congruent" voting, it will also investigate to what extent contextual factors influence the capacity to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, and whether it moderates the influence of political knowledge and party identification on the dependent variable.

5.1. Theoretical Expectations

The basic task of this chapter is to evaluate to what extent and under what circumstances information and party identification influence the propensity of individuals to vote in accordance with their policy preferences. Based on findings from the US case, we can expect more informed voters will do a better job of identifying the parties that match their policy preferences (Chan and Stevens, 2008; Downs, 1957: 79–80; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Somin, 2005). Moreover, a simple heuristic, such as party identification, is expected to have a positive effect on the quality of electoral decisions (Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994). I will also indicate out how macro factors (institutional factors) directly impact "attitude-congruent" voting and analyze whether and to what extent such factors moderate the influence of political knowledge and heuristics (i.e. party identification) on the ability to vote in accordance with a particular policy preference.

The likelihood of such influence is clearly possible under the neo-institutional framework that points to how a certain institutional setting can offer individuals the cognitive scripts, models, and categories(March and Olsen, 2006) that can, either unconditionally or conditionally, impact the capacity of individuals to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. The basic assumption, then, is that certain institutional settings can impact directly the ability of voters to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote and, at the same time, favor the stronger influence of political

knowledge and/or party identification on "attitude-congruent" voting, while others diminish this influence.

One such specific factor is the complexity of the institutional structure. As mentioned above, a simple institutional structure would make it easier for individuals to choose the candidate that best represents their view. In the case of less well-informed voters, and those without a party identification, such a structure could have a simplifying role, enabling them to make the same choices as the better-informed, or as those who can already rely on a basic heuristics, such as party identification. By contrast, more complex systems could "confuse" individuals into making choices that do not accord with their preferred policy outcome. This should be especially apparent for the less well-informed and those who do not identify with any party. These groups have neither the level of knowledge necessary to understand politics in such a system, nor do they benefit from the cues from political parties.

Two aspects of the institutional structure need to be considered. The first is party system characteristics. Having a larger number of parties/candidates means that voting for the candidate that best represents an individual's policy preference is more difficult than in a two-party system – for at least two reasons: in such a system it becomes more difficult for voters to remain informed about the position of each party (Kroh, 2009); and accountability is harder to identify (Dalton, 2008). Therefore, in a multi-party system a higher level of political knowledge is required than is the case in a two-party system. More, a highly-volatile party system would make choosing alternative candidates much more difficult than is the case in a stable system, for the simple reason that information about new faces in politics needs to be gathered all the time. Given this, it is clear that political knowledge and heuristics should have a stronger influence on "attitude-congruent" voting in a highly-volatile system. Finally, a highly-polarized party system

makes options clearer for voters (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Kroh, 2009; Pomper, 1972) and enforces the impact of issues and ideology on vote choice (Lachat, 2008; van der Eijk et al., 2005). In such a system it is easier for voters to cast a consistent vote, even if they are generally less well-informed.

The second group of institutional characteristics is linked to institutional stability. Generally speaking, a more stable system makes it easier to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, and it is especially helpful in the case of less well-informed voters or those who cannot rely on their party identification. Two aspects of stability need to be mentioned here: the first is government stability (the life of cabinets), which should at least in theory provide a clearer picture of the political life and make casting an "attitude-congruent" vote easier; second, the general stability of the regime (length of democracy) should have a similar effect. In older and more established democracies, citizens are more acquainted with the rules of the game and of the political scene; therefore in these systems it should be easier for less well-informed voters to become familiar with all the alternatives and to choose the party that best represents their interests.

5.2. Methodology, Measurements, and Case Selection

The data used for the statistical analysis comes from the European Election Survey 2009 (Egmond et al., 2013) a cross-national survey comprising the 27 EU member states. Although this survey happens to be carried out in the context of the EU elections, none of the variables used for the analysis is specific to these elections. Rather, the variables focus on national issues and national parties, with the European Parliament elections providing an opportunity for collecting comparable data (see appendices 12 and 13).

Using this data set allows an examination of how political knowledge and party identification influence an individual's ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote across different institutional settings. Consequently, any future findings could be generalized to apply to a large number of electoral democracies because of the diversity of the cases selected.

The measurement of "attitude-congruent" voting is based on the difference between observed party preferences and the inverted ideological distance between the respondents and the parties in their respective country. This operationalization has a certain degree of commonality with the concept of "correct voting" developed by Lau and Redlawsk (1997; 2006). But unlike these authors, here I have chosen to eliminate party identification, incumbent performance, and group endorsement from the construction of the concept. This has been done because there is no *a priori* way to examine to what extent the various respondents ought to support a certain party (independently of positions on the issue dimensions) if they were to make reasonable "attitude-congruent" choices. Similarly, satisfaction with government performance or with its economic performance is likely to reflect pro- or anti-incumbent partisanship (Evans and Andersen, 2008; Wlezien et al., 1997). Concentrating only on the issue and ideological stand, the formulation adopted here will reflect a normative concept about how individuals should vote when they are fully informed, and thus avoids bias from empirical generalization about observed information gathering strategies and determinants of the vote among citizens that is typical of Lau and Redlawsk's measurement procedures (1997; 2006).

The position of the respondents can be identified easily from the EES 2009 citizen survey data, while the position of the parties can be found in the Euroamanifesto dataset (Egmond et al., 2013). Further validation of candidate positions can also be carried out through comparison with the 2007 Chapel Hill expert survey (Bakker et al., 2015; Hooghe, Bakker, Brigevich, De Vries,

et al., 2010), the candidate survey in EES 2009 (Wessels, 2011), and the calculated ideological position based on the placement of parties by the respondents. The ideological distance (i.e. distance on the left-right axis) is considered to be an appropriate tool for comparing the policy position of votes and of the parties. This is based in the fact that left-right is generally regarded in the literature as a "super issue", which by encapsulating a wide range of more specific issues and orientations represents the most important axis of competition in the countries analyzed here (Inglehart, 1984; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Sartori, 1976; van der Eijk et al., 2005), and which is also closely related to vote choice (Kroh, 2009; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; van der Eijk et al., 2005). While political competition can be viewed as multi-dimensional (Albright, 2010; Bakker et al., 2012; Benoit and Laver, 2006; Hooghe, Bakker, Brigevich, Vries, et al., 2010), it is argued that during elections these multiple dimensions merge into a single left-right dimension from the point of view of both voters and parties (McDonald and Budge, 2005). This single dimension is an important determinant of the party choice voters make, and parties themselves use it to convey their policy position more easily and in a way that does not require voters to understand different positions on multiple issues (McDonald and Budge, 2005). Furthermore, it is clear, even for those who argue for multiple issue dimensions, that the left-right axis explains a substantial proportion of the variance in these issues (Benoit and Laver, 2006). Another advantage of using the left-right "super issue" is that since it is not influenced by the salience specific issues (e.g. immigration) have in different countries, it ensures comparability. The smaller the difference between the respondent and the ideological stance of the party, the more likely it is that a vote for that party will be "attitude-congruent".

Given that the scope of this dissertation is not to evaluate whether voters make their decisions based on proximity considerations (Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008; Westholm,

1997), the objective distance between parties and voters is preferred to the perceived distance. The former is more appropriate for testing whether voters choose the alternative that is congruent with the policy output as it reflects their best interest, rather than the alternative that naively gives them the semblance of this. Furthermore, perceived proximity could actually be independent of the political information level (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). It is also argued that the perceived distance introduces additional endogeneity between a candidate's position and feelings towards parties and/or voting behavior (Lewis and King, 1999; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008) and therefore entails the risk of reverse causality (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Westholm, 1997) and of capturing a projection effect based on the need of respondents to retain their cognitive balance (Brody and Page, 1972). Finally, by using the objective distance there are no issues with missing data resulting from the inability of voters (especially the less well-informed) to place parties on the left-right axis (Kroh, 2009).

Ascertaining whether the respondent cast an "attitude-congruent" vote can be established by a simple comparison with the respondent's reported vote in the 2009 election to the European Parliament (EP). However, a more appropriate method of comparison will be used here, one that follows the work on party utilities carried out by van der Eijk and Niemöller (1984),Van der Eijk and Niemöller (1984), Tillie (1995) and van der Eijk et al. (2006). As well as providing a more nuanced view concerning choice, party utilities were also shown to be a valid indicator of party choice (Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1984; van der Eijk et al., 2006). Moreover, by avoiding the usage of discrete choice models (van der Brug and Mughan, 2007) and by facilitating cross-country comparisons (van der Brug et al., 2008; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996), party utilities have a substantive methodological advantages when compared to vote

choice. In the case of the EES 2009 Voter Study, 93.78% of voters would choose to vote for the party to which they assigned the maximum utility if there were to be "a general election tomorrow". All respondents in the EES survey were asked to rate, on a 0-10 scale, the probability of them ever voting for each of the major parties in their country. Hence the difference between this self-reported actual party utility and the inverted issue/ideological distance from the party provides the current measure of how "attitude-congruent" the respondents' party preferences actually are. After inverting this measure, a value of 10 indicates an increased ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, while a value of zero indicates a very low ability to identify the candidate that best accords with an individual's policy preference. This difference will provide a more nuanced interval scale measurement of "attitude-congruent" voting in place of the simple dichotomy that a comparison between vote choice and issue distances provides. Moreover, it eliminates the problem that some respondents may deviate from their "attitude-congruent" vote for perfectly rational, but momentary, considerations – such as the appeal of particular candidates, the perceived utility of tactical voting, and so forth. This difference, averaged for each respondent across all relevant parties in the given country, captures how "attitude-congruent" vote intentions reflect the objective utility for all parties in a given country. It can therefore be used to test how institutions might influence the impact of political knowledge on "attitude-congruent" voting in general, and not only for the party the individuals voted for.

Finally, while this concept is similar to issue/ideological voting, it differs from it in at least four crucial aspects. First, unlike most operationalizations of issue/ideological voting, which are based mainly on voting intention (e.g. Ensley, 2007; Kroh, 2009; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Westholm, 1997), the measure of "attitude-congruent" voting is based on more nuanced

party utilities. Second, unlike issue voting, "attitude-congruent" voting is concerned with the ability citizens have to evaluate all the parties they consider to be important in a system (i.e. all the parties for which they might vote) and not just the party they actually voted for. Third, the measure is not based on the perceived distance between the voter and the party, but on the objective distance between them. Fourth, the purpose is not to see whether and by how much proximity influences vote choice, but rather to evaluate whether citizens make decisions that are in direct accord with their preferred policy outcome.

In order to test the influence of political knowledge and heuristics on "attitude-congruent" voting, and to explore the possible unconditional and moderating role of institutions, I use a series of multi-level models. At the individual-level, i.e., the first level of the regression, the possible effects of media consumption, political discussion, efficacy, and interest in politics as possible determinants of "attitude-congruent" voting are considered (Lau et al., 2008), but are used mainly to clearly isolate the effect of political knowledge and party proximity (Levendusky, 2011). A number of additional controls will be included in the model, including: age, education, gender, part of national/ethnic minority, marital status, church attendance, and urban-rural residence (see Appendix 12 for a complete description of the level 1 variables).

As mentioned above, a series of institutional characteristics will be used for the second level of analysis in order to determine whether and how the institutional setting moderates the role of political knowledge on "attitude-congruent" voting. The models will be run using HLM 6.02 (Raudenbush et al., 2004) with restricted maximum likelihood (REML). All first-level variables are group mean centered with the second-level predictors grand mean centered, which is recommended in cases in which the effect of second-level variables and cross-level interactions are the focus of the analysis (Enders and Tofighi, 2007).

5.3. Empirical Analysis

The analysis begins by running an empty model that will show how much variation we can expect at the second level. This will be followed by a model that includes all relevant level one predicators, a random intercept, and random slopes for political knowledge and party identification. Finally, separate multi-level models will be run for each group of macro variables: party system characteristics and stability indicators (see Table 5.1). Even if, from a theoretical viewpoint, running a single model with all the above mentioned macro variables would be more desirable, the small number of cases on the second level makes such an analysis methodologically suspicious (Maas and Hox, 2004).

The only aspect worth mentioning from model one, is that around 20% in the variance of "attitude-congruent" voting is at the second level. This does indeed justify using a multi-level model and indicates that the institutional setting can explain differences in the ability of individuals to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote.

Model 2 has all relevant level 1 predictors for "attitude-congruent" voting with random intercepts and slopes for political knowledge and partisanship. This model reveals the first surprising finding: political knowledge does not have a statistically-significant impact on the capacity of individuals to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. This contradicts findings that are based mainly on the specific environment of US elections, and which underline the importance of political knowledge in the quality of electoral decisions (Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 223; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2014; Moore, 1987). In other words, political knowledge does not have an impact on the quality of electoral decisions once individuals are placed in the more complex European institutional setting.

Table 5.1: Multi-level Model Explaining "Attitude-Congruent" Voting[(a)(b)]

	Model 1 Empty model	Model 2 Individual-level	Model 3[16] Party system characteristics	Model 4 Party system characteristics	Model 5 Stability indicators	Model 6 Stability indicators
Fixed effects:						
Knowledge		-.015 (.075)	-.015 (.076)	-.015 (.070)*	-.015 (.076)	-.014 (.075)
PID		.138 (.045)**	.137 (.045)**	.141 (.033)**	.137 (.045)**	.139 (.033)**
Union		.009 (.024)	.008 (.024)	.008 (.024)	.009 (.024)	.009 (.024)
TV		.084 (.013)**	.084 (.013)**	.084 (.013)**	.084 (.013)**	.084 (.013)**
Paper		.017 (.018)	.017 (.018)	.017 (.018)	.017 (.018)	.017 (.018)
Web		.012 (.019)	.012 (.019)	.012 (.019)	.012 (.019)	.012 (.019)
Interest		.057 (.017)**	.056 (.017)**	.056 (.017)**	.056 (.017)**	.056 (.017)**
Efficacy		.092 (.012)**	.093 (.012)**	.093 (.012)**	.093 (.012)**	.093 (.012)**
Discussion		.002 (.020)	.002 (.020)	.002 (.018)	.002 (.020)	.002 (.020)
Placement		.002 (.022)	.002 (.022)	.002 (.012)	.002 (.022)	.002 (.022)
Age		-.005 (.001)**	-.005 (.001)**	-.005 (.001)**	-.005 (.001)**	-.005 (.001)**
Education		.002 (.004)	.002 (.004)	.002 (.004)	.002 (.004)	.002 (.004)
Urban		-.018 (.023)	-.018 (.023)	-.017 (.022)	-.018 (.023)	-.018 (.023)
Religiosity		.015 (.009)	.014 (.009)	.015 (.009)	.015 (.009)	.015 (.009)
Female		.077 (.027)**	.077 (.027)**	.077 (.027)**	.077 (.027)**	.077 (.027)**
Minority		.017 (.039)	.017 (.039)	.019 (.038)	.017 (.039)	.019 (.038)
Number of parties			.203 (.093) *	.277 (.099) *		
Volatility			-.024 (.009)*	-.037 (.011)**		
Polarization			.442 (.141)**	.314 (.186)*		
Regime stability					-.004 (.004)	.003 (.005)
Government stability					-.088 (.039)*	-.089 (.041)*
Knowledge X Parties				0.005 (0.006)		
Knowledge X Volatility				-0.001 (0.001)		
Knowledge X Polarization				-0.012 (0.013)		
PID X Parties				-0.069 (0.035)+		
PID X Volatility				0.012 (0.002)*		
PID X Polarization				0.123 (0.073)		
Knowledge X Regime stability						.001 (.002
Knowledge X Government stability						.001 (.001)
PID X Regime stability						-.007 (.002)**
PID X Government stability						.001 (.011)
Intercept	5.05 (0.12)**	4.74 (0.15)**	4.74 (0.13)**	4.74 (0.13)**	4.74 (0.14)**	4.74 (0.14)**
Random effects, variance:						
Intercept	.389	0.464	0.288	0.257	0.331	0.296
Information		0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
PID		0.062	0.062	0.032	0.062	0.030
Residual	1.56	1.52	1.52	1.52	1.52	1.51
N of systems	27	27	27	27	27	27
N of individuals	18492	18492	18492	18492	18492	18492
Deviance	60876	60368	60355	60337	60359	60341
AIC[17]	60882	60417	60410	60405	60412	60402

+ p<0.1;* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; standard errors in parenthesis

Notes: (a) Models using only knowledge computed only from responses to national politics knowledge questions yield very similar results; (b) Models run using lme4 package in R yield very similar results.

[16] Models including the number of parties in government and type of electoral system (PR vs. SMD), lead to the same conclusions but have a worse fit. The results are available from the author on request.

[17] The AIC was obtained by doing an ANOVA comparison between models.

On the other hand, a simple heuristic device, such as feeling close to a certain party, does have a statistically-significant, although substantively rather limited impact. Feeling close to a certain party, therefore, does not only help evaluate that party, but it also offers individuals an anchor that helps them evaluate the entire system. Theoretically, such an anchor offers individuals the possibility to evaluate all parties in the system by comparing them to the party they feel closest to.

As one might expect, those who are more motivated (greater interest in politics), who use media more often, and who have a higher sense of political efficacy are more likely to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. However, these variables should be mainly regarded as controls that help isolate the effect of political knowledge.

The second part of the research question is concerned with how the structure of the institutional setting impacts the ability of citizens to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. To recall, I hypothesized that institutional characteristics have both a direct and a moderating role on the relation between political knowledge and "attitude-congruent" voting. More precisely, institutional characteristics can have the same effect as heuristics: a simple institutional structure can make it easier for voters to identify the party that best represents their policy preference and help them cast an "attitude-congruent" vote.

Model 3 shows the unconditional effect of specific types of institutional characteristics and party system characteristics (effective number of parties, polarization, and volatility) on the dependent variable. The analysis reveals that the effect of all three variables achieves statistical significance. On the one hand, volatility and polarization go in the expected direction, thus a more simple system characterized by fewer changes in the party system and clear differentiations between parties will make it easier for voters to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote; while on the

other, and contrary to initial expectations, the effect of the number of parties goes in the opposite direction[18]. It is a more complex structure (more parties) that facilitates an "attitude-congruent" vote. This finding might also seem counter-intuitive as a larger number of parties would by default increase the average distance between individuals and parties. But it is important to remember that when computing "attitude-congruent" voting we also include in the equation the probability to vote for a given party. Thus no matter if the addition of one party can indeed mechanically increase the average distance between and individuals and parties, if individuals correctly estimate the propensity to vote for the given party based on the distance between them and the party (i.e. discard parties that are far from them and find parties close to them as viable alternative) there is no reason to except that the chance of casting an attitude congruent vote will automatically decrease once the number of parties increases. On the contrary, a larger number of parties can offer better representation as individuals, independently of their position on the left-right axis, have, in such a context, an easier job in finding a party that best represents their interests. Consequently, in such a situation it might be easier for voters, especially those at the extremes of the left-right axis, to identify a party that is closer to them and cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. Then again, in the hypothetical case in which there are a few parties concentrated in the center, individuals with more extreme views have a reduced chance of casting an "attitude-congruent" vote, for the simple reason that none of the parties truly represents their policy preferences.

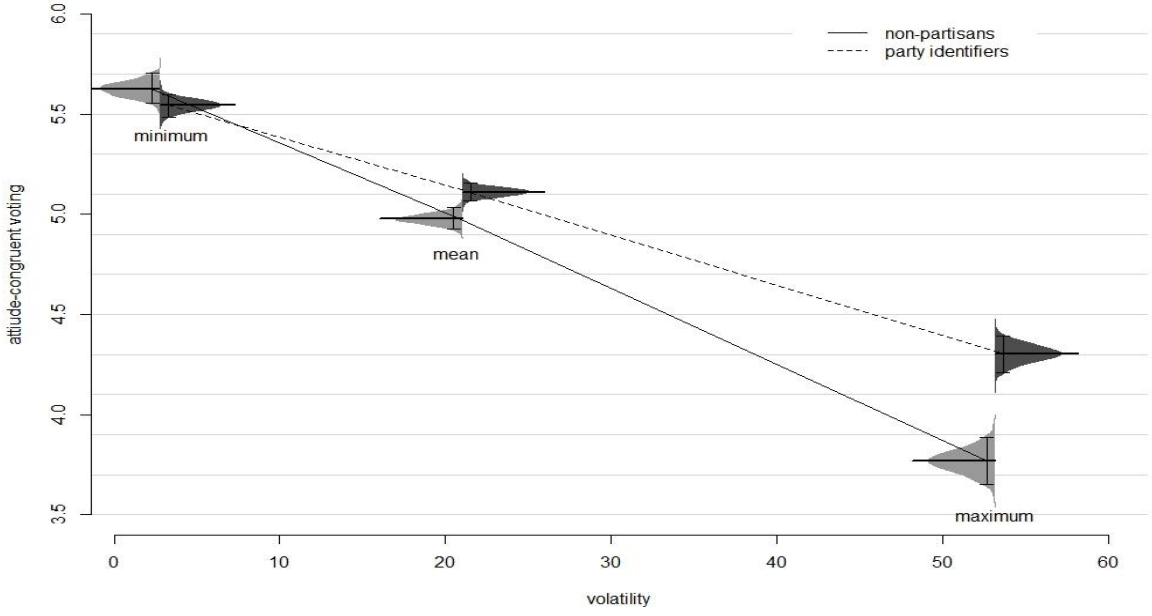
When looking at Model 4, which focuses on the conditional effect of the party system, we can see that none of the interactions with knowledge reach statistical significance. This is to be

[18] This finding holds across different operationalization of effective number of parties, i.e. using both the effective number of electoral and legislative parties computed based on both the results of the 2009 EP elections and the results of the previous national legislative elections.

expected when taking into account the limited impact of political knowledge. On the other hand, volatility and the effective number of parties have a statistically-significant conditional effect in interaction with party identification (the one with the effective number of parties is only significant at $p<0.1$), confirming that the institutional structure moderates the impact of party identification.

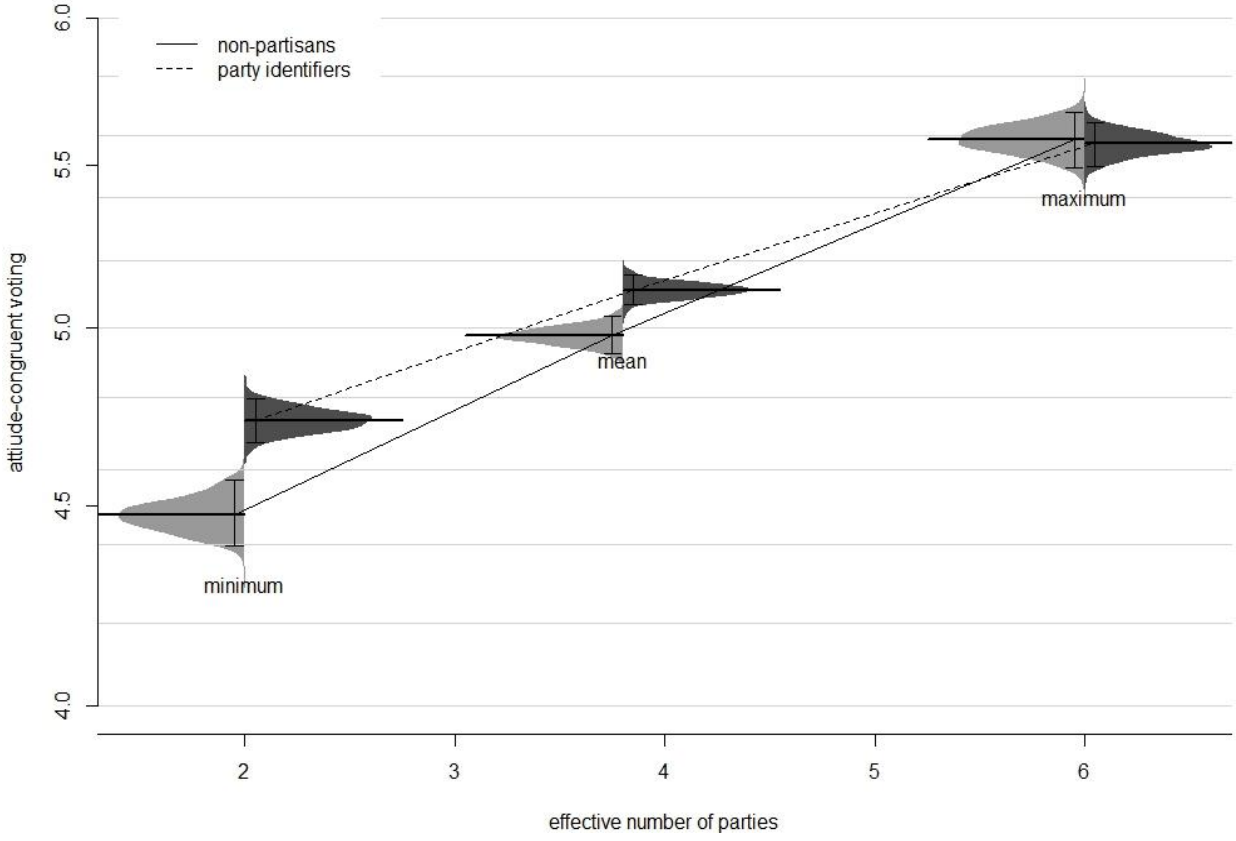
The interaction with volatility has a negative sign: the interpretation of this relationship is simplified by Figure 5.1, which confirms the initial expectation. A more volatile system reduces the ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote for all individuals, but it has a stronger effect for those who do not identify with a party. Then again, in a less volatile system the difference between identifiers and non-identifiers is not statistically significant, supporting the claim that in a more stable system the difference between the two groups disappears (see Appendix 16 for marginal effects). Substantively speaking, a less stable party system is especially harmful to those who cannot anchor their evaluations in the party with which they feel closest to, making it even more difficult for them to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote.

Figure 5.1: Cross-level Interaction between PID and Volatility



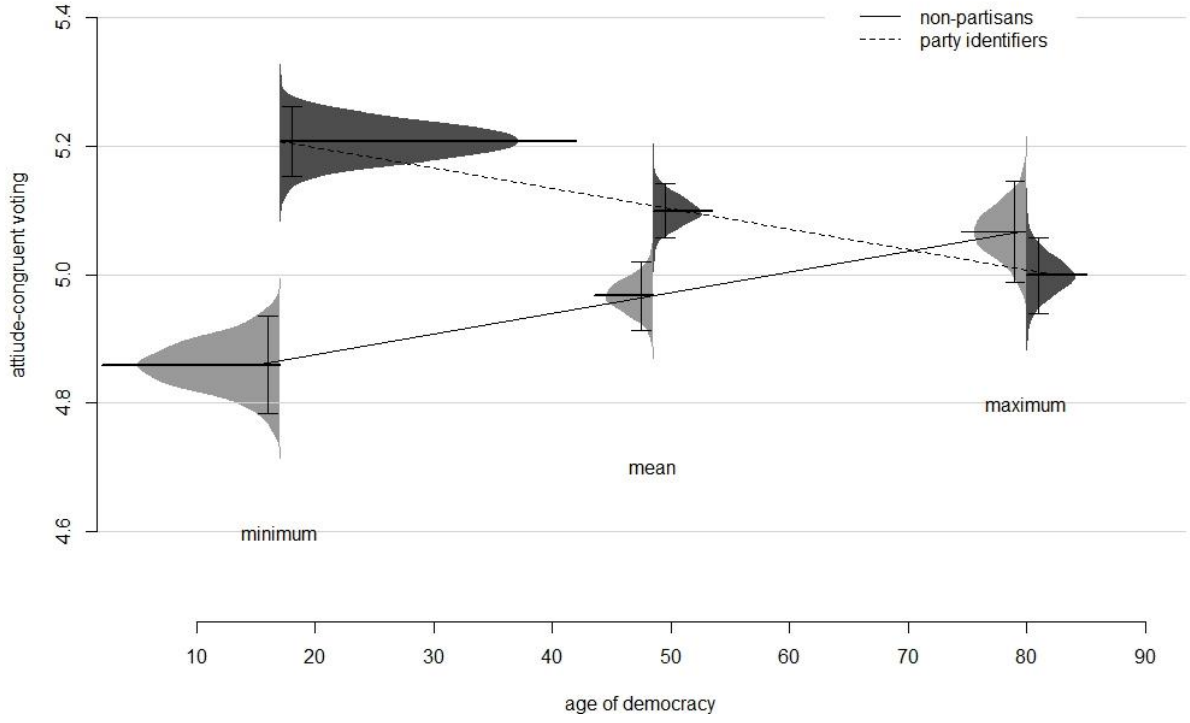
The second significant interaction is with the number of parties. Figure 5.2 confirms that a larger number of parties make it easier to identify the party that best represents an individual's interests, which is in line with previous expectations. The difference between party and non-party identifiers is not statistically significant in a system with a large number of parties. This gap increases as the number of parties decreases, and becomes statistically-significant in a system with a relatively low number of effective parties. Consequently, the chances to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote in a system in which it is difficult to find a party that best represent an individual's interest are lower, and are especially difficult for non-partisans.

Figure 5.2: Cross-level Interaction between PID and the Effective Number of Parties



The next set of institutional factors to be tested is related to system stability in general, i.e. regime stability and government stability (see Model 5). As expected, a high degree of government alternation (that is, many governments since 1990) has a negative effect on "attitude-congruent" voting. Identifying the alternative that best meets a voter's policy preferences is easier in a more stable system, since low government alternations indicates there are fewer changes within the political scene. Government stability gives citizens more time to learn about the available policy alternatives and reduces the possible confusion caused by numerous changes in government.

Figure 5.3: Cross-level Interaction Stability: Age of Democracy and PID



As in the previous model, interactions with political knowledge are not statistically significant (see Model 6) due both to the limited impact and lack of cross-country variance of

political knowledge. Still, the interaction between party identification and regime stability (age of democracy) reaches statistical significance with a negative sign (see Model 6). Looking at Figure 5.3, we note that the moderating effect of democracy has a different role for identifiers than it has for non-identifiers. The initial expectation regarding non-identifiers is confirmed: older democracies are particularly helpful for individuals as they offer more cues that help them evaluate the system and thus help them make better electoral decisions. What is surprising is that living in an older democracy has a negative impact on the ability of party identifiers to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. This can be explained by the fact that in younger democracies parties are less well established, and the differentiation between them is less clear: thus, the importance of the anchoring effect is higher in such a system than it is in older democracies. Still, independently of the age of a democracy, party identifiers are more likely to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote.

The final observation is that Models 3 through 6 help is to better understand what determines the variation of "attitude-congruent" voting across countries. These models explain around 40% of the variation of the intercept, and approximately half of the variance in the effect of party identification across countries.

5.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to evaluate the effect of political knowledge and party identification on what I have defined as "attitude-congruent" voting , and to investigate how specific institutional settings moderate this relationship. Three clear-cut conclusions can be drawn. First, no evidence was found to support the fact that political knowledge has an impact on "attitude-congruent" voting. Second, party identification, as a simple heuristic device, impacts on

the ability of individuals to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. Finally, the quality of electoral decisions is both directly and indirectly dependent on the institutional setting in which individuals act.

The literature, mainly drawing on evidence from the US, suggests that the effect of political knowledge is a decisive factor in the quality of electoral decisions (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Downs, 1957; Moore, 1987; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Zaller, 1991, 2004). Still, a more comprehensive analysis that takes the large diversity of the European political arena into account shows that the US is the exception rather than the norm. We did not find any conclusive evidence to support this hypothesis (although in the specific case of Denmark there is a positive and statistically-significant relationship between political knowledge and "attitude-congruent" voting, although even here the substantive impact of political knowledge is rather limited). The positive effect of information on the quality of electoral decisions is not universal, however, and political knowledge is far from being a decisive factor in the ability of individuals to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote.

Heuristics can offer an alternative explanation to support those who claim that "gut reasoning" is what people use when making electoral decisions (Lupia, 1994; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin, 1994). Indeed, a simple heuristic device, such as feeling close to a party, seems to provide support for these claims, since it has a positive and statistically-significant effect, albeit with a rather limited substantive impact. This supports the view that argues political knowledge is not necessary for democracy to work, but rather using cognitive shortcuts helps citizens make "good enough decisions".

What does have a substantial unconditional and conditional effect is the institutional setting. Mainly confirming initial expectations, a simple institutional structure is favorable as it

helps individuals evaluate the political parties in a way that is consistent with increasing their ability to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote. Essentially, a more stable party system, a clear differentiation between parties, and more stable governments help individuals cast an "attitude-congruent" vote by simplifying the political arena. A larger number of parties has the same effect, albeit with the difference that in this case that which leads to higher levels of "attitude-congruent" voting is the chance of having parties that better represent the voters.

The institutional setting also has a moderating role on the effect of party identification. As expected, a simple and stable institutional setting is especially helpful for non-identifiers, reducing the gap between them and those with a party identification (the cases of volatility, number of parties, and age of democracy). In sum, the institutional setting does have a substantial influence on the ability of a voter to cast an "attitude-congruent" vote, leading to a difference of around one standard deviation in the level of "attitude-congruent" voting. "The system", therefore, is much more important than the level of political knowledge, which was previously considered to be a decisive factor in the quality of electoral decisions.

What we can take away from this is that normative concerns related to the fact that democracy can only function when most citizens are knowledgeable about politics are not justified. In the present analysis, political knowledge has been shown not to be a statistically significant predictor for the quality of electoral decisions; and more, its substantive effect is close to zero. On the other hand, a simple heuristic device, like party identification, is shown to be useful for voters. This happens not only in a context in which it can compensate for low levels of political knowledge, but it is equally helpful for all individuals, irrespective of their level of knowledge. This suggests that the importance of heuristics can be much greater than previous research has implied. Furthermore, as the institutional context emerged to become the most

important predictor of "attitude-congruent" voting, in order to suffice the normative desideratum is that voters should choose the policy outcome that is best for them, and that more attention should be paid to institutional design. Bearing in mind that a system offering voters more alternatives (greater number of parties), but which at the same time simplifies the political arena by offering a clear differentiation between options (greater polarization) and more stability (lower levels of volatility, more durable governments, and longer periods of uninterrupted democracy) provides the most encouraging conditions to enable citizens to choose the outcome that is most favorable to them.

6. Conclusions

Possessing at least some level of basic political competences is a pre-requisite for citizens to live up to the role assigned to them in democratic theory (Dahl, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Elkin, 1999; Hamilton et al., 1961; Schumpeter, 1942). Even if it is by no means clear what the "necessary" and/or "sufficient" level of political competences ought to be so that democratic societies can properly function (Kuklinski and Quirk, 2001; Weissberg, 2001), it is widely acknowledged that low levels of political competences are damaging for the ability of citizens to act in the political realm (Alvarez, 1997; Crozier et al., 1975; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Downs, 1957; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2008; Mill, 1958; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin and Dimock, 1999). This is part of the reason why both democratic theorists and empirical researchers chose to define political competence in negative terms by pointing to the deficiencies of a "politically ignorant" citizenry (Page and Shapiro, 1992: 1; Smiley, 1999). The "politically ignorant" are incapable of effective participation in the democratic process (Mill, 1958) as they cannot discern their real interests, are unlikely to take the appropriate actions to pursue those interests and are less likely to choose representatives that would act in their best interest (Alvarez, 1997; Dahl, 1989; Downs, 1957; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2008; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin and Dimock, 1999). Obviously a "politically ignorant" citizenry raises important normative considerations by questioning the ability of citizens to rule themselves (Adams, 1778: 7; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 24–40; Hamilton et al., 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 3–4; Schumpeter, 1942). This is particularly a problem for visions of democracy that assume a more active involvement of the public in the democratic process, such as representative and participatory democracy (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Pateman, 1976;

Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003). But elitist theories of democracy also face the issue of a "politically ignorant" citizenry, the difference being that the solution they propose is limiting the involvement of ordinary citizens to electoral participation (Adams, 1778: 7; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 24–40; Hamilton et al., 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 3–4; Schumpeter, 1942). All in all, at least according to normative democratic theories, citizens need some basic level of political competences to be able to make reasonable political decisions, which in turn allows political decision makers to act in their interest and electoral democracy to function properly.

Furthermore, differences in the level of political competences across individuals have the potential to give rise to inherent political inequalities (e.g. unequal political representation) between societal groups (Bartels, 2008: 252–254; 275–277; Converse, 1990; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 268–272). Ultimately, such inequalities conflict with the democratic ideal of political equality, which demands that individuals be accurately represented according to the one person-one vote principle, irrespective of what societal groups they belong to (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Pateman, 1976; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003).

What are the sources of the variation in the level of political competences across individuals in contemporary democracies? Based on previous research, I develop a conceptualization of a political competent citizenry, theoretically specify it and empirically test the main factors that explain individual differences in political competences. I pay special attention to "stable" factors (e.g. socio-economic status) that are widely acknowledged as a main source of inherent inequalities in the level of political competences. Furthermore, I point to other individual and contextual level factors that have the capacity to increase political competences across all societal groups and also reduce the inequalities stemming from socio-economic factors.

Drawing on the previous literature, I specify three essential facets of political competence that are analyzed in this dissertation: 1) the level of political knowledge, 2) the ability to develop a coherent and consistent set of attitudes (i.e. attitude constraint) and 3) the ability to cast a vote that best represents ones interest (i.e. "attitude-congruent" voting). (1) Political knowledge is probably the most widely studied aspect of political competences. Knowledgeable individuals are considered to be better able to identify their preferences and own interests and thus are better able to understand politics and better fitted to act in the political realm (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 223; Downs, 1957, pp. 79–80; Kroh, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Somin, 2005; Sturgis, 2003). Therefore, a more knowledgeable citizen can assure both responsiveness and accountability from governments and elites (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 55–61; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 393–396; Pande, 2011; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Vicente, 2014; Wantchekon, 2003), two essential characteristics of democracy (Andeweg, 2000; Dahl, 1975; Powell, 2000: 20–46, 122–157; Roberts, 2009; Shapiro, 2012: 200–201). (2) Attitude constraint is important as it helps citizens to make sense of the variety of issues in a particular policy domain and help structuring their behavior (Converse, 1964). Therefore high level of attitude constraint help people aggregate their preference and identify and choose their preferred policy outcome (Friedman, 2006; Jacoby, 1995; Key, 1966; Krouse and Marcus, 1984; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985; Weissberg, 2001). (3) Last but not least, "attitude-congruent" voting taps into the ability of voters to make electoral decisions that are congruent with promoting the policy consequences that they prefer. Therefore "attitude-congruent" voting reflects the capacity of citizens to make informed choices between political candidates (Downs, 1957; Popkin and Dimock, 1999: 117; Weissberg, 2001: 263).

In the next section I review the main findings of the dissertation in relation to these three different facets of political competences. Moreover, I highlight what the main sources of inequalities in the level of political competences are, and also show that citizens have at their disposal alternative tools to at least partially overcome such inequalities.

6.1. Inequalities in Political Competence and Possible Remedies

Each of the empirical chapters investigates one of the aspects of political competences discussed above, i.e. political knowledge, attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting. Starting with political knowledge, the empirical analysis confirms that the main source of inequalities in the level of political knowledge stems from the "ability-motivation-opportunity triad", as this represents the foundation for the acquisition of political information among individuals (Luskin, 1990). Specifically, Chapter 3 shows that education, as a proxy for abilities that determines how easy information learning is for individuals (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 179; Luskin, 1990), and media exposure, which is used as an indication for the opportunities (i.e. the availability of information and its form) that individuals have to gather information (Baum and Jamison, 2006; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 197; Luskin, 1990; Zukin and Snyder, 1984), both have a positive and substantive impact on the level of political knowledge/sophistication. Given that altering these two characteristics in order to increase the level of political knowledge seems implausible (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 272–282; Weissberg, 2001), I theorize that individuals have at their disposal other tools to gather politically relevant information. People can rely on a specific category of political elites, i.e. political parties, to provide them with cues that help them evaluate the complex and remote political environment (Campbell et al., 1960; Weisberg and Greene, 2003).

This idea goes beyond the established finding that partisans are more informed (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Grönlund and Milner, 2006). I start with the assumption that parties can increase the level of sophistication of their supporters either directly during their effort to mobilize their support (e.g. electoral campaigns, party congresses), (Converse, 1964; Craig and Hurle, 1984; Field and Anderson, 1969; Jacoby, 1995; Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie and Rabjohn, 1979) or as an indirect consequence of this process, i.e. by mobilizing support parties stimulate political participation which then increases the level of political knowledge/ sophistication (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbi, 1994). Based on these two assumed mechanisms I show that support for parties that challenge the *status quo* offers specific incentives to gain information. Specifically, I show that in post-communist countries support for an opposition, a smaller and/or a right-wing party is, either directly or in an interaction with individual characteristics, related to higher levels of political knowledge. These results suggest that by relying on cues coming from parties that have stronger incentives to fight the *status quo* even the less educated and those who are not frequent media users can find alternative tools to acquire political knowledge. The crucial implication here is that in a context where the level of education and media usage can hardly be altered, the supporter of parties that have incentives to fight the *status quo* are in a better position as they can (at least partially) rely on these parties to provide them with political information. Thus even if the distribution of political knowledge among the populations seems to be plagued by inherent inequalities that are hard to alter, Chapter 3 offers an alternative path to become knowledgeable about politics. In sum, parties that challenge the *status quo* offer their supporters viable paths to acquire political information even if such supporters are relatively uneducated and less frequent media users.

In the next two chapters the perspective changes: political knowledge is not used as the main dependent variable but is examined as the main independent variable predicting the two other dimensions of political competence (attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting). This comes naturally when we consider that political knowledge has been recognized as an essential factor in forging attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Federico and Hunt, 2013; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Sturgis, 2003). To sum up, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 analyze political knowledge as the main determinant of the other two dimensions of political competence (attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting), but also as the main factor responsible for generating inequalities in the two facets of political competences.

In chapter 4 I confirm the role that political knowledge has for generating "attitude constraint" (Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse and Pierce, 1992; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Jacoby, 1995; Sturgis, 2003; Visser et al., 2014; Zaller, 1992). The important addendum to previous research is that political knowledge apparently has a stronger effect for the consistency across "hard issues" (i.e. economic issues) than for the consistency across "easy issues" (i.e. moral and social issues). Despite the fact that political knowledge is one of the main sources of inequalities of "attitude-constraint", I again argue that citizens can effectively rely on political elites to supply them with cues that can effectively increase the level of attitude constraint (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992), even in the absence of political knowledge. Here two aspects are critical, namely the clarity and consistency of cues that come from political elites about where they stand on issues. Clearer and more consistent cues from political elites should produce higher

level of attitude constraint (Niemi and Westholm 1984; Zaller 1992). The empirical analysis presented in Chapter 4 confirms that the consistency of elites positively impacts the level of attitude constraint irrespective of the level of political knowledge. However, the clarity of the message coming from the elites and the reliance on cognitive heuristics (i.e. partisanship) do not seem to have an impact. All in all, by showing that the presence of constrained elites has the potential to offer at least a partial remedy for low levels of political knowledge, Chapter 4 also supports the claim that political elites can effectively increase the level of political competences of the citizenry.

Drawing on existing literature, Chapter 5 starts from the assumption that political knowledge should also be the main explanatory variable behind the quality of electoral decision (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987). However, the analysis does not support this hypothesis. Using a more accurate operationalization of the quality of electoral choice, which requires individuals to evaluate all the viable alternatives in a given political system, I do not find any evidence for the role of political knowledge. This is a surprising result given the existing findings that emphasize the role of information for both "correct voting" in the specific case of the US (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006) and the quality of electoral behavior more broadly understood (i.e. decrease electoral malpractices such as clientelism and vote buying) across a number of developing countries (Banerjee et al., 2011; Pande, 2011; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Vicente, 2014; Wantchekon, 2003). But in the more developed environment of the EU, characterized by a multi-party system, the level of

political knowledge does not seem to have an impact on the quality of electoral decisions[19]. Instead, Chapter 5 reveals consistent positive effects of what are generally regarded as substitutes of political knowledge in the development of more complex political competences, i.e. partisanship as a cognitive heuristic and a more stable and simple institutional structure. Being a partisan and living in contexts that offer more alternatives for voters (higher number of parties), a simplified political arena that signals clearer differentiation between options (higher polarization), and offers more stability (lower levels of volatility, longer living governments, longer periods of uninterrupted democracy) all have a positive impact on the quality of electoral decisions. These results indicate that such characteristics make it easier for citizens to behave in a politically competent way.

Taken together, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 show the important role that political elites have for the development of political competences. Even if in both chapters the results confirm the presence of inherent inequalities in political competences stemming from individual characteristics, individuals have a viable alternative at their disposal: they can rely on political elites to increase their level of competences. Supporting parties that oppose the *status quo* or the mere fact that political elites are consistent can alleviate such inequalities and even have the potential to increase political competences for all individuals (regardless of their socio-economic predispositions). Chapter 5 reveals an even more optimistic picture since the ultimate aspect of political competences, i.e. quality of electoral decision, does not seem to be influenced by political knowledge. Instead, citizens can rely on heuristics and make use of a more simple and

[19] Although in a recent article Lau et al. (2014) claim to show that political knowledge has an impact on "correct voting" across a number of developed democracies, one needs to note that in the case of several countries in their sample they use the level of education as a proxy for political knowledge, which is, to say the least , a less than perfect operationalization

stable institutional structure to effectively choose the representative that best matches their interests.

These results contrast the grim pictures painted particularly by democratic theorists that question the ability of citizens to be part of the decision making process because of their lack of political abilities (Adams, 1778: 7; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 24–40; Hamilton et al., 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 3–4; Schumpeter, 1942). However, it is true that the development of some political competences (i.e. political knowledge and attitude constraint) is plagued by inherent inequalities steaming from individual characteristics that are difficult to alter (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 272–282; Weissberg, 2001). Furthermore, considering the important role political knowledge has for the development of attitude constraint and "attitude-congruent" voting, (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Federico and Hunt, 2013; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Sturgis, 2003), one can assume that inequalities in the development of political knowledge would also have an impact on the development of more complex competences. But the good news is that individuals have at their disposal at least some alternative tools that they can rely on to overcome these inherent inequalities. People make use of their partisan attachments (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5) and also rely on the cues coming from the political elites (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) to increase their political competences. Finally, a system that offers more alternatives for voters (higher number of parties), but at the same time simplifies the political arena by offering clear differentiation between electoral choice options (higher polarization) and shows more stability (lower levels of volatility, longer living governments, longer periods of uninterrupted

democracy) provides the most encouraging conditions for citizens to choose the outcome that is most favorable to them (see Chapter 5).

Unfortunately, manipulating the previously mentioned factors might not be an easy task, so we cannot consider this issue to be closed. Even if such tools are available, citizens might still be locked in a certain environment. For example, partisan attachments (which, as shown by this dissertation, are a crucial compensating mechanism of inequalities in political competencies) are developed in early childhood (Bartels, 2002; Campbell and Cowley, 2014; Dalton, 1980; Goren, 2005; Green and Palmquist, 1990, 1994; Green et al., 2002; Kroh and Selb, 2009) and might even have a hereditary base (Settle et al., 2009). Still, the acquisition of partisan attachment in later life does not seem implausible given recent work that shows that the "distance" one needs to bridge from being an independent to partisanship is quite small (Neundorf et al., 2011). Furthermore, while some aspects of the macro factors (i.e. the characteristics of the environment where an individual resides) are immune to short changes others can be susceptible to change. For example, the rise of a new political movement/party can have a positive impact on the opportunities citizens have to further develop their political competences. The emergence of a new political party (or even a substantial increase in popularity) would also allow for a new challenger of the *status quo*, which in turn might influence the level of political knowledge of its supporters (see Chapter 3); it also has the possibility to allow for the rise of more constraint elites, which can increase the overall level of attitude constraint (see Chapter 4); and finally, it can boost the quality of electoral decisions as it has the potential to increase the effective number of parties and the level of polarization (see Chapter 5). All things considered, even if manipulating these factors is by no means an easy task, the take home message is that such factors do offer individuals an alternative path to the development of political competences (or it

at least allows citizens to act as if they are politically competent) and can compensate inequalities in the level of political competences stemming from individual level characteristics like education, media use, income, gender and especially the level of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 272–282; Weissberg, 2001). Naturally, some individuals might still be locked in a context where both the attributes of political elites and the systemic factors have a negative impact on the development of political competences, leading to claims that such individuals are worse off than those who have only their individual characteristics to blame for their low level of competences. However, even such a scenario does not eliminate the possibility that plausible changes in the macro structure of the society (see "new political party" example above) can offer citizens the opportunity to increase their level of political competences and even compensate for inequalities stemming from individual characteristics.

6.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current dissertation provides a better understanding of what determines inequalities in political competences and what are the alternatives that citizens have at their disposal to compensate for these inequalities. However, it remains unclear what the minimal level of competences ought to be for a proper functioning of democracy. In other words, while we know what facilitates the development of political competences, we cannot tell exactly what competences are required and what is their required level. This is partly due to the conceptualization and operationalization of political competences. Regarding conceptualization, it is clear even from this dissertation that there is no such thing as a "golden standard" for what is the most important political competence. Even if political knowledge occupies a central role due to its importance for other political competences (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Carmines and

Stimson, 1982; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Federico and Hunt, 2013; Granberg and Holmberg, 1996; Jacoby, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2001, 2006; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Sturgis, 2003), the empirical analysis in Chapter 4 and especially in Chapter 5 clearly cast doubts on its "primordial" role. The widely expected impact of political knowledge might be only illusory given that even uniformed individuals can act as if they were politically competent. Also, even if some might consider that what ultimately matters is the quality of one's electoral decisions, such a claim would ignore the fact that citizens also have an important role for the functioning of democratic systems outside the electoral process (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 50; Elkin, 1999: 393). Furthermore, while this dissertation analyzed the most common facets of political competences, the list could be extended to citizens behavior in direct legislative elections, such as referendums (Gerber and Lupia, 1999; Lupia, 1994), or the capacity of voters to effectively provide checks for the executive during the electoral cycle (Elkin, 1999: 393). The point is that political competence might refer to a diversity of sub-facets that are not necessarily empirically related, and creating an index that would combine specific individual competences from all domains of an individual's political behavior is a challenging task which this dissertation did not address.

Moreover, even if we manage to identify measurable phenomena that are indicative of one's political competences, the issue of operationalization is still a delicate one. If in the case of political knowledge (Chapter 3) and attitude constraint (Chapter 4) the results were mostly consistent both across the different operationalizations and with previous findings from the literature, the same cannot be said about the quality of electoral behavior. Using an operationalization (see pages 97-101) that improves on related concepts such as "ideological voting" (Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993; Ensley, 2007; Kroh, 2009) or "correct voting" (Lau and

Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2014), revealed that quality of electoral behavior might not be related to political knowledge.

To sum up, as long as there is no clear agreement on the vital aspects of political competences and the best way to measure them, no conclusions can be drawn regarding what the optimal/minimal level of political competences ought to be. Therefore, unfortunately, this dissertation cannot offer an answer to this question. This would require linking all facets of political competences to the overall democratic performance. While this might represent a fruitful avenue for future research, such a task goes beyond the purpose of this dissertation.

Another possible limitation of this study stems from using cross sectional data. The issue of reverse causality is mostly obvious in Chapter 3 where one can always argue that selecting ones partisan attachment is at least a partial function of the level of political knowledge. Furthermore, even if cross sectional data allows for testing relations which in combination with a plausible theoretical path can point towards causal relations, fully causal claims cannot be made as critics can always argue that the identified empirical relations might be indeed spurious or endogenous. One solution would be to resort to experimental designs. In the case of partisanship one can imagine creating artificial in-group and out-group affinities similar to partisan attachment (Landa and Duell, 2014) or make use of existing partisan attachments (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997) and test if this could impact the quality of political decisions and even compensate for the lack of political knowledge. Furthermore, partisanship is not the only available heuristic that voters have at hand. In controlled laboratory experiments the effect of other heuristic mechanisms such as ideology, endorsement, candidate appearance, or representativeness (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Popkin, 1994; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974) on the level of political competences could also be tested. In the case of the macro characteristics

analyzed in this dissertation one could try to explore the potential of natural experiments. For example one could analyze if a sudden increase in the level of polarization could lead to an increase in the level of political competences such as attitude constraint and the quality of electoral decisions. Such a design could be extended to a number of macro characteristics that can substantially vary across a short period of time. This might represent a distinct possibility for future research as the number of national panels with a focus on political behavior has recently surged. One such example is the panel component of the 2014 European Election Study which covers nine EU countries and aims to interview the same respondents after the 2014 EP elections and after the subsequent national legislative elections and which is partly coordinated by the author of this dissertation.

6.3. Contribution

This dissertation has important implications for the normative concerns regarding the development of political competences among citizens. It partly alleviates the widely accepted worries across various democratic theories that low levels of political competence and socio-economic variations in political competence can hinder the ability of citizens to live up to democratic standards, and ultimately increase inequalities in political representation (Barber, 2004; Dahl, 1975, 1989; Pateman, 1976; Putnam, 2000; Tocqueville, 2003). I show throughout this dissertation that political knowledge is not as important as it has been suggested. For instance, when it comes to "correct voting choice" (i.e. electoral choice congruent with person's attitudes), political knowledge does not seem to play any role at all. Hence, while political knowledge might be a democratic virtue on its own, it is far from being the "giant tortoise" on the shell upon which democracy rests (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 61). Such findings are

essential considering the generally low levels of political knowledge in contemporary democracies (Fraile, 2013; see also results in Chapter 3) which, so far, have been seen as a great danger challenging the prospects of democracy. Also, these results directly speak to the ongoing puzzle steaming from the conflict between (a) expectations of democratic theories that question the ability of citizens to be part of the decision making process because their lack of political abilities (Adams, 1778: 7; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 24–40; Hamilton et al., 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1992: 3–4; Schumpeter, 1942) and (b) the empirical observation that democracies can function even if the citizens lack basic political abilities such as political knowledge. To a certain extent we can say that humans are adaptable and even if they are at heart politically ignorant the quality of their political actions can be superior to what is expected from their levels of political knowledge.

The other good news for the functioning of democratic polities that is implied by this dissertation is that the level of political competences is by no means fully predetermined by individual characteristics. Even if the development of political competences is plagued by inherent socio-economic inequalities, the political context can provide citizens with opportunities to move beyond such inequalities and act as if they were politically competent. Political elites possess the tools to influence citizen's abilities to act in accordance to democratic standards which require an element of rationality in the process of decision making (Alvarez, 1997; Downs, 1957; Elkin, 1999: 387; Key, 1966; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau et al., 2008; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Popkin and Dimock, 1999). In this way, political elites can alleviate the complex task that citizens are facing when making political decisions. Political elites have the potential to make politics easier for citizen either directly by challenging the *status quo* and thus offering more politically relevant cues to the public or by acting in a more constrained way. But

they can also reach such goals indirectly as (at least theoretically) they have the power to modify the institutional characteristics that might make it easier for citizens to arrive at good electoral decisions. This is not to say that political elites represent the universal panacea for "curing" political ignorance. On the contrary, to the same extent that they can be helpful, their actions can also "damage" the level of political competences among the citizenry. To sum up, the take home message is that elites have at their hands the means to decrease the burden of a "fully informed" citizenry that is deemed necessary for making "rational" political decision (Dahl, 1989: 180–181; Popkin and Dimock, 1999: 117; Weissberg, 2001: 263) and provide citizens with tools that would allow them to at least act as if they were politically competent even if their individual background characteristics would point to a different conclusion. But, the degree to which elites use such tools to fulfill these goals remains an open question as their self-interest would rather lead them to focus on winning elections (Strom, 1990) and less on decreasing the burdens which citizens faces when acting in the political realm. As always, "with great power comes great responsibility" (Lee, 2002).

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Appendix 1: Dependent Variable, Chapter 3

SOPHISTICATION: constructed as an additive score of four variables knowledge1, knwoledge2, interest, opinionation.

KNOWLEDGE1: Responses to the following question, recoded 1 for correct answers and 0 for wrong answers and no answer: "As far as you know, which political party has the most seats in the . . . [lower or only house of the national parliament]?" Note that the coding of "do not know" responses is based on the recognition that they mask much of the same degree of ignorance as explicitly incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock 2006; Sturgis et al. 2008; Hansen 2009a). Also, the correlation of this item with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .77.

KNOWLEDGE2: Responses to the following question, recoded 1 for correct answers and 0 for wrong answers and no answer: "Who is now the finance minister of . . . [name of country]. On the coding of "do not know" responses see above. Note that the correlation of this item with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .78.

OPINIONATION: An additive scale computed as the number of valid responses to the following questionnaire items: E3: "[Many people think of political attitudes as being on the "Left" or the "Right". This is a scale stretching from the Left to the Right.] When you think of your own political attitudes, where would you put yourself?"; A1a: "[Tell us, please,] what do you think about the idea that a democracy, in which multiple parties compete for power, is the best system for governing [country]?"; A3a: "[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether

and to what degree you agree with each statement] Democracy is a good means of solving social conflicts." A3b: "[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree you agree with each statement] Democracy is better for the rich in society than the poor." A2a: "[And what do you think about the idea that] a market economy, in which there is private property and economic freedom to entrepreneurs, is the best system for [country]?" A3c"[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree you agree with each statement]. The market economy improves the standard of living of ordinary people in [country]." A3d: "[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree you agree with each statement]. The market economy leads to more social conflict." E1a: "[Consider the following pairs of statements. Using one of the phrases on this card, can you say which one of these two statements comes closest to your own views. Some people feel that …] The government should not concern itself with how equal people's incomes are. OR The government should try to make differences between incomes as small as possible." E1b "[Consider the following pairs of statements. Using one of the phrases on this card, can you say which one of these two statements comes closest to your own views. Some people feel that …] The government should take all major industries into state ownership. OR The government should place all major industries in private ownership." E1c: "[Consider the following pairs of statements. Using one of the phrases on this card, can you say which one of these two statements comes closest to your own views. Some people feel that …] The government should just leave it up to individual companies to decide their wages, prices and profits. OR The

government should control wages, prices and profits." Note that the scale runs from 0 to 1 and its correlation with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .42.

INTEREST: The inverse score of political interest recoded from a four point scale ranging from 1 "very interested" to 4 "not at all". Note that the scale runs from 0 to 1 and its correlation with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .66.

Appendix 2: Independent Variables at the Individual-level, Chapter 3

PARTY SUPPORTER: "Thinking about political parties in the country today, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any particular party?" only respondent answering yes to this question was included in the analysis. If yes "Which one"?

Note: All these variables were linearly transformed if needed so that they run from 0 to 1;

EDUCATION: recoded from initial country scales into: 3=more than secondary; 2=secondary (including any type of secondary institution even without having graduated); 1=less than secondary (including those without any type of education).

Media: additive score between TV and NEWSPAPER usage, the correlation between the two variables in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .15.

TV: constructed from TV usage, initial wording of question: "[On an average weekday] how much time, in total, do you spend watching television? [Please use this card to answer]"; initially coded from 1="not at all"; 2="lest than ½ hours"; 3="1/2 hour to 1 hour"; 4="1 hour to 1 ½ hours"; 5="1 ½ hours to 2 hours"; 6="2 hours to 2 ½ hours"; 7="2 ½ hours to 3 hours" to 8="more than 3 hours". Its correlation with **MEDIA** in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .84.

NEWSPAPER: constructed from newspaper usage, initial wording of question: "[On an average weekday] how much time, in total, do you spend watching newspapers? [Please use this card to answer]"; initially coded from 1="not at all" to 8="more than 3 hours", as TV. ". Its correlation with **MEDIA** in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .69.

MALE: coded 1 for man and 0 otherwise.

AGE SQUARED: the age of the respondent in years;

AGESQ: age squared;

RELIOGISITY: a measure of church attendance recoded from a four point scale. The scores on the resulting scale were linearly transformed so as to fall in the 0 to 1 range, with "never" being coded as a separate category.

INCOME: Natural logarithm of monthly household income, after taxes, as reported by the respondents.

MINORITY: coded 1 for all respondents claiming to belong to an ethnic minority and zero otherwise.

RURAL: coded 1 for residents in rural areas and 0 otherwise. In Poland and Latvia the coding was based on the administrative status of the locality. For Czech Republic and Hungary settlements with less than 1000 inhabitants were considered rural. For Lithuania settlements with less than 2000 inhabitants were considered rural. For the rest of countries settlements with less than 4000 inhabitants were considered rural.

Appendix 3: Independent Variables at the Party-level, Chapter 3

Note: All these variables were linearly transformed if needed so that they run from 0 to 1;

POSITION: The mean of left-right placements among country experts who respondent to the 2006 Chapel Hills expert survey. In the case of Russia and Ukraine where the Chapel Hill survey was not conducted the mean left-right placements among country experts from Benoit and Laver 2006 was used.

SIZE: percent of supporter of the party in the Eurequal survey. Support of party, meaning vote intention for the specific election; wording of question for vote intention: C4a: "Assuming there was a parliamentary election tomorrow, which of these parties would you be most likely to vote for?".

INCUMBECY: Parties that were in government during the time the survey took place, data obtained from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow 2010). 1=incumbent party, 0=non-incumbent.

Appendix 4: Effects of Country Dummies on Political Sophistication, Chapter 3[20]

Countries	Model 1	Model 2	*Model 3*	*Model 4*
Bulgaria	0.127 (0.203)	0.078 (0.157)	0.050 (0.157)	0.035 (0.150)
Czech Republic	0.209 (0.130)	0.149 (0.130)	0.166 (0.137)	0.158 (0.134)
Estonia	0.097 (0.123)	0.071 (0.123)	0.099 (0.122)	0.092 (0.116)
Hungary	0.258*** (0.063)	0.161 (0.102)	0.185 (0.154)	0.194 (0.144)
Latvia	-0.297 (0.174)	-0.261 (0.158)	-0.273 (0.160)	-0.272 (0.162)
Lithuania	-0.597*** (0.101)	-0.700 (0.106)	-0.641*** (0.129)	-0.638 (0.128)
Moldova	-0.499*** (0.076)	-0.505 (0.100)	-0.517*** (0.098)	-0.512 (0.103)
Poland	0.203 (0.151)	0.088 (0.137)	0.149 (0.143)	0.159 (0.143)
Romania	-0.475*** (0.179)	-0.602 (0.094)	-0.661*** (0.112)	-0.673 (0.106)
Russia	-0.230 (0.179)	-0.329 (0.103)	-0.288* (0.120)	-0.293 (0.116)
Slovakia	0.440*** (0.188)	0.346 (0.064)	0.351*** (0.082)	0.340 (0.085)

[20] Ukraine was chosen as the baseline for comparison, standard error in parantehsis

Appendix 5: Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables, Chapter 3

Level 1, individual level variables

	Media	Education	Male	Age	Age square	Rural	Income	Minority	Church
Media	1								
N	4450								
Education	.029	1							
N	4443	4534							
Male	.006	.019	1						
N	4449	4533	4540						
Age	.178**	-.172**	-.044**	1					
N	4447	4531	4537	4538					
Age square	.173**	-.194**	-.045**	.985**	1				
N	4447	4531	4537	4538	4538				
rural	-.078**	-.170**	.026	.043**	.036*	1			
N	4450	4534	4540	4538	4538	4541			
Income	-.028	.110**	-.038*	-.140**	-.143**	-.005	1		
N	3555	3622	3626	3624	3624	3627	3627		
Minority	-.039**	-.017	-.041**	.004	.007	-.004	.046**	1	
N	4440	4527	4530	4528	4528	4531	3620	4531	
Church	-.039*	.022	-.147**	.039*	.035*	.071**	-.020	-.130**	1
N	3290	3357	3360	3358	3358	3360	2751	3359	3360

** significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Level 2, party level variables

	Position	Size	Opposition
Position	1		
N	4455		
Size	.013	1	
N	4455	4455	
Opposition	-.012	-.247**	1
N	4455	4455	4455

**. significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed),* significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 6: Determinates of Political Knowledge, Chapter 3 Additional Analysis[21]

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects:				
Media		0.119** (0.041)	0.118** (0.041)	0.110 (0.069)
Education		0.228*** (0.021)	0.229*** (0.021)	0.141** (0.040)
Male		0.104*** (0.013)	0.104*** (0.013)	.104*** (0.013)
Age		1.43*** (0.245)	1.451*** (0.245)	1.42*** (0.250)
Age squared		-1.28*** (0.237)	-1.293*** (0.234)	-1.27*** (0.241)
Rural		-0.039* (0.015)	-0.038* (0.015)	-0.038* (0.016)
Income		0.005 (0.025)	0.004 (0.025)	0.005 (0.025)
Minority		-0.086** (0.024)	-0.082** (0.024)	-.085** (0.024)
Religiosity		0.001 (0.017)	0.001 (0.018)	0.004 (0.017)
Party level variables:				
Left-right party position			0.093+ (0.050)	0.112* (0.051)
Party size			0.068 (0.095)	0.81 (0.095)
Opposition			0.032 (0.025)	0.35 (0.025)
Party position*education				-0.090 (0.110)
Size* education				0.361** (0.124)
Opposition* education				0.098* (0.042)
Party position*media				-0.622** (0.195)
Size* media				-0.093 (0.233)
Opposition*media				0.025 (0.079)
Intercept	0.649** (0.048)	0.288*** (0.087)	0.253*** (0.077)	0.261*** (0.079)
Random effects				
Intercept	.008	.006	.005	.006
Education		.002	.001	.002
Media		.018	.016	.009
Residual	.114	.103	.102	.101
Number of parties	52	52	52	52
Number of individuals	2642	2642	2642	2642
Deviance	1829	1650	1649	1647
-2LL	3101	1565	1528	128
AIC	3130	1624	1590	1588

+denotes p<0.1; * denotes p<0.05; ** denotes p<0.01; *** denotes p<0.001. Unstandardized coefficient reported. Standard error in parenthesis

[21] The result of the AIC ad -2LL are obtained by running ANNOVA tests between models

Appendix 7: Determinates of Political Sophistication (including parties with less than 20 supporters), Chapter 3 Additional Analysis[2223]

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Fixed effects:			
Media		.495 (.101)***	.565 (.145)***
Education		.654 (.054)***	.656 (.069)***
Male		.348 (.029)***	.347 (.029)***
Age		3.51 (.581)***	3.51 (.574)***
Age squared		-3.17 (.566)***	-3.17 (.600)***
Rural		-.072 (.040)+	-.072 (.040)+
Income		.036 (.056)	.037 (.055)
Minority		-.203 (.056)**	-.201 (.055)***
Religiosity		.013 (.044)	.016 (.044)
Party level variables:			
Left-right position			.163 (.145)
Opposition			.092 (.065)
Party size			.359 (.240)
Position*education			-.491 (.233)*
Opposition* education			.211 (.096)*
Size* education			.783 (.284)**
Position*media			-1.143 (.526)*
Opposition* media			.100 (.189)
Size* media			-.658 (.498)
Intercept	2.80(.070)**	1.93 (.084)***	1.98 (.191)***
Random effects			
Intercept	.056	.047	.046
Education		.015	.003
Media		.121	.083
Residual	.701	.582	.581
Number of parties	70	70	70
Number of individuals	2823	2822	2822
Deviance	7009	6623	6644
-2LL	7010	6622	6543
AIC	7038	6679	6617

+denotes p<0.1; * denotes p<0.05; ** denotes p<0.01; *** denotes p<0.001. Unstandardized coefficient reported. Standard error in parenthesis

[22] The result of the AIC ad -2LL are obtained by running ANNOVA tests between models
[23] The result of the AIC ad -2LL are obtained by running ANNOVA tests between models

Appendix 8: Distribution of Dependent Variables, Chapter 4

Figure A1.1: Distribution of economic constraint across political units

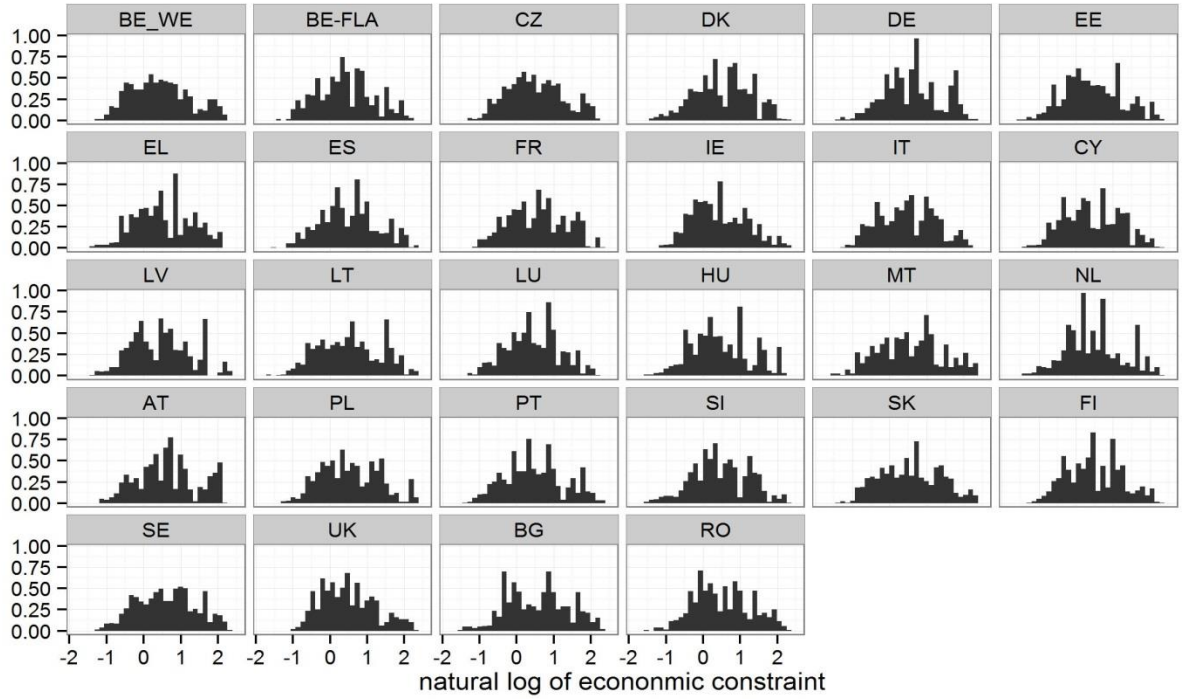


Figure A1.2: Distribution of moral constraint across political units

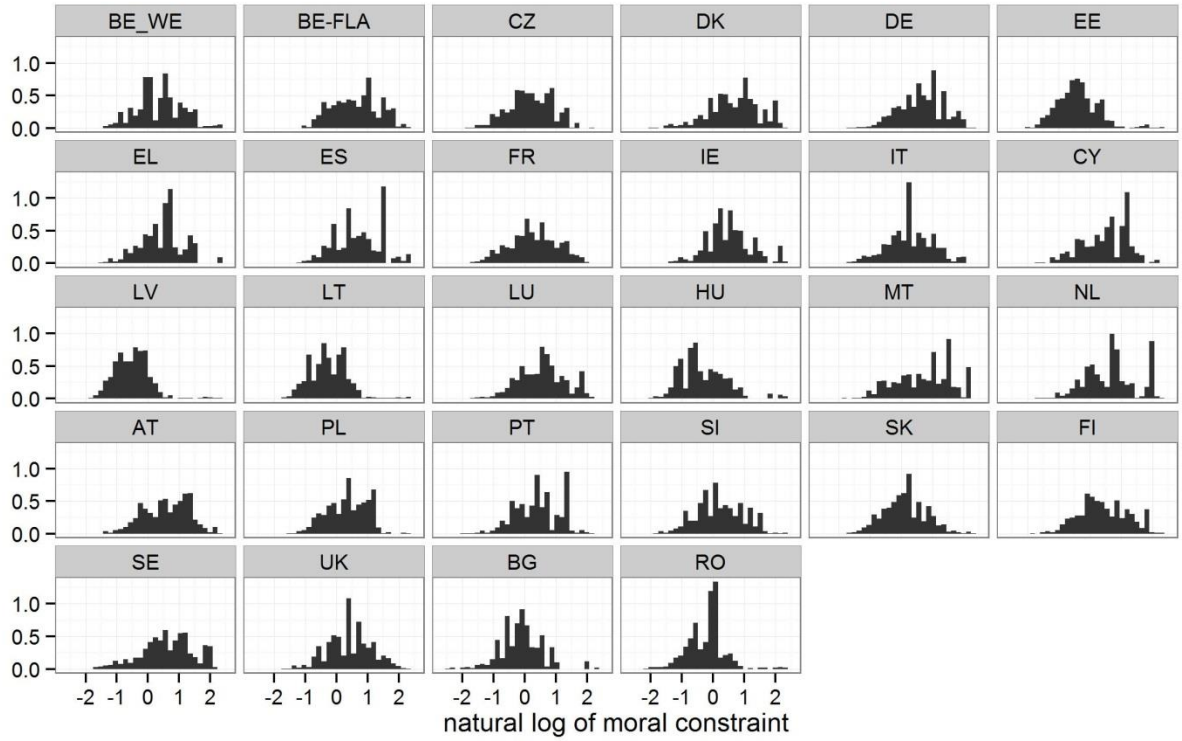
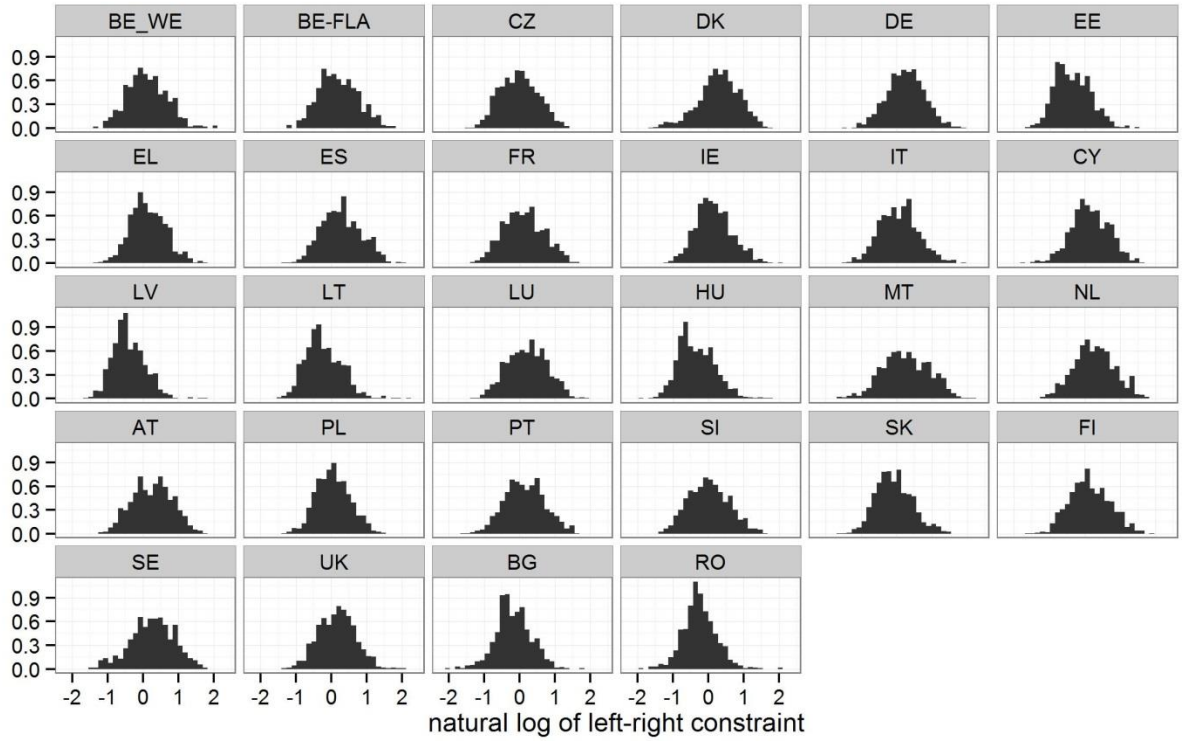


Figure A1.3: Distribution of left-right constraint across political units



Appendix 9: Spearman Correlation Between Issues, Chapter 4

Economic domain

	econ1	econ2	econ3	econ4
econ1	1,000	,089**	,128**	,027**
N	25130	24463	24365	24138
econ2		1,000	-,151**	,206**
N		25792	24912	24736
econ3			1,000	-,075**
N			25699	24668
econ4				1,000
N				25670

**correlation is significant at p<0.01

Moral Domain

	lib1	lib2	lib3	lib4	lib5
lib1	1,000	,176**	,236**	,207**	,318**
N	25919	25444	25360	25649	25270
lib2		1,000	-,102**	-,059**	,144**
N		26342	25762	26053	25667
lib3			1,000	,351**	,161**
N			26299	26018	25607
lib4				1,000	,191**
N				26629	25908
lib5					1,000
N					26173

**correlation is significant at p<0.01

Immigration domain

	Imig1	Imig2
Imig1	1,000	,368**
N	26465	25490
Imig2		1,000
N		25772

**correlation is significant at p<0.01

Appendix 10: Independent Variables, Chapter 4

Individual Level Variables

Political knowledge: measure of political knowledge that ranges from 0 to 7, reflecting the correct True/False answers given by each respondent (Cronbach's alpha = 0.618, 7 items). "Don't Know" answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock 2006; Sturgis *et al.* 2008; Hansen 2009a. Original statements:

Q92. Switzerland is a member of the EU: True/False

Q93. The European Union has 25 member states: True/False

Q94. Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament. True/False

Q95. Every six months, a different Member State becomes president of the Council of the European Union. True/False

Q96. The [Specific Minister] is [Correct name]. True/False

Q97. Individuals must be 25 or older to stand as candidates in [COUNTRY] elections. True/False

Q98. There are [150% of real number] members of the [COUNTRY Parliament]. True/False

PID: wording of question "Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?" initial coding". Recoded in 1 yes if R is feeling close to any party and 0 if the response is no

Contextual Level Variables

POLARIZATION: ideological polarization computed using the formula: $f = \sum_{i=1}^{N} p_i \mid x_i - \bar{x} \mid$

where *f*-is the polarization index, p_i -is the vote share of the party, x_i -is the placement on the left right axis as given by the voters' placement on the party in the European Parliament Election Study 2009, Voter Study, $\bar{x}$ - is the mean placement on the left-right axis of the parties in a certain country based on the coders placement. The natural logarithm was used in order to have a normally distributed variable

ELITE CONSTRAINT: the overall country correlation among elitest between two items reflecting pro market vs. pro state attitudes as given by the Candidate Survey of EES 2009. The two items for the Economic domain are:

V021_4: "Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership", originally coded from: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree", recoded to take values from: 0 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree"

V021_9: "Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people", originally coded from: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree", recoded to take values from: : 0 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree"

The two items for the Moral domain are:

V021_7:” People who break law should get much harsher sentences than now”, originally coded from: 1 “strongly agree” to 5 ”strongly disagree”, recoded to take values from: 0 “strongly disagree” to 4 ”strongly agree”;

V021_8: “Schools must teach children to obey authority”, originally coded from: 1 “strongly agree” to 5 ”strongly disagree”, recoded to take values from: 0 “strongly disagree” to 4 ”strongly agree”;

The two items for the Immigration domain are:

V021_1: “Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of [Country]”, originally coded from: 1 “strongly agree” to 5 ”strongly disagree”, recoded to take values from: 0 “strongly agree” to 4 ”strongly disagree”;

V021_12: “Immigration to [country] should be decreased significantly”, originally coded from: 1 “strongly agree” to 5 ”strongly disagree”, recoded to take values from: : 0 “strongly agree” to 4 ”strongly disagree”;

Appendix 11: Values for Country-level Variables, Chapter 4

Political region	Polarization	Elite congruence, Economic domain	Elite congruence, moral domain	Elite congruence, left right domain	Mean level of political knowledge	% of partisans
Wallonia	1.15	0.46	0.66	0.527	3.47	0.60
Flanders	0.48	0.46	0.66	0.527	3.55	0.84
Czech Republic	2.55	0.34	0.32	0.505	3.78	0.54
Denmark	1.60	0.76	0.44	0.414	4.83	0.59
Germany	1.42	0.65	0.32	0.53	4.20	0.55
Estonia	1.23	0.54	0.50	0.676	4.03	0.38
Greece	1.53	0.31	0.62	0.543	4.63	0.63
Spain	1.55	0.55	0.39	0.465	3.12	0.59
France	1.73	0.65	0.61	0.79	4.11	0.59
Ireland	0.95	0.60	0.91	-0.007	3.84	0.37
Italy	2.25	0.52	0.58	0.68	3.85	0.85
Cyprus	3.02	0.58	0.32	0.763	4.36	0.75
Latvia	1.51	0.04	0.12	0.499	3.69	0.32
Lithuania	1.65	0.40	0.26	0.263	4.05	0.36
Luxembourg	1.06	0.56	0.72	0.68	4.81	0.56
Hungary	2.28	0.69	0.50	0.707	3.96	0.61
Malta	2.28	0.72	0.82	0.118	3.65	0.57
Netherlands	1.36	0.55	0.40	0.469	4.17	0.89
Austria	1.36	0.68	0.47	0.792	4.58	0.64
Poland	1.47	0.27	0.41	0.175	3.32	0.60
Portugal	1.94	0.21	0.68	0.466	4.11	0.82
Slovenia	2.23	-0.075	0.48	0.753	4.64	0.55
Slovakia	1.94	0.68	0.47	0.566	3.89	0.58
Finland	1.36	0.34	0.39	0.635	4.40	0.66
Sweden	1.89	0.50	0.43	0.548	4.77	0.69
United Kingdom	0.86	0.45	0.59	0.77	3.23	0.41
Bulgaria	1.98	0.49	0.71	0.44	3.59	0.68
Romani	1.16	0.47	0.45	0.303	2.50	0.58

APPENDIX 12: Dependent Variable, Chapter 5

"Attitude-congruent" voting, left right dimension: computed as the difference between this self-reported actual **Party Utility** and the inverted **Ideological Distan**ce. Rescaled from 0 low attitude-congruent voting to 10 high attitude-congruent voting. See below for detailed description of how the dependent variable was created:

Ideological distance: distance between the voter Self-placement on left-right dimension and the Placement of party on left-right dimension.

Self-placement on left-right: response to Q46, recoded to 1"left" to 10 "right", by merging the 0 and 1 categories, in order to ensure better comparability with the EES manifesto study

Placement of party on left-right: the EES manifesto study coder's evaluation of the position on the party on the left-right axis ranging from 1 "left" to 10 "right". Alternatively, the party positioning made by experts in the Chapel Hill 2006 study and the one computed based on the placements by the voters was used to compute the dependent variable (they are correlate at the level of 0.85 significant for $p<0.001$ and respectively at the level of 0.82 significant for $p<0.001$). The results were consistent with the results presented in the paper which used the coder's placement of the parties. In the end the coder's placement was preferred due to the smaller number of missing values both at the individual level and at the country level (the expert placement did not include parties from: Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta).

Party utility: response to Q39, recoded to 1"not at all probable" to 10 "very probable", by merging the 0 and 1 categories.

APPENDIX 13: Explanatory Variables, Individual Component (level 1), Chapter 5

Political knowledge: measure of political knowledge that ranges from 0 to 7, reflecting the correct True/False answers given by each respondent (Cronbach's alpha = 0.618, 7 items). "Don't Know" answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one of incorrect answers (see Luskin & Bullock, 2011; Sturgis, Allum, & Smith, 2008). Original questions: Q92, Q93, Q94, Q95, Q96 ,Q97, Q98.

PID: response to Q87, recoded in 1 yes if the respondent is feeling close to a party and 0 if the response is no

FEMALE: coded 1 for female and 0 otherwise.

AGE: the age of the respondent in years.

RELIGIOSITY: response to Q118 , the original coding was inverted, thus 1 is for Never, while 6 is for Several times a week.

EDUCATION: response to Q101, I used the recoded EES 2009 ISCED education level variable (17 categories classified into a variable ranging from 0 to 6).

MINORITY: response to Q108, recode to a dichotomous variable where 0 is for those who answered 1, and for any minorities it takes the value 1.

UNION: response to Q99, recoded in 1 - initial categories from 1 to 3 and 0- initial category 4

INTEREST: response to Q79, answers order was reversed in the analysis, 4 reflecting "very", 1 reflecting "not at all".

TV: wording of question: How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European election? How often did you: Watch a program about the election on television? Coding: 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

PAPER: response to Q17, coded: 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

WEB: response to Q20, coded: 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

DISCUSSION: response to Q18, coded, 1 Never, 2 Sometimes, 3 Often.

EFFICACY: response to Q44, recoded: 0 Strongly disagree, 1 Disagree, 2 Neither, 3 Agree, 4 Strongly agree.

APPENDIX 14: Macro-level Variables, Chapter 5

Party system characteristics:

VOLATILITY: party system volatility based on the results on the last five national elections before the survey and computed by the author using the Pedersen's (1979) index.

NUMBER OF PARTIES: effective number of legislative parties competing at the previous national elections computed by Michael Gallagher available at: http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf , and updated by the author for Wallonia and Flanders.

POLARIZATION: ideological polarization computed using the formula $f = \sum_{i=1}^{N} p_i \mid x_i - \bar{x} \mid$ where

f-is the polarization index, p_i -is the vote share of the party, x_i -is the placement on the left right axis as given by the mean voters' placement on the party in the European Parliament Election Study 2009, Voter Study, $\bar{x}$ - weighted mean of the parties' placement on the left-right in a given country.

Political and Institutional system stability:

GOVERNMENT STABILITY: Number of governments since closest national election to 1990 as given by the ParlGov database, available at: http://parlgov.org/.

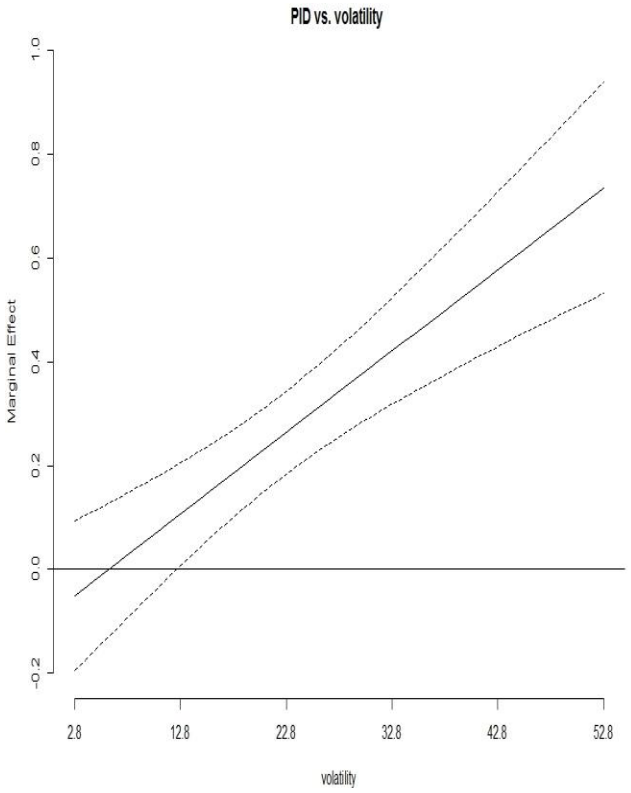
REGIME STABILITY: Age of democracy, uninterrupted years of democracy since 1930 as given by the QOG database. Available at http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/data/qogstandarddataset/

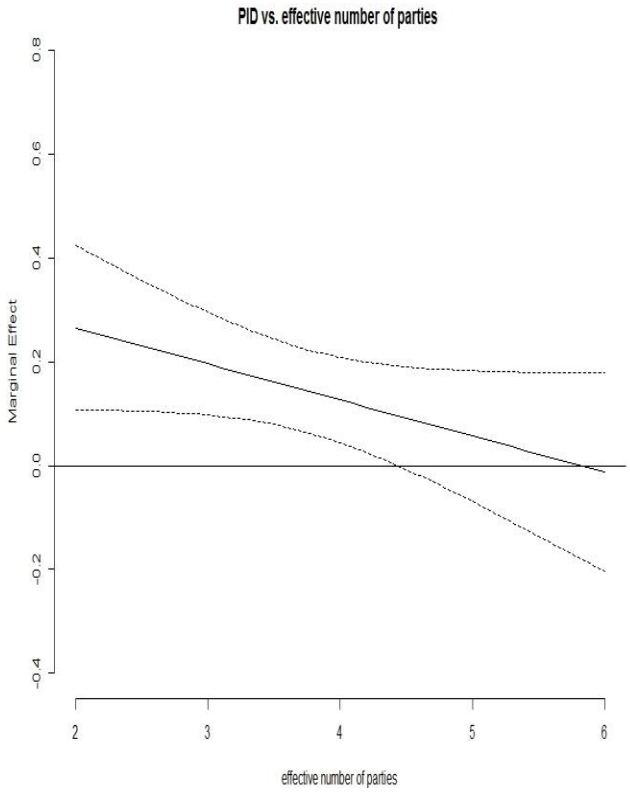
APPENDIX 15: Country by Country Regressions, Estimates of Political Knowledge, PID and Intercept, Chapter 5

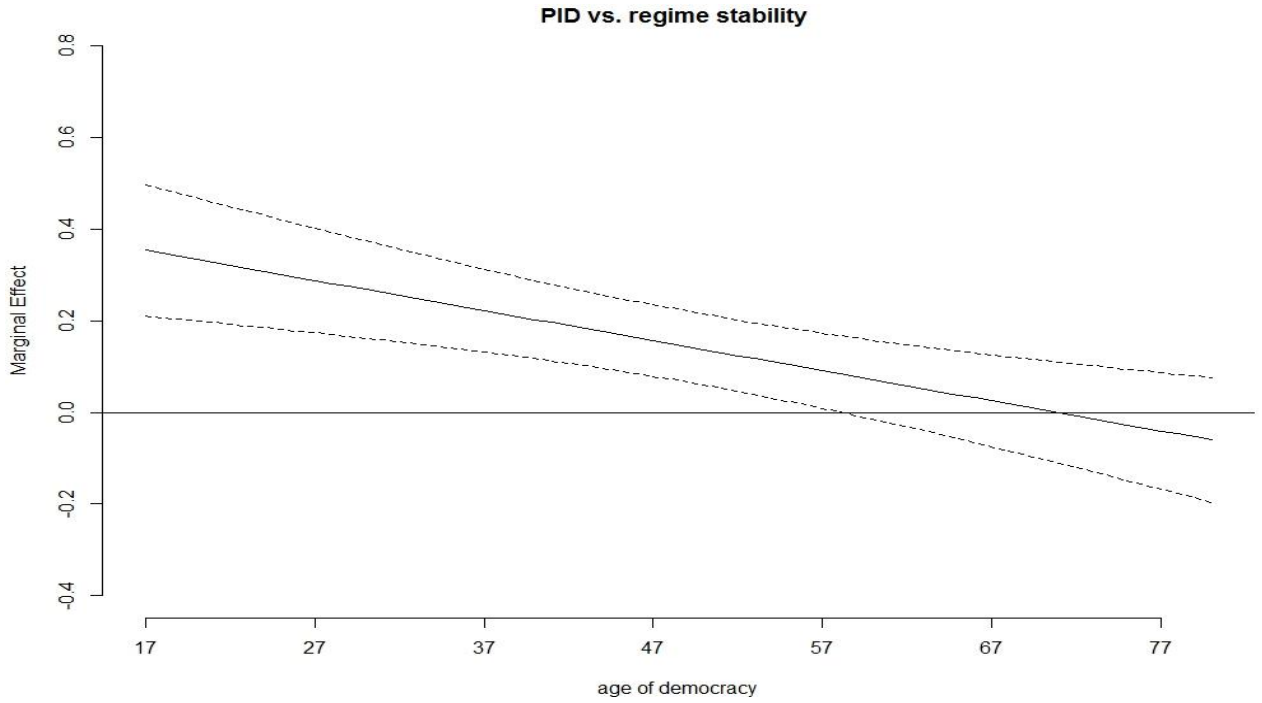
Region	Intercept	Political Knowledge	Party ID
Wallonia	**5.743 (0.424)**	0.019 (0.047)	0.007 (0.157)
Flanders	**6.337 (.436)**	0.012 (0.048)	**-0.719 (0.208)**
Czech Republic	**5.000 (0.236)**	**-0.05 (0.026)**	**0.537 (0.094)**
Denmark	**5.638 (0.291)**	**0.051 (0.025)**	**-0.235 (0.082)**
Germany	**4.704 (0.292)**	-0.023 (0.031)	0.075 (0.100)
Estonia	**5.390 (0.276)**	-0.005 (0.034)	**0.2621 (0.103)**
Greece	**4.331 (0.245)**	0.042 (0.031)	**0.203 (0.0938)**
Spain	**3.662 (0.346)**	-0.017 (0.028)	**0.534 (0.094)**
France	**5.813 (0.239)**	0.001 (0.029)	0.060 (0.098)
Ireland	**3.796 (0.230)**	-0.020 (0.028)	-0.113 (0.090)
Italy	**3.812 (0.343)**	-0.010 (0.038)	0.083 (0.173)
Cyprus	**6.015 (0.271)**	-0.020 (0.029)	0.122 (0.1137)
Latvia	**3.698 (0.277)**	-0.053 (0.028)	**0.396 (0.100)**
Lithuania	**5.252 (0.264)**	**-0.075 (0.034)**	**0.327 (0.109)**
Luxembourg	**4.930 (0.317)**	0.032 (0.032)	-0.107 (0.096)
Hungary	**4.548 (0.248)**	-0.030 (0.025)	**0.323 (0.098)**
Malta	**5.527 (0.355)**	-0.016 (0.037)	-0.220 (0.135)
Netherlands	**6.206 (0.301)**	**-0.057 (0.027)**	-0.007 (0.137)
Austria	**4.801 (0.297)**	-0.013 (0.031)	0.061 (0.090)
Poland	**4.363 (0.285)**	-0.016 (0.030)	**0.490 (0.119)**
Portugal	**5.334 (0.264)**	**-0.078 (0.025)**	0.202 (0.129)
Slovenia	**4.392 (0.247)**	0.019 (0.029)	0.176 (0.091)
Slovakia	**5.143 (0.260)**	-0.025 (0.027)	**0.334 (0.098)**
Finland	**4.784 (0.265)**	0.024 (0.028)	0.013 (0.096)
Sweden	**4.115 (0.275)**	-0.046 (0.028)	**0.350 (0.092)**
United Kingdom	**4.661 (0.250)**	0.013 (0.027)	0.128 (0.088)
Bulgaria	**2.315 (0.291)**	**-0.069 (0.029)**	**0.579 (0.119)**
Romania	**3.806 (0.275)**	-0.015 (0.034)	**0.379 (0.118)**

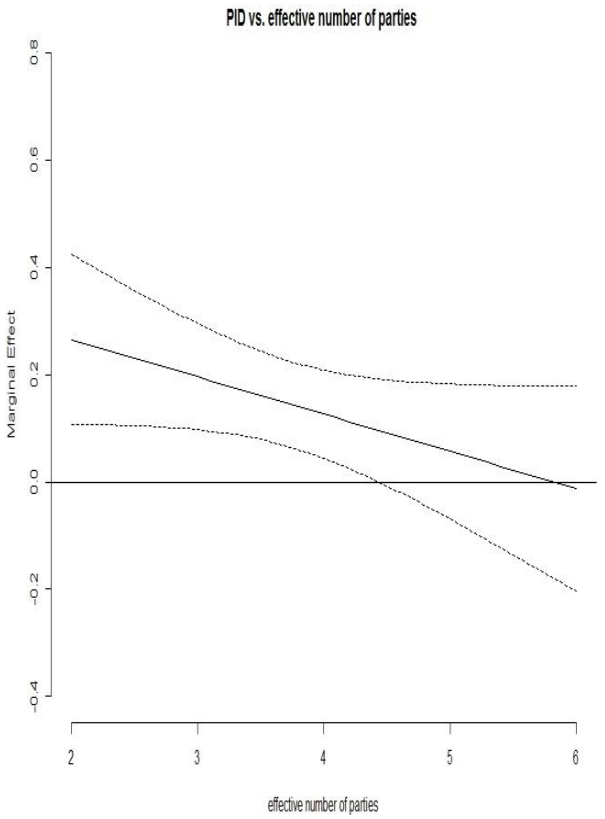
- Standard errors in parenthesis, bolded coefficient are significant at $p<0.05$

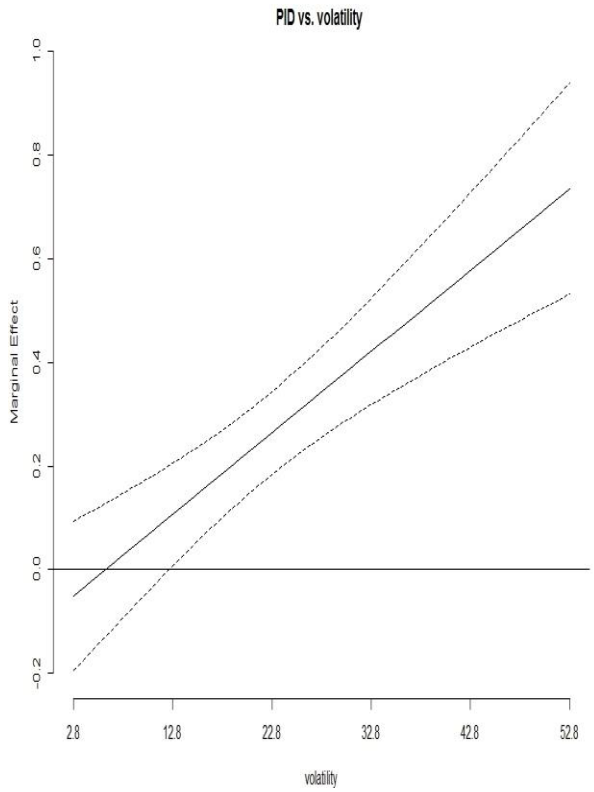
APPENDIX 16: Marginal Effects of PID interaction with 95% Confidence Intervals, Chapter 5

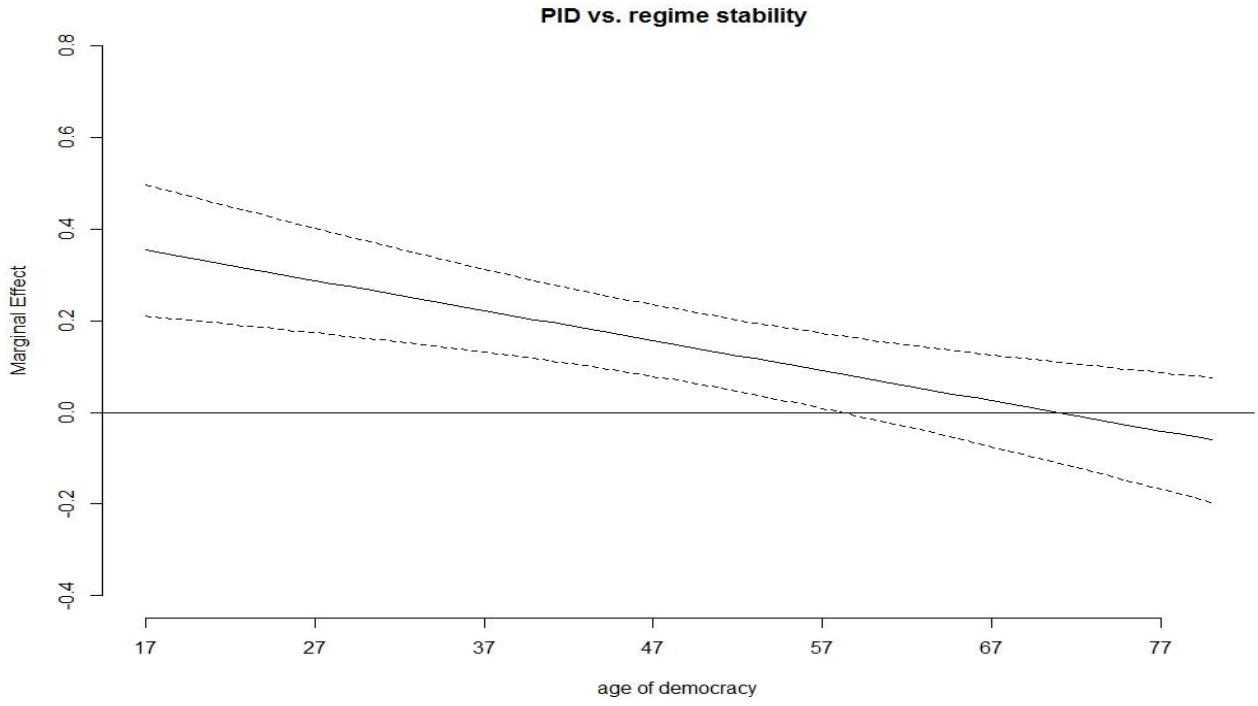







PID vs. effective number of parties
Marginal Effect
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0
-0.2
-0.4
2
3
4
5
6
effective number of parties


PID vs. volatility
Marginal Effect
1.0
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0
-0.2
2.8
12.8
22.8
32.8
42.8
52.8
volatility


PID vs. regime stability
Marginal Effect
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0
-0.2
-0.4
17
27
37
47
57
67
77
age of democracy