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# The moderating role of identification and campaign exposure in party cueing effects

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## ABSTRACT

In a democracy, citizens are expected to have political opinions. Previous research has shown that citizens, in part, form their opinions by following cues from political parties. Building on this literature, this article argues that these cueing effects are the result of individuals identifying with political parties, leading to parties as credible sources and alignment of attitudes to maintain in-group coherence (motivated reasoning). However, party cues can only be successful when individuals are actually exposed to these cues, which previous research has not explicitly studied. Using survey data ( $N = 20,893$ ) collected from 21 EU member states, this study shows that cueing effects indeed depend on the strength of party identification and the degree of exposure. These results demonstrate the *contingent nature* of party cueing effects which are also changing as party loyalties decrease.

**KEYWORDS** Public opinion; party cues; identities; political behaviour; quantitative survey

An important aspect of democracy is citizens forming opinions in a meaningful way. But how do citizens form their opinions? Already some 50 years ago Converse (1964) argued that the majority of citizens do not have a clear set of beliefs that result in consistent and meaningful opinions. Based on Converse's ideas, Zaller (1992) suggested that citizens' opinions are formed through exposure to elite discourse. He argued that individuals who are persuaded by elite discourse are those that are likely to both receive and accept the message. Whether a message is accepted depends on whether the information flow is either one-sided or two-sided, but also on which party the information comes from. Several other scholars have observed how these party cues indeed affect

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the opinions of their followers (e.g. Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Dalton *et al.* 1998; Kam 2005; Steenbergen *et al.* 2007).

In this article, we focus on party cues as a source of public opinion. We build on literature that argues that these cueing effects depend on party identification (e.g. Goren *et al.* 2009; Green *et al.* 2002; Marks 1999). We argue that through this process, individuals who identify with a political party are inclined to have positive evaluations of their in-group members and feel the need to protect the in-group (see Brewer 1999; Brown 2000; Tajfel 1982). This leads individuals to (a) perceive partisans as a credible and trustworthy source and (b) align attitudes with their identity, through a process of motivated reasoning.

Most studies examining party cues focus on the US, i.e. in a two-party context (e.g. Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Dalton *et al.* 1998; Druckman *et al.* 2013; Goren *et al.* 2009; Kam 2005; Malka and Lelkes 2010). Although this bipolar political environment gives a clear distinction between the in-group party and the out-group party, it remains the question whether these findings hold in an environment of multiple parties. In a multiparty system, the presence of ideologically proximate parties and the need for parties to form coalitions may render the distinction between the in-group and the out-group less clear.

Also, extant research generally employs experimental designs. However, due to limited ecological validity (e.g. Morton and Williams 2010), it is important also to test theory in a real-life setting. There are some studies that use survey data and find evidence of party cue effects (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2005; Steenbergen *et al.* 2007). These studies, however, do not include exposure to party cues in their models. But for a party cue to affect an individual's opinion, it is a necessary condition that an individual is first exposed to it.

In this article, we fill these gaps in the following ways. Firstly, we focus on European, multiparty systems and test whether party cueing theory holds in such systems. Secondly, we test our theory in a real-life setting outside the 'experimental laboratory'. And thirdly, where other non-experimental studies only *assumed* exposure to party cues, we assess who is likely to be exposed to these cues by assessing campaign exposure and what impact it has. For this we make use of survey data ( $N = 20,893$ ), complemented with party cues derived from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker *et al.* 2012). As a topical research area, we focus on the issue of Turkey's potential accession to the European Union.

## Theory

Several authors have described dual-process models of how citizens interpret political information (see Chaiken and Trope 1999). In these models, some individuals are believed to follow a cognitively intense route to form an opinion, while others avoid the effort by using shortcuts. In the cognitively intense

route, an individual uses issue-relevant information and weighs the arguments to come to a conclusion in accordance with the individual's values and preferences. Within different contexts, scholars have labelled this way of forming an opinion differently, such as *systematic processing* (in the heuristic systematic model (HSM), see e.g. Chen and Chaiken 1999) or *central route processing* (in the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), see e.g. Petty and Wegener 1999).

Other individuals are believed to be more likely to apply a less effortful mode of forming an opinion. Instead of considering and weighing all relevant information, individuals may also use shortcuts to come to a conclusion. When forming political opinions, an individual then relies on non-issue-relevant information, such as party cues, to come to a satisfactory, though perhaps not optimal, conclusion. This way of forming an opinion has been labelled *heuristic processing* (HSM) or *peripheral processing* (ELM). Concerning political issues, a major heuristic cue for individuals when forming an opinion comes from source cues (i.e. party cues: Kam 2005).

From these dual-process models, we would expect some individuals to be more likely to follow the more effortful route and others the easier route. In (social) psychology, need for cognition has been recognised as the character trait that explains which route an individual takes (see Cacioppo *et al.* 1996). Others have, however, argued that need for cognition is too general a characteristic and that it may not be sufficient to explain cognitive effort over a variety of topics. Kam (2005) showed that when forming political attitudes, political awareness is better for understanding which individuals use which route.

But why would a party cue actually be a heuristic shortcut to forming political opinions? Several authors have argued that party attachment should be considered as a social identity (e.g. Goren *et al.* 2009; Green *et al.* 2002; Malka and Lelkes 2010), leading to 'party identification'. But if party identity is a social identity, then based on premises from social identity theory (e.g. Brewer 1999; Brown 2000; Tajfel 1982), we would argue that individuals would consider members of the party they identify with to be viewed as members of the in-group and thus are shown a positive bias, whereas members of another party are considered members of an out-group and are consequently shown a negative bias. Hence, members of one's own party are likely to be considered as a credible and trustworthy source, while members of other parties are not. Thus, an individual following the heuristic route may choose the party cue just because the party is a trustworthy source (Slothuus and de Vreese 2010).

But Cohen (2003) showed that even under conditions of effortful processing, party cues were the most prominent predictor of opinion. In four subsequent experimental studies on welfare policy, Cohen found that without information about which party supported a particular policy, participants based their opinion on 'the objective content of the policy and its merit in light of long-held ideological beliefs', but when a party cue was given 'participants assumed that position as their own regardless of the content of the policy' (Cohen 2003: 819).

Also, Cohen showed that the party cue was not the result of more or less cognitive effort, i.e. of systematic or heuristic processing. Participants in the party cue condition showed an equal amount of depth-of-processing, but elaborated by giving meaning to the issue in line with partisan identity.

This can be understood by looking at motivated reasoning (e.g. Druckman *et al.* 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010). The concept of motivated reasoning entails that individuals are motivated to form opinions that are in line with (among others) their identities. Kunda (1990) argues that as individuals would feel obligated to construct a justification for their opinion, they usually access only a biased subset of considerations, with this biased subset originating from a hypothesis-confirmation bias (i.e. in order to prove the hypothesis, an individual is likely only to think of those considerations that support the hypothesis). Kunda explains this as an unintentional and subconscious process, which is in line with Cohen's finding that his participants thought they were not influenced by party cues.

Thus, with party identity being a social identity, individuals who identify with the party are likely to be affected by cues from partisans, independent of whether they use heuristic or systematic processing. If an individual uses heuristic processing, they are likely to follow the partisans because partisans are members of the in-group and thus considered as credible sources; if an individual uses systematic processing, they are likely to follow partisans because they are motivated to form attitudes in line with the in-group.

Cueing effects are thus (likely to be) the result of party identification. However, identification cannot be sufficient for a cueing effect. An understudied but necessary condition for any cueing effect is *exposure* to the cue. Most studies that look at cueing effects employ experimental designs (e.g. Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Druckman *et al.* 2013; Goren *et al.* 2009; Kam 2005; Malka and Lelkes 2010; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010), so exposure to party cues is the result of participation in the experiment (and usually verified through a manipulation check). Whether an experimental cue is considered from the in-group party or an out-group party is usually assessed (prior to the experimental manipulation) by asking participants whether they identify themselves as Democrat or Republican (as most studies are performed in the US).

Two notable exceptions make use of survey data. Steenbergen *et al.* (2007) make use of Eurobarometer data, but aggregate it to 'ideological strata' in order to compare different time points as panel data (not the same individuals, but the same ideological groups). Thus, they do not look at individual exposure. Hooghe and Marks (2005) also use Eurobarometer data, and connect the individual-level data to party cues through the party a respondent reports they intend to vote for in the next general election. They also, however, do not look at whether an individual is likely to have come across a particular cue.

But for any cue to be successful, it needs to reach its audience. Given our argument on party identification above, this means that though party cues depend on exposure, they also depend on exposure to the right individuals:

namely those with strong party identification. That implies a three-way interaction, where a cueing effect depends on both exposure and identification.

## Hypotheses

From the theory described above, we hypothesise as follows. First, an individual is likely to be affected by cues from the party to which this individual feels close, such that the position of the individual on political issues is affected by the position of the party (*H1*).

Second, we argue that cueing effects depend on party identification. Individuals with strong party identification are more likely to be affected by a cue from their party than individuals with weak party identification (*H2*).

Third, we argue that cueing effects also depend on exposure to political information. Increasing likelihood of exposure to political information leads to more cues reaching an individual, and thus to stronger party cue effects (*H3*).

Finally, how do party identification and exposure to political information interact? Does high exposure to political information moderate the effects of party cues similarly for individuals with strong and weak party identification? We hypothesise that the effect of party positions on individual positions is stronger when the individual is exposed to political information, and the effect is strongest for those who also have strong party identification (*H4*).

## Methods

In order to thoroughly test our hypotheses, we need a design that ensures sufficient variation among political parties. We chose to look at parties in the European parliament, ensuring not only variation among the parties overall, but also within each country (as seats in the European Parliament are distributed by a system of proportional distribution, which is related to a higher number of effective parties; e.g. Lijphart 1999). We conducted a survey three weeks prior to the 2009 European Parliament elections. With the upcoming elections, both party articulation of their views and exposure to party communication is higher, ensuring variation in the information supply and exposure of the respondents.

The survey was conducted in 21 EU member states. In selecting which countries to include, we took into consideration that the sample would include larger and smaller member states, countries from north, south, east and west, and long-term and new members of the EU. The countries included were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. From the Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) databases and their partners, a sample was drawn, with quotas enforced on age, gender and education to ensure representativeness. A total of 34,412 respondents participated. The average response rate (AAPOR RR1) was 23%

(with a minimum of 13% in Denmark and a maximum of 46% in Lithuania; for details, see De Vreese *et al.* 2010).

The questionnaire was developed in English and translated by TNS (which also translates the Eurobarometer surveys) into the different languages. As an additional check, all translated questionnaires were retranslated back into English. Irregularities and problems arising from this process were resolved by deliberation.

## **Variables**

### **Dependent variable**

We test our hypotheses on the subject of Turkey's potential accession to the EU. Given the significance both citizens and political parties attribute to this issue, we expect parties to clearly articulate their position on the issue, which is a necessary condition for party cueing effects. Also, as we study political party cues during the European Parliament election campaign, it only seems fit to use a topic of European politics. Consequently, our dependent variable is the degree to which the respondents support Turkey becoming a member of the EU. We asked respondents to answer on a seven-point scale whether they were in favour (6) or against (0) Turkey becoming a member.

### **Partisan cue**

To measure the cue an individual would receive from the party they support, we first need to identify what cues individual parties would send out. To assess this, we made use of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey of 2010 (Bakker *et al.* 2012). In the expert survey, academic experts from each country were asked to score where parties from their country stand on a variety of issues, including parties' positions on the potential accession of Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The answers from these experts were aggregated to the party level by taking the mean of the score given by the individual experts, resulting in one party score. This party score was consecutively linked to our voter survey data through vote intention for the 2009 European Parliament Elections.<sup>2</sup> Using only the combination of parties that are both in the expert survey and the voter survey, we cover a total of 142 parties in 21 countries (see Online Appendix 1 for a complete list of the parties). From our original sample, 20,893 (60.7%) said they intended to vote for one of these parties (7.9% intended not to vote; 31.4% intended to vote for another party).

### **Party identification**

As an indicator of how close a respondent feels to a party, we used the response to a question of how certain the respondent was they were going to vote for that party, mentioned in the vote intention. The respondents answered on a seven-point scale, ranging from (0) very uncertain to (6) very certain.

### Exposure to political information

In an ideal situation, we would assess at the individual level in an unobtrusive manner exactly what information and party cues an individual is exposed to. In a possibly slightly less ideal situation, we have to rely on a self-reported exposure measure. We asked respondents to answer on a seven-point scale, ranging from (0) daily to (6) not at all, whether they have seen anything about the European Parliamentary Elections on television, whether they have read about the elections in a newspaper, and whether they have heard about the elections on the radio. The three items loaded onto one factor (eigenvalue = 2.186; 72.88% explained variance) and formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.813). We calculated the mean of these three items and rescaled the variable so higher scores would indicate higher exposure.

### Control variables

We controlled in our models for a range of variables identified in the literature as important predictors of support for further European integration. These include economic evaluations (e.g. Gabel and Palmer 1995), government satisfaction (e.g. Franklin *et al.* 1995), political interest (e.g. Inglehart 1970) and socio-demographics (see Online Appendix 2 for question wording and descriptive statistics).

### Data analysis

Our data consists of individuals, nested in parties, nested in countries. In Table 1, we present an intercept-only model, to assess the variances at the different levels. Table 1 shows that the individual level accounts for 89.2% of the variance in our sample; the party level accounts for 4.7%; the country level for 6.1%. This means it is prudent to use multilevel modelling techniques, in order to prevent deflated standard errors and thus type I errors (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). We used maximum likelihood estimation. Since we have clear expectations of the direction of effects, all significance tests were performed one-sided. First we show a model to assess the main effect of party cue (Model 1 of Table 2). Second we add the two-way interactions with the vote certainty and campaign

**Table 1.** Intercept-only model explaining support for Turkey's EU membership.

Intercept	2.108*** (0.109)
Variance of random components	
Individual	3.414***
Party	0.221***
Country	0.208***
-2 log likelihood	85,276.356

Note: Entry is ML coefficient with standard error in parentheses.  $N_{individual} = 20,893$ ;  $N_{party} = 142$ ;  $N_{country} = 21$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; + $p < 0.1$ .



exposure separately (Model 2 and Model 3), and consecutively model with both interactions simultaneously (Model 4). Finally, we add the three-way interaction (Model 5). We illustrate the results of the interaction with graphs of the predicted marginal effects for different values of the moderators.

## Results

We first test whether party cues affect opinion (*H1*). As *H1* predicts, Model 1 of Table 2 shows party cues have a significant positive effect ( $b = 0.236$ ,  $SE = 0.025$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). What does this mean substantively? It means that a one-point increase on a seven-point scale on party position (i.e. party more in favour of Turkey becoming a member) leads to an average increase of 0.236 points on a seven-point scale for the voters of this party (i.e. individuals more in favour of Turkey becoming a member). This result supports our first hypothesis.

We now turn to *H2*, which states that party cues have a stronger effect for individuals with higher vote certainty. In Model 2 of Table 2 the results are shown for a model with the two-way interaction between party cue and vote certainty added. As expected, we find a significant positive interaction effect between vote certainty and party cue ( $b = 0.026$ ,  $SE = 0.006$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, individuals with higher vote certainty (i.e. stronger party identification) are more strongly affected by party cues. This finding is illustrated in Figure 1. The solid line represents the marginal effect of party cues at different values of vote certainty. It shows a marginal effect of 0.123 (90%CI [0.051, 0.196]) at the minimum value of vote certainty, and a marginal effect of 0.279 (90% CI [0.225, 0.333]).<sup>3</sup> These results support *H2*.

*H3* states that higher campaign exposure would lead to a stronger party cue effect. This is modelled in Model 3 of Table 2. We find a significant positive coefficient for the interaction between party cue and campaign exposure ( $b = 0.017$ ,  $SE = 0.007$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). This is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows a marginal effect of 0.197 at the minimum value of campaign exposure and 0.298 at the maximum. Although the 90% confidence intervals at the extreme values of campaign exposure overlap ( $CI_{CE=0} \cap CI_{CE=6} = [0.228, 0.256]$ ), a formal test of the difference between the marginal effects at the minimum and maximum of campaign exposure shows a significant difference ( $b_{diff} = 0.101$ ,  $SE_{diff} = 0.046$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ). Having a significant interaction effect and significant different party cue effects within the range of campaign exposure, this supports *H3*.

In Model 4, both interactions are included. It shows that when both interactions are included simultaneously, the moderation of the party cue effect by vote certainty and campaign exposure remains similar to when interactions are included one at a time. This implies that the two moderators moderate the effect of party cues independently.

Finally, we turn to our three-way interaction. *H4* predicts that party cues have stronger effects on individuals who are more exposed to these cues

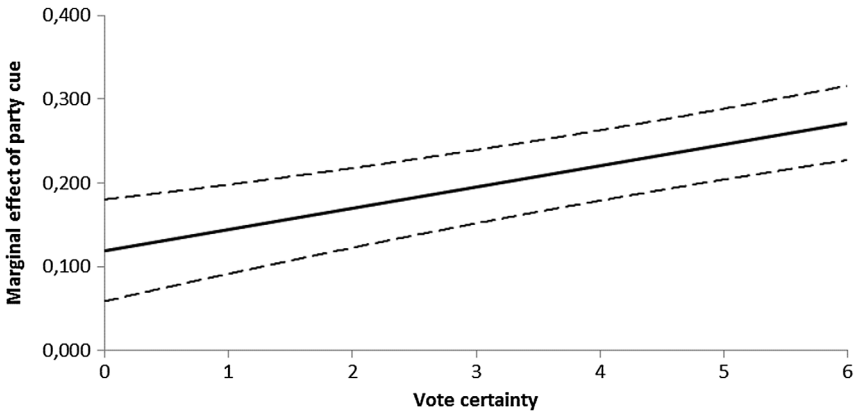


**Table 2.** Multilevel models explaining support for Turkey's EU membership.

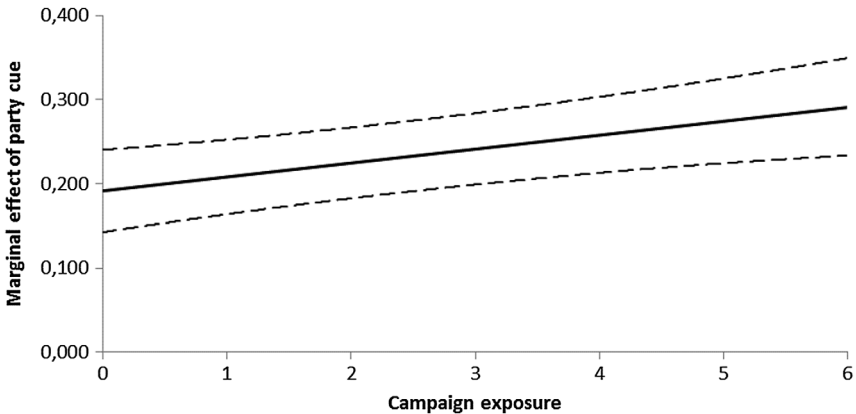
	1	2	3	4	5
Vote certainty	0.010 (0.008)	-0.101*** (0.027)	0.009 (0.008)	-0.095*** (0.028)	-0.042 (0.047)
Campaign exposure	0.010 (0.010)	0.010 (0.010)	-0.061* (0.030)	-0.049+ (0.03)	0.055 (0.079)
Party cue	0.236*** (0.025)	0.123*** (0.037)	0.197*** (0.03)	0.097** (0.039)	0.160** (0.054)
Vote certainty * party cue		0.026*** (0.006)		0.025*** (0.006)	0.010 (0.011)
Campaign exposure * party cue			0.017*** (0.007)	0.014* (0.007)	-0.015 (0.018)
Vote certainty * campaign exposure					-0.023+ (0.017)
Vote certainty * campaign exposure * party cue					0.006* (0.004)
<i>Variance of random components</i>					
Individual	3.339***	3.336***	3.338***	3.336***	3.335***
Party	0.128***	0.128***	0.130***	0.130***	0.130***
Country	0.159***	0.157**	0.157**	0.156**	0.157**
-2 log likelihood	84,760.834	84,743.024	84,754.562	84,738.838	84,735.750

Note: Entries are ML coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The control variables are included in the analysis, but not shown in the table.  $N_{individual} = 20,893$ ;  $N_{party} = 142$ ;  $N_{country} = 21$ .

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; + $p < 0.1$ .



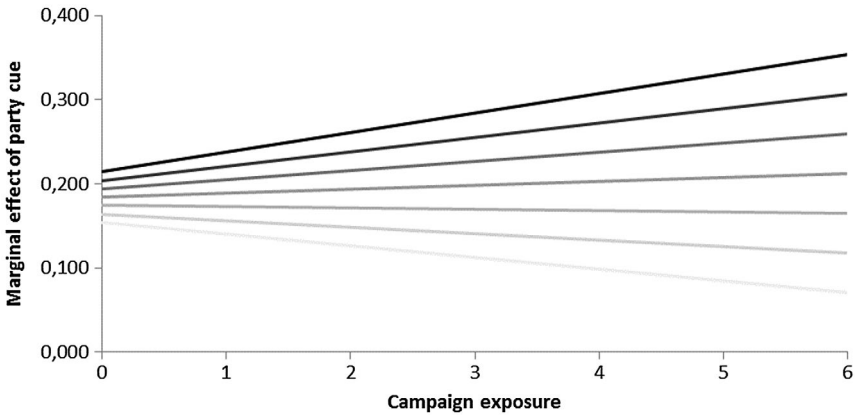
**Figure 1.** Marginal effect of party cue for different values of vote certainty, with 90% confidence interval.



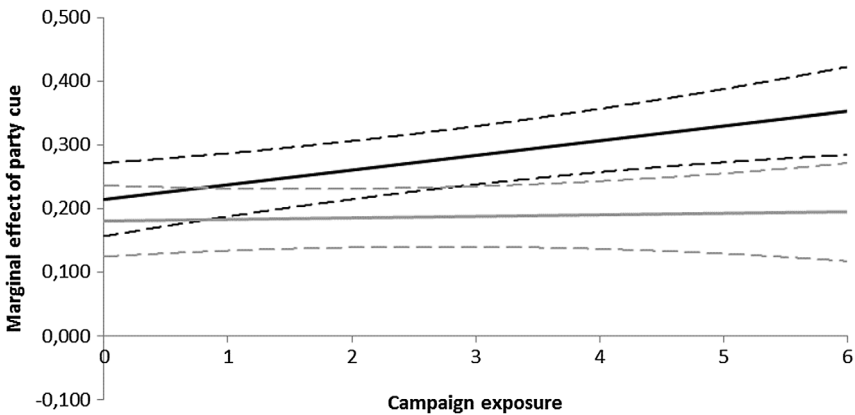
**Figure 2.** Marginal effect of party cue for different values of campaign exposure, with 90% confidence interval.

(through campaign exposure), but that the strength of this moderation also depends on the degree of party identification. This is tested by adding a three-way interaction the results of which are shown in Model 5. The coefficient of the three-way interaction is in the expected direction (positive) and significant ( $b = 0.006$ ,  $SE = 0.004$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ).

To ease the substantial interpretation of this coefficient, we illustrate the three-way interaction in Figures 3 and 4. In both figures, the marginal effect of party cues is plotted against campaign exposure. The different lines in Figure 3 represent the marginal effects for different values of vote certainty. It shows that the higher the value of vote certainty, the more positive the slope, i.e. the stronger the interaction between campaign exposure and party cues. Thus,



**Figure 3.** Marginal effect of party cue. The different lines represent different values of vote certainty: the darker the line, the higher vote certainty. Values of campaign exposure vary across the horizontal axis.



**Figure 4.** Marginal effect of party cue. The solid black line represents the marginal effect of party cue with vote certainty one SD above the mean; the grey line represents the marginal effect of party cue with vote certainty one SD below the mean. Campaign exposure varies across the horizontal axis. The dashed lines represent the 90% confidence interval.

party cues indeed affect individuals most when they are exposed to political information and when they identify strongly with the party.

In Figure 4, the marginal effects for different values of campaign exposure are shown for two values of vote certainty: for the mean plus one SD and for the mean minus one SD. Also, the 90% confidence interval is plotted. Figure 4 shows that at higher values of campaign exposure, the confidence intervals are disjointed. This implies that the marginal effects at higher values of campaign exposure differ significantly between individuals one SD above the mean of vote certainty and individuals one SD below the mean.

So the slopes differ significantly, but are the slopes also significantly different from 0 across the potential values of campaign exposure? A formal test shows that the highest marginal effects at the minimum and maximum values of campaign exposure differ significantly for values with certainty of 4 ( $b_{diff} = 0.066$ ,  $SE_{diff} = 0.047$ ,  $p = 0.083$ ), 5 ( $b_{diff} = 0.104$ ,  $SE_{diff} = 0.048$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) and 6 ( $b_{diff} = 0.142$ ,  $SE_{diff} = 0.055$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). This shows that for higher values of vote certainty, the moderation of the party cue effect by campaign exposure leads to significantly different effects within the potential range of campaign exposure. These findings support *H4*.

## Conclusion

In this article we tested for party cue effects through campaign communication in a multiparty environment in a real-life setting. We argued that through party identification, individuals either use party cues as a heuristic to form opinions, or form opinions based on these cues through a process of motivated reasoning. We hypothesised that the strength of party cue effects depends on the degree to which an individual identifies with a party, the degree to which an individual is likely to be exposed to the cue and a combination of the two. Using a voter survey conducted prior to European Parliament Elections, with party data inserted using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2010 (Bakker *et al.* 2012), we found support for our hypotheses.

These findings support and also add to the literature about party cues. As the existing literature is mostly situated in a two-party context and based on experimental designs, which may suffer from limited ecological validity (e.g. Morton and Williams 2010), this study adds evidence that party cues also occur in a multiparty environment and can also be found in real-life settings. Previous studies already provided non-experimental evidence of party cue effects (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Steenbergen *et al.* 2007), but did not look at exposure to the party cues, rendering the causal process less tangible. A party cue can only have an effect when individuals are exposed to the cue. In experimental studies this was already implicitly tested, as exposure was forced through manipulation. Although we also did not explicitly measure party cue exposure, we did use campaign exposure as a proxy for the likelihood of exposure. And by finding support in this study for hypotheses 3 and 4, we showed that exposure to the cue is indeed moderating, as a conditioning factor, the effect of the party cue. That implies that if parties wish to persuade their constituencies, they really need to put in the effort to reach them.

One might argue that campaign exposure may also function as a proxy for general political engagement, implying that the effects we observed are not due to exposure but due to stronger engagement (see e.g. Price and Zaller 1993). We control in our models for political interest, however. As this is conceptually closer to political engagement, we are confident that our findings are indeed due to the likelihood of exposure to the cue.

Also we have shown that party cues affect opinion in multiparty systems. Although identification of the in-group and the out-group in a two-party system may be clearer, we not only found a party cue effect in multiparty systems, but also a moderation effect of party identification in multiparty systems. But as in multiparty systems most parties will have ideologically proximate parties and, if they wish to be in government, parties need to form coalitions, the lines between the in-group and out-groups may become blurred. That means it would be interesting to see how cues not from an individual's own party but from an ideologically proximate party or a party in coalition with that individual's party affect the individual. Would such a party be considered as part of the in-group, as they are either ideologically close or in coalition? Or would such a party still be considered an adversary party and thus part of the out-group?

In this article, we only focused on positive cueing effects: an individual follows the cue of a party they favour. But an individual is of course also likely to receive cues from other parties: parties which an individual feels perhaps indifferent towards, or parties an individual may dislike (intensely). Goren *et al.* (2009), for instance, experimentally show that individuals display a negative cueing effect when exposed to a cue from an adversary party, but also that this negative cueing effect from an adversary party is stronger than the positive cueing effect of the supported party. Given our theoretical argument that cues originate from party identification as a social identity, it is indeed likely that a negative cueing effect of adversary parties is found. But where party members of one's own party are perceived as members of the in-group and shown a positive bias through a process of in-group favouritism, members of other parties are seen as members of an out-group and shown a negative bias through a process of out-group rejection (e.g. Brewer 1999; Brown 2000; Tajfel 1982), resulting in individuals distancing themselves, also in terms of opinions, from these out-group members. It would of course be an addition to the literature when such negative cues are also modelled in a real-life situation.

We started this article by emphasising that one important aspect of democracy is that citizens form their own meaningful opinions. The conclusions of this study may not be very positive vis-à-vis this aspect of democracy. If party cues work through parties as social identities and citizens form opinions in line with those identities instead of through juxtaposing important considerations, we might question to what degree these opinions are actually meaningful. This in turn raises more fundamental questions about the quality of democracies at large. In this light, the observation that citizens are increasingly detached from political parties may thus not be seen as a threat to democracy, but actually as a blessing, with the potential of increasing the quality of citizens' opinions.

## Notes

1. Answers to this item were given on a seven-point scale, ranging from (1) party 'strongly opposes' to (7) party 'strongly favours'.

2. We also linked parties and individuals using vote intention for the next national elections, which led to comparable results for the main effects. As we did not have a measure for certainty of the national vote, we could not test for the moderation, but are confident that we would also find similar results. In a similar way, we also linked parties and individuals using propensity to vote for each party. But since we measured propensity to vote as the self-reported likelihood to ever vote for each party, this measurement contains elements from both voting behaviour and party identification. Thus by using this particular measure we cannot distinguish between the cue and identification. But linking party cues to our respondents through propensity to vote does lead to similar results (though again without moderations, as interacting variables which share conceptual meaning is statistically not sound).
3. We present here and in following analyses the 90% confidence intervals. We do so because it is more illustrative, but with a more conservative interval (of 95%), the results are similar.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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