

**Party influence where predispositions are strong and party identification is weak:  
Assessing citizens' reactions to party cues on regional nationalism in Spain**

Eric Guntermann, Université de Montréal

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**Abstract**

I show that party positions on issues that are rooted in identity influence people's opinions even if they lack a party identification. When exposed to competing party positions, citizens adjust their issue opinions to make them more consistent with their preferred party's position even if they do not identify with that party. In two experiments conducted in Spain, I consider how citizens react to party cues on regional nationalism. Study 1, a lab experiment in Catalonia, shows that, when exposed to party cues on nationalism, citizens change their issue opinions in the expected direction but only weakly change their party evaluations. Study 2, a survey experiment in Galicia, shows that party cue effects only occur when participants are exposed to competing cues from their preferred party and from a disliked party. Parties thus influence opinions when they adopt contrasting positions even on issues that are rooted in identity.

**Keywords**

Party cues, public opinion, nationalism, Spain

In recent years, numerous studies have shown that parties influence citizens' issue opinions (e.g. Bullock, 2011; Cohen, 2003; Druckman et al., 2013; Kam, 2005; Lenz, 2012). While the conclusion that parties influence people's preferences, at least those they express in surveys, seems to be well established, scholars are still seeking to assess the limits to party influence. Recent studies have considered when partisanship drives preference formation and, conversely, when pre-existing issue opinions influence party preferences. The current literature suggests that parties influence their partisans' weakly-held opinions on low-importance issues (see, especially, Mullinix, 2016; Tesler, 2015). However, the nature of issue may not matter. Even on highly salient issues on which many citizens hold strong preferences, some people might have ambivalent views and thus be more open to influence. If such ambivalent citizens are numerous enough, parties should influence aggregate public opinion.

The current literature also focuses on the influence parties have on citizens who identify with them (e.g. Bullock, 2011; Druckman et al., 2003; Mullinix, 2006). This is a major limitation to party cue effects, because scholars of European politics have frequently argued that party identification is less potent in democracies in Europe (especially, Thomassen, 1976). However, classic studies in Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggest that such

an enduring identity is not necessary for parties to influence opinions. Those studies found that people have a tendency to act as members of groups with which they do not have strong identities (e.g. Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). I argue that political conflict, akin to the polarization focused on in US studies (Druckman et al., 2013; Mullinix, 2016), activates partisan attitudes and induces people to make their issue opinions more consistent with the positions of their preferred party and contrast them with those of parties they dislike, regardless of whether they identify with a party. Thus, parties can influence citizens who lack a strong connection to a party.

In this article, I assess party influence on opinions on regional nationalism, which is a powerful force in a number of countries in Europe, particularly in Spain, where nationalist movements exist in several regions. I focus on two regions of Spain: Catalonia and Galicia. A number of studies argue that political elites mobilize public support for nationalism (e.g. Brancati, 2009; Brass, 1979; Fernández-Albertos and Lago, 2015). However, no published studies have shown that party positions influence people's nationalist opinions.

Regional nationalism in Spain should be seen as a tough case to find evidence of party influence. Nationalist opinions are strongly rooted in national identification and family background (Miley, 2007). Nationalist preferences thus constitute the type of

opinions Tesler (2015) calls “crystallized”, which should be resistant to party influence. Moreover, most citizens in Spain do not identify with a party (Gunther and Montero, 2009). Party influence on nationalist opinions thus faces the two difficulties noted above. If I can show that parties influence opinions in the difficult context of regional nationalism in Spain, my findings would suggest that parties are even more influential than previously thought.

Using a lab experiment in Catalonia and a survey experiment in Galicia, I show that parties influence citizens’ opinions on regional nationalism when they read the contrasting positions of their preferred party and of a party they dislike even if they do not identify with a party. This influence is strongest on people who have dual identities, with both their region and with Spain. I conclude that parties influence issue opinions even though they are tied to identities and in spite of weak party identification. However, this influence occurs as a result of conflict between parties and no party can influence opinions on its own beyond a narrow partisan base. These findings suggest that parties do influence opinions in contexts where and on issues on which the current literature suggests they should be less influential.

## **Parties and opinions on regional nationalism**

There is a rich literature on how political elites influence issue opinions. Much early scholarship focused on the impact of frames (Chong and Druckman, 2007) and arguments (Zaller, 1992). More recent research has shown that elites can influence opinions by merely expressing their positions (Broockman and Butler, 2015). Consequently, cues, information about party positions, are a fundamental means for such elite influence.

Early studies suggested that cues influence issue opinions because they act as heuristics, making it easier for people to express opinions (e.g. Downs, 1957; Lupia, 1994). Recent studies, however, have shown that cues actually make it harder for people to express their opinions (Petersen et al., 2013) and now scholars generally argue that party cues influence opinions via partisan motivated reasoning: people adopt a party's positions, because they want to support a group with which they identify (e.g. Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014).

More recently, there has been a debate about the extent of elite influence. Research has considered the types of issues on which parties influence opinions. Tesler (2015) has notably shown that, while "crystallized" attitudes influence party and candidate preferences, parties influence attitudes that are "less crystallized". Crystallized attitudes are predispositions like party, ethnic or national identities. Attitudes that are rooted in such

predispositions are also generally crystallized (808). Relatedly, Mullinix (2016) shows that opinion importance leads to resistance to party influence. In his survey experiments, he manipulates importance by having experts assert policies will either have major consequences for people's lives or that they will have none (393). He finds that parties are only influential when people are induced to believe policies will not affect them personally (400-402).

Presumably, regional nationalism is an issue on which people have crystallized opinions and that many people consider important, particularly in regions where nationalism is salient. Miley (2007) shows that nationalism is strongly rooted in national identification and family background. Thus, it is not obvious that parties influence regional nationalism. Interestingly, Muñoz and Tormos (2015) found weak effects of attempts to persuade Catalans to support or oppose independence.

However, crystallization should not be an obstacle to party influence on opinions. Even though many citizens might have strongly crystallized opinions rooted in predispositions like national identification, others may have ambivalent underlying identities. Ambivalent identities less strongly determine attitudes (Lavine et al., 2012). Thus, such

ambivalent citizens, should have more malleable preferences. If they are sufficiently numerous, parties should be able to shift aggregate opinion distributions. Even in regions where nationalism is strongly rooted in people's backgrounds (Miley, 2007), for example, many people have dual identities. In Catalonia, where nationalism has been very salient in recent years, about half the population until recently equally identified with Spain and the region (Martínez-Herrera and Miley, 2010). Consequently, there is a large pool of citizens who could be influenced by parties.

A far greater potential obstacle to party influence is the weakness of partisanship outside the United States. To my knowledge, all existing studies on party cue effects have focused on the effects of party positions on people who identify with a party (see, notably, Bullock, 2011; Druckman et al., 2003; Mullinix, 2006). According to the previous literature, parties influence their partisans and in some contexts negatively influence partisans of the other party (e.g. Goren et al., 2009), although only in the US context is it really clear which other party's identifiers matter. However, in many democracies outside the United States, most people do not identify with a party. Moreover, when the Michigan concept of party identification was brought over to Europe, scholars noted that the identifications that did exist changed more frequently than vote choice and thus were

unlikely to influence attitudes (Kaase, 1976; Thomassen, 1976). As Gunther and Montero (2009) point out, party identification is particularly uncommon in Spain. Similarly, in the survey experiment I conducted on a representative sample in Galicia, only a third of respondents there said they identified with a party. Consequently, if party cue effects involve parties influencing their partisans, there is little attitudinal basis for such influence to occur outside the US.

It is not clear, however, why parties would only influence the opinions of people who identify with them. Early SIT studies found that people tend to favor groups defined by such trivial distinctions as which painter they prefer or whether they under or over-estimate the number of dots in clusters (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). If people can act on the basis of groups defined by such seemingly irrelevant considerations, why do they need to have an enduring identification with a party to be influenced by it? Rosema (2006) argues that, in multi-party democracies, where elections are competitions between parties not candidates, partisanship should be conceptualized in terms of evaluations of parties rather than identification with a single party. Blais, Guntermann, and Bodet (2017) show that citizens in a large number of democracies have distinct attitudes towards different parties. Thus, if people who share preferences for particular paintings can be induced to act



as members of a group, why would we not expect people who share similar attitudes towards parties to act as members of a group when that membership is made salient?

How does partisanship become salient? Recent studies in the US context show that polarization between opposing parties increases the salience of parties and leads to party influence on opinions. Druckman et al. (2013) and Mullinix (2016) find that party polarization increases people's reliance on party endorsements. While these American studies focus on polarization, how distinct the parties are from each other and how homogeneous they are internally (e.g. Druckman et al., 2013), I focus on inter-party conflict. In a parliamentary democracy like Spain, parties are generally cohesive. What really should matter is the contrast in positions between opposing parties. As Tajfel (1974) argues, a group only becomes a group because of the presence of other groups (72). Consequently, for people who do not spend most of the time feeling they are a member of a given party, their preferred party's position must be contrasted with that of an out-party in order for them to act as members of a partisan group. I thus operationalize conflict between parties by contrasting the positions of parties participants like with those of parties they dislike and expect that such conflict induces people to adjust their issue opinions in the direction of their preferred party. A party on its own should only be able to influence

people who identify with it, because it should prompt them to engage in partisan motivated reasoning in support of “their” party.

### **Experimentation on party cues and nationalism**

Some party cue experiments manipulate parties’ positions, while others present real positions. The former category includes American studies like those by Bullock (2011) and Cohen (2003) that present positions on policies that have clear ideological implications and manipulate whether Democrats or Republicans favor them. It also includes the study by Kam (2005), who presents cues on a policy, food irradiation, that is not obviously connected to ideology. Both types of studies find that participants are more supportive of their party’s position, and less supportive of the other party’s position, when exposed to cues.

The disadvantage of these approaches is that they do not allow us to know whether and how citizens react to real-world party positions, which may allow citizens to rely on predispositions like ideology to help them formulate their issue opinions. This is particularly problematic given the finding that the content of political messages influences citizens’ opinions on policies even in the presence of party cues (Bullock, 2011: 508). The

effects of cues in the real world may be very different from the effects of artificial cues. I, consequently, assessed the effects of real party positions in the experiments I conducted.

On the other hand, using real policy positions does present the problem of pre-treatment. In the real world, citizens are likely exposed to the same positions to which they are exposed in a party cue experiment. Slothuus (2016) identifies two varieties of this phenomenon. On the one hand, citizens may be aware of party positions, because they have featured prominently in the media. On the other hand, citizens may be able to figure out party positions, because they are consistent with party reputations. If a party supports a position that reflects its general orientation, citizens may be able to figure out which side the party is on. Thus, to the extent that experimental participants are already aware of party positions, they should be less responsive to cues. Such participants do not learn party positions by being exposed to positions they already know. I expect party cues to only influence people who do not know party positions prior to an experiment.

I test five hypotheses in two experiments. The first experiment assesses reactions to party positions that participants do not share. I assess whether they change their evaluations of the parties and whether they change their issue opinions when they learn those positions. In this experiment, I present the contrasting positions of opposing parties. Thus, if conflict

between parties primes partisanship, these party positions should influence people's issue opinions. The first hypothesis asserts that people follow party cues on nationalism.

**Hypothesis 1** *When people learn their preferred party has a position they do not share and that an opposing party has a contrasting position, they adjust their issue opinions in the direction of the former's position.*

Citizens may also change their evaluations of parties when they learn their positions. However, recent research has found that citizens tend not to significantly change their evaluations of elites or their vote choice when they learn their positions (Broockman and Butler, 2015; Lenz, 2012). In this study, exposure to competing positions should stimulate partisan motivated reasoning and thus people should seek to defend their party evaluations rather than change them. My second hypothesis is therefore:

**Hypothesis 2** *When people learn their preferred party has a position they do not share and that an opposing party has a contrasting position, they do not change their evaluations of these parties.*

The second experiment assesses whether conflict between parties is necessary for parties to influence issue opinions. It compares the effect of a single cue from one's preferred party,

on the one hand, to that of two competing cues from a party one likes and a party one dislikes, on the other hand. As in Study 1, these expectations only apply to people who do not know party positions prior to their participation in the experiment.

Some citizens feel closer to a party than others. For such people, partisanship should be more salient than for others. Consequently, without conflicting party positions increasing the salience of partisanship, only people who feel close to a party should be influenced by a cue.<sup>1</sup>

**Hypothesis 3** *In the absence of inter-party conflict, only people who feel close to a party adjust their issue opinions to make them consistent with the position of that party.*

When parties adopt contrasting positions, the salience of partisanship should increase and even people who do not feel close to a party should be influenced by party positions.

**Hypothesis 4** *In the presence of competing positions, people adjust their issue opinions in the direction of their preferred party's position regardless of whether they feel close to it.*

As I argued above, people with ambivalent national identities should be more susceptible to partisan influence. Thus:

**Hypothesis 5** *Parties have the strongest effects on the nationalist opinions of people with dual identities.*

### **Study 1: Lab experiment in Catalonia**

Study 1 was conducted in the Research Laboratory on Behavioral and Experimental Sciences at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. It was designed to assess people's reactions to positions their preferred parties have that they do not share. It dealt with five issues. A variety of issues were selected in order to ensure that as large a proportion as possible of the subject pool could express positions they do not share with their preferred party and thus qualify to participate. The issues were selected to represent the different facets of Catalan nationalism. Two are about the region's political status within Spain, two are about the status of the regional language and one is about the recognition of the region as a nation. They were all presented as positive statements. The first was that the government of Catalonia should take unilateral steps towards independence. This has been

a salient issue since the 2015 regional election when the parties that presently govern Catalonia ran on a common platform to take steps towards independence for the region without prior negotiations with the Spanish government. Only that coalition, Together for Yes (JxSí), including its constituent parties, Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC)<sup>2</sup> and Catalan Republican Left (ERC), as well as the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), agree with that position. All other parties are opposed.

The second issue statement is that Spanish should keep its official status in Catalonia. This issue has become salient in recent years as separatist politicians have asserted that Spanish should remain an official language in an independent Catalonia, perhaps to increase support for independence. They have thus been expressing positions that depart from conventional peripheral nationalism, an aspect of which is to promote the regional language. While Together for Yes and its constituent parties, CDC and ERC, in addition to the anti-nationalist Citizens' Party (C's) and the People's Party (PP), have clearly stated their support for this position, most left-wing parties and coalitions, including Catalonia Yes We can (CSQP), its components Podem and Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV), the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), and CUP, have, without opposing an official status for Spanish in Catalonia, focused on stressing the importance of promoting the Catalan language, a position that is more in line with conventional nationalism in Catalonia.

Given that there is no reason to expect these parties to be opposed to a status for Spanish, I have added a clear sentence at the end of their statements on this issue in which they assert their support for an official status for Spanish. Thus, rather than opposing the status of the Spanish language, the statements participants read have the parties voicing less clear support for keeping an official status for Spanish.<sup>3</sup>

The third issue statement is that Catalonia should become an independent state from Spain. This issue clearly separates the governing secessionist coalition, Together for Yes, its component parties, Democratic Convergence of Catalonia and Catalan Republican Left, as well as the Popular Unity Candidacy, which explicitly support separation, from all other parties that have clearly stated their opposition.

The fourth issue is that more classes should be taught in Spanish in schools in Catalonia. This has been a long-standing issue in Catalan nationalism. Since the 1980s, the Catalan government set up an immersion school system in which all classes are taught in Catalan, except a small number of hours of Spanish language classes. The Citizens' Party and the People's Party have consistently opposed this system calling for an increased presence for the Spanish language. All other parties oppose increasing the number of class hours in Spanish in Catalonia.



The fifth issue statement is that Catalonia is a nation. All parties support this statement except the Citizens' Party and the People's Party.

Table 1 summarizes the positions of each party on these issues.

Table 1: Party positions on five issues in the experiment in Catalonia

	Unilateral	Spanish	Independence	School	Nation
Together for Yes (JxSí)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Catalonia Yes We Can (CSQP)	No	Ambivalent Yes	No	No	Yes
We Can (Podem)	No	Ambivalent Yes	No	No	Yes
Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV)	No	Ambivalent Yes	No	No	Yes
Catalan Socialist Party (PSC)	No	Ambivalent Yes	No	No	Yes
Citizens' Party (C's)	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
People's Party (PP)	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Prior to the experiment, an email was sent out to the lab's list of potential participants, who were mostly students. They were invited to fill out a short questionnaire asking them to provide their opinions on the five policy statements related to Catalan nationalism and to evaluate 10 major parties and electoral coalitions in Catalonia.<sup>4</sup> Both

issue opinions and party evaluations were on scales from 0 to 10, where 0 means totally disagree/really dislike party and 10 means totally agree/really like party. Participants were given the option of filling out the questionnaire in either official language of Catalonia, Catalan or Spanish. The language they selected at this stage was later used for their participation in the experiment. In total, 506 people filled out the pre-experimental questionnaire.

Only responses from eligible voters in elections to the regional parliament were retained. Ninety-one percent (461) of respondents met this condition. For each eligible respondent, I determined the party they rated highest. If there was a tie, I kept note of all the parties they gave the highest score. I then determined the issues (of the five on which they were asked to provide an opinion) on which they had an opinion that was different from the position of their preferred party (or from one of their preferred parties). I selected potential participants who had at least two such positions that were inconsistent with the position of their preferred party or with at least one of their highest-rated parties.<sup>5</sup> Sixty-two percent met this requirement (284). If there were two or more parties they rated highest and they had two or more inconsistent opinions with more than one of those, I randomly selected one of those parties. I considered that party their preferred party. For each respondent who was retained, I randomly selected two of those issues when there were

more than two. For each issue, I identified the party opposing their preferred party's position that they rate lowest. I referred to this party as their disliked party. Ties were broken randomly.

I then invited 250 respondents who were available at the times of the experimental sessions to participate. If more respondents qualified and were available for an experimental session than it was possible to accommodate, I randomly selected respondents to invite among all eligible and available potential participants.

In total, 182 people showed up for sessions that took place between two and five days following their participation in the pre-experimental questionnaire. A total of 12 sessions were held in May 2016. On the day of the experiment, following a questionnaire on demographics and attitudes, participants read statements in which their preferred and disliked parties clearly state their positions on the two issues that were selected for them. These statements were short paragraphs containing basic information about the proposal and most of them contained one or two arguments supporting the parties' positions. They were based on positions expressed in legislative speeches in the regional and national legislatures, in documents on party websites, and in party manifestos. Paragraphs were adapted to make statements clearer and grammatically correct.

Participants were randomly divided into two groups.<sup>6</sup> A treatment group read the position statements by both parties, with the party labels clearly indicated. A control group read the same statements without the party name. Changes in issue opinions that take place between the pre-experimental questionnaire and the post-experimental questionnaire in the control group can be attributed to the content of the statements or to some external influence or simply to respondents giving thought to an issue. While such changes can be due to a number of different factors, if changes are greater in the treatment group than in the control group and are in the direction of people's preferred party's position, given random assignment, they must be due to party cues.

Following the conclusion of the experimental sessions, an error was discovered in the Spanish version of the experiment. The problem was in the code that identified the issues on which participants had preferences that were inconsistent with their preferred party. I had to exclude these respondents, because the experiment as carried out did not present them with two issues on which they disagreed with their preferred party. Responses from a total of 113 participants who participated in Catalan were thus retained for analyses. Although excluding these participants made the sample less representative, given that Catalan speakers are considerably more nationalist than Spanish speakers (Miley, 2006), it made the test more conservative, since we would expect the more nationalist group to have

less malleable nationalist preferences in a region where nationalism is so salient. The experimental sample is in fact more nationalist than the population (see the supplementary appendix).

Table 2 shows the numbers of participants who received cues on each issue along with the numbers who did not know their preferred party's position prior to the experiment. (See the supplementary appendix for a comparison of this sample to a conventional survey sample)

Table 2: Numbers who read and did not know positions on each issue

	Unilateral	Spanish	Independence	School	Nation	Total
Number who read positions	62	35	27	59	19	202
Number who did not know positions	9	20	7	13	8	57

Note that I excluded participants whose preferred party had an ambiguous position on the Spanish language issue. The total number includes each participant twice (they read positions on two issues), except those who read about the Spanish issue and whose party had an ambiguous position on it. They are included once.

The primary conclusion of this experiment is that, when people are exposed to positions they do not share with their preferred party, party evaluations are generally stable while issue opinions are not. Table 3 shows the results of OLS models in which the dependent variable consists of changes in issue opinions (Model 1) and of evaluations of preferred

(Model 2) and disliked (Model 3) parties. Note that all standard errors reported in this article and used to construct confidence intervals are Bell-McCaffrey adjusted standard errors. In Study 1, I use Bell-McCaffrey clustered standard errors with participants as the cluster variable to account for the fact that each participant read about two issues.<sup>7</sup>

Hypothesis 1 asserted that people should move in the direction of their party's position when they receive party cues. Model 1 is thus an OLS regression of issue opinion changes on the treatment dummy, a dummy indicating that participants placed their preferred party on the right side of the issue scale prior to the experiment and an interaction between the two.<sup>8</sup> Note that opinion changes are signed so that positive changes represent movements in the direction of one's most liked party. Note also that the number of people who did not know their preferred party's position (N Don't know), which is the number of observations used to calculate the coefficient on the treatment dummy, is indicated for each model. The coefficient on the treatment dummy shows that people who did not know the position of their preferred party but read that position moved 1.29 points more in the direction of that party's position than comparable participants in the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ). Study 1 thus provides support for Hypothesis 1 that, when people learn a position of their preferred party they do not share, they adjust their issue opinion to make it more consistent with that party's position.

Table 3: Models of changes in issue opinions and in party evaluations in Catalonia

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	DV: $\Delta$ Issue Opinion	DV: $\Delta$ Evaluation of Preferred Party	DV: $\Delta$ Evaluation of Disliked Party
Intercept	-0.22 (0.31)	0.43 (0.42)	-0.05 (0.34)
Treatment	1.29* (0.58)	-0.64 (0.46)	0.65 (0.64)
Knows Position	1.67*** (0.41)	-0.50 (0.47)	0.32 (0.33)
Treatment*Knows Position	-1.46* (0.69)	0.75 (0.53)	-0.73 (0.64)
<i>N</i>	202	95	208
<i>N Don't know</i>	57	45	41
$R^2$	0.06	0.03	0.01
adj. $R^2$	0.05	0.00	-0.00
Bell-McCaffrey clustered standard errors in parentheses (Models 1 and 3) Bell-McCaffrey standard errors in parentheses (Model 2)			
† significant at $p < .10$ ; *significant at $p < 0.05$ ; **significant at $p < 0.01$ ; ***significant at $p < 0.001$			

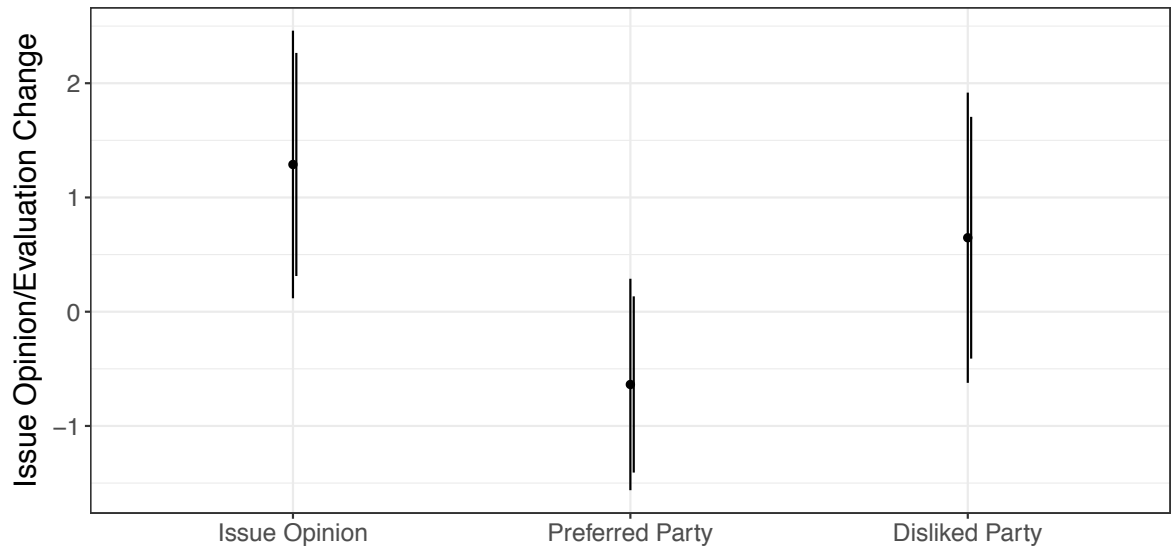
Hypothesis 2 stated that, when exposed to competing party positions, participants do not change their party evaluations. Models 2 and 3 show regressions of changes in evaluations of participants' preferred and disliked parties, respectively, on variables that are analogous to those in Model 1. In Model 2, the "Knows Position" dummy indicates that the participant knew their preferred party's positions on both issues. Those who did not know at least one of those positions may have changed their evaluation of their preferred party. In

Model 3, it indicates that they did not know the position of the disliked party that was presented to them for that issue. We can see that, while participants lowered their evaluations of their preferred party and improved their evaluations of their disliked party when they learned the parties' positions, neither effect was significant, providing support for Hypothesis 2.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 2 shows the coefficients on the treatment dummy in each of the three models. It includes both 90 per cent and 95 per cent confidence intervals. We can see clearly that, while the treatment moved people's issue opinions in the direction of their preferred party's position, it had only weak and insignificant effects on party evaluations. Results are thus supportive of Hypothesis 1 and broadly supportive of Hypothesis 2. I acknowledge that with a different treatment, for example, showing people a position their preferred party has with which they strongly disagree, the effect on party evaluations would likely be stronger. Nevertheless, this study shows that, when they learn positions of their preferred party that they do not share along with the contrasting position of a disliked party, people adjust their issue opinions in the direction of their preferred party.



Figure 2: Changes in issue opinions and in evaluations of preferred and disliked parties



We now know that competing party cues move opinions on nationalism even in a region where it is very salient. We still do not know whether conflict between parties is necessary for such party influence to occur. In Study 1, participants were exposed to competing party cues on both issues. The second experiment shows participants competing and non-competing party positions in order to determine whether conflict between parties is a necessary condition for parties to influence nationalist opinions. The major advantage of the first study was that the lab setting allowed the researcher to assess changes in issue opinions and party evaluations over time. For the second study, I am merely interested in

the influence of party positions on issue opinions. A survey experiment is thus sufficient and has the added benefit of allowing me to study a representative sample.

## **Study 2: Survey experiment in Galicia**

Survey Sampling International (SSI) recruited a representative sample of 618 respondents in Galicia, a region in the northwest of Spain where nationalism is weaker than in Catalonia. Two issues were considered. The first was whether Galicia should be called a nation. The second was whether Galicia has a right to self-determination. On both these issues, the three major statewide parties: the People's Party of Galicia (PPdeG), the Party of Galician Socialists (PSdeG), and the Citizens Party (C's) have anti-nationalist positions. In other words, they are against recognizing Galicia as a nation and accepting a right to self-determination for the region. The Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG) and the coalition of nationalist and left-wing parties En Marea (Podemos-En Marea-Anova-EU) are favourable to both proposals.

All participants were exposed to positions on both issues. However, they were randomly assigned to either read positions on the nation issue first and self-determination second or to read positions on the self-determination issue first and the nation issue second. This was done in order to determine the effect of having only a cue from one's highest

rated party compared to that of having a cue from both one's preferred and one's disliked party. All respondents received one position on the first issue, from their most liked party, and two positions, from their most liked party and from their disliked party, on the second issue. Randomizing the order of issues allows me to control for the malleability of opinions on each issue. As in Catalonia, the treatment group read position statements with party cues, while the control group read statements without cues.

In a pre-treatment questionnaire, respondents were first asked which of five major Galician parties they like the most.<sup>10</sup> If they selected one of the three parties with non-nationalist positions on both issues (PPdeG, PSdeG or C's), they were then asked which nationalist party they like the least. If they selected one of the parties with nationalist positions (BNG or En Marea), they were then asked which non-nationalist party they like least. The objective was to create a situation in which respondents would have strong opposing feelings about parties with contrasting positions for the second issue.<sup>11</sup> They were then randomly assigned to either the treatment group or the control group.<sup>12</sup>

Table 4 shows models in which issue opinions on the 0 to 10 scale are regressed on the treatment dummy, a dummy indicating knowledge of the preferred party's position, and an interaction between the two. The first two models include all participants, while the third and fourth include only participants who said they felt close to their preferred party. The

first and third models are for people whose preferred party was pro-nationalist. The second and fourth cover those whose preferred party was anti-nationalist. As expected by Hypothesis 3, when they read only their preferred party's position, there was no overall effect on issue opinions. The full sample of respondents only modestly shifted their opinions in the direction of their preferred party. Only respondents who identified with a pro-nationalist party significantly shifted their opinions in the direction of their preferred party. They became 2.22 points more supportive of their party's position ( $p < 0.05$ ). Contrary to expectations, however, single party cues did not influence anti-nationalist party identifiers. There is thus modest evidence that parties can influence opinions on nationalism in the absence of conflict between parties.

Table 4: Models of issue opinions in Galicia when participants read one cue

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	All Participants		Feel Close to Party	
	Pro-Nat	Anti-Nat	Pro-Nat	Anti-Nat
Intercept	3.67*** (0.91)	4.71*** (0.78)	1.56 (1.78)	4.40* (2.13)
Treatment	0.86 (0.53)	-0.24 (0.49)	2.22* (1.04)	0.10 (1.24)
Knows Position	4.12*** (1.10)	-3.07** (1.06)	5.60** (2.04)	-2.17 (2.46)
Treatment*Knows Pos.	-1.24† (0.66)	0.39 (0.66)	-1.88 (1.20)	-0.78 (1.42)
<i>N</i>	301	289	103	72
<i>N Don't know</i>	108	162	14	30
$R^2$	0.14	0.16	0.16	0.29
adj. $R^2$	0.13	0.16	0.13	0.26
Bell-McCaffrey adjusted standard errors in parentheses				
† significant at $p < .10$ ; *significant at $p < 0.05$ ; **significant at $p < 0.01$ ; ***significant at $p < 0.001$				

Table 5 shows similar models for the second issue, on which participants read competing party positions. Results are considerably stronger. Supporters of parties with pro-nationalist positions who did not know their preferred party's position and who received two party cues were 1.72 points more supportive of that position on a scale from 0 to 10 than those who received no cues ( $p < 0.01$ ). Among participants who preferred an anti-

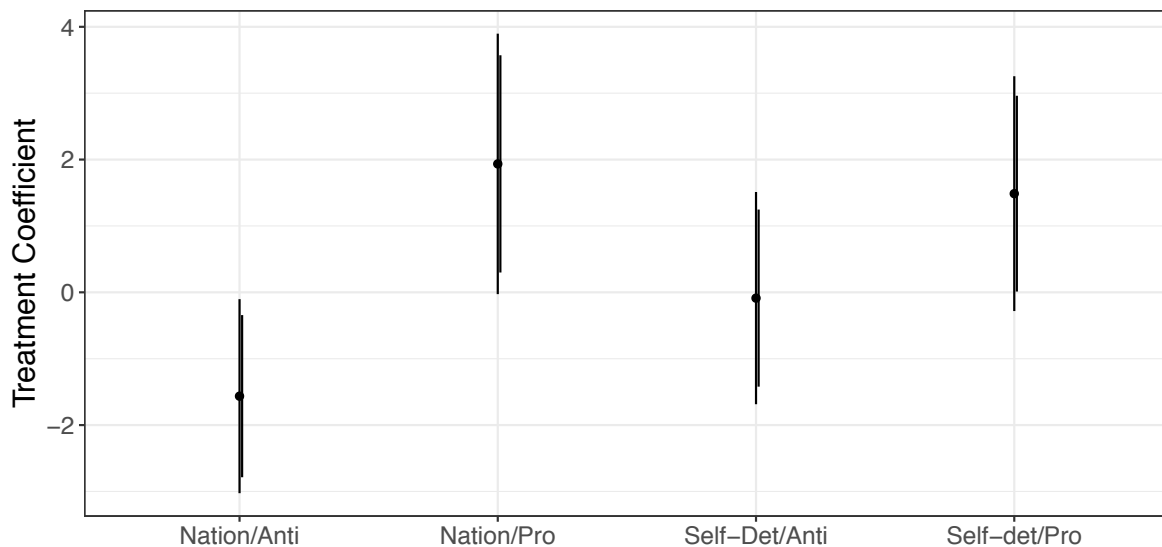
nationalist party, two party cues decreased support for nationalist positions by 0.99 points ( $p < 0.08$ ). Study 2 thus provides support for Hypothesis 4 that competing party cues influence people's issue opinions even if they do not identify with their preferred party. Effects were similar (although somewhat stronger among anti-nationalist party supporters) but not significant among participants who felt close to their preferred party. Readers should bear in mind the numbers of such participants when considering the significance of these results.

Table 5: Models of issue opinions in Galicia when participants read contrasting cues

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
	All Participants		Feel Close to Party	
	Pro-Nat	Anti-Nat	Pro-Nat	Anti-Nat
Intercept	1.95† (1.00)	5.59*** (0.91)	1.67 (2.08)	6.52** (2.16)
Treatment	1.72** (0.64)	-0.99† (0.55)	1.67 (1.53)	-1.31 (1.28)
Knows Pos	6.11*** (1.15)	-2.92** (1.14)	6.70** (2.25)	-4.31† (2.37)
Treatment*Knows Pos	-2.29*** (0.73)	0.36 (0.67)	-2.03 (1.62)	0.48 (1.38)
<i>N</i>	304	284	103	73
<i>N Don't know</i>	108	148	16	2
$R^2$	0.20	0.17	0.24	0.40
adj. $R^2$	0.19	0.16	0.21	0.37
Bell-McCaffrey adjusted standard errors in parentheses				
† significant at $p < .10$ ; *significant at $p < 0.05$ ; **significant at $p < 0.01$ ; ***significant at $p < 0.001$				

Figure 2 plots the coefficient on the treatment variable representing differences in support for each issue proposal between the treatment and control groups for supporters of pro-nationalist (Pro) and anti-nationalist (Anti) parties. All coefficients are from the issue on which participants received two cues.

Figure 2: Effects of contrasting party cues in survey experiment in Galicia



Party cues induced participants who did not know their pro-nationalist preferred party's position to be 1.93 points more supportive of considering the region a nation ( $p < 0.10$ ) and 1.48 points more favourable to the notion that Galicia has a right to self-determination ( $p < 0.10$ ). Among those whose preferred party had anti-nationalist positions, party cues made subjects 1.56 ( $p < 0.05$ ) points less supportive of referring to Galicia as a nation but did not affect their belief in a right to self-determination for the region. In short, the effect was strongest on the nation issue. One likely interpretation is that the language of self-determination has been much more present in Spanish political discourse in recent



years, given strong demands by Catalans for a referendum, making opinions on this issue less malleable.

Hypothesis 5 stated that party influence on nationalism should be greatest among people with dual identities. Table 6 shows the effect of contrasting party cues on the nation issue on Galicians who identified with both Galicia and Spain and on those who identified predominantly or exclusively with Galicia.<sup>13</sup> These models are limited to people who preferred the pro-nationalist parties.

We can see that party cues had no significant effect among non-pretreated participants who had a predominantly Galician identity.<sup>14</sup> Those who had dual identities (equally Galician and Spanish), a category with which 69% of participants identified, became 1.74 points more supportive of considering Galicia a nation if they were not pretreated ( $p < 0.05$ ). In short, party cues led people with dual identities to become more supportive of considering one of the territories they identify with a nation. The results are similar for anti-nationalist parties (i.e. cues made people with mixed identities less supportive of calling their region a nation). Party cues thus matter. If people have an ambivalent identity, their party pushes their opinions in a pro-nationalist or anti-nationalist direction.

Table 6: Models of opinions on the nation issue by national identification

	Model 9 Dual	Model 10 Galician
Intercept	2.76*** (0.49)	6.50*** (1.08)
Treatment	1.74* (0.79)	1.50 (1.47)
Knows Pos	3.85*** (0.70)	2.10 (1.15)
Treatment*Knows Pos	-2.51* (0.99)	-2.01 (1.73)
<i>N</i>	144	47
<i>N</i> Don't know	66	16
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.22	0.10
adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.20	0.04
Bell-McCaffrey adjusted standard errors in parentheses		
† significant at $p < .10$ ; * $p < .05$ ; ** $p < .01$ ; *** $p < .001$		

In sum, this experiment has shown that party cues influence nationalist opinions in Galicia among people who did not know their preferred party's position before the experiment. The effect was only strong and significant overall when participants read opposing cues from their preferred party and from a party they strongly disliked. It was strongest on the issue of whether Galicia is a nation and among people who identify with both Galicia and Spain.

## **Conclusion**

I have shown that party cues influence nationalist opinions in Spain even though we would expect such attitudes to be crystallized and in spite of the weakness of party identification in the Spanish context. Study 1 showed that, when exposed to cues from their preferred party and from a disliked party, participants who did not know the former's position shifted their opinions in its direction.

While people who have strong national identifications should have crystallized attitudes, other people have ambivalent identifications. If parties adopt competing positions, people who are ambivalent are influenced by the positions taken by the parties. Aggregate public opinion is, therefore, influenced by parties even though many participants have strong identities.

Recent American research (Druckman et al., 2013, Mullinix, 2016) has shown that polarization between the Democrats and Republicans increases the impact of party cues. I find that analogous inter-party conflict in Spain leads to party influence on opinions even among people who lack a party identification. Study 2 showed that, when exposed to a single cue from their preferred party, only Galicians who felt close to it adjusted their opinions in its direction. However, when exposed to contrasting cues from their preferred

party and from a disliked party, they adjusted their opinions in the direction of the position of the former. This effect was strongest for the issue of whether Galicia is a nation and among people who identified both with their region and with the country.

These findings thus show that party positions influence people's opinions even in a multi-party European context where party identification is uncommon. People do not have to identify with a party to be influenced by cues. Most people have attitudes towards parties. When those attitudes become salient, people adjust their opinions to make them consistent with their preferred party's position, regardless of whether they identify with it.

Bullock (2011), pointing to research finding weak effects elsewhere, suggested that party cue are less influential outside of the US. However, my findings suggest that, when we consider inter-party conflict as well as the side of the conflict citizens' party preferences place them on, we can see that parties do influence people, even if they do not identify with a party. Consequently, there is nothing particularly American about party cue effects. They are just easier to detect there given the two-party system in the US combined with increased polarization there.

My findings also show that party cues matter on an issue that is important for the survival of a country like Spain. If parties adopt competing positions on nationalism, they influence citizens' opinions. What these results do not show, however, is that parties can

manipulate public opinion. A party cannot get its supporters to change their opinions merely by expressing its position. Party influence depends on inter-party conflict. It only occurs when two (and possibly more) parties express opposing positions.

Much recent scholarship has argued that parties influence opinions due to partisan motivated reasoning (e.g. Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014). My results cast doubt on the notion that party cue effects are about seeking to show support for the party with which one identifies. However, they are consistent with partisan motivated reasoning if we conceptualize it in terms of showing support for one's side in a debate between parties. The party cue effects I find are greater among participants who are unaware of party positions prior to the experiment but who are, nevertheless, highly informed about politics in general (results not shown). According to recent work on the topic (e.g. Slothuus, 2015), these are the people who should be most influenced by partisan motivated reasoning. Thus, my findings are consistent with partisan motivated reasoning as long as we give up on the idea that it necessarily involves showing support for a party with which one identifies.

Given that parties can influence opinions in democracies where party identification is uncommon and on issues on which the present literature suggests they should not,

scholars should consider how parties influence opinions on other major debates currently dividing European societies, notably about immigration, refugees, and membership in the European Union. Since long-standing party identification is not necessary for parties to influence opinions, it is likely that new parties like Emmanuel Macron's La République en Marche as well as far-right parties that have recently attracted increased support exert influence on public opinion. Future work should consider the impact of conflict between these parties and others on citizens' opinions.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I adopt the notion of party closeness used in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES).

<sup>2</sup> Now called Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT)

<sup>3</sup> Since it is unclear how partisans of the latter parties should respond to party cues, their responses to this issue were removed from all analyses.

<sup>4</sup> Note that all parties and electoral coalitions that won seats in the last regional election were included. Coalitions and the parties they are composed of were included in order to allow participants to express different levels of support for different labels.

<sup>5</sup> On all issues, except the official status of the Spanish language for left-wing parties, parties clearly expressed positions in favour of or against a position. I thus considered positions to be inconsistent if a party supported a position and the potential participant did not have a position over 7 on 10 or if a party opposed the position and the respondent had a position that was not below 3 on 10. Participants were thus selected if they had

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opinions that were opposite those of the party they like the most or if they had a less clear position than their preferred party.

<sup>6</sup> Randomization was successful. Neither participants' preferred party nor their pre-experimental opinions on any of the five issues significantly predict treatment status, as assessed using logit models with a 0.05 significance level. See models in the supplementary appendix.

<sup>7</sup> See Bell and McCaffrey (2002). In using these standard errors, I follow the "Standard Operating Procedures for Don Green's Lab at Columbia". See Lin, Green, and Coppock (2016).

<sup>8</sup> I consider a placement to be on the right side if it is to the left of the midpoint (5) when a party opposes a position and greater than five when a party supports a position. People who did not answer a party position perception question were coded as not knowing the position.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the N is smaller in Model 2, because the unit of analysis is the participant, while in the other two models it is participant-issues. The N is slightly smaller in Model 1 because six participants did not report their post-experimental opinions.

<sup>10</sup> Note that participants were given the option of saying that they liked none of the parties most. If they selected this option, they were asked which of the parties they considered least bad. These respondents' choice at this second stage was used as their most liked party. The sample was less representative of the Galician electorate than promised by SSI. Respondents were considerably more supportive of En Marea and less supportive of the PP than the sample obtained by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) in their August 2016 Survey. See the Supplementary Appendix for a more complete comparison of the two samples.

<sup>11</sup> Unlike in that study, given limitations in the software used, it was impossible to select preferred and disliked parties using participants' evaluations of the parties.

<sup>12</sup> Randomization was successful, as assessed by logit regressions of treatment status on most liked party and on national identification category and hypothesis tests at the 0.05 level.

<sup>13</sup> The Linz-Moreno question asked participants to identify as "Only Galician", "More Galician than Spanish", "As Galician as Spanish", "More Spanish" or "Only Spanish". I consider those who answered "As Galician as Spanish" to have a dual identity and those who answered "Only Galician" or "More Galician than Spanish" to have a predominantly Galician identity.

<sup>14</sup> Note though that few Galicians who mostly identified with their region did not know their preferred party's position.

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