

Do Voters Respond to Party Manifestos or to a Wider Information Environment? An Analysis of Mass-Elite Linkages on European Integration

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Recent studies analyze how citizens update their perceptions of parties' left-right positions in response to new political information. We extend this research to consider the issue of European integration, and we report theoretical and empirical analyses that citizens do not update their perceptions of parties' positions in response to election manifestos, but that citizens' perceptions of parties' positions do track political experts' perceptions of these positions, and, moreover, that it is party supporters who disproportionately perceive their preferred party's policy shifts. Given that experts plausibly consider a wide range of information, these findings imply that citizens weigh the wider informational environment when assessing parties' positions. We also present evidence that citizens' perceptions of party position shifts matter, in that they drive partisan sorting in the mass public.

According to the responsible party model, the link between parties' policy positions and their supporters' policy beliefs is crucial for representative democracy. Parties are the conduit through which citizens articulate their policy preferences (Sartori 1968), and previous research identifies close matches on many salient issues between party elites' policy positions and their supporters' viewpoints (e.g., Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011, chap. 6; Iversen 1994).

In a dynamic setting where parties shift their policies over time, mass-elite linkages can be maintained through some combination of elites responding to their supporters and supporters responding to elites. Party elites may adjust their policies in response to their supporters' beliefs; supporters may update their policy views in response to shifts in parties' positions; or citizens may update their party support in response to parties' policy shifts. We la-

bel the latter two processes, whereby citizens respond to parties, as *partisan sorting* (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

We analyze the dynamics of mass-level partisan sorting on *European integration*, an increasingly salient cleavage in numerous polities, including Greece, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal, whose governments have encountered widespread public disapproval of the austerity policies they implemented to conform with the terms of international loans; Germany, where the fall 2013 national election was projected to feature heated debates over the terms and advisability of (past and future) financial assistance packages to distressed European Union (EU) member states; and Britain, where Prime Minister David Cameron has promised a national referendum on European integration for 2017 (assuming the Conservatives are reelected in 2015). We evaluate whether citizens' perceptions of party shifts on European integration

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track the content of the parties' election manifestos along with *political experts'* perceptions of party shifts. Because these experts, namely, the political scientists and journalists surveyed in the Chapel Hill expert surveys (see, e.g., Hooghe et al. 2010), can weigh all relevant information—including party elites' speeches, interviews, parliamentary debates, and policy manifestos, along with governing parties' coalition arrangements and policy outputs—experts' perceptions plausibly reflect parties' positions based on a wide range of information. Hence, if citizens respond to the global information environment, their perceptions should track experts' perceptions of party policy shifts more closely than they track party shifts as estimated from parties' manifestos alone (the *expert perceptions hypothesis*). Second, we argue that a party's current supporters are the most likely to perceive their party's policy shifts because supporters disproportionately seek out information about the party and believe its policy promises (the *partisan perceptions hypothesis*). Third, and related, we argue that partisan sorting will track experts' perceptions of party shifts more closely than it tracks the content of party manifestos (the *partisan sorting hypothesis*).

Our study of 12 Western European party systems from 1999 to 2009 produces four findings. First, we find no relationship between parties' shifts on European integration as perceived by political experts and parties' shifts based on the manifestos they published in the run-ups to European parliamentary elections and national elections. This implies that experts do not significantly update their perceptions in response to party manifestos.

Second, and related, we find no relationship between citizens' perceptions of parties' shifts on European integration and shifts in the policy statements the parties published in their manifestos. This pattern suggests that rank-and-file citizens—in common with experts—do not significantly weigh party manifestos when estimating party positions.

Third, however, we find that citizens' perceptions of parties' policy shifts on European integration *do* track experts' perceptions. Specifically, when these experts perceive that a focal party has shifted its stance on European integration, rank-and-file citizens typically shift their perceptions in the same direction. This supports our expert perceptions hypothesis. We also find that party supporters' perceptions of their preferred party's policy shifts track experts' perceptions especially well, a pattern that supports our partisan perceptions hypothesis.

Fourth, we find support for our partisan sorting hypothesis, in that when experts perceive parties shifting their positions on Europe, the viewpoints of these parties' supporters typically shift in the same direction. To the extent that experts estimate party positions based on

a wide range of information, this pattern implies a causal process whereby citizens react to this wider informational environment by updating their policy beliefs and/or their party support.

Our findings have interesting implications for parties' election strategies and for political representation. First, our conclusion that rank-and-file citizens and political experts have similar perceptions of party shifts on European integration is encouraging for representative democracy. We document below that parties' shifts on this issue, as perceived by experts, were generally quite modest across the 1999–2009 period of our study, and we might doubt that rank-and-file citizens could detect such subtle party policy adjustments. Yet—remarkably, in our view—citizens' perceptions track the perceptions of political experts who are well versed in party politics, and furthermore, our partisan sorting analyses suggest that citizens *react* to the party shifts they observe by updating their policy views and/or their party support. Second, our finding that parties' current supporters disproportionately perceive party policy shifts on Europe is relevant to the responsible party model of representation (Dalton 1985; Ezrow et al. 2011; Sartori 1968) because it suggests that parties are motivated to behave “responsibly” toward their supporters' viewpoints on this issue: For, to the extent that parties' core supporters disproportionately perceive their preferred party's policy shifts, parties can consolidate support among their core partisans by shifting their positions to represent these partisans' viewpoints, without sacrificing support among other segments of the electorate who are less likely to perceive the party's shift.

What Types of Information Do Citizens Weigh When Estimating Party Policy Shifts, and Which Citizens Perceive These Shifts? Hypotheses

Although the question of how political elites can alter their party's policy image is central to elections, there is little empirical research on this issue outside the United States. European-based research by Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu (2011) emphasizes citizens' reactions to parties' election manifestos and concludes that parties have limited abilities to alter their policy images via these manifestos. This disconnect is striking given evidence from elite interviews that politicians endeavor to campaign based on these manifestos (Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu 2011, 372), but it is plausibly illuminated by research suggesting that parties' manifestos do not reliably predict their

policies in government (see, e.g., Budge et al. 2012, chap. 10). If voters perceive a disconnect between parties' rhetoric and their subsequent policy behavior, these citizens may feel justified in discounting the policies parties articulate in their manifestos.

Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) extend this line of research, noting that studies on American politics typically evaluate whether American parties' policy images in the mass public track politicians' observed *behavior*, notably the legislative voting records of their congressional delegations (see, e.g., Hetherington 2001; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Fortunato and Stevenson argue (2013, 1460) that this comparison suggests that "if the analysis of the perceptions of European voters were to change its focus from party promises to party actions, we may well find a link between party positions and voter perceptions." The authors report analyses of voters' party placements from 18 democracies and conclude that citizens weigh an important feature of parties' observed behavior, namely, the compositions of governing coalitions.

Additional research implying that citizens update their perceptions in response to parties' observed behavior are studies by Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002), Soroka and Wlezien (2010; see also Wlezien and Soroka 2012), and Jennings (2009), demonstrating that public opinion in Western democracies responds thermostatically to government policy outputs, in that when government spending increases (decreases), the public's preference for more spending decreases (increases).¹ While these studies do not directly analyze voter perceptions of parties' positions, their findings imply that (some) citizens observe changes in government policy outputs, which suggests in turn that citizens update their perceptions of governing parties' positions in response to these outputs.

The research summarized above suggests that parties' policy images may not primarily reflect their election manifestos. Here we extend these studies to consider a measure of parties' policy positions that plausibly incorporates a wide range of information, namely, *political experts'* party placements. Experts are free to weigh all relevant information when estimating parties' policy positions, including the content of party elites' speeches, interviews, parliamentary debates, and policy manifestos; their coalition arrangements; and the policies they enact in government. In Benoit and Laver's influential study (2006, 230), for example, experts are instructed in the questionnaire to take "all aspects of party policy into account" when judging parties' left-right policy positions. Other scholars echo this view that experts weigh mul-

iple information sources (see, e.g., Mair 2001; Marks et al. 2007), and the designers of the Chapel Hill expert survey—the survey we rely on below—state that "if an expert is asked to place a party on an issue or ideological dimension, she will tap various sources of information, such as a party's manifesto, campaigning and parliamentary behavior" (Bakker et al. Forthcoming, 9).

Of course, experts' perceptions are not infallible. However, we believe they consider extensive information beyond that contained in party manifestos, and while it is an open question whether rank-and-file voters respond to the same informational cues as experts, these voters plausibly weigh information besides manifestos, an expectation supported by previous research that identifies stronger cross-sectional links between voters' and experts' party placements than between voters' party placements and codings of party manifestos (see Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011, chap. 5; also see Bakker et al. Forthcoming). These considerations motivate our first hypothesis:

H1 (The Political Experts Hypothesis): Parties' policy images in the mass public will track experts' perceptions more closely than they will track the statements in parties' election manifestos.

A corollary to H1 is that *partisan sorting* in the mass public, whereby citizens update their policy views and/or their party support in response to parties' policy positions, should track experts' perceptions of party positions more closely than it tracks the statements in parties' manifestos:

H2 (The Partisan Sorting Hypothesis): Mass-level partisan sorting will track experts' perceptions of party positions more closely than it tracks the statements in parties' election manifestos.

Why Party Supporters May Disproportionately Perceive Their Preferred Party's Policy Shifts

There are several reasons why a focal party's supporters may disproportionately perceive their preferred party's policy shifts. First, previous research suggests that partisans typically possess more information about their preferred party than they do about rival parties. Formally affiliated party members, for instance, are eligible to attend local branch meetings, receive direct communications from their party in the form of newsletters, and are invited to attend meetings with party officials that are not open to the general public (see, e.g., Haidar and Saglie 2003). More generally, empirical studies document that party elites interact disproportionately with citizens who

¹We thank an anonymous reviewer for stressing this point to us.

are copartisans (e.g., Janda and Colman 1998; Scarrow 1996, 2000; Tavits 2012), whereas experimental research concludes that many citizens are “motivated reasoners” who disproportionately seek out information about the political parties and candidates they evaluate positively (see, e.g., Redlawsk 2002).

A second consideration pertains to citizens’ evaluations of party elites’ policy statements. Previous research on partisan cueing (see, e.g., Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Carsey and Layman 2006) concludes that citizens judge the policy promises and arguments issued by their preferred party as more credible than those issued by other parties. As Goren, Federico, and Kittilson argue:

If the cue giver and recipient share a party label, the latter will trust the former and accept the message without reflecting much on message content. But if the cue giver and the message recipient lie across the partisan divide, the recipient will mistrust the source and reject the message, again without much reflection. (2009, 806)

This literature on elite policy cues suggests that a focal party’s supporters should accept elites’ policy statements as sincere expressions of these politicians’ beliefs, whereas rival parties’ supporters (and independents) may discount these communications as “strategic” or “insincere” promises, designed to pander to public opinion but which misrepresent the party’s true policy intentions. In this regard, rival parties’ elites may encourage their supporters to distrust other parties’ policy promises by highlighting internal contradictions and ambiguities in these parties’ policy programs (see, e.g., Tomz and Van Houweling 2012).

These considerations summarized above motivate our third hypothesis:

H3 (The Partisan Perceptions Hypothesis): When a focal party’s statements and/or behavior indicate it has shifted its policy position, its supporters disproportionately perceive this policy shift.

Empirical Tests: Data and Models

In order to evaluate our hypotheses, we require longitudinal, cross-national measures of parties’ stances on European integration as perceived by experts and by rank-and-file voters, along with measures based on parties’ manifestos. Our measure of voters’ perceptions of party positions is based on survey respondents’ party placements in the European Election Studies (EES), which were administered in Austria, Britain, Denmark, Finland,

France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.² In these surveys, which were administered around the time of the European parliamentary elections held in 1999, 2004, and 2009, approximately 1,000 respondents per country were presented with a scale running from 1 (“European unification has already gone too far”) to 10 (“it should be pushed further”) and were also asked to place each national party that contested the European parliamentary election.

Our measure of experts’ perceptions of party positions is derived from the Chapel Hill expert surveys (see Bakker et al. Forthcoming; Hooghe et al. 2010), in which respondents who were considered experts on the focal country’s politics were asked to place each party in the party system on a scale running from 1 (“strongly opposed towards European integration”) to 7 (“strongly in favor of European integration”). We used these survey responses to compute experts’ perceptions of the parties’ positions. We rely on the 1999, 2002, 2006, and 2010 versions of the Chapel Hill surveys, and we used linear interpolations of these data to calibrate the experts’ party placements against voter placements derived from the 1999, 2004, and 2009 EES surveys. We recalibrated experts’ party placements from the original 1–7 scale in the Chapel Hill surveys to a 1–10 scale that matches the end points of the scale presented in the EES surveys.³

Finally, our manifesto-based measure of party positions was derived from the European Manifesto Project (EMP) codings of the statements in the manifestos the parties published in the run-ups to European parliamentary elections held in 1999, 2004, and 2009. (Below we report sensitivity analyses based on codings of parties’ national election manifestos.) The procedure the EMP used to map parties’ positions was as follows: the coders counted and coded the percentage of each Euromanifesto dedicated to various issue areas, and then the total percentages for 14 pro-EU and 15 anti-EU issues were calculated by subtracting the percentage of anti-EU mentions from the percentage of pro-EU issue mentions. These codings run from –100 (maximum anti-EU score) to +100 (maximum pro-EU score). We rescaled these EMP codings to the same 1–10 scale used for experts’ and EES respondents’ party placements.⁴

²We exclude Belgium and Sweden from our study because subjects were not asked for their party placements in 2004, which interrupts time-series data for these countries, and we exclude Luxembourg because the Chapel Hill expert surveys do not include Luxembourg.

³Specifically, we set each expert respondent i ’s placement x_{ij} of party j on the 1–7 scale to the value $[1.5(x_i) - 0.5]$, which recalibrates these placements to a 1–10 scale.

⁴Details on the methodology for coding Euromanifestos can be found on the website associated with the project: <http://www>.

Model Specifications

We specify regression models to evaluate whether citizens' perceptions of parties' policy shifts track the parties' positions as coded in their Euromanifestos and based on the Chapel Hill experts' party placements, and whether party supporters disproportionately perceive their party's policy shifts. In our initial models, the dependent variable is the *change* in the party's policy image in the mass public between the year of the current European parliamentary election and the year of the previous election, defined as the *difference* between the party's mean perceived position in the current European Election Survey (EES) and its mean perceived position in the previous EES survey.⁵ We label this variable [*Party j's perceived shift – EES respondents (t)*]. Our key independent variables are [*Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)*] and [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*], which denote party *j*'s position shift between the current and the previous European parliamentary elections based on the codings of the parties' Euromanifestos and the Chapel Hill experts' party placements, respectively. We estimated the parameters of three different models in which we regressed citizens' perceptions of party shifts on these independent variables:

Manifestos model:

$$\begin{aligned} & [\textit{Party } j\textit{'s perceived shift} - \textit{EES respondents } (t)] \\ & = b_0 + b_1[\textit{Party } j\textit{'s shift} - \textit{Euromanifestos } (t)] \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Experts model:

$$\begin{aligned} & [\textit{Party } j\textit{'s perceived shift} - \textit{EES respondents } (t)] \\ & = b_0 + b_1[\textit{Party } j\textit{'s perceived shift} - \textit{experts } (t)] \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Multivariate model:

$$\begin{aligned} & [\textit{Party } j\textit{'s perceived shift} - \textit{EES respondents } (t)] \\ & = b_0 + b_1[\textit{Party } j\textit{'s shift} - \textit{Euromanifestos } (t)] \\ & + b_2[\textit{Party } j\textit{'s perceived shift} - \textit{experts } (t)], \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where

ees-homepage.net/seiten/euromanifestos.html. To rescale the EMP codings to a 1–10 scale, we rescale each Euromanifesto coding x_j of a party *j* on the –100 to +100 Euromanifesto scale to the value $[0.045(x_j) + 5.5]$.

⁵Although our variables are measured in terms of “changes,” when corresponding model parameters are estimated including variables measured based on “levels,” the results are unchanged.

[*Party j's perceived shift – EES respondents (t)*] is the change in party *j*'s mean perceived position on European integration at the current European parliamentary election compared with its mean perceived position at the previous election, based on the party placements of all EES respondents who provided valid party placements; [*Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)*] is the change in party *j*'s position on European integration at the current European parliamentary election *t* compared to the previous election *t* – 1, based on the codings of the policy statements in the party's Euromanifestos; [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*] is the change in party *j*'s position on European integration in the year of the current European parliamentary election *t* compared with its position in the year of the previous election *t* – 1, based on the mean party placements provided by the experts interviewed in the Chapel Hill expert surveys.

For all three variables, the parties' positions are calibrated along identical 1–10 scales.

Results

We estimated the parameters of Equations (1–3) on the set of party shifts in our data set for all parties that featured at least 20 supporters in each EES survey.⁶ Our analysis encompassed 78 shifts by parties in 12 European party systems: Austria, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.⁷ Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations of the values of the variables in our data set, which suggest that most political parties did not substantially shift their stances on European integration during the period of our study: The mean magnitudes of parties' shifts—whether based on experts' perceptions, survey respondents' perceptions, or the manifesto codings—are roughly 0.4 to 0.5 units on the 1–10 policy scales (see column 3), whereas even the largest inter-election party policy shifts are fewer than 1.5 units (see columns 4–5). While political experts are plausibly capable of monitoring such incremental party policy shifts, we might expect this to strain the capacities of rank-and-file citizens. Yet our computations below support different conclusions.

⁶We specified this 20-supporter threshold because we are interested in policy shifts by politically significant parties. However, analyses of all parties regardless of size support the same conclusions we report below (these analyses can be found in Table A2 in the online supporting information).

⁷Table A1 in the Supporting Information document lists the parties included in the analyses.

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics: Dependent and Independent Variables

| | Mean Value (1) | Standard Deviation (2) | Mean Absolute Value (3) | Minimum Value (4) | Maximum Value (5) |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)</i> | -.11 | .39 | .31 | -1.05 | +1.31 |
| <i>Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)</i> | -.08 | .73 | .57 | -1.89 | +1.90 |
| <i>Party j's perceived shift – EES respondents (t)</i> | .14 | .61 | .51 | -1.35 | +1.41 |

Note: N = 78. Each variable is calibrated along a 10-point scale where higher numbers denote a more positive stance vis-à-vis European integration. These variables are defined in the text.

Our data set should be regarded as time-series cross-sectional. Estimating a simple regression on the pooled data can lead to erroneous conclusions if there are unobserved differences between parties (Hsiao 2003); we address these concerns through the use of robust standard errors clustered by party (Rogers 1993).⁸ We note that we performed Lagrange multiplier tests that indicated that serial correlation is not present in our model.

Before we report our model coefficients, we note that we identify no relationship between our two independent variables, namely, parties' shifts on European integration as coded from their Euromanifestos and party shifts as perceived by experts. The Pearson correlation between the [*Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)*] variable and the [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*] variable is +0.04 (i.e., it is near zero and statistically insignificant). We believe this (non)finding is important: If experts do not update their perceptions of parties' policies based on their manifestos, then we might not expect ordinary citizens to react to parties' manifestos—nor should we downgrade our assessments of citizens' political capacities if they fail to do so.

We report the parameter estimates for our models in Table 2, where the dependent variable, [*Party j's perceived shift – EES respondents (t)*], is the change in EES respondents' perceptions of party *j*'s position between the years of the current and the previous elections to the European Parliament. Column 1 reports the parameter estimates for the manifesto model given by Equation (1) above, which calibrates citizens' perceptions against changes in the Euromanifesto codings of party positions. The coefficient estimate on the [*Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)*] variable is near zero and statistically insignificant, which implies that citizens—like experts—do not update their perceptions of parties' positions in response to party manifestos.

⁸We reestimated the parameters of our models using standard errors clustered by election, and these parameters supported substantive conclusions that were identical to those we report below.

TABLE 2 Analyses of Citizens' Perceptions of Parties' Policy Shifts on European Integration

| | Manifesto Model (1) | Experts Model (2) | Multivariate Model (3) |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)</i> | | .26** (.08) | .26** (.08) |
| <i>Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)</i> | -.17 (.16) | | -.19 (.14) |
| Intercept | .12 (.07) | .16* (.06) | .14* (.06) |
| Adjusted R ² / N | .01 / 78 | .09 / 78 | .11 / 78 |

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. For these analyses, the dependent variable was the change in the focal party's perceived position on European integration between the current European parliamentary election and the previous election, as perceived by all European Election Study respondents. The independent variables are defined in the text.

**p ≤ .01, *p ≤ .05, two-tailed tests.

Column 2 in Table 2 reports parameter estimates for the experts specification given by Equation (2) above. Here we estimate statistically and substantively significant effects: The parameter estimate on the [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*] variable, +0.26, is statistically significant (p < .01) and implies that, ceteris paribus, a one-unit over-time shift in the experts' perceptions of a focal party's stance on European integration is associated with an 0.26-unit shift in citizens' perceptions of that party's position in the same direction, where experts' and citizens' party placements are both calibrated along 1–10 scales.

Column 3 in Table 2 reports parameter estimates for the multivariate specification given by Equation (3) above. Consistent with the estimates reported for Equations (1–2), our coefficient estimate on the [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*] variable, +0.26, is again large

and statistically significant ($p < .01$), whereas our estimate on the [*Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)*] variable is again small and insignificant. Overall, the coefficient estimates reported in Table 2 support the political experts hypothesis, that parties' policy images in the mass public track experts' perceptions more closely than they track the statements in these parties' election manifestos.

Empirical Tests of the Partisan Perceptions Hypothesis

To evaluate the partisan perceptions hypothesis, that party supporters disproportionately perceive their preferred party's policy shifts, we reestimated the parameters of our multivariate model (Equation (3) above) while computing the values of our dependent variable, [*Party j's perceived shift – EES respondents (t)*], on three different subgroups of respondents in the EES: the *party's current supporters*, defined as respondents who reported that they supported the focal party in the current EES survey; *rival parties' supporters*, who supported a different party from the focal party; and *political independents*, who reported that they did not support any party. We distinguish rival parties' supporters from political independents because previous research documents that independents display substantially lower levels of political interest and knowledge than party identifiers, factors that may hamper independents' abilities to track parties' policy shifts (see, e.g., Arceneaux, Johnson, and Murphy 2012).

Table 3 reports parameter estimates on the multivariate model, with the dependent variable, [*Party j's perceived shift – EES respondents (t)*], computed over the party's current supporters, rival parties' supporters, and political independents. The partisan perceptions hypothesis implies that the coefficient estimate on our key independent variable, [*Party j's shift – experts (t)*], should be larger with respect to the focal party's supporters than with respect to rival parties' supporters and independents. The estimates reported in Table 3 support this expectation. The coefficient estimate on the [*Party j's shift – experts (t)*] variable is +0.37 for the focal party's supporters model (column 1), which is statistically significant ($p < .01$) and implies that a one-unit over-time shift in the Chapel Hill experts' perceptions of a party's stance on European integration is associated with a 0.37-unit shift in the focal party's supporters' perceptions of the party's position in the same direction. By contrast, the estimate on the [*Party j's shift – experts (t)*] variable for the rival parties' supporters model and the independents model is roughly +0.20 for both models (see columns 2–3); while these estimates are statistically significant ($p < .05$), they are only a little more

TABLE 3 Analyses of Citizens' Perceptions of Parties' Policy Shifts on European Integration: Subgroup-Based Analyses

| | Focal Party's Supporters (1) | Rival Parties' Supporters (2) | Independents (3) |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)</i> | .37** (.08) | .20* (.09) | .21* (.10) |
| <i>Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)</i> | –.59** (.21) | –.14 (.15) | –.21 (.21) |
| Intercept | .12 (.08) | .12 (.07) | .19* (.07) |
| Adjusted R ² / N | .20 / 77 | .05 / 76 | .06 / 77 |

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. For these analyses, the dependent variable was the change in the focal party's perceived position on European integration at the time of the current European parliamentary election compared to the previous election, as perceived by different groups of respondents to the European Election Study surveys: the focal party's supporters (column 1), rival parties' supporters (column 2), and independents (column 3). The independent variables are defined in the text.

** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$, two-tailed tests.

than one-half the magnitude of the +0.37 estimate for the focal party's supporters model. Furthermore, the differences between the coefficient estimate on the [*Party j's shift – experts (t)*] variable for the focal party's supporters model versus the coefficient estimates for the rival parties' supporters model and the independents model are statistically significant ($p < .05$), which supports the partisan perceptions hypothesis. In addition, our estimates continue to support the political experts hypothesis.

Finally, we conducted robustness checks that are reported in the supporting information, including analyses of the effects of removing outliers from the data set (Tables A3–A4); analyses of the possible effects of errors in our measurements of the independent variables (Table A6); analyses that incorporated country fixed effects (Table A5); analyses of parties' national election manifestos as opposed to their Euromanifestos (Table A13); and analyses that incorporated control variables including party size and governing status, parties' left-right positions, the positions of governing parties' coalition partners, and the "party family" of the party (Tables A9–A11). These analyses continue to support our substantive conclusions.⁹

⁹We thank two anonymous reviewers for suggesting these analyses. As outlined in the supporting information, the two most interesting results suggested by these analyses are, first, that errors in the measures of our independent variables likely lead us to underestimate

In toto, our estimates support the political experts hypothesis and the partisan perceptions hypothesis. Consistent with the political experts hypothesis, we find that rank-and-file voters' perceptions of parties' position shifts on European integration track experts' perceptions of these shifts but *do not* track the Euromanifesto codings. This suggests that citizens are not moved by parties' manifestos when updating their perceptions of parties' positions, but that citizens—along with political experts—respond to the wider informational environment that encompasses party elites' speeches, interviews, parliamentary debates, coalition arrangements, and legislative votes. And, consistent with the partisan perceptions hypothesis, we find that party supporters' perceptions of their preferred party's policy shifts track experts' perceptions more closely than do the perceptions of rival parties' supporters and of political independents.

Evaluating the Partisan Sorting Hypothesis

Our findings on citizens' perceptions of party policy shifts are arguably important to the extent that citizens also *react* to party shifts by updating their own policy viewpoints and/or their party support, that is, that we observe mass-level *partisan sorting*. While previous studies document that citizens take policy cues from parties on European integration (Gabel 1998; Ray 2003; Steenbergen, Edwards, and De Vries 2007) and also at times choose parties based on this issue (De Vries 2007), we are unaware of studies that evaluate citizens' reactions to parties' *policy shifts* on European integration. Here we evaluate the partisan sorting hypothesis, that mass-level partisan sorting tracks experts' perceptions of party positions more closely than it tracks parties' election manifestos.

In analyses based on panel data, we might parse out the extent to which voters react to parties' policy shifts by updating their party support as opposed to their policy views. However, because our data are time-series cross-sectional, we instead estimate the extent to which *either* of these processes takes place. We reason that to the extent that parties' policy shifts prompt citizens to update either their party support or their policy views, we should observe that when a party shifts its position, then the mean position of the party's supporters shifts in the same direction (see, e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989). This test is simple, and it is also incomplete in that even if

the strength of the association between voters' and experts' perceptions of party policy shifts; and second, that there is suggestive evidence that voters' and experts' perceptions of the policy shifts of anti-EU parties align more closely than do their perceptions of pro-EU parties.

we find evidence that parties' policy shifts correlate with their supporters' shifts, we cannot parse out whether this reflects a causal process of voters reacting to parties as opposed to parties reacting to voters. We will address this issue via analyses of *lagged* relationships between parties' policy shifts and shifts in their supporters' positions.

We specify a multivariate regression model in which our measure of the position of each party's partisan constituency is the mean self-placement on the European integration scale of all European Election Study respondents in that election who supported the focal party.¹⁰ Our dependent variable is the change in the mean position of the focal party's supporters between the current European parliamentary election and the previous election. We label this variable [*Party j supporters' mean shift (t)*]. Our key independent variables are again [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*] and [*Party j's shift – Euromanifestos (t)*]. We also include lagged versions of both independent variables, first in order to parse out the causal inference issues discussed above, and second because research by Carmines and Stimson (1989) identifies time lags before citizens react to parties' policy shifts. We also include a lagged version of the dependent variable that controls for serial correlation that is otherwise present in the model.¹¹

Table 4 reports parameter estimates for the specification described above, with robust standard errors clustered by party (Rogers 1993).¹² If party supporters' positions track experts' perceptions of their preferred party, we should estimate a positive coefficient on the [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t)*] variable and also possibly on the lagged version of this variable. Indeed, the estimates on both variables are positive, and, crucially, we estimate a significant ($p < .01$) coefficient of +0.40 on the *lagged* variable [*Party j's perceived shift – experts (t – 1)*], which indicates that, *ceteris paribus*, a unit shift in a party's position as perceived by the Chapel Hill experts at the previous time period is associated with a shift of

¹⁰The text of the party identification question in the European Election Study surveys is as follows: "Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?"

¹¹We also estimated the parameters of the model while omitting the lagged dependent variable (Table A12 in the supporting information), and these estimates supported substantive conclusions identical to those we report below.

¹²We note that the estimate on the lagged variable [*Party j's supporters' shift (t – 1)*] is negative and significant, indicating that party supporters' positions tend to shift in *opposite* directions during successive time periods. This pattern, which was also observed by Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu (2011, Table 3) for left-right issues, may reflect effects of policy cues provided by non-politicians—such as labor or business leaders, newspaper editorials, and so on—which influence the views of the focal partisan constituency during a specific time period. We thank two reviewers for raising this issue.

TABLE 4 Partisan Sorting Analyses: The Relationship between Changes in Parties' Positions and Shifts in Party Supporters' Positions

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Party <i>j</i> 's perceived shift – experts (<i>t</i>) | .09 (.22) |
| Party <i>j</i> 's perceived shift – experts (<i>t</i> – 1) | .40** (.10) |
| Party <i>j</i> 's shift – Euromanifestos (<i>t</i>) | –.60* (.24) |
| Party <i>j</i> 's shift – Euromanifestos (<i>t</i> – 1) | –.43* (.19) |
| Party <i>j</i> 's supporters' shift (<i>t</i> – 1) | –.55** (.16) |
| Intercept | –.09 (.15) |
| Adjusted R ² / N | .34 / 41 |

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. For these analyses, the dependent variable was the change in the mean position of the focal party's supporters on European integration at the time of the current European parliamentary election compared to the previous election, based on the self-placements of European Election Study respondents. The independent variables are defined in the text.

***p* ≤ .01, **p* ≤ .05, two-tailed tests.

0.40 units in the mean position of the party's supporters in the current period, where both shifts are calibrated along 1–10 scales. This lagged effect is important because it cannot be ascribed to a reciprocal causal process whereby party elites adjust their positions in response to their supporters' views.

The estimates on the current and lagged codings of the parties' Euromanifesto-based shifts are negative and significant (*p* < .05). While we do not draw the nonsensical inference that party supporters deliberately shift their positions in the *opposite* direction from that stated in their party's manifesto, these estimates strongly imply that party supporters do not meaningfully shift their views in the *same* direction as these manifestos. Suppose, for instance, that the true value of the [*Party j*'s shift – *Euromanifestos* (*t*)] coefficient is three standard errors higher than the estimate we report. In this case, the value of this variable would be +0.12, which would denote that a one-unit shift in the party's Euromanifesto-based position is associated with a 0.12-unit shift in the mean position of the party's supporters, that is, that party supporters' positions do not shift in any meaningful way in response to shifts in the party's manifesto.

Finally, we conducted robustness checks using an alternative measure of citizens' policy preferences based on the Eurobarometer data (Table A7 in the supporting information), and we also estimated the parameters of an

error correction (or autoregressive distributed lag) model designed to estimate both long- and short-term effects of our independent variables on party supporters' equilibrium position (see De Boef and Keele 2008).¹³ These analyses, which are presented in the supporting information (Table A8), continue to support our substantive conclusions.

In summary, we find no evidence of mass-level partisan sorting in response to the shifts on European integration that parties enunciate in their policy manifestos. By contrast, our analyses identify strong, statistically and substantively significant relationships between political experts' perceptions of parties' policy shifts and shifts in the policy viewpoints of these parties' supporters. In particular, we estimate a strong *lagged* relationship between experts' perceptions and party supporters' subsequent policy shifts, a pattern that cannot be explained by a reciprocal causal process whereby party elites respond to their supporters' policy viewpoints.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our study extends earlier research on citizens' perceptions of parties' left-right shifts in four new directions: We examine a more focused policy issue, namely, European integration; we calibrate citizens' perceptions against both *manifesto-based* and *expert-based* estimates of party policy shifts; we examine perceptions among partisan-based subgroups in the electorate; and we analyze evidence of mass-level partisan sorting. Our arguments and empirical analyses support the political experts hypothesis, that parties' policy images in the mass public track experts' perceptions more closely than they track the statements in parties' election manifestos; the partisan sorting hypothesis, that mass-level partisan sorting processes also track experts' perceptions of party positions more closely than they track party manifestos; and the partisan perceptions hypothesis, that party supporters disproportionately perceive their preferred party's policy shifts. We find no evidence that citizens update their perceptions of party positions in response to changes in the policy tone of parties' election manifestos, and in fact we find no evidence that political experts themselves update their party placements in response to these manifestos.

Given that political experts plausibly weigh extensive information besides party manifestos when estimating parties' policy positions, we interpret the empirical support for our political experts hypothesis as evidence that

¹³We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the error correction model to us.

rank-and-file citizens—like experts—weigh the wider informational environment when estimating parties' policy shifts. Important questions for future research include the following: What specific information do voters and experts consider when they estimate party positions? How much overlap is there between the information sources that experts and voters consider? To what extent do voters employ heuristics or information shortcuts to infer party policy positions (e.g., inferences based on parties' coalition arrangements, as Fortunato and Stevenson 2013 argue), as opposed to acquiring this knowledge directly?¹⁴ We have enumerated the data that voters and experts might plausibly consider beyond party manifestos, including party elites' speeches, interviews, parliamentary debates, their coalition arrangements, and governing parties' policy outputs. We expect that different voters prioritize different information, and we hope to parse out this issue in future research.

For now, we conclude that experts and rank-and-file voters appear to update their perceptions of parties' attitudes toward Europe in similar ways, and that neither group responds to parties' election manifestos. With respect to this latter (non)finding, we note that some readers might expect citizens (and experts) to ignore parties' Euromanifestos, given that elections to the European Parliament excite little political interest and attract only modest media coverage (De Vreese et al. 2006; Franklin and Hobolt 2011). However, in the supporting information, we find that voters also fail to respond to the positions parties stake out in their *national* election manifestos (Table A13), and, furthermore, our conclusions on European integration parallel Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu's (2011) finding that voters do not update their perceptions of parties' left-right positions in response to manifestos.

While we believe our study, in combination with that of Adams et al. (2011), raises serious doubts that parties can alter their policy images in the mass public via their manifestos, it is possible that parties use manifestos to signal areas of policy agreement to potential coalition partners, to appeal to special interest groups in an effort to induce financial contributions, and to motivate party activists to donate time and effort during election campaigns (see, e.g., Schofield and Sened 2006). Each of these groups may react to party manifestos even if rank-and-file voters do not. Furthermore, provocative research by Tavits (2007) concludes that parties can use their policy manifestos to convey a "pragmatic" orientation to the public (i.e., to enhance their image for achieving positive outcomes such as economic growth and reducing crime) even

if the public remains largely ignorant of the details of parties' policy positions. Thus, we do not claim that election manifestos do not matter. Instead, we advance the more limited—but in our view, important—conclusion that on the increasingly salient issue of European integration, rank-and-file voters—along with political experts—do not update their perceptions of parties' policy positions in response to election manifestos.

Our theoretical arguments and empirical support for the partisan perceptions hypothesis are relevant to the responsible party model of representation (Dalton 1985; Ezrow et al. 2011; Sartori 1968) because they imply that parties are motivated to behave "responsibly" toward their supporters' viewpoints on European integration. This strategic dynamic is also relevant to spatial models of elections because it implies that vote-seeking parties may have little to gain from shifting their policies away from their current supporters' policy viewpoints, in pursuit of support from rival parties' partisans and from independent voters, because these latter two groups will not perceive the party's policy shift to the same degree as the party's core supporters.

In this article, we have analyzed how citizens update their perceptions of parties' positions on European integration. We have presented theoretical and empirical analyses that citizens do not respond to parties' election manifestos but that they do respond to the wider informational context that political experts consider, that party supporters track their preferred party's positions more successfully than other citizens, and that citizens' perceptions matter in that they prompt mass-level partisan sorting in response to parties' policy shifts.

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¹⁴We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising these questions.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s website:

Figure A1. The Distribution of Parties’ Policy Shifts, Based on Euromanifesto Codings and Experts’ Placements

Table A1. Parties Included in the Empirical Analyses

Table A2. Analyses of Citizens’ Perceptions of Parties’ Policy Shifts on European Integration, for all Parties Regardless of Size (N=102)

Table A3. The Effects of Removing Outliers from the Euromanifesto Coding Data: Analyses of Citizens’ Perceptions of Parties’ Policy Shifts

Table A4. The Effects of Removing Outliers from the Chapel Hill Expert Data: Analyses of Citizens’ Perceptions of Parties’ Policy Shifts

Table A5. Analyses that Incorporate Country Fixed Effects: Citizens’ Perceptions of Parties’ Policy Shifts on European Integration (N=78)

Table A6. Analyses of the Effects of Errors in our Measures of Parties’ Policy Shifts (N=78)

Table A7. Partisan Sorting Analyses: The Relationship between Changes in Parties’ Positions and Shifts in Party Supporters’ Positions

Table A8: Parameter Estimates for Error-correction Models

Table A9: Controlling for the Effects of Governing Status and Party Size

Table A10: Controlling for the Effects of Green Parties and Anti-EU Parties

Table A11: Controlling for Party Policy Extremism

Table A12. Analyses that omit the Lagged Dependent Variable

Table A13. Analyses Based on Parties’ National Election Manifestos