

Do parties still orient voters in times of crisis?

Experimental evidence of partisan cueing effects in 2013 Italy¹

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A promising strand of research is adopting survey experimental approaches to assess the extent to which parties not only aggregate preferences, but are also able to shape them - a research question which becomes crucial as the economic crisis is weakening trust in parties and the party system in many European countries. Typical survey experimental designs adopt party-mention treatments, in order to assess difference in policy support based on the mention of a party to which the respondent has some kind of affinity. Results obtained so far in a variety of countries show the significant presence of party-cueing effects; however, existing research has been mostly experimenting on artificial, low-saliency issues, thus raising concerns of external validity.

In this paper we report findings from a survey experiment on real-world, high-saliency issues, which was included in the 4th wave of the CISE (Italian Center for Electoral Studies) Electoral Panel. The panel started in early 2012, covering about 12 months before recent general elections, a period of time during which the economic crisis expressed his deepest effects. The design included three issues selected in order to maximize variance on issue complexity and content: rights for gay couples, house property tax and electoral reform. On each policy issue, respondents in the control group were asked to choose among four different policy options, while respondents in the treatment group received the same options, but each accompanied by a proponent party.

Results show effects of party cueing that are large and significant. Respondents tend to support more a policy if they are informed that such policy is proposed by their preferred party. This effect however varies across issues. The paper also investigates variation across party identification, with findings that confirm theoretical expectations: party identifiers show stronger cueing effects than non-identifiers, although different levels of party closeness do not always correspond to cueing effects that are significantly different.

Finally we compare cueing effects across groups characterized by different levels of exposure to the economic crisis: we hypothesize that among those who are experiencing economic difficulties such effects should be weaker, expressing less trust in the party system and in specific parties.

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1. Introduction

The recent financial crisis has accelerated developments that have characterized electoral competition and political representation in the last decades in Europe and beyond. Processes of individualization of vote choices weaken long-standing group loyalties, while economic globalization is changing the economic landscape and influences political alignments. The democratic system of electorally accountable, representative government increasingly appears as the most vulnerable link in a complex system of multi-level governance. Furthermore, the development of the Internet and of online social networks rapidly changes the landscape and dynamics of public opinion.

In such a challenging environment, it is not surprising that, after the enforcement of severe austerity measures in many countries, unprecedented electoral outcomes have emerged in recent national elections. Several European countries have witnessed a resurgence of protest movements and anti-establishment parties: against financial austerity, national elites, and – not least – against the EU. These phenomena may lead to deep changes in the configurations of party systems. An example of such development is clearly the case of the recent Italian general elections held in February 2013, where a new, anti-establishment party, the Movimento 5 Stelle (5-Star Movement, M5S) reached 25.6% of valid votes – ranking first among parties – in what clearly emerged as a tripolar party structure, leading to radical changes in the format and mechanics of the Italian party system. These developments point to important questions for scholars working on electoral behaviour and public opinion, as they represent important challenges for existing theories of voting behaviour and party competition.

In particular, our aim is to highlight how recent developments in the Italian party system appear particularly stimulating as for the interplay of at least two of the main frameworks in voting behaviour research: spatial models of voting behaviour and party competition (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005) and party identification theory (Campbell et al. 1960; for a recent assessment see Bartle and Bellucci 2009). We argue that their interplay appears particularly meaningful in light of recent theories about the effect (and actual measurement) of *partisan cueing effects*, i.e. the ability for parties to shape public opinion by cueing voters to adopt the party's policy positions on some issues (Campbell et al. 1960, Przeworski and Sprague 1986, Goren 2005, Carsey and Layman 2006) (T. Brader and Tucker 2012; T. Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2012; T. Brader, Tucker, and Ryan 2013). While not providing yet a rigorous theoretical argument, we suggest that interest in these effects could be motivated by the ability of partisan cueing to avoid the typical disequilibria and decision cycles implied by intense

multidimensionality in the issue space (Arrow 1951). Previous research on Western Europe has highlighted how parties, despite a limited ability to shape voters' opinions on issues related to the left-right dimensions, are more successful in doing so on other dimensions (Adams et al. 2011, Milazzo et al. 2012, Ray 2003, Steenbergen et al. 2007). If confirmed, such finding would highlight a dynamic that might be crucial in terms of economic crisis and discontent towards political elites: even clearly multidimensional challenges to the party system (such as the one provided by M5S) might be limited in their potential disequilibria effects, due to an enduring party cueing ability on dimensions beyond left-right. As a result, decision equilibria on the left-right dimensions would still appear as legitimate in terms of their implication on other dimensions, due to partisan cueing effects. At the same time, the bases for such partisan loyalties have to be carefully assessed in times of plummeting trust in parties, with potential for party realignment towards new parties. Evidence of citizens switching from blind faith into a party to blind faith into another party (rather than through an assessment of policies and/or group identities) might hardly be considered as leading to a well-functioning and responsive democracy.

This paper aims to contribute to a reflection on this topic, by trying to assess the presence of partisan cueing effects among Italian voters in the aftermath of the 2013 general elections. We argue that the theoretical relevance outlined above might be even augmented in a context where party identification could be guessed to be extremely weak. Italy is a clearly multi-party system; recent polls have been showing all-time lows in overall levels of trust in political parties; recent elections have shown both an increase in fragmentation, with electoral ENP reaching 5.3 (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2013), and an important success of new parties (Maggini 2013). As a result, conditions appear the least favourable for strong partisan cueing effects on policy issues. With a large number of relevant parties (thus leading to a predominance of ideology over party identification – see Van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005), and several of them of very recent emergence (thus unlikely to have developed a large base of strong identifiers), we might expect partisan cueing effects to be difficult to find. Evidence for their presence should then suggest that the basic dynamics of party identification could be at play even in a clear multi-party system, with very young parties, and in times of low trust in political parties.

Our measurement strategy builds on recent literature that has successfully used experimental methodology to assess the presence and strength of partisan cueing effects. In such studies, survey respondents are typically administered items that measure individual preferences on policy issues. The experimental setup implies administering such items with or without a mention of the party endorsing each of the proposed policy positions, and then assessing – among respondents whose party preference has been measured elsewhere in the questionnaire – how much the policy position

congruence between respondents and their preferred party varies when parties are explicitly mentioned in the response item (T. Brader and Tucker 2012). We then conducted similar survey experiments on the fourth, post-electoral wave of the CISE Electoral Panel 2012-2013. Our data also represent a significant improvement compared to previous researches, as we employed issues with a high level of saliency in the current campaign, while most previous research has been employing low-saliency or even artificial issues.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly introduces the literature, and derives specific hypotheses to be tested on our dataset; Section 3 presents the dataset and our specific measurement choices. Section 4 then presents empirical findings about the presence and strength of partisan cueing effects, and tests the heterogeneity of treatment effects across issues and parties. Section 5 specifically tests hypotheses derived from party identification theory, by testing effect heterogeneity across respondents with different levels of partisanship. Section 6 moves then on to specific hypotheses about partisan cueing dynamics in times of crisis, by testing effect heterogeneity across respondents with different exposure to the economic crisis, as well as across respondents with different levels of trust in mainstream political parties. Conclusions follow.

2. Party identification and partisan cueing effects

It can be safely said that few concepts have had such an importance in the study of voting behaviour and political attitudes as the concept of party identification (Campbell et al. 1960). The very idea that individuals develop a socio-psychological attachment towards a political party, either through the family environment or through key experiences during the political socialization process, quickly established itself as one of the key categories for interpreting political attitudes and voting behaviour in the United States. So central was its role, that even challenges to the mainstream sociological paradigm for the interpretation of voting behaviour precisely targeted that concept, by reframing it in more dynamic, individual-level, choice-oriented terms (Fiorina 1981). Still, despite the emergence of structural changes in the patterns of partisanship (Dalton 1984), party identification still retains an absolutely central role in the study of voting behaviour and political attitudes in the U.S.

Given the success and usefulness of the concept, it is no wonder then that, shortly after its introduction in the United States, attempts were made by social scientists to adopt the same conceptual apparatus to study multi-party systems, especially in Western Europe. However, it could be said, with much less success. Looking from today's perspective, the usefulness of the concept of party identification is still widely contested with reference to multi-party systems (Bellucci and Bartle 2008). The application of the concept of party identification to multi-party systems led first

to measurement problems; secondly, first empirical findings on genuine multi-party systems ended up openly rejecting some of the cornerstones of the theory, such as the prediction that party identification ought to be more stable than actual vote choice (Thomassen 1976).

As a result, European scholars have always been careful in systematically adopting the party identification framework (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, Bellucci and Bartle 2008), and they have much more consistently and systematically referred to the *left-right dimension* as the fundamental political orientation device for citizens in multi-party systems in Western Europe (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990, Knutsen 1995, 1997, Miller et al. 1999, Budge et al. 2001, Gunther and Montero 2001). And the left-right ideological self-placement has even been suggested as a possible functional equivalent for party identification in Western Europe (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, Lancaster and Lewis-Beck 1986, Lewis-Beck 1983, Percheron and Jennings 1981), especially after van der Eijk and Niemöller (1983) effectively demonstrated that, in the Netherlands, left-right self-placement was much more stable than party identification, and that in general, such dimension is a stable driving force of vote choice in Europe (Cees Van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005), suggesting the very presence of some form of *ideological identification*. We argue, however, that an effective and useful conceptualization of long-term forces that shape voting behaviour in multi-party systems cannot be derived from ideological identification alone. There are aspects of the original Party ID theory that can hardly be reformulated in terms of ideological identification; especially those aspects that involve an active role by political actors. Among these there are clearly partisan cueing effects. Especially in presence of citizens with limited levels of information and interest in political affairs², it is easy to imagine that, if there is a party that the voter identifies with, it might be able to *form* the voter's opinion, especially on relatively minor and perhaps complex issues (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964). It should be clear how it would be more complex to imagine that such function can be performed by a general ideology, especially when dealing with issues that were not present at the time of the original ideological elaboration³. In our case, the presence of partisan cueing effects in a very unfavourable environment might demonstrate how some of the dynamics predicted by the party identification theory are present even in a complex multi-party system.

Coming to a measurement strategy, in recent years scholars have tried to overcome the problem of measuring party identification effects in different contexts by adopting experimental

² And also when low ideological sophistication does not allow the development of an abstract *system of beliefs* which could help the autonomous formation of opinions on new issues (Converse 1964).

³ The clear case with environmental politics, which became integrated among the core issues of the Left only many years after their first emergence.

designs containing party cues. The experiments consist in a manipulation of the presence of party cues in policy questions. Respondents are typically administered items that measure their preferences on policy issues. While respondents in the control group receive plain policy preference items, respondents in the treatment group also receive a mention of the party endorsing each of the proposed policy positions. Given that individual party preference is measured elsewhere in the questionnaire (or even in a previous panel wave, as in the present study), it becomes possible to assess how much the policy position congruence between respondents and their preferred party varies when parties are explicitly mentioned in the response item (T. Brader and Tucker 2012; T. Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2012; Samuels and Zucco 2013; J. Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2005; J. L. Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2008; Coan et al. 2008). And, apart from demonstrating the presence of partisan cueing effects, such experiments made possible for scholars the comparison of party identification effects on policy preference among countries with different characteristics in terms of age and stability of the political system (T. Brader and Tucker 2012; J. Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2005) or among different kind of parties (T. Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2012) and different types of individuals (T. Brader, Tucker, and Ryan 2013; Kam 2005).

However, one key limitation in most of these studies lies in the very frequent adoption of low-salience, often artificial policy issues. This choice is understandable in many regards. Real-world, salient issues are prone to potentially low, underestimated cueing effects, for at least two different reasons. On the one hand, policy congruence rates in the treatment group might be lower (and thus close to the control group) on very well known and debated policies, as voters might have developed a stronger and more stable opinion, with less room for party cueing. On the other hand, congruence rates in the control group might be higher (and thus closer to the treatment group) if the party's position has been widely publicized, so that party supporters would be able to conform with their party's position even without an explicit party mention. Other reasons for using artificial issues include experimental design requirements, often requiring the possibility for all parties to plausibly support a certain proposal, or requiring clearly distinct party positions on the same issue.

It is clear how such choices raise concerns of external validity. To what extent it is possible to generalize the presence of significant partisan cueing effects, when they have been demonstrated under very unnatural conditions?⁴ For these reasons, we decided to carry on our experiment on three issues, varying in complexity, but all extremely salient during the electoral campaign for last

⁴ See the discussion in Samuels and Zucco (2013). Also see Brader and Tucker (2012). Other concerns are also raised by the relationship between a specific issue and a particular party in terms of the strategic importance of the issue (De Sio and Franklin 2012).

Italian general elections⁵. To some extent, this test represents the first systematic application of the aforementioned experimental design to high-salience, real-world policy issues.

It is important to stress that, from many viewpoints, our specific dataset represents a worst-case scenario for the presence of strong, significant partisan cueing effects. There are several reasons for this. 1) As mentioned, high-salience, real-world issues lend themselves by definition to lower cueing effects, as confirmed by a previous research (Samuels and Zucco 2013); 2) given that our survey experiments were administered (see below) few weeks after the general elections, the aforementioned problem would be extraordinarily relevant, with voters already clearly aware of both their and their parties' positions (these latter, even without party mentions). 3) Italy is a clear multi-party system, where much of long-term socio-psychological attachments could be anchored to ideologies, rather than specific political parties; 4) given the radical transformations of the party system from 1992 on, and especially in more recent years (D'Alimonte, De Sio, and Grofman 2012), Italian parties can be expected to lack a large base of strong party identifiers; this is even more relevant for 2013, as new parties have obtained more than 30% of votes, with the newly-formed Movimento 5 Stelle becoming Italy's largest party. Given the aforementioned considerations, there are then several research questions of interest.

1) Is there any party cueing effect?

As mentioned previously, the conditions of the experiments are particularly demanding. As such, demonstrating the sheer presence of partisan cueing effects would already constitute a relevant empirical finding.

2) Does the effect vary across parties and issues?

The previous theoretical considerations would suggest lower partisan cueing effects for younger parties, and also lower effects for more salient issues. However, it is clear that, given the very low number of higher-level contexts (four parties, three issues), we can only derive tentative indications, as no explanatory hypothesis on this question can be assessed in a statistically rigorous fashion⁶.

3) Does the effect vary across voters?

⁵ Although, however, of the three issues, only one of them (house property tax for the PdL) is clearly a central issue for the identity of a party, both in terms of relevance and consistency with the core party identity

⁶ There are multiple potential mechanisms leading to effect heterogeneity across parties and issues, whose theoretical identification will lead to specific research designs in the future. Apart from party age potentially increasing the strength of partisan cueing effects, we can already easily identify multiple potential factors: at the issue level, policy domain, issue complexity, and overall saliency; at the party-issue level, party-issue saliency, clarity, internal cohesion of the party on the issue; at the voter level, voter-issue saliency..

On this last question, our theoretical interest is mostly driven by party identification theory, as well as by considerations connected to exposure to the economic crisis. As a result, we have two main interests. The first is in determining whether party identifiers are more affected by party cueing, compared to non-identifiers; and if there are differences based on the declared closeness to the party. Secondly, we want to assess treatment effect heterogeneity in relationship to exposure to the economic crisis, and to levels of trust in parties. These interests translate into four specific subordinate research questions:

- a. Compared to non-identifiers, are identifiers cued more by their party?
- b. Is there a different effect for voters accordingly to the self-reported degree of identification?
- c. Is there a different effect for voters differently affected by the economic crisis?
- d. Is there a different effect for voters with different levels of trust in parties⁷?

In terms of operational expectations, our general criterion of assessment and comparison is based on the estimation of average treatment effects (ATEs). When defining the *congruence rate* as the proportion of respondents that select the policy option supported by their preferred party, in general we observe an ATE when such congruence rate is different between the treatment and control group, i.e. the group receiving party mentions along with policy positions, and the group only receiving policy positions. Given this definition, we can translate the above research questions into specific hypotheses:

H1: We expect a significant, positive ATE in the overall sample

The congruence rate should be significantly higher in the treatment group compared to the control group. This finding would be theoretically even more relevant, given the above considerations leading to the expectations of small, perhaps non-significant effects. As a result, this hypothesis is perhaps the key test of this paper: its confirmation would, in our opinion, alone justify the analysis; its rejection would strongly restrict the relevance of subsequent hypotheses.

As a result, the hypotheses that follow all concern the presence of effect heterogeneity: whether (and to what extent) ATEs vary across issues, different groups of voters and finally parties.

First, we expect different effects for different issues: in particular we believe that parties should be able to drive the voters' choice on complex issues or on issues that strictly involve the political domain. On the other side it should be less likely for parties to move people's opinions on moral issues, on which is easier for voters to develop autonomous judgements, without recurring to the partisan shortcut:

⁷ This last effect could be conceptualized as the direct explanatory mechanism for the indirect effect of the former (exposure to crisis). However, in this exploratory stage we prefer to test the two separately.

H2: ATEs should vary across issues.

Secondly, we examine differences across parties. Previous literature has highlighted different effects across old, established and new democracies, as well as across old, established vs. new parties (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2013). The contemporary Italian context provides an interesting setting for testing the presence of such differences (new parties such SC and M5S vs. older parties such as PD and PdL).

H3: ATEs should be higher for older, established parties, and lower for new parties.

Finally, we examine differences of ATEs across individual-level characteristics. Our first test concerns the effect of partisanship. As suggested by the literature, party cues should have a stronger effect on voters that also identify with their preferred party, than for those who don't. (Campbell et al. 1960; Brader and Tucker 2012):

H4: Partisan voters should present higher ATEs than non-partisan voters.

The literature also suggest that proper subgroups can be distinguished among identified, in terms of the strength of their identification.:

H4b: Voters that are more strongly partisan should present higher ATEs.

Then we investigate the impact of the economic crisis on party-voters relationship. In particular we hypothesize that:

H5: Voters more affected by the economic crisis should present lower ATEs.

Our last test concerns the trust in the party system. We hypothesize that

H6: Voters with lower trust in parties should present lower ATEs.

3. Data, design and measurement

The experimental questions were included in the fourth wave of the CISE Electoral Panel, which was conducted few weeks after the elections, in March 2013. As a fourth, post-electoral wave of a panel, it is inherently affected by self-selection⁸. This can create a bias, so that only those more interested to politics are overrepresented. However, we think that this would be one more reason to consider our design as a least-likely case study. It is reasonable to hypothesize that it would be more difficult for parties to drive individual preference among the most involved fractions of their electorates. Those voters are indeed more likely to hold an autonomous position on salient issues.

On a total of 1490 respondents in our experiment, 753 were randomly assigned to the control group, 737 were assigned to the treatment group. We selected three issues, in order to

⁸ Although the first three waves included a replenishment of respondents to compensate for panel attrition, and partially recover representativeness on basic socio-demographic variables.

maximize variance on issue complexity and policy domain: rights for gay couples, house property tax and electoral reform⁹. For each of these issues, respondents in the control group were asked to choose among four different policy options without party labels. Respondents in the treatment group received the same options, but each labeled with the specific endorsing party.

We performed balance tests through a multivariate logistic regression of treatment assignment based on a large set of typical predictors of voting behaviour, as well as actual vote choice. The results (see Table 12 in the Appendix), show that the sample is well balanced: none of the included classical electoral variables discriminates the two groups in a statistically significant way. Also, it has to be noted that this logistic regression test is much more demanding than traditional bivariate tests, as our test shows that none of the aforementioned variables predicts treatment *net of all other variables*. As a result, the pseudo-R-squared of the model is virtually zero. This confirms that the random assignment was performed correctly, so it is possible to not include control variables when comparing treatment and control groups: simple bivariate tests and means comparisons are appropriate.

Coming to measurement considerations, party identification is operationalized through the traditional questions used in studies of multiparty systems in Western Europe: respondents are first asked if there is a party they feel closer to. If the answer is positive, they are then asked what party it is and if they consider themselves as simple sympathizers, quite close or very close to the party. Exposure to the economic crisis was measured through an item asking whether the respondent (or someone in her family) had actively and unsuccessfully sought a job in the last six months. Trust in parties (given the lack of specific items in our data) was measured as the difference between the PTV (propensity-to-vote) measure for the highest party (C. Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996), and the corresponding measure for abstention, available in our dataset.

Concerning the dependent variable, in general we assess treatment effects on the party-responder congruence rate on a given policy position. In practice, for each policy issue we offered four alternatives corresponding to the actual policy position of the four largest parties: the leftist Partito Democratico (PD), the rightist Popolo della Libertà (PdL), the anti-establishment movement Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) and finally the new party founded by the incumbent prime minister Mario Monti, called Scelta Civica (SC). These four parties obtained respectively 25.4, 21.6, 25.6 and 8.3 percent of votes in the February 2013 election. For each of the three issues tested (see the Appendix) we calculated a dichotomous “congruence” indicator, coding whether the respondent

⁹ Actual question wordings are in the Appendix.

chose the policy option endorsed by his preferred party, measured in a previous pre-electoral wave¹⁰. Congruence rates in a given group (e.g. treatment vs. control) were calculated based on this dichotomous congruence indicator. We also calculated an overall party-respondent congruence index across all issues, by averaging over valid values of the congruence indicators for all issues.

4. Partisan cueing effects

The first test we provide is the ATE of the entire experiment, across all issues. As we have said, each respondent was assigned to either treatment or control for all the three questions together. We selected those cases who support one of the four parties included in our experiment. For each of them, we employed the aforementioned overall average congruence index for each individual as our dependent variable. By focusing on this index, we thus estimated the overall ATE across items. Findings are reported in Table 1.

This first test already shows, in our opinion, impressive results. On average (over three issues, and only among supporters of the four major parties), 52.2% of respondents in the treatment group (where voters are informed of the party endorsing each position) pick the option held by their party, compared to only 33.9% in the control group (where parties were not mentioned). In other words, we have a strong ATE, reaching 18.3 percentage points. Such effect is positive to a statistically significant extent, with $p < 0.001$. From this result we conclude that H1 is definitely confirmed: in our sample and with our choice of policy issues, party cues have a not only significant, but definitely very strong effect in driving respondents towards the policy positions endorsed by their party on all three issues. It is worth to underline that such effect is sensibly stronger than those accounted by previous literature, despite – as discussed previously – all the conservative biases introduced by our design, which features real-world, highly debated issues, in the immediate aftermath of a general election.

Table 1. Regression of party-respondent congruence rate on treatment inclusion, for all the three experimental issues

¹⁰ This required us to exclude supporters of other parties, which overall received 19.3 percent of Italian votes. Identification of the preferred party is performed according to the same algorithm adopted in previous analyses using this experimental setup (T. A. Brader and Tucker 2012), with the difference that, in this analysis, we employed all items in the previous, pre-electoral panel wave, to try to limit post-hoc rationalization effects. The party identification item is used first (if present, the party towards which R feels close is coded as the preferred party); if no party closeness is present, vote intention is then used; for respondents still without a preferred party, we finally code – as preferred party – the party that receives the maximum PTV (propensity-to-vote) score. Through this algorithm we were able to link 1147 respondents out of the total 1490 with one of the four major parties. All analyses are performed on this subsample, while we had to remove 343 respondents not preferring any of the major parties.

(1)		
treatment	18.306 ^{***}	[14.622,21.990]
Constant	33.918 ^{***}	[31.306,36.531]
Observations	1147	
R^2	0.077	

95% confidence intervals in brackets
^{*} $p < 0.05$, ^{**} $p < 0.01$, ^{***} $p < 0.001$

Finally, it is worth briefly commenting on the policy congruence rate in the control group, expressed by the constant. Such value is above 25% to a statistically significant extent, meaning that respondents in general tend to be closer to their party's position than according to a random prediction (given that four alternatives were offered, a random choice in the control group would yield a constant of 25 points). However, such difference is small: respondents appear to have little ability to discern their party's policies, when a party label is not provided. In general, we have no previous analyses to rigorously compare with and to provide theoretical expectations. We will mostly comment on such findings in comparing between subgroups of our sample.

We now separately analyse and compare ATEs for each of the three issues of our experiment, in order to test H2, where we stated our expectation of ATE variance across different issues. Each of them can be considered as a distinct experiment. As clear from Table 2, each of the three ATEs is statistically significant with $p < 0.001$. The strongest effect is on electoral reform: on that issue we have the lowest congruence rate in the control group: 26% (expressed by the constant). This is probably part of the reason why we find the strongest effect on this issue, with an ATE almost reaching 27 points.

For both the other two issues we have effects that are slightly lower, but still very strong. On the house property tax, the presence of party labels increases the congruence rate of 15 points, from 39% to 55%. Despite being slightly lower than on electoral reform, such ATE appears as a very strong finding, if we consider that this very topic has been at the centre of the electoral campaign. Berlusconi based virtually his whole campaign strategy on this issue, even with specific campaign events (letters promising the abolition of the tax and the reimbursement of the tax amount paid in the previous year, were sent to millions of households of potential voters). Other parties too were committed to come up with some reform proposal, due the vast popular discontent towards such tax. It was definitely the most covered issue on all media. It is then indeed notable that even on a such debated issue, where we would expect voters to have clearly formed opinions and a clear awareness of their party's opinion, the explicit mentions of party labels still have a 15-point effect.

Finally on gay couples' rights the ATE is 13 points, increasing the congruence rate from 36 to 49%. The effect is still strong. However, now even in the treatment group (with explicit party

mentions) the respondent-party congruence rate is below 50%. Essentially, more than half of treated respondents do not pick up their party's (clearly stated) policy option. It is not surprising that we find the lowest effect on gay rights: it is a moral issue on which it is very likely for voters to have their own positions, regardless which one their party support. However, it could be argued that an effect higher than 10 points on such a sensitive issue is still an important partisan cueing effect.

Table 2. Regression of treatment inclusion on party-respondent congruence rate for different issues

	(1) IMU	(2) Gay_mrgs	(3) El_reform
treatment	15.468*** [9.749,21.186]	12.733*** [7.047,18.419]	26.717*** [21.257,32.177]
Constant	39.298*** [35.242,43.354]	36.140*** [32.108,40.173]	26.316*** [22.443,30.188]
Observations	1147	1147	1147
R^2	0.024	0.017	0.075

95% confidence intervals in brackets

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Overall, we then observe that H2 is essentially confirmed. ATEs clearly differ among issues. In particular the electoral reform issue shows an ATE that is statistically different from those observed on the other two. A tentative explanation we suggested for the variance among issues is issue complexity. The extremely high effect we observe on the electoral reform issue can indeed be explained by the many technicalities involved in such matter. This is even confirmed by the very low value of the constant, which is not significantly different from 25. Given that there were four alternatives, this shows that – when not offered explicit party cues – respondent are not able to autonomously identify their party's position, as a random choice in the control group would yield a value of 25. Another factor that might potentially play a role, as we suggested, is policy domain: the more an issue is close to voter's personal beliefs or everyday life, the less likely it is for party cues to produce large effects; However, such small number of issues makes impossible to disentangle the effects of issue complexity and policy domain: more research on more issues is needed for a rigorous test of the impact of such differences. In any case, H2 seems to be confirmed: different issues clearly show different ATEs¹¹.

¹¹ However, it is worth spending a few words on our analysis setup. We originally hypothesized that the presence of specific ATEs would be an appropriate measure of party cueing effects; however, we anticipated that congruence levels in the control group might reflect the tendency of some voters to already recognize the policy position of their party, without the need of a specific mention. What is to some extent a bit puzzling is the interplay of these two aspects. In terms of differences across issues, we would expect sensitive personal issues to not only have

We then move on to assessing heterogeneity in terms of party characteristics. Here too, the limited number of parties does not really allow for a rigorous test of any explanatory hypothesis on effect heterogeneity at the party level. However, a first qualitative assessment might be useful, especially if clearly highlighting counterintuitive patterns.

The experiment includes the four largest parties. Two of them are extremely new: both M5S and SC are competing for their first national elections. More than that, the latter was formed only few months before the elections. The other two, PD and PdL, are still in part new if compared to other advanced democracies: they appeared in late 2007 and early 2008. But each of the two was formed by the federation of previous parties: they represent the two poles of Italian bipolar party system that has characterized the last 20 years.

Among the new parties, SC was clearly an incumbent party: it was founded by the prime minister of the technocrat cabinet. On the other hand, M5S was the most fierce opponent of such government.

To same extent, the same thing can be true for the group of old parties. It is true that they both supported Monti's government, but during the electoral campaign Berlusconi managed to successfully separate his image from the government's. Bersani, the leader of PD, campaigned on the possibility of a post-electoral alliance with Monti's coalition.

Table 3 reports the regression table of the interaction between preferred party and treatment exposure. We were expecting differences due to the party age of the parties, with oldest parties having higher effects. On the contrary, we find no significant differences among parties.

Table 3. Effects of treatment inclusion, preferred party and their interaction on party-respondent congruence rate

lower ATEs, but also lower congruence in the control group, so as to result in an overall lower level of policy congruence, which would be theoretically appropriate. We observe instead that party labels have a “levelling” effect: while baseline congruence in the control group differs significantly across issues, and while party cueing effects differ significantly across issues, the final outcome (overall congruence level when party labels are mentioned) does not vary significantly across issues. Such finding suggests that voters tend to conform with their preferred party in a uniform way across very different issues. Perhaps this might suggest social desirability effects, to be further investigated. One possible explanation could be question ordering: our survey experiments are administered *after* questions on vote choice.

	(1)	
	est1	
treatment	14.862 ^{***}	[9.769,19.955]
Party: Pd (Bersani)	0.000	[0.000,0.000]
Pdl (Berlusconi)	-25.221 ^{***}	[-31.988,-18.454]
M5S (Grillo)	-14.955 ^{***}	[-21.576,-8.334]
Sc (Monti)	-7.006	[-15.715,1.703]
Treatment * Pd	0.000	[0.000,0.000]
* Pdl	9.388 ⁺	[-0.377,19.152]
* M5S	6.132	[-3.134,15.398]
* Sc	2.088	[-9.757,13.933]
Constant	42.638 ^{***}	[39.047,46.230]
Observations	1147	
R^2	0.138	

95% confidence intervals in brackets

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

This finding is best understood when looking at the marginal effects presented in Table 4, which synthetically reports the confidence intervals of the ATEs for supporters of the different parties, allowing us to easily see their overall size and assess the statistical significance of the observed differences. First of all we notice that none of the four effects statistically differs from any of the others: this a first very negative finding for H3.

On average on the three issues, PdL shows the strongest effect: above 24 percentage points. which is anyway the lowest of the four parties. Again contrary to what H3 would suggest, we find a lower ATE on PD's supporters (17 points) than on M5S's one (21). So party age clearly does not seem to have a decisive impact on variance among parties, even if SC, the newest one, shows the lowest effect (13 points) and the only one not significant at the 99,9% level. We also have to consider the large differences in congruence (across different parties) in the control group. For PD supporters the "baseline" congruence in the control group reaches 42%, while for PdL' supporters it is less than 18%, even below random choice. SC has around a one-third congruence rate in the treatment group, and M5S has 28%. From this perspective the party mention in the treatment group seems to be working as a *leveller* for the overall ATEs for the different parties. Electorates whose congruence rates would be significantly different (in terms of their ability to adopt the position of their party without an explicit mention) become very similar once they receive a party mention.

Table 4. Confidence intervals of the different ATEs for supporters of the different parties

	ATE	Delta-method			[95% Conf. Interval]	
		Std. Err.	z	P>z		
treatment						
_at						
PD	14.8616	2.5958	5.73	0.000	9.773928	19.94928
PdL	24.24925	4.245892	5.71	0.000	15.92745	32.57104
M5S	20.99363	3.945099	5.32	0.000	13.26138	28.72588
SC	16.94998	5.450557	3.11	0.002	6.26708	27.63287

These findings leave us no option but to reject H3: we were expecting PD and PdL to have similar effects, and statistically higher than those of the two new parties, but that is not what the data show. On the contrary we have no statistical differences and the highest difference in the effects is among the two old parties. In any case this findings lead us to some considerations about what we are actually observing. The fact the newborn M5S can deploy similar effects to the PD, the last heir of Italian mass parties, definitely points out to the fact that for Italian voters partisan cueing effects do not stream from a deep enduring psychological attachment.

It is however clear that party-specific differences might call into question the relationship between each party and each particular issue. This is confirmed by Table 5, which reports ATEs on different issues for supporters of the four parties. We can see a certain issue-specific variance in the effects from the different parties. First of all, we notice that on the electoral reform the four big parties show similar huge effect (ranging from 25 to 30 percentage points). On the other two issues, they widely differentiate in the ability to shape their own supporters preferences. The party with the overall weakest effect (SC) manages to have the strongest effect on voters' policy preferences on the gay rights issue; on the same issue PD has the weakest effect, a non-statistically significant one. On the house tax issue PdL has the strongest effect and SC a not significant effect. We can see then how party effects rankings are not stable across the three issues.

Going back to H3, from Table 5 we receive more evidence to reject it. It is true that one of the two old parties (PdL) has the strongest oaverall ATE but the other one (PD) has all three effects lower than M5S and on gay rights presents the lowest effect, which is not significant. And on that issue, it is the other new party (SC) that shows the strongest effect, almost 22 points.

Table 5. Average treatment effects for supporters of different parties on various issues

	PD	PdL	SC	M5S	Overall
Electoral reform	25***	29.8***	27.8**	25.5***	26.7***
Rights for gay couples	8	16.8**	21.7*	15.8**	12.7***
House property tax	11.6**	26.2***	1.3	21.7***	15.5***
Overall ATE	14.9***	24.2***	17**	21***	18.3***

5. The role of party identification

So far we have only confronted ATEs on congruence rates on different issues and in general terms. We now want to test the presence of heterogeneous treatment effects across different categories of respondents, beginning from the key distinction between partisans and non-partisans. In other words, we want to test H4: whether there is an impact of party identification on the way party cues affect the answers of the respondents.

We divided our group of supporters of the four selected parties in two subgroups according to the answers to party identification questions: partisans (those close to the preferred party); non-partisans (those not close to the preferred party). Heterogeneous effects within these two groups are observable in Table 6. H4 is fully confirmed: as expected, partisans show a stronger effect: 25 points, from 36 to 61% of party-responder congruence rate, averaged over the three issues. This effect is statistically significant with $p < 0.001$. The effect among non-partisans decreases to 12 points: party cues increase the congruence rate from 32 to 43% (still $p < 0.001$).

Table 6. Regression of treatment inclusion, party identification and their interactions on party-responder congruence rate

	(1)	
	Party ID	
treatment	11.513 ^{***}	[6.277,16.749]
party identification	4.143	[-0.994,9.280]
treatment * party ID	13.643 ^{***}	[6.412,20.874]
Constant	31.679 ^{***}	[27.903,35.455]
Observations	1147	
R^2	0.115	

95% confidence intervals in brackets

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

¹³ We have also provided a similar test including a three-way interaction with the party preference variable together with exposures to the economic crisis and treatment. We did that in order to test if for voters of any specific party we could observe a significant effect of the economic crisis. In particular, we hypothesized that M5S supporters would react to the crisis differently from supporters of the parties holding the technocratic cabinet up. The assumption was that M5S supporters could be influenced regardless of the economic crisis by their party cues because they have found in it a possible political alternative solution to the crisis, while mainstream parties supporters are left with the only choice of maintaining austerity measures. If that was the case we might find no interaction effect of the crisis in the whole sample because it was washed away by the different mechanism applicable to M5S supporters. We do not present the findings here, but for none of the four parties we could observe a significantly different treatment effect between those affected and those not affected by the crisis.

Finally, we present findings of the empirical test of H4b: whether the level of closeness to the preferred party is actually able to discriminate among groups that respond in different ways to the party cues. As we can observe in Table 7, effects grow with the level of closeness with the party, in a pretty orderly way: about 7 additional points from each category to the next. In any case we can immediately observe that the effects on non-partisans and simple sympathizers are not significantly different.

Table 7. Effects of treatment inclusion, party identification level and their interactions on party-respondent congruence rate

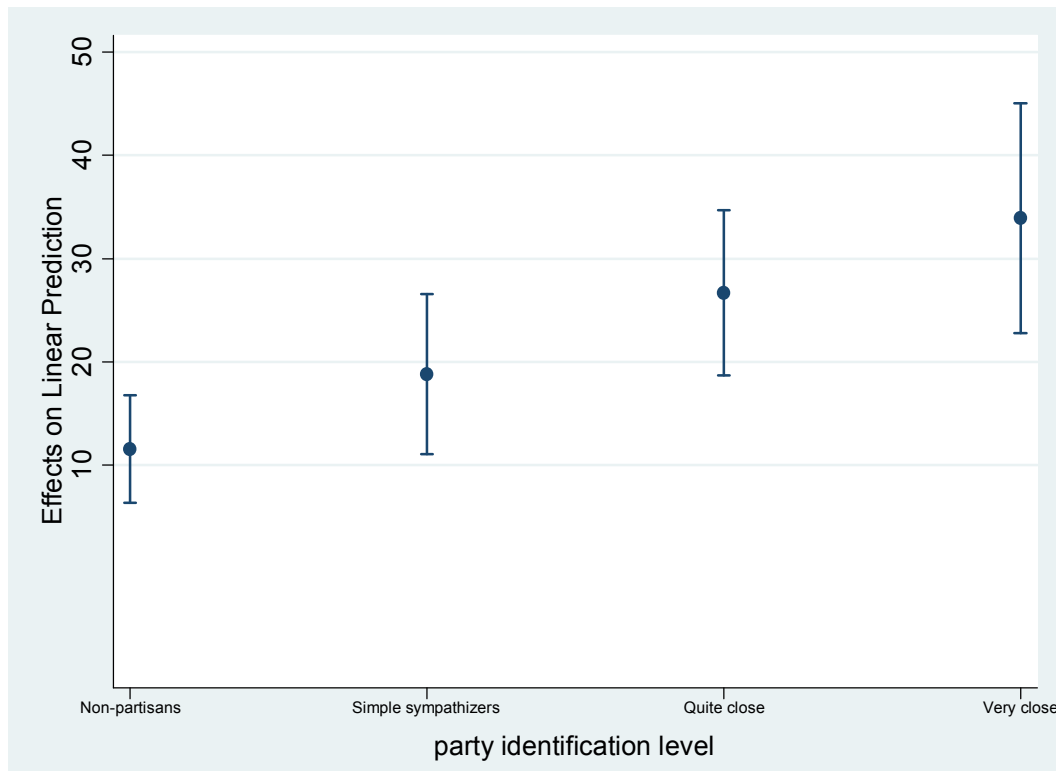
	(1)	
	Party ID level	
treatment	11.513***	[6.290,16.736]
non-partisans	0.000	[0.000,0.000]
simple sympathizers	3.893	[-2.583,10.368]
quite close	5.858 ⁺	[-1.047,12.763]
very close	1.654	[-6.902,10.210]
non-partisans * treatment	0.000	[0.000,0.000]
sympathizers * treatment	7.301	[-2.061,16.662]
quite close * treatment	15.157**	[5.605,24.709]
very close * treatment	22.405***	[10.096,34.714]
Constant	31.679***	[27.912,35.446]
Observations	1147	
R^2	0.122	

95% confidence intervals in brackets

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

But in order to properly test H3b we have to look at the conditional marginal effect, reported in Figure 1. This shows differences that are a bit blurred. First, “quite close” and “very close” groups do not show a statistically significant difference in ATEs among each other, although they significantly differ from the other two categories. Secondly, the effect among “mere sympathizers” is not different from any of the other three groups. In conclusion H3b appears to be only partially supported.

Figure 1. ATEs of treatment inclusion on party-respondent congruence rate conditioned on party identification level (95% c.i.)



6. The impact of an economic and political crisis

Finally we investigate if the economic recession has decreased the ability of parties to influence individual policy preferences. In particular we want to verify if those voters particularly afflicted by the crisis are less receptive to the stimulus of party labels because they no longer trust political parties *tout court*, not even their preferred ones.

We selected those respondents who reported themselves or a family member as unsuccessful job seekers during 2012 (374 respondents out of our 1147 party supporters). Table 8 shows on the left side the regression of the interaction of treatment exposure and this unemployment measure. As you can see, there is a statistically lower congruence for job seekers in the control group, but this does not hold in the treatment group¹³. From this data we have to conclude that H5 is rejected: the economic crisis did not impact on the adoption by voters of party cues shortcut to select policy positions.

Table 8. Effects of treatment inclusion, unsuccessful job seek and their interaction on party-respondent congruence rate

	(1)	
	Job seek	
treatment	17.558 ^{***}	[13.063,22.053]
JobSeek	-5.498 [*]	[-10.946,-0.051]
Treatment * JobSeek	1.462	[-6.417,9.341]
Constant	35.890 ^{***}	[32.629,39.152]
Observations	1145	
R ²	0.082	

95% confidence intervals in brackets

Party*Treatment interaction does not add significant changes.

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

A final test concerns then the potential effect of what should be the direct factor activated by exposure to the economic crisis: a lower trust in parties. Its ability to produce an effect heterogeneity is shown in Table 9. As you can see, the interaction term is positive and significant. The more respondents are likely to vote for their most liked party, as opposed to abstain, the more they are cued by their party. The 0.95 coefficient means that there is a 19 points difference in the treatment effect between those respondents with maximum propensity to abstain and minimum propensity to vote the preferred party and those with opposite propensities.

Table 9. Regression of treatment inclusion, propensity to abstain and their interactions on party-respondent congruence rate

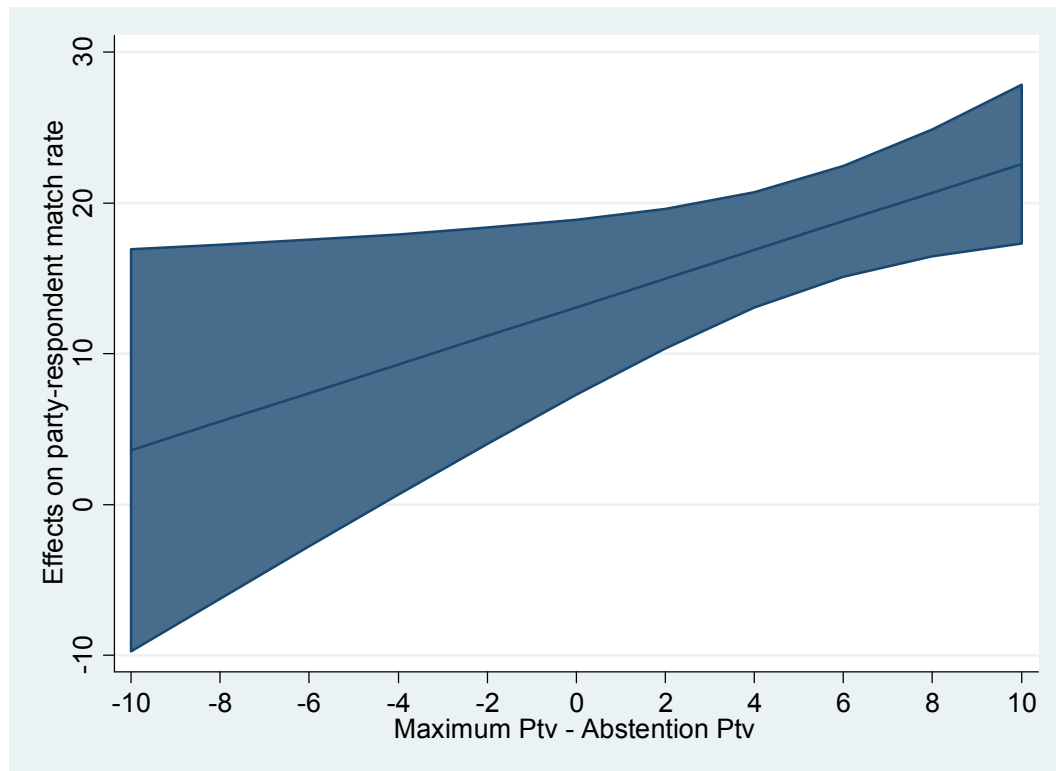
	(1)	
	Propensity to abstain	
treatment	13.085 ^{***}	[7.280,18.889]
Maximum Ptv – Abstention Ptv	0.620 [*]	[0.027,1.213]
Treatment * maxptv-abstptv	0.949 [*]	[0.118,1.781]
Constant	30.529 ^{***}	[26.428,34.630]
Observations	1145	
R ²	0.103	

95% confidence intervals in brackets

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

We have reported in Figure 2 the margin plot graph of this interaction. It visually shows the increasing treatment effects accordingly with trust in parties, a finding supporting H6.

Figure 2. Margin plot of the effect of trust in parties on party-respondent congruence rate (95% c.i.)



We have also adopted another strategy to assess the impact of trust in parties on the partisan cueing effect, using the set of questions dealing with the most important problem facing Italy at the moment. Respondents are first asked what they consider to be the most important problem, then they are asked which government could solve it. One of the possible answers is “none could solve it”. We selected those 342 major parties supporters who gave such answers and compared them with the rest of the sample. Table 10 reports the outcome of the regression of the interaction between treatment inclusion and perceived inability to solve Italian most important problem.

Table 10. Effects of treatment inclusion, perceived inability to solve Italian most important problem and their interactions on party-respondent congruence rate

	(1) All four major parties supporters		(2) Mainstream parties supporters	
treatment	20.053 ^{***}	[15.694,24.413]	20.885 ^{***}	[16.276,25.493]
none could solve the mip	-6.938 [*]	[-12.724,-1.153]	-3.183	[-11.187,4.821]
treatment * no mip solution	-4.572	[-12.571,3.427]	-15.300 ^{**}	[-26.165,-4.435]
Constant	35.841 ^{***}	[32.795,38.888]	36.060 ^{***}	[32.843,39.276]
Observations	1147		903	
R ²	0.094		0.095	

95% confidence intervals in brackets

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

Looking at all the 1147 respondents, we find a significant lower congruence in the control group, but the interaction term is not significant. We have then excluded supporters of M5S, focusing on supporters of the parties who parliamentary supported Monti’s cabinet. We did so considering that the fact that neither a left, a center or a right government could solve Italian most

important problem should be particularly relevant for voters supporting those parties that would lead such governments. A separate test on this subsample is presented in model 2 of Table 10: we can observe a huge negative and significant interaction term. This fits with H6.

Table 11, reporting the confidence interval of the effects on mainstream parties supporters divided by their perception of the ability of parties to solve Italian most important problem, confirms that these two groups are statistically differently affected by the partisan cues. More than that, for those who support one of the three parties supporting Monti’s government and who believe the current political system will not be able to solve what they consider Italian most important problem, the treatment effect is not statistically significant.

Table 11. Confidence intervals of the different ATEs for supporters of mainstream parties feeling at least one coalition could solve Italian most important problem (1) or that none could solve it (2)

	Delta-method					[95% Conf. Interval]	
	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P> z			
treatment							
_at							
1	20.88464	2.348158	8.89	0.000	16.28233	25.48694	
2	5.584826	5.013209	1.11	0.265	-4.240883	15.41053	

From this evidence we can confirm H6: trust in parties has a positive effect on partisan cueing effect, in particular for supporters of mainstream parties.

7. Conclusions

We started this paper with the aim of investigating the ability of parties to shape voters’ preferences on relevant policy issues. The answer appears definitely positive. Our findings show that even when issues are real-world and salient, party cues have a strong and significant effect on voters’ preferences. The share of respondents choosing the policy option endorsed by the preferred party sensibly increases when party labels are explicitly added to the different options. This is in line with party identification theory, which is also confirmed by differences due to partisanship and to decrease of trust in parties, as a result of the economic crisis.

A second interesting finding is heterogeneity of effects across issues and parties: cueing effects tend to vary across different issues (although the very low number of issues did not allow us to more systematically test potential explanatory factors at the issue level: this constitutes a particularly stimulating question for further research) as they do across parties. It is however on this last question that we observed unexpected findings: cueing effects appear as strong in new parties as they are in older, more established parties.

It is interesting to look at these empirical findings in light of the recent economic (and political crisis). In this regard, findings suggest two partially conflicting dynamics. The first is related to differences across groups of voters that had different exposure to the crisis. Those more exposed show weaker party cueing effects. This would suggest a potentially rational response to crisis, with voters becoming less looking at parties for advice, as they become less trustful in them. But, in a partially contrary direction, there is the surprising finding of the lack of differences in cueing ability across different parties. The newly formed M5S appears to have a partisan cueing ability as strong as the two older and more established Pd and Pdl. This appears even more surprising as the M5S has presented an intrinsically contradictory, inconsistent policy programme. This might be considered understandable for a populist, anti-establishment party. But we might have expected its voters, while attracted by its anti-establishment stance, to still be more sceptical in terms of (at least some of the) actual issues, so as to present overall lower cueing effects. On the contrary, such effects are pretty high. This suggests how voters that might have selected the M5S for protest voting, non-policy reasons, appear prone to have their policy preferences shaped by this new party.

To some extent this pattern is not new in Italian politics. It was actually the very first pattern of democratic legitimation at the beginning of the Italian democracy: in a situation of strong ideological conflict after WWII, voters with extremely low levels of education and sophistication were socialized into mass parties, to which they essentially delegated the task of negotiating policy. After several decades, in a time of crisis, once again there are some signs that part of the electorate might be simply switching from one acritical party affiliation to another, without any policy evaluation taking place as an intermediate process, and once again under the influence of a charismatic leader. This does not sound exactly optimistic for the political future of Italy.

Obviously, the proper framing of such findings can only take place in comparative perspective. To what extent are our expectations of effect heterogeneity across parties justified? Isn't there the possibility of the above paradox to be replicated also in other European countries, perhaps even in those with a longer democratic tradition? And what about those with a younger democratic background? All in all, we think this paper demonstrates the potential of an experimental research strategy on partisan cueing effects, when applied to salient, real-world issues. This obviously calls for a comparative extension, which might particularly enlightening especially in times of potential party system change due to the economic crisis.

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Appendix

Experimental questions for the treatment group:

1. One of the topics at the centre of the debate is electoral reform. Several proposals have been advanced in order to change the current law. Which of the following proposals is your favorite?

- [1] The French run-off system, as proposed by the **PD**
- [2] A proportional system with a threshold, similar to the German model, as proposed by **SC**
- [3] The current law, with the introduction of a majority bonus at the national level also for the Senate, as proposed by the **PdL**
- [4] The current system, but with preference voting, as proposed by the **M5S**

- [88] doesn't know
- [99] doesn't answer

2. Another controversial issue concerns the IMU, i.e. the house property tax. Several proposals have been advanced in order to change the current law. Which of the following proposals is your favorite?

- [1] Abolishing the tax for the first house, as proposed by the **M5S**
- [2] Abolishing the tax for the first house and refunding the amount paid in 2012, as proposed by the **PdL**
- [3] Exemption for the first house for low income families, as proposed by the **PD**
- [4] Gradual remodeling of the tax through time, as proposed by **SC**

- [88] doesn't know
- [99] doesn't answer

3. Another relevant theme is rights for homosexual couples. Which of the following proposals is your favorite?

- [1] The introduction of a law that recognizes civil unions, as proposed by the **PD**
- [2] The protection of individual rights for cohabitants, as proposed by **SC**
- [3] Keeping the current law, as proposed by the **PdL**
- [4] Opening a debate towards a new law, as proposed by the **M5S**

- [88] doesn't know
- [99] doesn't answer

Experimental questions for the control group:

4. One of the topics at the center of the debate is the electoral reform. Several proposals have been advanced in order to change the current law. Which of the following proposals is your favorite?

- [1] The French run-off system
- [2] A proportional system with a threshold, similar to the German model
- [3] The current law, with the introduction of a majority bonus at the national level also for the Senate
- [4] The current system, but with preference voting

- [88] doesn't know
- [99] doesn't answer

5. Another controversial issue concerns the IMU, i.e. the house property tax. Several proposals have been advanced in order to change the current law. Which of the following proposals is your favorite?

- [1] Abolishing the tax for the first house
- [2] Abolishing the tax for the first house and refunding the amount paid in 2012
- [3] Exemption for the first house for low income families
- [4] Gradual remodeling of the tax through time

- [88] doesn't know
- [99] doesn't answer

6. Another relevant theme is rights for homosexual couples. Which of the following proposals is your favorite?

- [1] The introduction of a law that recognizes civil unions
- [2] The protection of individual rights for cohabitants
- [3] Keeping the current law
- [4] Opening a debate towards a new law

- [88] doesn't know
- [99] doesn't answer

Table 12. Balance table: regression of typical electoral control variables on the dichotomy treatment/control for supporters of the four major parties

	b	s.e.
Woman	-0.095	(0.122)
Age (classes)	0.024	(0.049)
Education	-0.031	(0.054)
Political interest	0.014	(0.087)
L-R self	-0.031	(0.080)
Church attendance	0.042	(0.039)
2013 Vote choice (center-left)	0.000	(.)
Center-right	-0.043	(0.222)
Center	0.018	(0.228)
M5S	0.289	(0.182)
Others	0.270	(0.377)
DK/NA/Not valid vote	0.453	(0.232)
Constant	-0.049	(0.419)
Observations	1142	
Pseudo R^2	0.005	
<i>AIC</i>	1598.475	
<i>BIC</i>	1658.961	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$