



DISSERTATION | DOCTORAL THESIS

Titel | Title

Citizen Responses to Independent Politicians in Party
Democracies

verfasst von | submitted by
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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doktorin der Philosophie (Dr.phil.)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 796 310 300

Dissertationsgebiet lt. Studienblatt | Field of
study as it appears on the student record
sheet:

Politikwissenschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of many people. Embarking on this doctoral journey has been an extraordinary privilege, and I am grateful to the many people who contributed to making it a positive experience.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, and my co-supervisor, Markus Wagner. I am deeply grateful for your ongoing support and your thoughtful feedback on countless drafts. It has been a great privilege to benefit from your advice and guidance. You have challenged and encouraged me in equal measure, and I could not have asked for better mentors on this journey.

I am also thankful to the DEPART team: Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, Oliver Huwyler, Florence Ecornier-Nocca, and Manuel Wagner. Thank you for the many conversations and close collaboration over the years, which have had a lasting and positive influence on my research. I would also like to thank the exceptional team of student assistants: Daniel Bliem, Béla Duschek, Helena Hartl, Florian Kärcher, Katharina Mair, Viktoria Nutz, Klara Pernsteiner, Nadja Pohorely, Marika Proietti, Sayman Johannes Rohleder-Stribl, Noah Schroth, Daniel Steinwider, Viktoria Strejc, and Ella Wagnleitner. Moreover, this dissertation was made possible by the financial support of the European Research Council (ERC; grant no. 954401).

To my co-authors, Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik and Matthias Kaltenegger, thank you for your invaluable contributions. I could not have imagined a better team to collaborate with on my first publication. Working with you has been a wonderful experience and I continue to learn from both of you.

The Department of Government has provided a supportive and stimulating environment throughout my PhD. Thank you to everyone who offered feedback at research seminars, and to all who shared lively lunch breaks and insightful conversations along the way. I am also thankful to the PhD Club and especially to Beatriz for organizing it with me. Thank you to all the pre-docs who helped make this journey intellectually stimulating and truly enjoyable. I would also like to thank the administrative team for their ongoing support.

I am grateful to Julia Partheymüller and Sylvia Kritzinger for giving me the opportunity to include modules in the AUTNES Online Panel. Your feedback significantly improved my work, and I am thankful for your trust in the projects.

Throughout my doctoral studies, I have benefited from outstanding teaching. I would like to thank Christopher Wratil, Tobias Dienlin, and Paul Kellstedt, as well as Iulia Cioroianu and Ryan T. Moore at the Essex Summer School.

I am grateful to Jean-Benoit Pilet for hosting me at Université Libre de Bruxelles and providing valuable feedback on my research. I would also like to thank the University of Vienna (KWA) for their financial support during this time.

I would like to thank the ‘Montréal crew’, especially Ruth, Alex, and Semih. Finding familiar faces at conferences has made all the difference, and I am continuously inspired by your work, creativity, and kindness. Navigating the academic landscape has been made much easier thanks to your support. Thank you, Ruth, for giving me the confidence to embark on this journey.

I am deeply grateful to my friends and my family, especially my parents, Géry and Jamila, for their trust, support, and curiosity, even while not fully understanding what I do. Thank you for supporting my education and for everything you have done for me. A special thanks to Gérard, Fiona, Erwan, Jonathan, Suzanne, Axel, Eva, Juliette, Léa, Mathilde, Margaux, and Reane. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandmother, Zohra.

Thank you, Florian, for your love and unwavering support throughout this journey, and for being by my side every step of the way.

Jeanne Marlier, Vienna 2025

1 Introduction

1.1 Laying the Groundwork: The Party Government Model

Political parties have long been seen as the *makers of democratic government* (Schattschneider, 1942). The legitimacy of political parties in government rests on the process by which they reach high political office: elections. Parties are regarded as the only viable mechanism for organizing mass opinion, structuring electoral competition and forming political personnel (Aldrich, 1995). Parties structure the vote by aggregating interests, values, and opinions through coherent ideologies and by presenting competing policy programs. Through voting, citizens select a policy path, and representatives are bound to it through a quasi-contractual mandate. Input legitimacy stems from this popular mandate, while output legitimacy depends on parties' capacity to govern effectively and responsibly. By linking individual officeholders with a broader organization, parties enable voters to hold elected officials accountable as a collective. As such, they have been described as “the only way” collective responsibility can exist within democratic institutions (Aldrich, 1995; Fiorina, 1981). As put by Aldrich (1995), “Parties are—or should be—integral parts of all political life, from structuring the reasoning and choice of the electorate, through all facets of campaigns and seemingly all facets of the government, to the very possibility of effective governance in a democracy.” (Aldrich, 1995, p. 18). From this standpoint, representative democracy is inherently tied to party government (Strøm, 2002).

Principal-agent theory explains that delegation occurs when a principal entrusts an agent to make decisions on their behalf. In parliamentary democracies, the chain of delegation refers to the process where voters delegate authority to elected representatives, who then entrust it to the executive and civil servants to implement policies. This delegation process is mirrored by a chain of accountability, ensuring that those who govern are held responsible for their actions (Strøm, 2000; Müller, 2000). The party government model thus describes the extent to which political parties enforce this chain of delegation from voters to those who govern (Strøm, 2000; Müller, 2000), i.e., the extent to which parties hold operational control over government (Rose, 1974). This control over government has been described as *the* primary objective of the party organization (Schattschneider, 1942).

The conditions for fulfilling the ideal-type party government have been outlined in several works (Rose, 1974; Katz, 1986; Thomassen, 1994). Mair (2013) summarizes these conditions as follows: Parties win control of executive office through competitive elections, where they offer distinct policy alternatives. Once in office, policies are determined by the party in the executive. Lastly, the executive is recruited and held accountable by and through parties. These conditions also align with early definitions of democratic government (Downs, 1957)

and the responsible party thesis (Aldrich, 1995). Following this framework, the *partyness of government* is defined as the extent to which the control of government is exercised in accordance with these conditions (Katz, 1986). Defining an ideal-type party government establishes the criteria by which the partyness of government can be evaluated and measured (Strøm, 2002), shaping subsequent empirical work on party-government relationships and the degree to which parties are in decline (Blondel and Cotta, 2000; Mair, 2013; Strøm, 2002; Katz and Mair, 1995; Neto and Strøm, 2006).

1.2 The Challenge to Party Government

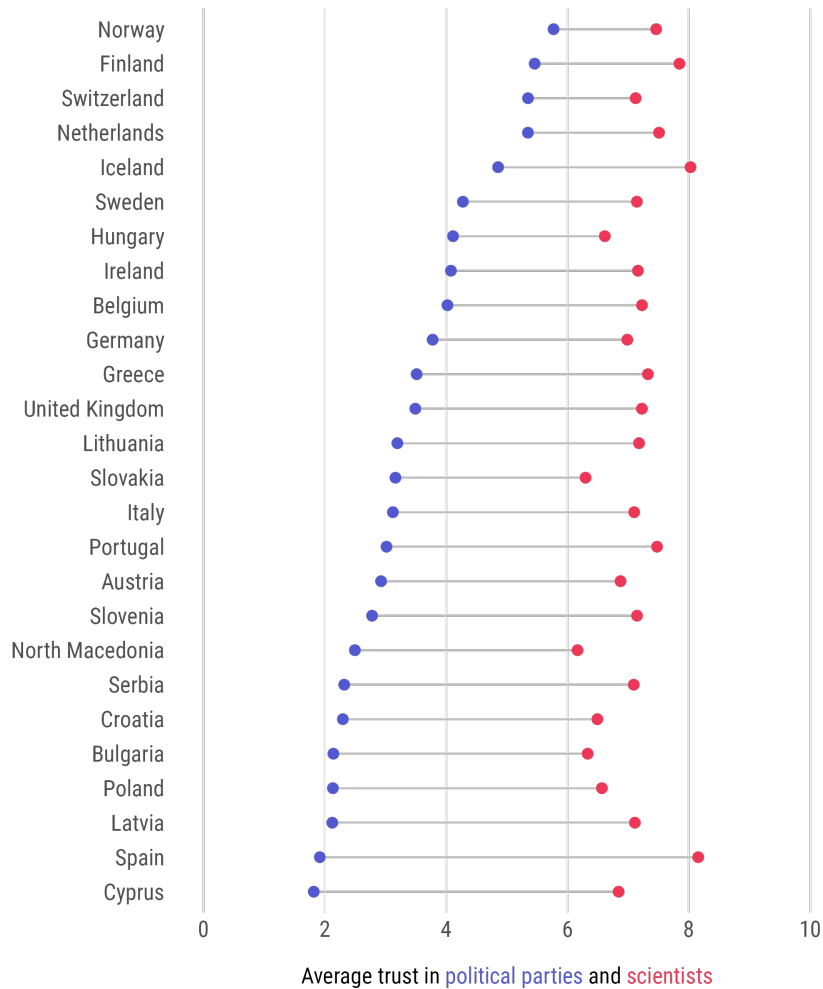
Research on party government soon evolved into debates about the extent to which party government faces challenges and, by extension, whether political parties themselves are in decline (Aldrich, 1995). Parties may face a legitimacy crisis, stemming both from disengagement among voters and from detachment among elites (Mair, 2013; Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2002).

From the voter’s side, party decline is reflected in falling turnout rates, shrinking party membership, and reduced campaigning efforts and volunteerism for parties (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2002; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012). Voters are increasingly making their vote choice later in the campaign and are less guided by stable partisan cues, contributing to rising electoral volatility (Mair, 2013) and leading to a broader trend of partisan dealignment (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2002). The sources and extent of partisan dealignment remain debated, with significant differences across countries, over time, and between generations (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2020). Whether perceived as a stable long-term attachment (Campbell et al., 1960) or the product of short-term considerations (Fiorina, 1981), voters’ likelihood to develop party attachments depends on individual (Dalton, 2007; Evans and Neundorff, 2020) and contextual factors (Lupu, 2015; Dassonneville, Fournier and Somer-Topcu, 2023). Moreover, the public has become increasingly polarized, especially along affective dimensions (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012; Mason, 2015; Wagner, 2021). As a result, party-voter linkages are likely to play an even more significant role in shaping political choices and interpersonal attitudes (Brown and Enos, 2021; Huddy and Bankert, 2017; Broockman, Kalla and Westwood, 2023). At the same time, polarization in Europe is often driven by a dislike of mainstream parties and support for parties that claim to enhance democracy by being “anti-party” (Mudde, 2007; Harteveld, Mendoza and Rooduijn, 2022). In some contexts, polarization may reflect party decline, as these parties call into question the democratic role of political parties.

Party decline is also reflected in recent survey data on trust in political parties. In 2020,

the 10th wave of the European Social Survey examined the level of trust that respondents place in various institutions. Figure 1.1 illustrates the disparity between trust in political parties and trust in scientists across European countries (51,542 respondents). In the overwhelming majority of countries, political parties are met with significant distrust, with 75% of respondents rating their trust in parties below 5 on a 10-point scale, and an average rating of 3.4. This indicates a stark contrast when compared to other societal groups, here scientists, who consistently receive higher trust ratings, with an average of 7. This trust gap underscores the lower legitimacy of political parties, particularly when contrasted with the perceived credibility of scientific experts.

Figure 1.1: Trust gap between political parties and scientists in Europe (2020) ([ESS ERIC, 2023](#))



The withdrawal of elites from parties has been seen in the increasing importance of the party in public office over other party activities, such as the party on the ground and the party in central office ([Katz and Mair, 2002](#)). This shift has also been described as

the transition from the mass party to the “cartel-party model” (Katz and Mair, 1995). Traditionally seen as intermediaries between civil society and the state, parties are argued to have become more state-reliant over time, by becoming more professional, less dependent on party members, and more focused on campaigns, the media and government effectiveness. In this view, cartelization may weaken party government, as increased cooperation between parties for the sake of government effectiveness may reduce the perception of distinct policy alternatives, ultimately diminishing party competition (Katz and Mair, 1995; Mair, 2013). Furthermore, political leaders are less likely to be recruited through parties or based on party loyalty. Instead, the focus may have shifted to their ability to appeal to voters and the media (Mair, 2013).

An alternative perspective challenges the cartel-party model by suggesting that party development is more complex than a transition from mass parties to cartel parties. Rather than following a single evolutionary path, parties may fit into a broader and more varied pluralistic typology (Koole, 1996). Additionally, some argue that electoral competition still plays a significant role in limiting the autonomy of party elites, contrary to the model’s suggestion (Kitschelt, 2000). Other studies have shown that state subsidies for parties have little impact on party competition, and in some cases, they may even contribute to increased party fragmentation (Scarrow, 2006). Furthermore, evidence indicates that party patronage has decreased over time in Europe, contrary to the assumptions of the cartel-party model (Biezen and Kopecký, 2014).

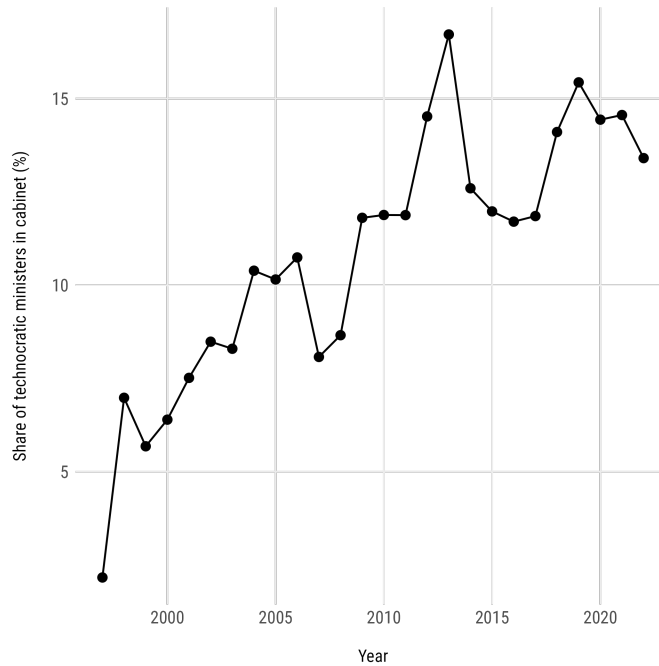
Nonpartisan representation is a key indicator of party decline (Strøm, 2002; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). The recruitment of ministers from outside party ranks fundamentally challenges the notion of party government. As these appointments are not based on enforcing party loyalty or representing internal factions (Rose, 1974), parties lose agency over ministers’ actions. Their presence signals a reduction in partisan control over government offices, which may erode voters’ long-term perceptions of parties’ capacity to implement policy. From a party government perspective, as parties increasingly delegate responsibilities to nonpartisan actors, their function as vehicles for policy implementation is further weakened (Strøm, 2002).

Moreover, nonpartisan ministers break the chain of delegation from voters to governing actors and, in effect, disrupt the chain of accountability (Strøm, 2000; Müller, 2000). Party affiliation creates a clear line of responsibility: if a minister underperforms, voters can sanction the minister’s party at the subsequent election, but if an independent minister acts against voters’ interests, it is unclear whether the blame should be placed on the appointing party (if one can be identified), the prime minister, or the individual minister. Therefore, the lack of continuous partisanship throughout the chain of delegation undermines accountability processes.

While theoretically, the two dimensions—party independence and expertise—are independent (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022), empirically, nonpartisan ministers have tended to be experts in the field of the portfolio to which they are appointed and are therefore often studied as *technocrats*. As such, the terms nonpartisan, technocrat, and outsider are often used interchangeably. These ministers are appointed to a wide range of portfolios, though they are most commonly placed in high-profile government portfolios such as Health, Economic Affairs, Finance, and Justice (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). They are typically trained in law, economics or STEM fields, and have professional backgrounds in state administration, academia, or the private sector (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). Technocrats often retain their mandates as long as partisan ministers, especially when they serve in party-led governments (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). While partisan ministers also develop expertise, their careers differ, as they are generally shaped by the political career path *through* party organizations and parliamentary work (Blondel and Thiébault, 1991).

Outsiders were once seen as a rare occurrence in Western Europe (de Winter, 1991). However, they have attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly in the context of the increasing prevalence of technocratic governments following the 2008 financial crisis. Consequently, several studies have contributed to the development of a typology of technocrats in leadership positions, including full technocratic governments, nonpartisan caretakers, and technocrat-led partisan governments. These have emerged primarily as solutions for crisis resolutions, with 24 such governments occurring in the EU-27 from 1945 to 2013 (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014; Pastorella, 2016). Other research focuses on technocrats serving as ministers in party-led governments, as prime ministers account for a small minority of technocratic appointments (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). Figure 1.2 shows the average share of technocratic ministers in Europe per year from 1997 to 2022 (Vittori et al., 2022). The pattern reflects a broader trend of elites increasingly withdrawing from traditional party recruitment, with nonpartisan appointments being negligible in 2000, rising to approximately 15% in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. While technocratic-led governments make up a minority of technocratic appointments, these government formations may have led party politicians to maintain a closer relationship with technocrats in subsequent years.

Figure 1.2: Average share of technocratic ministers in Europe (1997-2022) ([Vittori et al., 2022](#))



The mutual withdrawals of citizens and elites from party politics reinforce each other. Parties become more reliant on the state as the electorate becomes more unpredictable and less engaged. At the same time, citizens are less likely to see parties as the main drivers of policy, especially as parties rely more on nonpartisan actors. While party decline is not confined to government, it is in this area where it becomes most critical. A weak party in government is likely to result in a weakened party in parliament and a diminished voter base ([Strøm, 2002](#)). This makes evaluating the strength of parties in government crucial to assessing the overall viability of political parties.

1.3 Why Study Party Independence?

Technocrats are, by definition, both experts and independents. This dissertation focuses specifically on one dimension: party independence.¹ There are two key reasons for this choice. First, the democratic shortcomings of technocracy are not tied to its role in bringing expertise, but rather to its lack of party affiliation ([Meynaud, 1964](#)). From this perspective, it is the absence of party ties that undermines democratic processes by disrupting the chain of delegation between voters and government members ([Strøm, 2000](#); [Müller, 2000](#)), which is why early studies focused specifically on the effect of *nonpartisan* representation

¹Throughout the dissertation, “independent” refers to independence from political parties.

(Neto and Strøm, 2006; Strøm, 2002). Second, party independence is the dimension that potentially creates information difficulties for voters. While party cues may distort political realities in some contexts (Bartels, 2002), they also serve as valuable informational shortcuts that simplify citizens' democratic tasks, from participation to accountability (Lupia, 1994). Therefore, exploring how the absence of party cues shapes democratic processes offers important insights into the democratic implications of technocratic governance, building upon existing research on the role of expertise.

Which democratic processes are potentially affected by party independence? The literature on party government and delegation theory strongly points to the question of how accountability works under nonpartisan representation. The ability of voters to hold governments accountable is a central pillar of democratic representation and a key foundation of political legitimacy (Weatherford, 1992). In a party-based democracy, in order to assign responsibility and maintain accountability for an outcome fairly and effectively, citizens must be able to correctly identify the government actors who contribute to the outcome they are dissatisfied with, and associate them with a political party. Only then can elections function as mechanisms of retrospective reward or punishment, and thus produce accountability. The empirical investigation of this break in the chain of delegation and accountability remains limited.

The numerous other functions of parties, along with empirical work on the decline of parties, point to additional mechanisms: falling turnout rates and low levels of trust in parties. Voting creates a quasi-contractual relationship between political parties and the electorate, and higher electoral participation strengthens political legitimacy, as governments derive greater authority from a broad popular mandate. Parties play a central role in ensuring voter turnout: they organize electoral campaigns, provide voters with clear ideological cues to simplify decision-making and structure political competition. Considering the role of parties in driving electoral turnout, the presence of independents on the ballot raises important questions about voter engagement. Do independents fill the void left by declining turnout rates, or do they reduce the stakes of voting and increase information costs for citizens?

Political legitimacy is also rooted in trust in institutions and perceptions of government competence and effectiveness. Over time, parties build reputations based on their handling of issues, helping voters select competent actors on the issues they care about and reducing uncertainty about how a party will perform once in office. Under the party government model, a central function of parties is to be at the forefront of policy formulation and implementation. For party democracy to function effectively, citizens must view parties in this role, expecting with little uncertainty that governing actors will provide effective solutions to societal problems. However, the presence of independent politicians disrupts this

mechanism. Without party affiliation to signal competence, voters must reassess how they evaluate political effectiveness. Do independents automatically appear more competent due to disillusionment with parties? Or do citizens still view party affiliation as an advantage for effective policy-making, given that independence may imply greater uncertainty?

I thus explore the democratic shortcomings of nonpartisan representation through three key mechanisms: electoral participation, competence perceptions and accountability mechanisms. These are central components of a functioning democracy that maintain political legitimacy, with political parties serving as key actors in these processes. Political legitimacy may weaken when parties lose their importance in democratic representation and alternatives to party-based representation emerge. When alternatives to party-based representation emerge, it becomes essential to assess the quality of these democratic processes. As parties have traditionally been the key actors ensuring participation, accountability and competence signaling, how well do these processes function when politicians operate independently of political parties? This dissertation directly addresses this question. It considers the impact of independent politicians on citizens at three key moments where legitimacy is ensured: at the time of elections, when they enter political office, and in response to their actions while in office.

The dissertation is therefore guided by the following overarching research question and sub-questions:

How do independent politicians affect democratic quality?

RQ1. How do independent politicians affect electoral participation?

RQ2. How do independent politicians affect voters' evaluations of government competence?

RQ3. How do independent politicians affect accountability mechanisms?

I answer the above questions through four empirical chapters. Table 1.1 displays the overview of the papers included in this dissertation and the research question each address. First, this dissertation analyzes how the presence of independent politicians on the ballot influences electoral participation (Paper 1). Second, it examines how party independence shapes perceptions of ministerial competence at the time of their appointment (Paper 2). Third, it investigates how voters hold them accountable for their performance in office (Papers 3 and 4). By examining these three key moments, this dissertation provides a compre-

hensive assessment of how independent politicians shape the quality of democratic processes across different stages of the electoral cycle.

Table 1.1: Overview of papers included in the dissertation

Paper	Question	Title	Co-authors
1	RQ1	The causal effect of independent candidacies on electoral participation: the French case	-
2	RQ2	Why do people like technocrats? (Published in the <i>European Journal of Political Research</i>)	Matthias Kaltenecker, Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik
3	RQ3	Does electoral accountability work when ministers are independent?	-
4	RQ3	Raising standards? Citizen sanctions for corruption by independent and partisan ministers	-

1.4 Outline of the Dissertation

I address the three research questions across four empirical chapters. This section summarizes each empirical chapter.

The first paper tackles the first question: Do independent politicians increase or decrease voter turnout? I identify two competing mechanisms. On the one hand, they may increase information costs, leading to demobilization. On the other hand, they may expand the choice of candidates and engage those dissatisfied with political parties, leading to greater mobilization. I examine whether characteristics of the electoral contest and characteristics of the independent candidate determine which of these mechanisms are at play. In addition, I propose two conceptualizations of party independence: a narrower one, *pure independents*, and a broader one, *leaning independents*. In a first step, I reassess the link between independents and voter turnout. In a second step, I examine whether independents affect turnout differently depending on contest and candidate characteristics. To test this, I use data from French local and regional elections from 1994 to 2020, where the two-round voting system allows any candidate whose vote share exceeds a threshold to compete in the second round. By following a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach, I am able to causally isolate the effect of their qualification in the second round on voter turnout. I find that independents do not demobilize the electorate but can enhance participation under specific conditions. Independents increase voter turnout when they qualify for the second round in local elections and they decrease the share of blank and null votes when facing partisan opponents. While independents never demobilize citizens, they do increase the share of blank and null votes when

they run as incumbents, face independent opponents or are *pure independents*. Ultimately, I find that independents are most effective in mobilizing citizens when they maintain their outsider appeal while providing enough informational clarity to avoid creating ambiguity for the broader electorate regarding their positions.

The second paper addresses the second question: How does party independence affect voters' evaluations of government competence? The aim of this paper is to identify the perceived advantages and disadvantages that voters see in party government versus government by independent experts. Specifically, it disentangles the perceived value of expertise and party independence as two distinct dimensions of technocratic support. The study investigates how both dimensions shape two dimensions of competence perceptions: *issue* competence, the ability to apply expert knowledge to policymaking and *bargaining* competence, the ability to negotiate political support. The expectations are driven by a technocratic support perspective: While issue competence should positively relate to expertise, we test whether the negative view of partisanship reduces the value of expertise. Conversely, party members should possess a distinct advantage in bargaining competence, as their experience in public and party office should enhance their perception as better negotiators compared to independent political outsiders. Empirically, these expectations are tested with a two-by-two survey experiment conducted in Austria, where ministers' partisanship and expertise are randomized in a vignette describing a recently appointed minister. The findings indicate that support for technocratic governance is determined not only by the perceived advantages of expert ministers, but also by the disadvantages voters expect from being governed by partisan politicians. When expertise is held constant, partisan ministers are perceived as having lower issue competence. Additionally, partisanship weakens the effect of expertise on issue competence perceptions, and, to a lesser extent, on perceived bargaining competence, indicating that voter perceptions of these ministerial traits are not independent from each other. However, the negative evaluations of partisan ministers are conditional: the partisanship penalty in issue competence disappears among supporters of the minister's party.

The third and fourth papers examine the third question: How does party independence affect accountability mechanisms? One paper focuses on electoral accountability and policy performance and the second focuses on corruption accountability.

Several factors influence voters' ability to attribute responsibility for political outcomes, including both individual-level and contextual dimensions. In the third paper, I apply mechanisms from research in social psychology on group perception and attitude formation to explain the effect of a contextual dimension: the clarity of responsibility at the level of government members. I take a novel approach to government clarity (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013) by focusing on the perceived party clarity at the ministerial level, i.e., how

clearly ministers are tied to political parties. It can be expected that weaker party ties of ministers will make it more difficult for voters to identify a single party to hold responsible, as they may perceive the government as a less unified and cohesive group. In a first step, I test whether voters can trace responsibility to a political party when ministers' partisan ties are weaker. In a second step, I investigate variations in this mechanism among subgroups. I assess whether weaker party ties moderate the influence of technocratic attitudes and partisan motivated reasoning in assigning credit or blame for government performance. I use a factorial vignette experiment in Italy, where respondents are presented with fictional scenarios describing the consequences of a policy reform enacted by a minister. Regardless of whether a minister is an independent or a long-standing party member, I find evidence that voters consistently hold parties responsible for the policy failures and successes of the minister they appoint. Consequently, political parties appointing independents as a way of diluting and shifting responsibility away from them is an ineffective strategy. This paper highlights a significant constraint placed on elites, where they have limited room to distort public perceptions of responsibility, as electoral accountability is maintained even in low party clarity contexts.

I broaden my investigation of accountability mechanisms in the fourth paper by examining public approval following corruption scandals. Voters may hesitate to hold independent ministers accountable, especially when seen as key to effective governance. Yet voters may hold independents to higher ethical standards, associating corruption with party politics and thus sanctioning them more harshly when they fall short. We have yet to know how voters navigate these competing pressures. I posit that voters' sanctioning of politicians depends on the standards they hold them to, which are shaped by both partisanship and demographic traits. I hold the overall expectation that the higher the standards voters hold politicians to, the more severely they will punish misconduct. First, I compare the severity of sanctions against partisan and nonpartisan ministers. Second, I examine whether party independence exacerbates double standards in corruption sanctions based on ministers' gender and ethnicity. I employ two complementary survey experiments. The first study, conducted in Austria, uses a two-by-five design to examine how minister gender and party affiliation shape voter responses to a corruption scenario. The second extends this to France, Germany, Sweden, and Romania, with scandals of varying severity. I find that voters impose harsher sanctions on independents and out-party ministers compared to those from their own party. In fact, independent ministers are penalized just as severely as out-party ministers. This indicates that a greater presence of independents in government does not undermine corruption accountability. Rather, voters uphold anti-corruption norms by imposing sanctions on elites, regardless of partisanship and their policy successes. Additionally, the absence of party cues

does not increase the weight of demographic cues. This paper underscores the role of voters in maintaining democratic accountability, creating strong incentives for elites to avoid malpractice and reinforcing anti-corruption norms regardless of partisanship.

2 Theoretical Framework

This dissertation begins with the premise that political parties perform vital functions in the democratic processes under study. After establishing the importance of parties and outlining how they have receded from some of these roles, this section first examines the theoretical implications of independent politicians for representation and legitimacy. It then examines the implications of technocratic appointments for delegation risks faced by parties and situates the empirical increase in technocratic ministers within party governments across Europe. The remainder of this section identifies key gaps in the literature and introduces a framework for understanding how party independence may shape the quality of democratic processes. Central to this is the informational role of political parties: by structuring political competition, parties help voters navigate politics. The absence of partisan cues, therefore, introduces information costs. However, in the context of declining trust in parties, party independence may offer an alternative that resonates with citizens, particularly those inclined to support technocratic representation. I posit that while mechanisms of information costs likely influence how party independence affects accountability, its impact on competence can be understood through a technocratic lens, and participation is likely to be influenced both by information costs and the positive mobilizing effect on technocratic citizens.

2.1 The Alternatives to Party Government

“While populism and technocracy aim at discovering the common good, parties compete to define it.” (Caramani, 2017, p. 64)

This section situates independent politicians within the broader context of alternatives to party-based representation and highlights their theoretical implications for representation and legitimacy.

Competing Models of Representation

A natural extension of defining the ideal-type model of party government and the challenges it faces was to anticipate and define its possible alternatives (Mair, 2013). Early accounts identified a range of substitute forms of governing, including traditional government, military

government (Rose, 1974), corporatism, pluralist democracy, and direct democracy (Katz, 1986). The viability of political parties cannot be assessed solely by their own performance, but also in light of how they compare to these competing models (Strøm, 2002). In line with the challenges previously discussed, these alternatives often emerged as responses to the shortcomings of party democracy. While party government cannot be entirely replaced, given its foundational role in democratic representation, the crisis of party-based representation likely compels parties to engage with and rely on alternative modes of representation (Strøm, 2002). In a direct response to the declining trust and civic engagement, the most widespread of these alternatives is the inclusion of direct democracy within systems of party-based representation. It has therefore been identified as one of the fundamental challengers of party government (Strøm, 2002).

Another response to improve party democracy has been to investigate what citizens themselves prefer when it comes to who governs and how decisions are made. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002)’s *Stealth Democracy* finds that many citizens in the US would rather delegate decision-making to unelected experts and business leaders. This preference stems from a perceived cost of direct democracy and a general aversion to political conflict and deliberation. In a more recent contribution, Hibbing et al. (2023) revisit their argument and find evidence for an *attentive democracy*, where citizens still want elected officials to govern, but only after careful consultation with the public. Citizens tend to value politicians with real-world experience, as well as those who appear impartial and not driven by self-interest (Hibbing et al., 2023). Citizens across Europe hold more fragmented views, splitting along several dimensions, such as the roles of party politicians, citizens, and experts (Pilet et al., 2023). Moreover, citizens’ conceptions of representation may not be static, but shift in response to contextual factors such as protests, democratic backsliding (Claassen et al., 2025), and crises (Bertsou, 2025). While parties are unlikely to vanish from the executive or legislative arenas, they may be increasingly required to share space with less established and more flexible bodies of representation (Strøm, 2002).

The Technocratic Critique

The critiques of party government can be understood from two alternative forms of representation: populism and technocracy (Caramani, 2017). In their ideal-typical forms, both are unmediated, nonpartisan modes of representation, in which the partyness of government is at its weakest. Both claim to be able to identify and govern based on the common interest of society, something that parties are seen as unable to do under the challenges facing party democracy (Caramani, 2017). While both are symptoms of the shortcomings of party democracy, the alternatives address different issues: populism brings the supposed will of

the people to guide political action against an elite, aiming at increasing *input* legitimacy, whereas technocracy focuses on relying on rational speculation and expert knowledge to enact efficient policy solutions, aiming at increasing *output* legitimacy (Caramani, 2017).

The technocratic critique of party democracy is grounded in a belief in efficiency: the idea that political decisions should produce the greatest benefit with the least cost, and should therefore be based on technical knowledge rather than political negotiation or public deliberation (Meynaud, 1964). Early accounts of technocracy emphasized its contempt for voters, public opinion, and political conflict (Meynaud, 1964), as well as its rejection of partisan disputes, positioning itself above party politics (Meynaud, 1960). In this view, technocrats are skeptical of the popular will and the institutions of representative democracy, which are seen as barriers to policy-making informed by technical expertise. Defined as an alternative to party democracy, technocracy is “a form of representation stressing the prominence of expertise in the identification and implementation of objective solutions to societal problems.” (Caramani, 2017, p. 55).

The technocratic critique portrays party politicians as overly responsive to public opinion, prioritizing short-term responsiveness and engaging in the unnecessary politicization of issues (Pastorella, 2016). Political parties are therefore seen as being in a state of constant monitoring of the electorate, with policymaking driven by vote- and office-seeking motives, as well as the demand for immediate results (Caramani, 2017). Technocracy, by contrast, does not act based on a popular mandate and is not responsive to public opinion. Instead, it claims to act in the best interest of society based on expert knowledge and technical reasoning (Caramani, 2017). From this perspective, the general public is seen as lacking the necessary information, skills, and time to determine the most appropriate political course, while expert representatives are thought to be better equipped to do so (Caramani, 2017). Technocracy does not derive legitimacy from popular support through elections but from expertise, aiming to maximize output legitimacy. In contrast, input legitimacy is often viewed as the tyranny of public opinion (Caramani, 2017). Many of the concerns raised by the technocratic critique had already been anticipated in the literature on the problems of party government. Scholars noted that features of party democracy may incentivize politicians to pursue short-term or personal goals over long-term policy objectives (Katz, 1986), or that party politicians often lack the capacity to achieve their goals effectively (Rose, 1974).

The Democratic Challenges of Technocracy

In its more extreme form, technocracy tends toward authoritarianism and is viewed as fundamentally incompatible with democracy (Meynaud, 1964; Putnam, 1977; Caramani, 2017). Indeed, treating technocracy as compatible with democracy is considered a “conceptual er-

ror” (Meynaud, 1964). Since the technocratic claim to legitimacy rests on knowing better than the public, it undermines the legitimacy of political opposition. Basing actions on scientific evidence removes any incentives to engage in democratic deliberation and justification (Pastorella, 2016). This perspective can also be observed in political campaigns, where opposition to the European Union has been framed as a defense of democracy against technocracy (Nava, Centeno and Liu, 2020).

An alternative interpretation sees delegation to technocratic institutions as compatible with democracy under specific conditions: when their tasks are narrowly defined, their competence is limited, and institutional rules are in place to maintain accountability (Majone, 1998; Pastorella, 2016). Empirical studies of how technocrats behave in office remain limited, but, intuitively, they seem to be less responsive to parliament than partisan ministers (York, 2024). Research on technocratic finance ministers shows that they implement significantly more reforms and are linked to larger budget cuts in public social and health spending compared to their partisan counterparts (Alexiadou, 2020). Whether a technocrat governs in line with the technocratic mindset also depends on their professional background (Putnam, 1977).

The democratic deficit of technocracy does not lie in its pursuit of efficiency, which contributes to output legitimacy, but rather in its lack of input legitimacy. At its core, technocracy promotes the idea of a unified general interest, one it claims to be uniquely capable of identifying and translating into policy actions. This implies a non-pluralistic view: opinions are not aggregated, political competition is absent, and opposition and deliberation are seen as either unnecessary or unreasonable (Caramani, 2017). In addition, technocracy is unmediated. It does not operate on the basis of an electoral mandate, and its claim to act in the name of the general will open the door to distortion (Caramani, 2017). In doing so, technocracy depoliticizes democratic processes. Citizens are less likely to be democratically engaged under these conditions, as political competition helps them perceive what is at stake and believe that their vote can make a difference. When governments appear unresponsive, citizens may feel discouraged from participating in elections. In the absence of an electoral mandate, citizens also face greater uncertainty about what governing actors will do in office. While expertise may strongly signal competence, party independence on its own conveys limited information about politicians’ capabilities, especially when compared to partisan politicians who accumulate reputations over time.

From early definitions to contemporary discussions, technocrats have consistently been criticized for their lack of accountability (Meynaud, 1964, 1960; Fischer, 1990; Caramani, 2017; McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014). From the perspective of the technocratic critique, the public lacks the competence to judge the actions of governing elites and, therefore should

not have the power to sanction them. In addition, because technocrats do not govern on the basis of a mandate and pledges, there is no clear standard against which to evaluate their performance. While this contrasts with party politicians, who are answerable to citizens through elections, the mechanisms of accountability in party-based democracies are not without flaw. Voters often evaluate incumbents based only on recent performance, particularly during the election year (Kramer, 1971). They may also punish governments for events outside of their control (Achen and Bartels, 2016; Healy, Malhotra and Mo, 2010), and their assessments of political conditions are frequently influenced by party identities (Bartels, 2002). Hence, citizens may lack the necessary information to effectively sanction or reward their representatives, and institutional rules for government formation may not always align with the outcomes produced by electoral systems (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999).

Just as the mechanisms of accountability in party democracy differ theoretically from how they function in practice, similar questions can be raised about technocracy. In parliamentary systems, technocratic governments remain accountable to parliament through confidence votes, and voters may be aware of the break in the chain of delegation, holding parties that support technocratic governments accountable instead (Pastorella, 2016). Moreover, technocrat-led governments are often appointed with a specific purpose, such as managing a crisis, which gives their mandate a clearer and more limited scope (Pastorella, 2016). These dynamics raise important questions about the democratic implications of technocratic governance in theory and its broader consequences for the quality of democracy in practice.

2.2 Technocratic Ministers in Party Government

Party independence in national governments is examined in Papers 2, 3, and 4, specifically focusing on its effects on accountability and competence perceptions. This section outlines the tension that parties face when appointing outsiders through the lens of delegation theory. It identifies the key drivers behind these appointments to contextualize their emergence, their strategic functions, and the potential implications for democratic quality.

Ministerial Recruitment and Delegation Risks

Ministerial recruitment is typically the responsibility of political parties, which act as the link in the chain of delegation from voters to government (Müller, 2000; Strøm, 2000). When selecting ministers, parties aim to minimize agency loss that may arise during the delegation process. Within a rational choice framework, parties are seen as pursuing a combination of vote-, office-, and policy-seeking goals (Strøm, 1990), and party elites prioritize appointing ministers who will advance these objectives and remain loyal agents of the party (Andeweg,

2000; Blondel and Cotta, 2000; Strøm, 2000). Consequently, political parties have long been the primary recruitment channels for executive office, with party-affiliated ministers seen as posing the least risk of deviating from the party line (Andeweg, 2000; Müller, 2000; Strøm, 2000). A defining feature of party government is that partisan ministers should occupy the most important government offices and should be sufficiently prominent to participate meaningfully in the formulation and implementation of government policy (Rose, 1974). This ensures that political parties can fulfill their central democratic functions: translating citizens' preferences into policy and being held accountable for government performance through elections.

Appointing outsiders, by contrast, introduces uncertainty: their actions may not clearly align with party positions, and the potential for agency loss increases as parties lose ideological and organizational control over government actions (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022). However, subject-matter expertise is a valuable asset in informing policy decisions (Alexiadou, 2015), especially in times of crisis. This creates a trade-off: parties may cede some political control in exchange for technocratic competence, especially when faced with policy challenges that require expert handling. Parties are also motivated by office-seeking goals: securing government positions for party elites enhances the party's reputation and helps consolidate power. While outsiders may gain personal prestige from holding office, the party itself may not necessarily benefit directly in terms of reputation, as voters might perceive the performance of outsiders separately from the party. In this context, agency loss takes the form of diminished reappointment power, as parties are indebted to outsiders when they perform positively (Andeweg, 2000). However, when parties are primarily vote-seeking, appointing outsiders who perform poorly may represent an agency loss that nonetheless serves the party's goals, as it may allow them to deflect blame and avoid electoral costs. Outsiders may be particularly relied upon when parties seek to implement unpopular policies or change their position, as they may help the party avoid direct electoral consequences (Wratil and Pastorella, 2018). When technocrats govern alongside partisans, the drivers of their appointment reveal under which conditions parties are willing to lose agency and control over government.

The Drivers of Technocratic Appointments

Technocratic appointments—only possible when ministers can be selected outside of the parliament—are more likely when institutional and political conditions empower individuals over the party. They occur more frequently under prime ministers with strong authority and autonomy, or in systems with presidential features, weak parties, and personalized politics (Rodríguez Teruel and Jerez Mir, 2018; Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida, 2018;

Verzichelli and Cotta, 2018; Bruère and Gaxie, 2018; Neto and Strøm, 2006). In a study of 12 Latin American countries, Martínez-Gallardo and Schleiter (2015) finds that presidents often appoint nonpartisan ministers when partisan ministers are unreliable. This dynamic is also evident in Austria, where unsuccessful party leaders rely more heavily on party elites for appointments, while successful leaders act more autonomously (Kaltenegger, 2023). In addition, Austrian outsider ministers are more likely to be appointed when party support in the bureaucracy is greater, while experts are preferred when ideologically aligned, suggesting that parties anticipate the risk of losing agency involved with appointing technocrats (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022).

Technocratic appointments are also more likely when parties are under strain. Under competitive and personalized electoral systems, technocrats are preferred over experienced politicians during crises, suggesting that the trade-off between control and competence is resolved in favor of the latter when electoral stakes are high (Alexiadou and Gunaydin, 2019). While party system fragmentation and polarization do not seem to drive such appointments (Pilet, Puleo and Vittori, 2024; Wratil and Pastorella, 2018), high electoral volatility and economic downturns create incentives for parties to loosen their control over executive office, as electoral costs in such contexts are more uncertainly assessed (Emanuele et al., 2023; Neto and Strøm, 2006; Semenova, 2020). Outsider appointments are also more likely under minority governments, where parties may rely on technocrats as neutral agents to reduce conflicts between coalition partners and increase cabinet survival (Neto and Strøm, 2006). The share of populist parties within governments increases the likelihood of technocratic appointments, suggesting that populist parties may delegate due to a lack of qualified personnel, indicating that limited party resources may lead to greater delegation (Pilet, Puleo and Vittori, 2024). During periods of economic uncertainty, parties may also appoint technocrats to signal credibility to international actors. Indeed, countries with technocratic finance ministers receive significantly lower borrowing costs, thus trading off agency loss for greater external credibility (Alexiadou, Spaniel and Gunaydin, 2022).

The drivers of technocratic appointments reveal that parties are willing to cede agency when their future is at risk or when power imbalances exist between leaders and the party. Technocrats are valued not only for their legitimacy and credibility as experts, but also as strategic assets when electoral strength is under pressure. This underscores the need to examine how technocratic traits affect democratic processes, particularly their implications for accountability and perceptions of governmental competence.

2.3 Parties, Information Costs, and Electoral Participation

Citizens may first encounter party independence on the ballot. This section discusses the role of parties in driving electoral participation, identifies how independent candidates may influence turnout, before outlining how this dissertation adds new insights to the field.

How Parties Mobilize the Electorate

[Downs \(1957\)](#) emphasized the importance of uncertainty and information in decision-making. For citizens to make a decision, they must understand their own goals and the expected consequences of choosing one option over another. This requires both a coherent set of beliefs and values, as well as contextual knowledge about political issues and party positions. As such, deciding whether to vote and for whom involves processing information and weighing alternatives in order to reduce uncertainty about the future implications of said choice. Political parties, alongside other actors, play a key role in minimizing this uncertainty.

From a rational choice perspective, political mobilization is more likely when the benefits of participating in an election outweigh the associated costs. These costs primarily involve the effort required to reach a voting decision, understand the electoral system, and physically go to the polls. Political parties help reduce these costs by simplifying vote choice. They do so by aggregating opinions and interests, offering voters structured alternatives. Party manifestos help reduce uncertainty about a party's intended actions once in office. This is particularly essential, as voters tend to find it difficult to take clear positions on policy issues and to identify where candidates stand ([Campbell et al., 1960](#)).

Parties provide a perceptual lens through which citizens can infer party positions and assess political conditions ([Bartels, 2002](#)). This is especially relevant under spatial theories of voting, which suggest that rational voters choose the option closest to their own preferences ([Downs, 1957](#)). The ability to do this increases when parties offer distinct platforms, as required by the party government model. Clear differences between parties raise the perceived stakes of elections, make it easier for voters to identify their preferred option, and increase their perception that their vote matters ([Downs, 1957](#)). In this way, party cues function as informational shortcuts that reduce the complexity of decision-making ([Lupia, 1994](#)).

Parties also contribute to mobilization by building consistent reputations over time. Through repeated cues and messaging, they establish a recognizable party brand, making it easier for voters to infer positions based on party affiliation ([Lupu, 2013](#)). This not only strengthens partisan loyalty among the base but also increases the likelihood of long-term partisan attachments among the electorate ([Dassonneville, Fournier and Somer-Topcu, 2023](#)). Partisanship is a form of social identity, providing an anchor that shapes individuals'

political views and long-term voting behavior, further lowering information costs (Huddy and Bankert, 2017). While scholars differ on the origins and nature of partisanship (Campbell et al., 1960; Fiorina, 1981), party cues are commonly understood to function as an economizing device.

Beyond their core supporters, parties also fulfill an educational role. By offering competing platforms, they expose citizens to different perspectives, helping them understand what is at stake in an election and where they themselves stand (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). Parties also reduce participation barriers by informing voters about where, when, and how to vote. This function is essential for parties seeking legitimacy through broad-based electoral support. During campaigns, parties inform the electorate through manifestos, public appearances, and debates, increasing the visibility and the stakes of elections. Canvassing efforts and get-out-the-vote campaigns directly enhance participation by motivating voters and reducing the informational and logistical barriers to turnout. Party organizations, with their resources and networks, are key to making these campaigning efforts effective.

Consequently, much of the literature on the drivers of turnout highlights both affective motivations, such as civic duty and partisanship, and contextual factors that influence information costs. Turnout has been shown to increase under conditions of economic growth, larger population size, greater candidate choice, and closer electoral competition (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Bol and Ivandic, 2022), as well as with heightened political competition (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2000) and polarization (Harteveld and Wagner, 2023). These conditions all raise the likelihood that voters perceive parties as offering distinct alternatives and improve access to “free” information.

Voting Without Party Labels

Given the central role of parties in mobilizing voters, scholars have explored the implications of elections featuring party-independent candidates on turnout (Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001; Kapoor and Magesan, 2018; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020). Intuitively, the absence of party cues may increase information costs and lower perceptions of electoral stakes. Whereas parties simplify vote choice through recognizable symbols, ideological platforms, and consistent policy positions, independent candidates offer fewer informational shortcuts. Under greater uncertainty, voters may find it harder to distinguish between alternatives, reducing the perceived utility of voting. Moreover, since parties function as organizations that train candidates and coordinate campaigns, independent candidates may face resource constraints that lower campaign visibility. These limitations can further reduce electoral stakes and public motivation to participate.

A burgeoning literature also suggests that party independence could mobilize voters

dissatisfied with or distrustful of political parties, potentially increasing turnout (Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020; Erlingsson et al., 2024; Bernard et al., 2025). In this way, independents may expand the range of candidate choices available to voters. The tension between more choices and higher information costs raises important questions about how party independence affects voter turnout. This leads to the following research question addressed in Paper 1:

RQ1. How do independent politicians affect electoral participation?

Party independence in elections generally takes two forms: fully nonpartisan elections and elections where independent candidates run alongside partisan candidates. The literature has explored how mobilization works under these two scenarios. In the U.S. context, research consistently shows that turnout is significantly lower in nonpartisan elections, such as school board and judicial elections, and that it increases disparities in voter turnout based on income and education levels (Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001). These elections also tend to have a higher share of undecided voters (Schaffner and Streb, 2002). Moreover, the removal of party cues exacerbates the need for alternative informational shortcuts, such as incumbency (Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001), professional and political experience (Kirkland and Coppock, 2018), and demographic cues such as race and gender (Mcdermott, 1998). A growing body of literature focuses on elections where independents run alongside partisans. In countries such as Portugal, Norway, and Czechia, studies generally find that a higher presence of independents in local elections increases turnout, but rather to a small extent (Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005; Freire, Martins and Meirinho, 2012; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020; Bernard et al., 2025), with a positive effect also observed in India (Kapoor and Magesan, 2018), while in Sweden, the results are null (Erlingsson et al., 2024).

These studies have offered valuable insights, which Paper 1 builds on. I posit that accurately assessing how independents affect turnout requires considering the types of independents and the contexts in which they run. A challenge in the European context has been to compare how party independence affects turnout, given the diversity in its definition and legal classification. While in some contexts, independents are grouped with local parties, other cases rely on more restrictive definitions. I propose that the definition of party independence, along with other candidate characteristics, has significant theoretical implications for understanding its impact on turnout.

In Paper 1, I address this challenge by offering a theoretical discussion on the definition of independence, distinguishing between a restrictive definition that considers only outsiders with no current or prior ties to political parties, and a broader definition that includes can-

didates who run without party labels but have prior party ties or ideological leanings. I further explore candidate characteristics such as incumbency and prior candidacy experience. I then empirically assess how these varying types of independents affect turnout. This approach allows for a clearer distinction between different types of independents, enabling a comparison between independents with varying levels of ties to the political realm, such as outsiders versus independent incumbents or those with prior candidacy experience. Additionally, I compare independents who align ideologically on the left-right spectrum with those who refrain from doing so. The theoretical argument on information costs is likely to apply to a specific type of independent: those who are less established, less well known, and less ideologically aligned. In contrast, the theoretical argument about expanding the choice of candidates may be more relevant when independents hold a stronger outsider status. These distinctions, which have not been explored in previous research, constitute one central contribution of Paper 1.

2.4 Parties, Competence Perceptions and the Technocratic Citizen

This section examines how parties shape competence perceptions, explores the role of party independence through the literature on public support for technocrats, and outlines how this dissertation builds on and extends existing research.

Party Reputations

Over time, parties build reputations based on their handling of policy issues, reducing voter uncertainty about their future actions in office. They achieve this not only through manifestos and pledges (Downs, 1957), but also by signaling competence through their performance records (Fiorina, 1981). Thus, parties develop distinct brands that reflect their ability to address specific issues, with party cues serving as signals of competence. This aligns with the conditions of party government, where parties are seen as vehicles for policy formulation and implementation, and voters should expect them to fulfill this role. The concept of issue ownership refers to a party’s positive reputation for handling issues and an increased interest in a policy area (Petrocik, 1996). This means that parties have an electoral advantage when the issues they “own” are salient in an election campaign (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008). Green and Jennings (2017) propose that issue ownership is a long-term reputation, which is different from “issue performance”, referring to the short-term reputation that governing parties build while in office. Parties in government will be evaluated on the basis of their handling of issues whose policy outcomes are directly noticed by voters (Petrocik, 1996),

and parties can further shape their competence perceptions by emphasizing specific issues (Stiers and Dassonneville, 2024).

Public Support for Technocrats

As discussed, the decline in trust toward political parties has raised questions about their credibility in achieving policy goals. This has led to a growing body of literature exploring the extent to which voters perceive alternative actors as competent and credible alternatives to party politicians in policymaking. In the context of party independence, this has led to a growing body of literature examining the conditions under which voters prefer independent experts over party politicians to handle policymaking.

Research shows that giving more power to experts is one of the five governance dimensions European citizens favor, with significant country differences (Pilet et al., 2023). Support for technocrats is strongest in Poland, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Austria, while weakest in Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands (Rojon et al., 2023; Pilet et al., 2023). Technocratic attitudes are also more common in countries with a history of party-based authoritarianism (Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017) and those that have experienced technocratic governments (Chiru and Enyedi, 2022). Bertsou and Caramani (2022) introduced a multidimensional measure of technocratic attitudes consisting of three dimensions: affinity to expertise, anti-politics and elitism. Citizens who support technocrats are in favor of a greater role for expertise and experts in political decision-making, they reject politicians and party politics, and they mistrust the political skills of citizens, preferring elites instead. Using a multi-dimensional measure of technocratic attitudes, voters with a technocratic profile account for 12% of the electorate overall, with shares reaching 18%-19% in Greece, Romania and Poland, 13.5% in Italy and as little as 6.5%-10% in France, Sweden, and Germany (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). Technocratic attitudes have increased after the COVID-19 pandemic and now account for 15% of the electorate overall (Bertsou, 2025). The largest shifts occurred in Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, where pre-pandemic support was lowest, while growth was minimal in countries with already high levels (Bertsou, 2025). This suggests that technocratic attitudes may be dormant preferences that can be triggered by external factors, but they still appear to be subject to a ceiling effect.

Voter support for the involvement of technocrats in policy-making depends on several additional factors. Qualitative evidence suggests that while citizens may support the inclusion of independent experts, they prefer to make experts part of representative democracy rather than rejecting party democracy altogether (Ganuza and Font, 2020). Evidence from the UK indicates that most supporters of greater expert inclusion prefer experts to work alongside citizens or political parties, rather than taking decisions independently (Haesevoets et al.,

2025). In addition, voters’ preferences depend on specific steps in the policy-making process. In particular, voters prefer independent experts to be in charge of policy design and implementation on all issues rather than elected representatives (Bertsou, 2022). Support for technocrats is also stronger for technical issues than for positional issues (Bertsou, 2022; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023) and is influenced by external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Bertsou, 2025). Preferences for independents depend on the professional background of political outsiders, with university professors being favored over party politicians, while business leaders and civil servants do not enhance the appeal of outsiders (Rojon et al., 2023).

Citizens can better evaluate the competence of politicians when parties and politicians build reputations based on their past handling of policy issues. This enables voters to recognize which parties are most capable on the issues they care about and to make more informed choices. Parties thus serve as important competence signals. In the absence of party cues, however, citizens have less information and may feel greater uncertainty about how well independents can perform in office. Meanwhile, the growing literature on public support for technocrats suggests that citizens may sometimes prefer independent actors over party politicians for policymaking roles, perceiving them as more competent. While this may be primarily attributed to technocrats’ expertise, party independence may also contribute to their appeal, particularly in a context of declining trust in parties. This raises important questions: do citizens still view parties as competent actors of policymaking, as envisioned in the party government model? Or, in the context of lower party trust, do independents enjoy a competence advantage? How much of technocratic support is driven by party independence? This leads to the following research question, which I address in Paper 2:

RQ2. How do independent politicians affect voters’ evaluations of government competence?

The literature on technocratic support offers several avenues for further exploration. Existing studies often treat party independence and expertise as a single dimension, rather than two distinct traits. Paper 2 builds on prior work that theoretically distinguishes between party independence and expertise (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022), applying this framework to competence perceptions. While most independents are empirically associated with expertise, party politicians can also be experts within their portfolios. Paper 2 addresses this gap by exploring to what extent voters perceive the advantages and disadvantages of

being governed by independent experts versus party politicians. By treating party independence and expertise as separate dimensions, this approach isolates whether technocratic support arises from a disdain for parties or a general preference for expertise.

2.5 How Parties Clarify Who Is Responsible

This section discusses the role of parties in informing who is responsible for political outcomes and how politicians' characteristics influence how severely they are held accountable. It then examines how party independence may limit or strengthen accountability, concluding with how this dissertation contributes to understanding these dynamics.

Retrospective Voting

As previously discussed, political parties facilitate the chain of delegation from voters to those who govern, mirrored by a chain of accountability where collective responsibility is realized through elections (Strøm, 2000; Müller, 2000). The extent to which vote choice is shaped by electoral accountability has long been the subject of theoretical discussion. As posited by Downs (1957), both the decision to vote and vote choice can be understood as a calculation of costs and benefits. This choice may be informed by both retrospective or prospective evaluations (Downs, 1957). A *prospective* evaluation, i.e., anticipation of the benefits that a voter might obtain, requires a highly sophisticated electorate, which must be familiar with and evaluate the candidates' manifestos and anticipate their consequences (Downs, 1957). On the other hand, *retrospective* voting, i.e., the evaluation of past events, is seen as less demanding: voters can evaluate the incumbent government according to the changes in their own welfare (Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966).

Through retrospective voting, effective electoral accountability can be achieved by relying on simple and easy-to-grasp performance indicators to reward or punish incumbents. Elections offer voters the opportunity to express their evaluation of how society has functioned under the incumbent's term (Fiorina, 1981). Therefore, citizens base their decision (voting for or against the incumbent) from their personal experience as well as their understanding of the incumbent's performance for society at large. According to the *sanctioning* model, or more formerly known as the traditional reward-punishment theory (Key, 1966), citizens consider past performance as a primary indicator of the government's competence. Voters then foster good government performance by re-electing competent actors and throwing out incompetent ones (Barro, 1973; Ferejohn, 1986). Under the *selection* model, retrospective voters will either re-elect the incumbent they consider competent or vote for a challenger in the hope of selecting a better performer (Fearon, 1999). In this conception, voters rely on

past performance to improve the selection of future leaders (Mansbridge, 2009; Persson and Tabellini, 2000).

Retrospective voting is thus one of the most important mechanisms in representative democracy: voters incentivize office holders by punishing poor performance and rewarding competence, thus achieving political accountability through the electoral process. Given its importance, research has examined the individual and institutional factors that influence the stability of retrospective voting and, by extension, the effectiveness of democratic accountability.

Partisan Rationalization

How do citizens know who is responsible for political outcomes? Just as with the decision to vote, a substantial body of research has examined the role of party cues as informational shortcuts in shaping perceptions of political outcomes and responsibility attribution. A foundational insight is that individuals tend to consider only political messages that align with their pre-existing views (Zaller, 1992), a phenomenon related to the confirmation bias well documented in psychology (Wason, 1960; Mynatt, Doherty and Tweney, 1977). When individuals form opinions, they tend to rely on the most accessible considerations, often neglecting the full context (Zaller, 1992). Often, partisanship serves as the most accessible cue, acting as a perceptual lens through which voters interpret political conditions. This lens causes different segments of the electorate to reach different conclusions about political conditions and, therefore, to assign responsibility differently (Bartels, 2002). Indeed, social psychology research shows that individuals' judgments are often influenced by a "group-serving bias" (Hewstone, 1989; Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Specifically, voters are more likely to attribute good performance to actors affiliated with their party, and to attribute poor performance to the ones who are not, even if this follows an inaccurate judgment (Peffley, 1984; Bartels, 2002; Rudolph, 2003, 2006; Gaines et al., 2007; Malhotra and Kuo, 2008; Marsh and Tilley, 2010; Plescia, Kritzing and Spoon, 2022; Bisgaard, 2015).

Elites play a role in activating partisan bias. Elite polarization has been found to amplify the effect of party endorsements on public opinion (Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013). Voters also respond more favorably to issue frames endorsed by their own party than those promoted by opposing parties (Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010). When party elites convey a unified message, partisan perceptual differences tend to decrease (Bisgaard and Slothuus, 2018).

The Clarity of Responsibility

Another strand of research focuses on identifying the contextual factors that influence voters' ability to accurately attribute responsibility for government performance. In particular, studies show that coalition complexity, as well as the level of division within governments, has hindered voters' ability to sanction governments for poor performance by reducing the clarity of responsibility (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 1995; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013). Research indicates that economic voting, i.e., the tendency to vote more for the incumbent when the economy is performing well and less when it is not, is more prevalent in high-clarity contexts than in low-clarity ones, a distinction defined by the perceived unified control over policymaking by the incumbent government (Powell and Whitten, 1993).

Other scholars have conceptualized the clarity of responsibility as consisting of separate dimensions, focusing on specific characteristics of policymaking. These dimensions include the clarity of alternatives, such as the number of effective parties (Anderson, 2000), and the level of party polarization, with retrospective evaluations of government performance having a stronger effect on vote choice when polarization is higher (Stiers and Dassonneville, 2020). In coalition governments, the prime minister's party is consistently seen as the incumbent and thus the responsible actor (Lewis-Beck, 1986; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Fisher and Hobolt, 2010; Williams and Whitten, 2015; Vinæs Larsen, 2016; Silva and Whitten, 2017). Moreover, voters' perceptions of responsibility also increase with proposal power, party size (Angelova, König and Proksch, 2016; Debus, Stegmaier and Tosun, 2014; Duch, Przepiorka and Stevenson, 2015; Duch and Stevenson, 2013), bargaining strength (Bowler, Gschwend and Indridason, 2020), intra-coalition conflicts (Plescia and Kritzinger, 2022), and time in office (Bengtsson, 2004).

Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci (2013) demonstrate that both static and dynamic dimensions of institutional factors are at play: *institutional clarity*, referring to the level of concentration of institutional power, and *governmental clarity*, referring to the degree of cohesion among government members. They define governmental clarity in parliamentary systems as the extent to which the government is a single party or coalition, the dominance of one party within a coalition, and the ideological cohesion of the government. They find that governmental clarity better captures contextual variation in retrospective voting, as compared to institutional clarity. This suggests that voters' ability to vote retrospectively and hold the government accountable is more influenced by their ability to identify a single political party to credit or blame for performance than by their ability to identify which part of the political system is responsible.

Accountability Standards

Citizens hold clear standards for how politicians ought to behave in office (Waterman, Jenkins-Smith and Silva, 1999; Malhotra and Margalit, 2014; Gottlieb, 2016). When political outcomes exceed, meet, or fall short of these expectations, they trigger emotional responses ranging from elation to disappointment (Bell, 1985). These evaluations are anchored to reference points—levels set by voters’ prior expectations (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Higher expectations often result in harsher sanctions when they are not met.

Research shows that incumbents face greater electoral losses and lower approval ratings when there is a significant gap between expected and actual performance (Waterman, Jenkins-Smith and Silva, 1999; Malhotra and Margalit, 2014). Similarly, issue ownership amplifies these effects: parties are punished more severely for underperformance on issues they are perceived to own (Plescia and Kritzing, 2018). The relationship between expectations and strength of accountability has been widely studied in the context of politicians’ demographic affiliation. Voters tend to apply double standards in assessing political malpractice, holding certain demographic groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, to higher ethical expectations. These groups are frequently viewed as more honest, of higher integrity, and more risk-averse. Their under-representation in politics reinforces the perception that they are outsiders, lacking access to the networks and resources typically associated with corruption. As a result, voters assume they are less likely to engage in malpractice, and when such transgressions do occur, the perceived breach of trust is more severe, resulting in harsher sanctions. These perceptions contribute to a broader pattern: voters tend to hold female and ethnic minority politicians to higher standards of performance and qualifications than their male and ethnic majority counterparts, leading to harsher sanctions (Bauer, 2020b; Costa, 2021; Bauer, 2020a; Lawless and Pearson, 2008; Butler, Naurin and Öhberg, 2022; Berinsky et al., 2011; Niven, 2025).

This body of literature highlights that the effectiveness of accountability is shaped by the salience of citizens’ party identities, the clarity with which responsibility is distributed among governing actors, and the standards citizens apply to politicians. Voters rely on informational shortcuts, especially partisan cues, to assess who is responsible for political outcomes and to what degree. Investigating how party independence affects accountability mechanisms builds on these insights: in the absence of the cues they typically rely on, how do citizens determine who is responsible and how harshly to hold them accountable? As established, party independence disrupts the chain of delegation and accountability from parties to those who govern (Strøm, 2000; Müller, 2000). Scholars have emphasized that party in-

dependence in government may serve as a strategy for parties to avoid blame (Wratil and Pastorella, 2018; Alexiadou and Gunaydin, 2019). The lack of accountability has long been discussed as a limitation of nonpartisan representation (Meynaud, 1964; Putnam, 1977; McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014; Pastorella, 2016; Caramani, 2017), yet we still know little about how accountability functions under nonpartisan representation, especially when independent ministers serve within party-led governments. This leads to the following research question, which I address in Papers 3 and 4:

RQ3. How do independent politicians affect accountability mechanisms?

Existing research has significantly advanced our understanding of how party cues influence the strength of electoral accountability. In Paper 3, I build on prior work on government clarity (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013) by focusing on perceived *party clarity* at the level of ministers. In this context, party independence is conceptualized as the strength of a minister’s partisan ties, based on their party membership and prior involvement in the party organization. The paper introduces a novel theoretical approach grounded in social psychology, drawing on research on group perceptions and attitude formation, to explain how the strength of ministers’ partisan ties may moderate electoral accountability. Based on this framework, I hypothesize that parties are likely to escape blame but also miss out on credit for the policy performance of the independent ministers they appoint.

Since partisan bias is more likely under context of high clarity of responsibility (Parker-Stephen, 2013; Jilke, 2018), I also examine whether partisan motivated reasoning is shaped by the strength of ministers’ partisan ties. In doing so, Paper 3 contributes to and builds on existing research on how elite cues shape partisan bias. I also contribute to the field on technocratic attitudes by investigating for the first time how voters with higher technocratic attitudes attribute responsibility for the actions of independent ministers. Similar to partisan bias, I expect the technocratic citizen to engage in motivated reasoning, consistently blaming parties when independent ministers fail and rewarding independent ministers when they succeed. This exploration allows for an investigation of whether these attitudes have a direct effect on accountability perceptions when voters are represented by nonpartisan ministers.

Through party-vote linkages, parties are incentivized to engage in public justification not only during election campaigns but throughout the entire electoral cycle, as they remain continuously exposed to public (dis)approval. In Paper 4, I take a different approach to explore how party independence shapes accountability mechanisms in cases of corruption scandals. While party independence may weaken electoral accountability by increasing information costs at the ballot box, I argue that in the context of corruption, party independence can

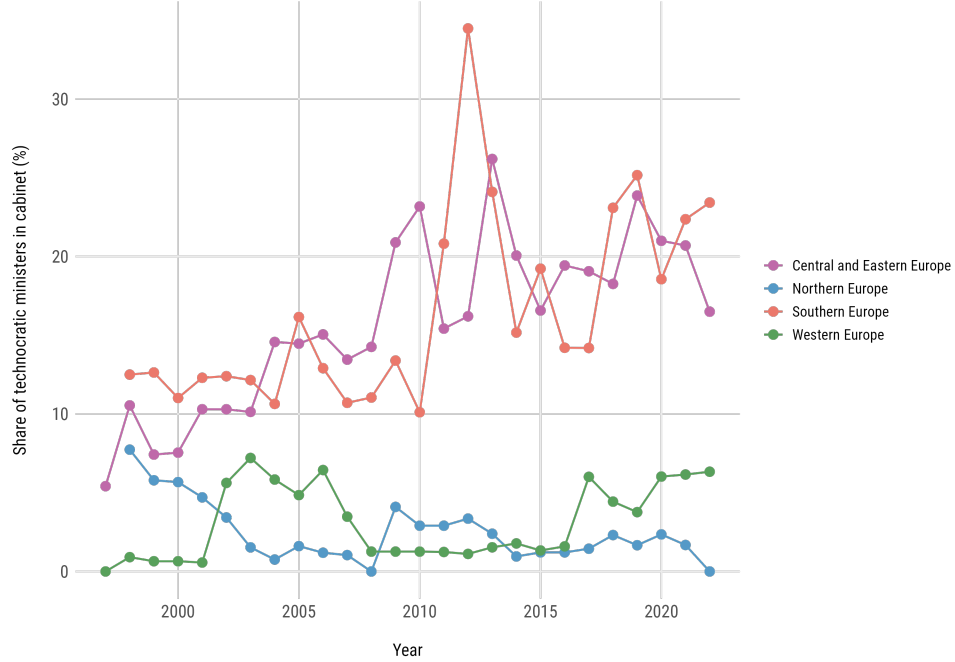
itself serve as an informational cue. Because independent politicians may be associated with greater impartiality, integrity, and outsider status, voters may hold them to higher standards. As a result, they may be subjected to harsher sanctions. Building on foundational research on the role of demographic cues in shaping corruption accountability, I explore how party and demographic cues interact. I propose that demographic cues play a greater role in shaping voters' responses to independent politicians than to partisans, due to the weaker informational environment in the absence of party labels. The absence of clear party cues may activate biases based on other candidate characteristics, a dynamic that remains underexplored in the context of corruption accountability.

To conclude, this dissertation examines the role of nonpartisan representation in shaping democratic processes through two main lenses: one where parties play a crucial role in shaping what voters know and how they navigate political decision-making. While parties simplify citizens' democratic tasks, party independence may complicate them. On the other hand, in the context of declining trust in parties, party independence may provide an alternative that resonates with citizens, potentially improving their ability to navigate democratic processes.

3 Empirical Strategy

A comparative approach is particularly relevant for studying how voters respond to party independence, as countries vary considerably in both their experience with technocratic ministers and their public support for technocratic representation. Figure 3.1 shows the average share of technocratic ministers by regions in Europe over time (Vittori et al., 2022). The increase in technocratic appointments over time is most pronounced in Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe, especially during the political and economic crises of the early 2010s, where technocrats have since comprised between 15% and 25% of serving ministers. In contrast, the presence of technocrats has been more limited in Northern and Western Europe, where their share has consistently remained below 10%. Since experience with technocratic representation influences public support for technocrats, and this may affect voters' reactions to party independence, I include cases from each region of Europe to address these regional differences: France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Austria and Romania.

Figure 3.1: Average share of technocratic ministers by regions of Europe (1997-2022)



This dissertation uses two types of data: observational electoral results and experimental citizen survey data. The observational data, used in Paper 1, focuses on election results in France, while the survey data, used in Papers 2, 3, and 4, was collected across six European countries: Italy, France, Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Romania. Survey data in Austria was collected as part of the Austrian National Election Study ([Partheymüller et al., 2024](#)) and survey data from all other countries were collected as part of the DEPART Project (ERC grant no.954401). Causal inference is central to all papers: in the survey data, I use experimental designs to estimate causal relationships, while in the observational data, I employ a fuzzy regression discontinuity design. The observational electoral results data enables the estimation of how citizens respond to party independence in real-world settings, providing greater external validity, despite the use of a quasi-experimental design. In contrast, the survey experiments provide stronger internal validity for the causal relationships under study.

Within the survey experiments, I examine how party independence affects respondents through both simpler experimental designs (Papers 2 and 4) and more complex ones (Papers 3 and 4). This approach allows for a range of experimental settings, from more abstract contexts to those that closely reflect real-world scenarios, balancing internal and external validity. Together, these data sources complement one another, providing a comprehensive assessment of how citizens react to party independence in various settings. In the following sections, I explain the rationale behind the case selection, describe the data collection process,

and discuss how party independence is defined in each study.

3.1 Case Selection

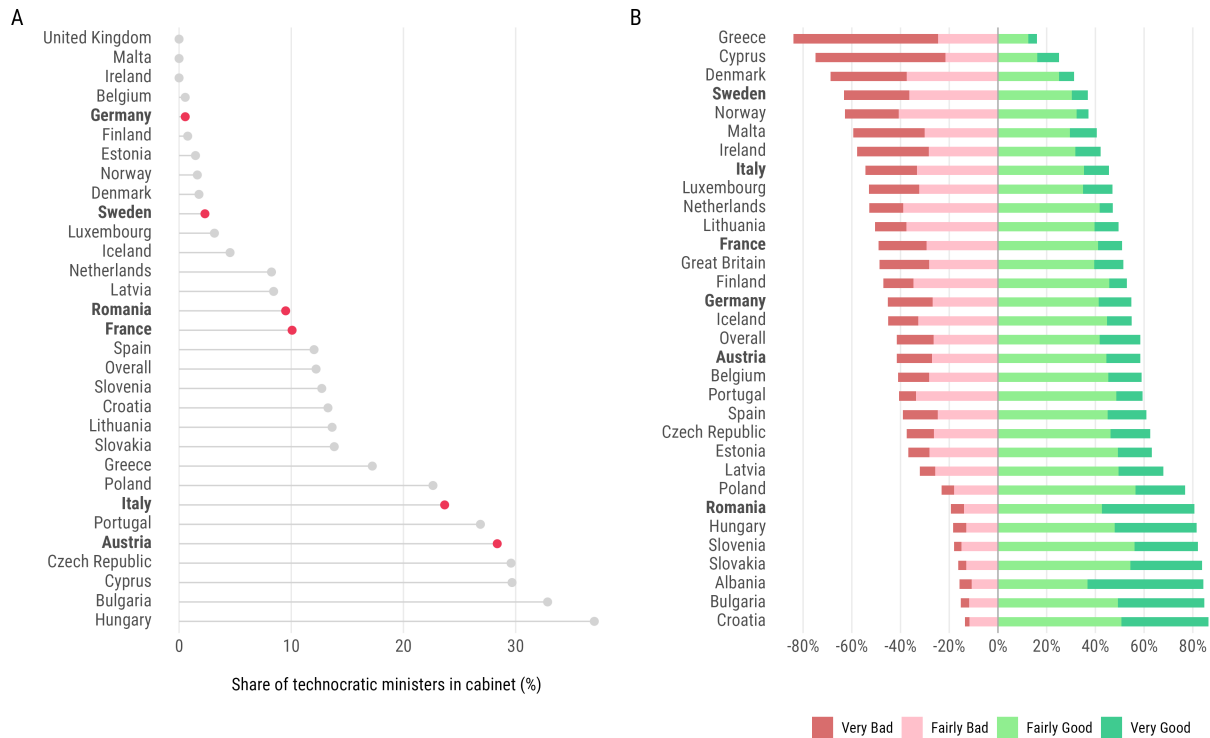
I first describe the selected cases in terms of their prior experiences with technocratic representation and levels of public support for technocratic governance, and then outline the implications and rationale for each research question.

As mentioned earlier, employing a comparative approach contributes to a better understanding of how party independence may affect voters. Citizens in countries with considerable past experience with technocratic representation may exhibit greater variance in their responses to party independence compared to citizens in countries with less experience. Their familiarity with independent members of government may make them more responsive to experimental treatments that vary ministers' partisanship. This leads to the first rationale: selecting cases with varying prior experiences with technocratic representation. Panel A of Figure 3.2 shows the average share of technocratic ministers by country (1997-2022) (Vittori et al., 2022). The selected cases capture this variation, with Italy (24%) and Austria (28%) representing countries with frequent technocratic appointments, France (10%) and Romania (9.5%) falling near the European average, and Sweden (2.3%) and Germany (0.5%) having the lowest levels of technocratic governance.

The second rationale is to select cases with varying levels of support for technocratic representation. The European Values Study (1991-2021, waves 3-5) surveyed citizens on their views of different modes of political representation, including the following scenario: "Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country" (EVS, 2022). Panel B of Figure 3.2 shows the pooled responses to this item by country, with a total sample of 107,217 respondents.² Overall, 58% of respondents view this mode positively (i.e., very or fairly good). The cases selected in this dissertation represent a range of support levels: Romania has the highest support (80%), while three countries are close to the overall average: Austria (58%), Germany (54%), and France (51%). Lastly, Italy (45%) and Sweden (36%) exhibit lower-than-average support. Because public attitudes toward technocrats may shape how voters react to independent ministers, incorporating this variation allows for more external validity.

²To improve readability, "no response" and "don't know" answers are excluded from the figure. These responses are infrequent ($\bar{x} = 2.1\%$) and do not vary systematically across countries ($\max = 5.3\%$).

Figure 3.2: Average share of technocratic ministers (A) and average technocratic support (B) by country



Countries in bold are the cases included in this dissertation.

The implications of the case selection depend on the specific research questions addressed in each paper. In the study of electoral participation (Paper 1), France provides a suitable case because its level of public support for technocratic governance allows for a balanced distribution of respondents with both favorable and unfavorable views, while also being close to the European average, enhancing external validity. This makes it an appropriate setting to test whether independent candidates mobilize the citizens dissatisfied with political parties, a central theoretical expectation of the study. Although comparative data on the strength of independent candidates in local elections is limited, independent candidates in French local elections play a role comparable to those in similar European democracies (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008).

In the study on competence perceptions (Paper 2), Austria provides an ideal case due to its moderate level of public support for technocratic representation and its relatively high experience with technocratic ministers. This balance ensures that the effect of party independence can be estimated in a context where neither strong distrust nor overwhelming support for technocrats would bias competence perceptions. Because Austria's level of public support for technocratic governance is close to the European average, findings from this case

are more likely to generalize to other European contexts. Additionally, Austria’s substantial experience with technocratic representation, including independent non-experts ([Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022](#)), enhances the credibility of the experimental treatment, ensuring that respondents find the treatment credible.

To study how party independence affects voters’ ability to attribute responsibility for policy performance (Paper 3), Italy presents a most-likely case given its extensive history of technocratic governance. First, Italy’s familiarity with party-independent governance enhances the vignette’s credibility. Second, this familiarity increases the likelihood that respondents will engage with the treatment, as Italian citizens are more likely to have formed opinions on technocrats’ performance and considered their accountability. As a result, Italy represents a most-likely case where party independence should have the strongest effect. The findings have implications not only for similar contexts but also for countries with less experience with technocratic representation, where we would expect weaker effects. Moreover, since the analysis includes interaction effects with technocratic attitudes, Italy’s moderate levels of support ensure a sufficiently large and balanced sample to properly test interaction effects.

The study on corruption punishment is conducted in four countries: France, Germany, Sweden, and Romania (Paper 4). In countries where technocratic governance is more favorably viewed, voters may hold independent politicians to higher standards, leading to harsher punishment. Including cases with varying levels of public support for technocratic governance enhances the accuracy of the estimates and strengthens the external validity of the findings. Moreover, the diversity in prior experiences with technocratic representation allows for testing the effects in both most-likely and least-likely cases, assessing how strongly respondents respond to the treatment. A multi-country approach was essential for this study, as it also examines how a minister’s gender and ethnicity influence corruption sanctions. Therefore, case selection also accounted for cross-national variation in gender attitudes and attitudes toward ethnic minorities.

Lastly, the case selection also involves certain limitations. All selected cases are European, which constrains the generalizability of the findings beyond this regional context. In other parts of the world, technocratic representation has emerged under different institutional and historical conditions, which may shape how voters interpret and respond to party independence. For example, in Latin America, technocracy is associated with legacies of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, and later to the implementation of neoliberal reforms ([Dargent, 2014](#)). The profiles of technocrats may also differ: Latin American technocrats are more autonomous from parties, whereas in Europe, some technocrats have transitioned into party politicians. Furthermore, the sources of public support for technocratic

governance vary across regions (Vittori and Paulis, 2024). In contexts where technocracy is more closely associated with democratic deficits or carries stronger ideological connotations, public responses to party independence may differ markedly from those observed in European settings.

3.2 Data

Paper 1 focuses on the link between party independence and electoral participation. For this, I rely on French election results made publicly available on the platform data.gouv.fr. The data set prepared for analysis was obtained by merging data for each round of each local and regional (*départementales*) elections from 1994 to 2020³. The sample begins from the point where independents start to be recorded, in 1994. The 1998 and 2001 local elections are excluded, as election results are not available at the candidate level. In the context of local elections where candidates ran as lists, the data does not include a unique list-ID but rather the first and last name of the top candidate. This presented a challenge for merging first- and second-round data by candidate-level information. Some cases emerged where candidates present in the second round did not find a match in the first round. This can arise for two reasons: either the top-list candidate changed between the two rounds, or multiple lists merged to run together in the second round. These cases were manually coded by searching the publicly available [electoral archives](#) where the names of all list members are available. This had consequences for defining the treatment status of the electoral contest: When an independent list changed the top-list candidate in the second round, the contest remained in the treatment group. When an independent list merged with another partisan list, I consider the new coalition list to no longer be independent, and thus the contest is considered part of the control group, unless another independent list is present. Previous research has used a quasi-experimental approach with French election data, particularly to estimate the effect of the number of candidates on voter turnout (Bol and Ivandic, 2022; Pons and Tricaud, 2018; Eggers, 2015). I build on this work by focusing on the partisanship, or lack thereof, of the qualified candidate.

Papers 2, 3, and 4 focus on how party independence affects voters' competence perceptions and accountability mechanisms, using citizen survey data. All survey experiments share common characteristics: they were originally designed, underwent ethical review, and all hypotheses were pre-registered with the Open Science Framework prior to data collection. Papers 2 and 4 both include an original module included in the Austrian National Election Study Online Panel (Partheymüller et al., 2024). The survey experimental mod-

³The 2021 regional elections were excluded as none of the observations were in the treatment group.

ule for Paper 2 was fielded between October 10th and 26th, 2022, following the Austrian presidential election (N=3,072). The module for Paper 4 was fielded between June 10th and July 6th, 2024, after the European elections (N=3,139). Both samples are representative of the Austrian population, with quotas for gender, age (16-70), region, education, and household size, and only citizens of voting age were eligible to participate. The survey data for Paper 3 and the second study of Paper 4 were collected as part of the DEPART project (ERC grant no. 954401). The survey for Paper 3 was conducted in Italy from April 26th to May 9th, 2023 (N=2,130), with respondents recruited from a representative sample of online panel respondents provided by the survey firm Bilendi-Respondi. The survey for Paper 4 was conducted in France, Germany, Sweden, and Romania in 2024 (N=2,152 per country), using a representative sample of online panel respondents from Dynata. In both surveys, representative quotas were applied for gender, age, region, and education, with only citizens eligible to participate. Lastly, descriptive statistics for all samples are provided in the appendix sections for each paper.

All survey experiments share common design characteristics. First, I employ a factorial vignette design, ranging from simpler 2×2 designs (Paper 2), 2×5 designs (Paper 4) to more complex single-profile conjoint designs where respondents are exposed to multiple vignettes (Papers 3 and 4). Second, respondents are presented with hypothetical scenarios featuring hypothetical ministers, while real political parties are used to study partisan effects. This approach aligns with both prior research and the goals of each study. Exposing respondents to hypothetical scenarios eliminates the influence of respondents' prior attitudes toward real ministers on their responses. This strategy is consistent with established practices in both the literature on technocratic support (Bertsou, 2022; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022, 2021; Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023) and research on political accountability (Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011; Eggers, Vivyan and Wagner, 2018), where conjoint designs are also frequently used.

Paper 2 adopts a simpler design to match its more focused objective: disentangling the two components of technocratic support: expertise and party independence. Respondents completed the task only twice, once for each of two policy issues, ensuring that results are not issue-specific. In contrast, Papers 3 and 4 employed more complex experimental designs. In Paper 3, the aim is to evaluate how voters attribute responsibility for the policy performance of independent ministers. To provide a comprehensive test, the design covers three policy issues and varies whether the policy outcome was a success or a failure. Additionally, the experiment varies the party affiliation across four real political parties to test whether independent ministers reduce partisan bias. The repeated-task design increases the likelihood that each respondent rates both in-party and out-party ministers during the experiment,

thereby maximizing statistical power for interaction tests.

Paper 4 consists of two separate studies, both focused on how party independence affects how severely voters punish corruption scandals. While the first study follows a simpler design to provide an initial test, the second study is more complex. First, the complexity of the design is driven by the inclusion of five types of corruption scandals with varying levels of severity. This allows for a comprehensive assessment of the conditions under which independent ministers may be punished more harshly. Second, the study seeks to estimate how ministers' demographic characteristics shape the severity of sanctions and how these effects differ, depending on whether the minister is independent or partisan. This requires substantial statistical power, making repeated tasks necessary. A challenge of complex designs is to maintain data quality and minimize respondent fatigue. To address this, all experiments included attention and comprehension checks, measures of political sophistication, which were subsequently used in robustness checks. Ultimately, the complexity of the designs enables a more comprehensive examination of accountability mechanisms, enhancing both the external validity and the theoretical contribution of the dissertation.

3.3 Defining and Measuring Party Independence

“In defining party government, one is again confronted with a choice between a dichotomy and a range.” (Katz, 1986, p. 42).

This dissertation is about party independence among politicians and how voters respond to it. Political parties can work as powerful socialization agents. Over time, individuals develop ideological and affective attachments to parties, which shape how they perceive politics and engage with it (Campbell et al., 1960). This applies not only to ordinary citizens but also to political elites. When elites align with a party, especially by holding office on its behalf, they internalize its norms and values. The deeper their involvement, the stronger their attachment becomes. Although this varies across party types, the party in public office has increasingly come to dominate other dimensions of the party organization (Katz and Mair, 2002).

The socialization process shapes how elites behave both in office and in public life. Public office holders act as vehicles for their party's values and are often the most visible face of the party to citizens. As a result, voters may associate public office holders with their parties and perceive these ties in varying degrees, with some being seen as deeply embedded within their party, while others may be viewed as more distant or independent. In this sense, elite partisanship can be understood as the extent to which a politician and her party are perceived as one entity. These perceptions can result in how strongly voters perceive the government

itself as being associated with political parties. This is related to the concept of partyiness of government, meaning the extent to which political parties are prominent and influential in government (Katz, 1986). Partyiness of government can be considered inversely related to the degree of technocracy (Caramani and Bertsou, 2020; McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014). In the clarity of responsibility literature, a related concept is government clarity, which refers to the degree of dominance of one party in a coalition, as well as the ideological cohesion of the coalition (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013).

The notion that affiliations between political elites and parties vary in strength is central to how this dissertation defines party independence. Operationalizing independence from parties is the more controversial part of defining technocrats (Caramani and Bertsou, 2020). In the simplest terms, independents are individuals who are not members of any political party at the time of their appointment and while in office. A more restrictive definition holds that party independence only applies if the individual has also never held public office for a political party (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014). While, in theory, independents lack ties to political parties and have no prior experience in public office (Caramani and Bertsou, 2020), this is at odds with contemporary realities of technocratic governance. Since the 2010s, the growing reliance on technocratic appointments in Europe has increased the likelihood of technocrats serving multiple terms or moving between technocratic and more explicitly political roles. As a result, a technocrat's first appointment may be followed by increasing political experience, which inevitably blurs the lines of who qualifies as party independent. This has led to situations where government members are perceived by the public and the media as independent, even though they no longer meet the stricter theoretical definitions of independence.

For example, French President Emmanuel Macron entered politics as a technocrat, gaining political experience as Finance Minister under President Hollande. When he later founded his own party and won the 2017 presidential election, he was still widely perceived as a political outsider, despite having previously held ministerial office. In Austria, Education Minister Heinz Faßmann served from 2017 to 2019 and again from 2020 to 2021. Despite being nominated for a second time by the Austrian People's Party, he continued to be described and perceived as a nonpartisan member of government. While some technocrats go on to form their own political parties and become party politicians, others move in and out of office and continue to be seen as independent.

To account for how political career trajectories have evolved over time in Europe, my approach to defining independents is based on the understanding that ties between politicians and political parties exist on a spectrum that varies in degrees rather than being strictly binary. As technocrats are likely to remain a component of party-based representation,

particularly in the context of ongoing environmental and economic crises, and may increasingly form stronger ties to political parties, this approach also ensures that the dissertation’s contribution remains relevant over time.

Table 3.1 presents how party independence is defined in all studies included in this dissertation. In Papers 2 and 4, I follow a simpler approach and operationalize degrees of partisan ties through the length of party membership: independents are not members of any political party, while partisan ministers are long-term party members. This allows for a clear contrast in the level of political commitment, ranging from none to very high, and enables the definition of distinct treatments. In Paper 3, I take a more complex approach by defining three levels of partisan ties. I emphasize a stronger form of independence, the independent minister is not currently a party member and has never held membership in any political party. The second level describes a minister who recently joined the party but has never worked for the party. The strongest partisan ties describe long-term members who have also actively worked for the party. The identification of independents in Paper 1 aligns with the experimental manipulation of independence in Paper 3. Independent candidates in France who have been party members in the past or who are close to a particular political family can be distinguished from those who have strictly never been party members in the past. This makes it possible to differentiate between *pure* independents and *leaning* independents, and to assess whether different levels of attachment to political parties lead to different effects of party independence on turnout.

Signaling independence in survey experiments by simply labeling actors as “independents” aligns with prior research (Bertsou, 2022; Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023; Kirkland and Coppock, 2018), while signaling the strength of partisan ties by accounting for time spent in politics follows the approach taken by Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez (2021). Overall, this approach provides a nuanced understanding of party independence, bridging conceptual and empirical gaps in the literature.

Table 3.1: Operationalization of party independence

Paper	Independent	Partisan
1	<i>Pure independents</i>: have not been party members in the past, have not received informal support from any party, difficult to place on the left-right scale. <i>Leaning independents</i>: not affiliated with a party, career trajectory shows a connection to a party or a political family (left, right or center) through past party membership, informal support from a party, public positions or manifesto.	-
2	not affiliated to a political party	long-standing ÖVP member
3	independent [...] has never held a membership to any political party	long-term party member [...] has been a prominent member of the party and has held a high-ranking position within the party recent party member [...] has recently become a member of the party and has never held a position within the party
4.1	independent	long-standing member of the [party]
4.2	independent from any political party	long-standing member of the [party]

4 The Causal Effect of Independent Candidacies on Electoral Participation: the French Case

4.1 Introduction

Independent candidates, i.e., those who are not, and have not been, members of a political party and are not supported by one, are increasingly gaining electoral support across Europe (Bolleyer and Weeks, 2009; Ehin et al., 2013). Yet this contrasts with the fact that independents face higher administrative burdens due to the requirements placed on registration as a party, a candidate or a list to stand in elections (Brancati, 2008). As a result, independents are implicitly ineligible to stand in general elections in 14 of the EU-27 countries (Ehin et al., 2013). This suggests a tension between greater support for nonpartisan representation, as highlighted in the literature on technocratic support (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022; Pilet et al., 2023; Beiser-McGrath et al., 2021) and efforts to exclude this possibility from the democratic process. This paradox deserves further investigation to determine whether and under what conditions independents affect democratic quality and the electoral process. This paper focuses on a central aspect of this issue: electoral participation.

While the literature has focused on explaining the presence and electoral performance of independent candidates, only a few studies have looked at their consequences on voter turnout. Hence the focus of this paper, where I aim to determine whether the presence of independent candidacies mobilizes or demobilizes citizens. I rely on data from French local and regional elections, where local lists that are free of partisan considerations are very common, representing 16% of candidates in the 2020 municipal elections. These elections are held in a two-round system in which any candidate who obtains 10% of the vote out of expressed voters (local) or 12.5% of the vote out of registered voters (regional) qualifies to compete in the second round. This allows for a unique setting in which I can compare second-round turnout in constituencies where an independent candidate just passed the threshold to those where they just did not, and thus provide a causal estimate of the relationship between the presence of independent candidates and voter turnout.

The inclusion of independents in the democratic process has been the subject of concern for a number of reasons. Given that party identification is an important heuristic for citizens to facilitate voting decisions, independents are thought to increase information costs for citizens, which in turn decreases electoral participation (Downs, 1957; Blais, 2006; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020; Brancati, 2008). Consequently, their presence can also increase inequality in voter turnout based on income and education levels (Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001). Research in the US context has shown that turnout is significantly lower in

nonpartisan elections, and that citizens are less able to form a voting intention, meaning that surveys tend to report a higher proportion of undecided voters in these elections ([Schaffner and Streb, 2002](#)). Voters also seek other sources of information when party affiliation is not available, such as incumbency ([Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001](#)), professional and political experience ([Kirkland and Coppock, 2018](#)), and inferring candidates' policy positions from demographic cues such as race and gender ([Mcdermott, 1998](#)). The absence of clear party cues may therefore activate biases based on other candidate characteristics, which could be detrimental, as they may lead voters to make choices based on superficial traits rather than a comprehensive evaluation of a candidate's propositions.

Others argue for the inclusion of independent candidates in the electoral process. Local elected officials in France have advocated for the creation of a "without label" category in the reporting of election results to reflect the nonpartisan nature of local politics and to have the ability to distinguish themselves from national party politics ([AMF, 2014](#)). Efforts to implement nonpartisan elections in the United States were motivated by a rejection of the divisiveness and perceived corruption of traditional party politics ([Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001](#)). Similar to the model of technocratic governance ([Caramani, 2017](#)), the reforms sought to shift the focus of the electorate toward evaluating the competence of candidates, thereby promoting policies that serve the common good. The prevalence of polarization and the decline in political trust, as well as the signs of weakening of party-based representative democracy ([Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#); [Mair, 2013](#)), are cited as reasons for exploring alternative forms of representation. Independents could appeal to citizens with anti-party and anti-establishment attitudes and potentially mobilize them to participate in the electoral process. As [Bertsou and Caramani \(2022\)](#) put it, citizens with technocratic attitudes are an electorate "up for grabs", as no traditional party reflects their representation ideal, independents could therefore mobilize this part of the electorate. Lastly, while party identity is an important information shortcut for voters, empirical evidence also supports that party identification can lead to distortions that prevent voters from forming well-informed judgments and making rational voting decisions ([Bartels, 2002](#); [Taber and Lodge, 2006](#); [Leeper and Slothuus, 2014](#)). Independents could therefore reduce the weight of partisan affect in shaping voting behavior.

While the literature on the US context provides some answers, nonpartisan elections in the US are distinct from the European context, where partisan candidates compete against nonpartisan ones. The current body of evidence on the European context covers local elections in Portugal, Norway, Czechia and Sweden. Almost all report that a higher presence of independent lists increases turnout in local elections, but rather to a small extent ([Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005](#); [Freire, Martins and Meirinho, 2012](#); [Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020](#);

Bernard et al., 2025), while in the Swedish case the results are null (Erlingsson et al., 2024). Kapoor and Magesan (2018) are the first to attempt to identify a causal effect, and have examined the impact of independent candidates on voter turnout and competing candidates' vote share in India using an instrumental variable method. The authors show that one standard deviation increase in the number of independent candidates increases voter turnout by 6 percentage points.⁴

The current literature on this topic is largely limited to correlational studies, lacking the use of causal inference methods in the European context. The effects reported in previous research may be overestimated or underestimated due to unobserved factors, such as differences in candidate quality, unique local issues, or a history of party scandals. Independents may also self-select into municipalities with higher distrust of parties or historically higher turnout, complicating causal interpretation. In addition, the current literature conflates independents with local list or niche local parties and lacks a precise definition. This paper addresses these gaps by employing a more robust causal identification strategy and operationalizing more and less restrictive definitions of party independence to determine whether existing research underestimates or overestimates their impact on turnout. In addition, several subgroup analyses are conducted to examine how the presence of independents affects participation under different conditions.

I find no evidence that independents significantly raise information costs in elections to the point of overall voter demobilization. Instead, independent candidates increase voter turnout in local elections by 9 percentage points. While this also increased the likelihood that citizens would cast blank and null votes, the majority of the increase in participation resulted in voters voting for one of the candidates. Hence, I find that existing research may have underestimated the impact of independents on turnout. Independents affect the share of blank votes differently depending on the context, increasing it when independents dominate the race and decreasing it when they compete against partisan candidates. This suggests that citizens are more effectively mobilized when both independents and partisan candidates are on the ballot, catering to citizens who prefer party-based representation and those who are dissatisfied with it.

4.2 Defining Party Independence

Defining independents has been a challenge in the literature, as their diversity can be just as vast as that found within political parties (Weeks, 2009; Reiser and Holtmann, 2008). Scholars are often constrained by legal and regulatory definitions of political parties in their

⁴See (Lal et al., 2024) for a replication.

respective cases, which inform how independents are identified. A common approach is to define independents according to their legal status in order to facilitate data interpretation (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008). However, this approach has the unintended consequence of lacking conceptual clarity, as the regulation could, for example, group niche party lists with nonpartisan lists. Consequently, cross-national differences in regulations make it difficult to compare findings across studies. Given these challenges, reviewing how party independence has been defined in prior studies, particularly those examining independents and voter turnout, provides context for interpreting the present findings in relation to existing evidence.

The literature consistently agrees that independents are not affiliated with national political parties at the time of competing in an election. This consensus holds in studies examining the effect of independents on voter turnout (Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005; Freire, Martins and Meirinho, 2012; Gendźwił and Żółtak, 2017; Kapoor and Magesan, 2018; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020; Erlingsson et al., 2024; Bernard et al., 2025), as well as in research exploring their role in other outcomes (Brancati, 2008; Weeks, 2009; Boogers and Voerman, 2010; Hijino, 2013; Vampa, 2016; Angenendt, 2018; Welborne, 2020; Otjes, 2020; Titelman and Sajuria, 2024). Beyond this shared premise, however, definitions of independents vary.

More narrowly, independents are also defined as having no party affiliation at the local or regional level. This is the case in studies conducted in Germany (Angenendt, 2018), Norway (Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005), Italy (Vampa, 2016), India (Kapoor and Magesan, 2018), Chile (Titelman and Sajuria, 2024), and the MENA region (Welborne, 2020). In Portugal, the legal classification explicitly defines independents as “groups of citizens”, distinguishing them from local political parties (Freire, Martins and Meirinho, 2012; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020).

Broader definitions have tended to group together nonpartisan and local partisan candidates. In Sweden, independents are categorized as “local parties”, encompassing both nonpartisan candidates and small local parties, who lack formal ties to national parties and focus on local issues (Wallman Lundåsen and Erlingsson, 2023; Erlingsson et al., 2024). Similarly, in the Netherlands, local parties are considered part of the broader category of independent candidates (Otjes, 2020). Additionally, in a large comparative study, Brancati (2008) defines independents to also include candidates who later align with a political party or join a parliamentary faction after being elected. Lastly, independents are also identified as candidates that do not use a party label but instead use the name of the local constituency in which they compete (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008). This may include candidates with concealed party affiliations or splinter groups from established parties (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008).

The way party independence is defined has significant implications for accurately esti-

inating its impact on voter turnout. When the definition of independents is broader, their effect on turnout may be underestimated. The electorate may be more easily informed and engaged by local parties than by pure independents, which can lead to a lower perceived demobilizing effect of independents when they are grouped with local parties. Conversely, a broader definition may also mask the potential mobilizing effect of independents. Citizens dissatisfied with traditional parties may not view local parties as a true alternative, instead associating them with the political establishment and workings of party politics.

The French case is ideal for overcoming these limitations, as its legal categorization enables two distinct operationalizations of party independence. First, using a narrower definition, i.e., the *Pure independents*, I consider independents to have a distinct nature and fate compared to minor parties or any candidate or list affiliated with a party at any geographical level. I take a step further than current studies that already use a narrow definition by further restricting it to candidates that have not been party members in the past, that have not received informal support from any party, and that are difficult to place on the ideological left, right or center. These candidates tend to campaign on local issues, such as construction projects, traffic and school issues. Others emphasize their identity as a citizens' list, focusing on bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds as an alternative to traditional party politicians.

Second, I rely on a broader definition of independence, i.e., the *Leaning independents*. This broader definition refers to candidates or lists that are not affiliated with a national political party, but whose trajectory shows a connection to a political party or a political family, i.e., the left, the right or the center. This can be through past party membership, informal support from a party, their public positions or their manifesto. Candidates or lists under this broader definition may have a history of party affiliation, making them distinct from the narrower category of independents who have no such ties. This broader category captures a wider range of politicians who, while not officially affiliated with a national party, can be identified as operating within a party political framework due to their past associations and career trajectory.

My approach is similar to that of [Hijino \(2013\)](#), where in the context of Japan, “pure” independents are distinguished from independents who receive support or endorsements from political parties. A key difference is that, in Japan, candidates can choose to register as independents, which allows them to conceal any partisan ties. In contrast, in the French context, the classification is assigned by a third party, eliminating the possibility of candidates strategically hiding their partisan affiliation. My approach also aligns with [Brancati \(2008\)](#), who distinguishes between independents as political outsiders with no prior party experience and those as political insiders with past ties to political parties. While [Brancati](#)

(2008) introduces this conceptual distinction, it has yet to be empirically examined.

This conceptual framework is relevant beyond the French case and can be applied to understand the emergence and nature of independents in different political contexts. Contextual factors play a significant role in shaping political careers and influencing the types of independents that emerge. As a result, the prevalence of pure and leaning independents may vary across countries and over time. Independents are more likely to emerge in systems with lower ballot access requirements, candidate-centered electoral rules, low electoral thresholds, and smaller district sizes (Brancati, 2008; Gendźwił and Żółtak, 2017), and these conditions may also determine the likelihood of pure versus leaning independents. In majority and plurality systems, individual candidate qualities are emphasized, and party labels play a smaller role in driving vote choice (Brancati, 2008; Gendźwił and Żółtak, 2017). Consequently, this diminishes the incentives for independents to align with political parties, potentially making pure independents more prevalent. In contrast, in PR systems, party cues carry more weight, making it more advantageous for independents to join an existing party list rather than face the difficulties of recruiting others to form their own list. As a result, PR systems create stronger incentives for independents to align with parties to improve their electoral prospects, potentially leading to a higher share of leaning independents. Building on factors identified by Brancati (2008), the ongoing and deepening trend of partisan dealignment (Garzia, Ferreira da Silva and De Angelis, 2022; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012) may represent an additional factor contributing to the rise of independent politicians. Independents are more likely to emerge when political parties are unpopular (Hijino, 2013; Titelman and Sajuria, 2024) and party-voter ties are weaker (Weeks, 2016). Over time, in such environments, independents may have fewer incentives to form affiliations with established parties, increasing the likelihood that *pure* independents persist compared to *leaning* independents.

4.3 Independent Candidates and Turnout

Do independent candidates mobilize or demobilize the electorate? To tackle this question, I take an exploratory approach, as two theories offer competing expectations. While independents may reduce participation by increasing information costs, they may also increase it by expanding the choice of candidates available to the electorate.

The literature on the various factors influencing voter turnout falls under the notion that making voting easier leads to higher participation (Blais, 2006). Research shows that voter turnout is affected by economic growth, population size, the number of parties, and the closeness of the race (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). Notably, it has been shown that greater political competition and closely contested races increase voter turnout by raising

the stakes of an election (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2000). Although this effect is relatively small (Kostelka and Blais, 2021), its size is more prominent in smaller districts (Blais and Lago, 2009). More recently, scholars have focused on linking affective and ideological polarization to voter turnout. The central notion being that the further citizens are from each other on the ideological spectrum, the higher the stakes of experiencing undesirable policy outcomes and the more likely citizens would be to turn out at the polls (Harteveld and Wagner, 2023). This would be even more pronounced the more citizens from different camps dislike each other, as this activates intergroup conflict and thus the more citizens have to lose by abstaining. Several studies have shed light on the polarization-turnout nexus, where elite polarization has been found to increase turnout in various electoral contexts (Steiner and Martin, 2012; Wilford, 2017; Béjar, Moraes and López-Cariboni, 2020; Harteveld and Wagner, 2023), while showing mixed results in others (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2008).

If higher stakes typically drive higher turnout, how does participation change when the opposing candidate avoids national partisan debates and instead campaigns on a manifesto that may be perceived as ambiguous? One theoretical expectation posits that the presence of independents will decrease electoral participation. Through multiple mechanisms, independents may contribute to lowering electoral stakes and increasing information costs. By adopting stances that are viewed as ambiguous, independent candidates make it difficult for citizens to perceive them in terms of left-right orientations (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008; Brancati, 2008). In fact, it has long been established that citizens rely on elites' party affiliation to facilitate voting decisions and to form political preferences (Downs, 1957; Lupia, 1994; Malhotra and Kuo, 2008). In the context of independent candidates, citizens cannot rely on the candidate's party label as an information shortcut. This increases information costs and voter uncertainty, thereby demobilizing citizens and disconnecting them from the options available on the ballot. Due to the perceived ambiguity in independents' positions, citizens may also find it more difficult to identify ideological differences between independent and partisan candidates. As a result, the perceived candidate differential may be lower. This concept was first coined by Downs (1957), who defined the perceived "party differential" as the expected utility difference between voting for different candidates, that is, ideological differences between the candidates' platforms. Downs (1957) posits that a lower degree of party differential lowers the stakes in an election, leading more to abstain, as citizens see no value in participating. Lastly, because independent candidates are not affiliated with an overall organization, they typically have fewer resources to spend on campaigning (Brancati, 2008). As a result, the visibility of the election may be lower, and there may be a lack of interest on the part of citizens, and thus a lack of mobilization. From this first perspec-

tive, the presence of independent candidates will decrease voter turnout by increasing the information cost of the electoral environment and by decreasing the perceived stakes, i.e., depoliticizing the election contest.

An alternative expectation posits that the presence of independents may increase electoral participation. Independents may contribute to increasing the choice for the electorate, particularly for part of the electorate dissatisfied with political parties. The coexistence of partisan and independent lists may create a “best of both worlds” scenario (Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005; Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020; Erlingsson et al., 2024), where both partisan voters and those dissatisfied with all partisan options have choices on the ballot, potentially increasing overall mobilization. Indeed, the decline of party membership and the weakening of ties between parties and voters have contributed to growing partisan dealignment, leaving an increasing share of the electorate disengaged or dissatisfied with political parties (Garzia, Ferreira da Silva and De Angelis, 2022; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012; Mair, 2013). This trend is also investigated in research on support for greater inclusion of independent experts in government decision-making, with studies showing that voters with strong technocratic attitudes make up a significant portion of the electorate in Europe (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022; Pilet et al., 2023). Both party independence and expertise are traits that voters highly value (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Panel et al., 2024; Marlier, Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2025). Beyond mobilizing party skeptics, independents may also engage otherwise disengaged citizens whose political interest is limited to local issues. Unlike partisan candidates, who operate within the framework of a nationwide campaign, independents are more likely to prioritize local concerns (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008). This focus can resonate with citizens who feel disconnected from national politics but are invested in local issues, ultimately increasing their likelihood of turning out to vote. While mobilizing the electorate who dislike parties may be one reason independents increase turnout, alternative mechanisms may also be at play. Without a party label to provide clear ideological cues, citizens might perceive independents as a blank slate, projecting their own preferences onto them. This perceived alignment could, in turn, mobilize citizens who believe they have found a candidate that best reflects their views. Thus, independents’ perceived ideological ambiguity may create a greater sense of preference fit, thereby increasing voter turnout.

Throughout my analysis, I also consider how the presence of independent candidates affects the proportion of blank and null votes. From the information costs perspective, independents could increase in the share of blank votes and this could indicate that some voters, despite turning out to vote, struggle to make a decision because they do not understand the implications of their choices between candidates or doubt whether their vote can make a

difference (Schaffner and Streb, 2002).⁵ From the technocratic support perspective, independents could decrease the share of blank votes by increasing the choice for citizens otherwise disengaged or dissatisfied with political parties.

The literature on voter turnout, electoral stakes, and information costs suggests that the presence of independent candidates may reduce electoral participation. Conversely, research on partisan dealignment and attitudes toward technocratic representation highlights the potential for independents to increase turnout. In the following sections, I outline how the characteristics of both the electoral contest and the independent candidate shape the likelihood of both expectations.

Contest Characteristics

The impact of independents on voter turnout may be strongly related to the context in which they stand as candidates. Precisely, the electoral system and geographical level of the election, the partisanship or lack thereof of their opponents and the size of the district may imply different effects of the presence of independent candidates on turnout.

Research shows that features of electoral systems influence the electoral strength of independent candidates, with more candidate-centered systems, lower ballot access requirements, lower electoral thresholds and smaller district sizes increasing the number of independent candidates and their vote share (Brancati, 2008; Gendźwił and Żółtak, 2017; Ehin et al., 2013). This pattern may partly stem from these conditions making it easier for independents to mobilize the electorate, by giving them more incentives to make greater campaign efforts. Electoral rules can affect the resources available to independents. When independents run in single-candidate elections, they campaign on their own, underlining the burden of lack of party resources. However, when independents run as part of a list, they can balance their previously limited resources by leveraging the collective efforts of multiple candidates. This setup provides more opportunities to network and form local community ties through the social networks of other individuals on the list. However, candidate qualities are more likely to drive voting decisions in candidate-centered systems, with party labels playing a greater role in list-based systems (Brancati, 2008; Gendźwił and Żółtak, 2017). This means that independents may make greater campaign efforts in candidate-centered systems due to a greater focus on candidate qualities, while they may make greater efforts in list-based systems due to greater resources. Independents may also be more likely to intensify their

⁵While I cannot distinguish between blank and null votes, both can arise from information problems or as a form of protest voting. The only difference is that blank votes are always intentional, whereas null votes can result from both intentional actions and unintentional errors.

campaign efforts when they have a stronger chance of winning seats. Consequently, in electoral systems with a proportional component, independents may be more inclined to invest in their campaigns compared to those in plurality systems.

In addition to differences in electoral systems, differences in geographical levels may contribute to different mobilization outcomes between types of elections. The larger geographical area of regions and the more dispersed population require more resources for an effective campaign than at the municipal level. The competence of the municipalities also relates to issues that are easier for citizens to grasp and less technical than the competence of the regions (Escalona, Labouret and Vieira, 2013). In addition, campaigning on local issues may be more advantageous for independents, as it is less of a matter of left-right alignment and is less likely to involve partisan debates than in regional elections (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008; Jérôme and Lewis-Beck, 1999; Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziari, 2005). Voters are also more likely to be familiar with the candidates in local elections than in regional elections. Voters are thus more likely to feel detached from the candidates and the issues at stake in regional elections than in local elections. Thus, the differences in electoral systems may imply different campaign strategies, which can significantly affect the opportunities and resources available to independents. In local elections, independents may find it easier to increase the visibility of their campaigns due to smaller districts, more tangible issues, more resources and higher chances of winning seats. In turn, this greater visibility potentially decreases information costs for the electorate, thus leading to a lower demobilization effect than in regional elections. However, in regional elections, where candidate qualities carry greater weight, independents may still have opportunities to mobilize citizens. These dynamics suggest that electoral stakes may be elevated differently across election types, shaping the ways independents affect mobilization.

Further related to contest characteristics, I also conduct subgroup analyses based on the partisanship of the top-two candidates and by the size of the district. When the top-two candidates are partisan, they may put less effort into campaigning against independents, as they may believe that they have a greater chance of winning. As a result, they may allocate their resources to close partisan races instead of races against independents. The lack of political competition may lead citizens to perceive that there is less at stake in the electoral contest and that their vote will have little impact on the outcome, which, in turn, may demobilize them. On the other hand, the coexistence of partisans and independents may represent the “best of both worlds” scenario (Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020). When the top-two candidates are independent, the perceived ambiguity of their policy positions could make it harder for the electorate to see independents running against each other as distinct alternatives, thus increasing information costs and potentially leading to greater

demobilization. When an independent qualifies for the second round in a contest where the top candidates are also independents, this may lead to greater demobilization due to higher information costs. When an independent qualifies in a contest where the leading candidates are partisans, their presence may instead boost mobilization by offering citizens a broader range of choices, giving more weight to the “best of both worlds” hypothesis. Lastly, when the top-two candidates include both a partisan and an independent, the presence of an additional independent may still raise information costs and contribute to demobilization, though to a lesser extent than when both leading candidates are independents.

Regarding the differences by district size, it can be expected that contests in larger districts may receive more media attention, which can increase the visibility of independent candidates and thereby reduce information costs for the electorate. In addition, a larger electorate implies more opportunities for independents to develop a broader network and appeal to a wider range of potential voters. Larger districts may also contain more citizens who are responsive to being mobilized by a candidate offering an alternative to traditional party representation. Research suggests that the size of the municipality matters for the fate of independent candidates, with them receiving higher vote shares in small rural municipalities ([Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#)). This may indicate that it is less costly for independents to campaign and raise their profile in smaller districts, thereby reducing information costs for citizens and leading to a lower demobilization than in larger districts. Thus, while, on the one hand, I may observe lower demobilization effect in larger districts due to increased campaign visibility and a more urban electorate. On the other hand, I may observe a lower demobilization effect in smaller districts due to reduced campaign costs.

Candidate Characteristics

Independent candidates who are complete newcomers to politics may differ from independents who have previously held office or who have stood in several elections in the past. This section discusses the implications of these two candidate characteristics for how independents may impact voter turnout.

Holding public office is a transformative experience for politicians ([Enemark et al., 2016](#)). As a result of having held office, I expect independent incumbents to have 1) a more extensive network, 2) greater financial resources, and 3) greater name recognition with the electorate compared to their newcomer counterparts. Therefore, unlike independent candidates who are new to politics, independents running as incumbents or who have been candidates in the past may have a less significant impact on voter turnout. First, independent incumbents have become better known to the electorate during their mandate. This means that the information costs associated with the lack of a party label are lower, as citizens have

become familiar with the incumbent’s positions and values, particularly through increased media exposure. Voters use the incumbency cue as an information shortcut, perceiving it as a signal of the candidate’s competence, particularly because winning an election is seen as an indication of the candidate’s quality relative to untested challengers (Fowler, 2018). Consequently, citizens may be better able to distinguish independent incumbents from rival candidates, making the demobilization effect less likely. However, experienced independents may be less likely to mobilize citizens who seek an alternative to partisan options, as they may associate them more with the political establishment. Over the course of their mandate, they may also have taken positions that align them with a particular party. The best of both worlds mechanism may be stronger for independent newcomers, as their political outsider status is more pronounced.

Second, once constrained by their lack of resources, independent incumbents expanded their network and assets over the course of their mandate. While this is less likely for local politicians (Berg, 2020; Bertoni et al., 2023), individuals accumulate wealth while in public office (Querubin and Snyder, 2013; Fisman, Schulz and Vig, 2014). Holding public office also means expanding one’s political connections and social network (Tavits, 2009). They have had more time to build alliances and relationships with local organizations and community leaders, increasing their influence in the local public discourse. As a result, they have more resources to make their campaign stand out and increase their visibility to the electorate, thus making the demobilization effect less likely. I expect the same mechanism to hold true for candidates who have run multiple times in the same constituency, as they have also accumulated greater visibility among the electorate and expanded their resources through campaigning.

Overall, independents who are incumbents or have experience running for office may be less likely to demobilize the electorate, as they entail lower information costs and increase the visibility of the election compared to independent newcomers. However, independent newcomers may also be less likely to demobilize, as they are more likely to be perceived as outsiders to party politics than experienced independents, thus giving more salience to the best of both worlds explanation in this context.

4.4 Empirical Strategy

The goal of this paper is to estimate the causal effect of treatment D , the presence of an independent in the second round on outcome Y , voter turnout in the second round. I will also estimate the effect on subgroups, as the treatment may differ depending on 1) whether the candidate is the incumbent, 2) the number of times the candidate ran in the past, 3) election

type 4) whether the independent competes against another independent or a partisan and 5) by the size of the district.

I control for the number of candidates in the second round to isolate the effect of an independent candidate qualifying for the second round from the general effect of having, for instance, three candidates rather than two. This is demonstrated by [Bol and Ivandic \(2022\)](#) and [Pons and Tricaud \(2018\)](#) who find that having three candidates instead of two increases turnout by 3.5% points in French legislative and departmental elections. In addition, the presence of a third candidate in the second round reduces the vote share of the top candidate by 6.9 percentage points ([Pons and Tricaud, 2018](#)).

The French Context

In France, electoral candidates are labeled in two ways: the “*étiquette politique*” or political label chosen by the candidate as they register their candidacy, and the “*nuance politique*” or political designation, which is a specific code assigned by the prefect based on guidelines provided by the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry provides a list of political designations along with their definitions so that the prefect can assign them accordingly. The prefect can assign a political designation different than the political label chosen by the candidate, the purpose behind the creation of political designations being to improve the readability of aggregate election results, especially in local elections where many different political labels are involved. For this reason, political designations are not applied to all municipalities. Instead, they are applied to those with a population greater than 3,500 in 2001, 2008, and 2020, and those with a population greater than 1,000 in 2014. This threshold was designed to align with the different electoral systems in place based on population size⁶. Due to several controversies about the list of possible political designations, the Ministry of the Interior is making its guidelines publicly available as of 2019.

Following previous studies, I rely on the legal definition of independent lists. For reasons of data availability, I rely on political designations rather than self-declared political labels to identify independent lists. Independents have been registered since 1994, the sample thus covers the period from 1994 to 2020 and includes 3 local elections and 7 regional elections⁷, as shown in Table 4.1. I identify pure independents relying on the code ‘*DIV*’ meaning ‘*divers*’ or miscellaneous. Below is the description of the code *DIV*, i.e., the pure independents, in

⁶While all rely on a two-round system, municipalities with more than 1,000 inhabitants vote with a majority bonus system, while those below that threshold use a plurality block voting. In the 2001 and 2008 municipal elections, the threshold for the electoral system was 3,500 inhabitants.

⁷The 1998 and 2001 local elections are excluded as election results are only available at the aggregate level. The 2021 regional elections are excluded as there are no observations in the treatment group with either definition of party independence.

the guidelines for the 2020 local elections:

‘If candidates do not claim any particular label, and only if it is proven that they are not attached to any precise political sensibility, you will assign them the DIV nuance. Consequently, the DIV nuance is intended to include all candidates whose opinions are unclassifiable, categorical, apolitical or fanciful. You will allocate with discernment to avoid that a multiplication of candidates classified as DIV results in an excessive increase of votes and percentages of this nuance, which would be likely to partly alter the political meaning of the ballot by underestimating the main political currents.’
([Castaner, 2020](#))

Previous studies faced issues with a “noisy” categorization of independents, where party dissidents and “hidden” party lists were coded as independents ([Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#)). Here, the guidelines address this issue by providing criteria for coding candidates who are close to a party or who have left a party, thus defining the second definition of independents that I rely on, the leaning independents. Such candidates must be coded based on their past political trajectory, their public positions, their manifesto, and their political label ([Castaner, 2020](#)). Based on these considerations, instead of being assigned “DIV” they can be assigned a “political sensibility” code, such as “miscellaneous right”, “far left”, “miscellaneous left”, and “miscellaneous center”.⁸ The definition further states that independents who have no prior partisan experience but have a political sensibility should not be coded as “miscellaneous” but by the political sensibility codes. Therefore, the pure independents and leaning independents definitions refer to distinct profiles of independent candidates.

This categorization is not without its limitations. As explained above, political designations are the product of arbitrary, albeit guided, decisions by prefects, whose decisions have occasionally been disputed by candidates. Journalistic efforts to link political designations to political labels have revealed that candidates from the same party have been assigned different political designations by different prefects. In the 2022 legislative elections, the Pirate Party candidates were assigned the “DIV” nuance, but in other departments they were assigned the regionalist party label or the miscellaneous left ([Les Décodeurs, 2022](#)). Given the perceived ambiguity in the ideological signals of nonpartisan candidates, errors across prefects may be more likely within the category of interest. In addition, since the political designation guidelines for previous municipal elections are not publicly available, I assume that the meaning of this category remains constant over time⁹.

Political designations are not available below a certain population threshold, hence I do

⁸The political designations used to define the leaning independents are the following: DVD, DVC, DVG, EXD, EXG, REG, GJ and ECO.

⁹The description of the code is nearly identical when considering the guidelines for all elections since 2019: the 2020 municipal elections, the 2021 regional elections, the 2022 legislative elections, and the 2023 senatorial elections.

not study the municipalities that adopt a plurality voting in local elections. [Eggers \(2015\)](#) used this population threshold to analyze the impact of electoral systems on voter turnout in French local elections and showed that voter turnout increases by 1 percentage point in municipalities with a majority bonus system compared to those with plurality voting. Although the exclusion of these municipalities may raise concerns about the representation of independent lists in the sample, existing evidence suggests that electoral participation patterns in both groups of municipalities (those with majority bonus systems and those with plurality voting) are highly similar. Therefore, the present findings are likely to hold true in the excluded districts as well.

Lastly, it is worth considering the extent to which citizens are aware of the candidates running in their constituency, how exposed they are to political designations, and their ability to distinguish between partisan and independent candidates. A few days before the first round, citizens receive the election leaflets and ballot papers of all candidates standing in the constituency in which they are registered to vote. A few days before the second round, they will again receive the election leaflets and the ballot papers of the candidates who have qualified and accepted to run in the second round. On the ballot, party candidates typically include their party’s logo and colors, while independents vary in their presentation, either using the constituency template or creating their own. Some independents display their political designation, while others do not. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that citizens are generally aware of the pool of candidates running in their constituency and have the ability to visualize and differentiate between partisan and independent candidates.

Data

I rely on electoral results data from French local (“*municipales*”) and one of the two regional (“*départementales*”) elections between 1994 and 2020, made publicly available on the platform data.gouv.fr. These elections were chosen because independents have been officially registered since 1994 and they have a significant number of independent candidates who reach the second round, thus allowing enough observations on both sides of the treatment.¹⁰ Table 4.1 lists the elections selected in the sample and their electoral rules. The selected elections vary according to the two definitions of independence, as elections where there were 0 or 1 observation in the treatment group were excluded from the analysis.

Figure 4.1 shows the proportion of independent candidates by election in Panel A and voter turnout levels in Panel B. At the regional level, independents have consistently been

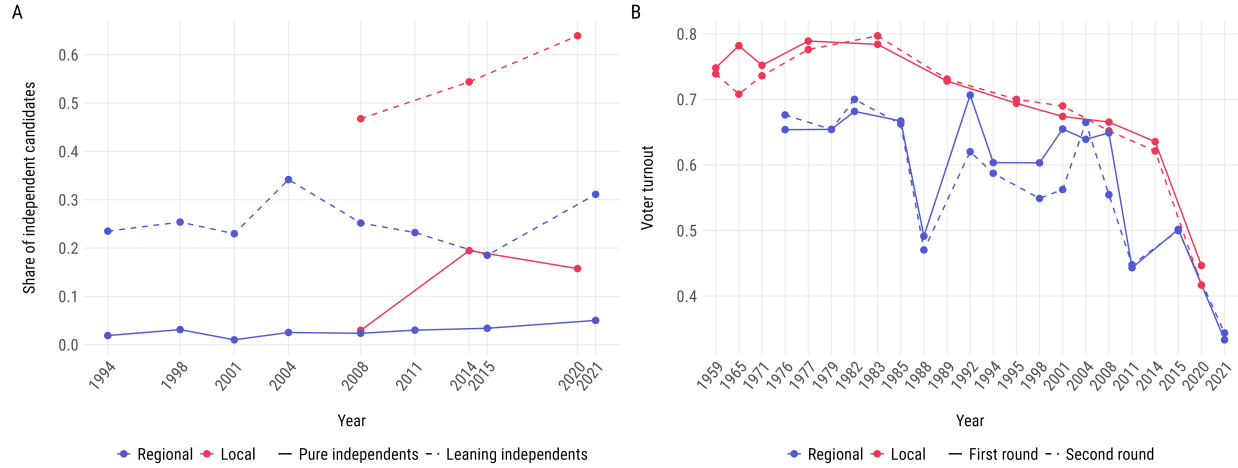
¹⁰From 1997 to 2022, an average of 2 independent candidates reached the second round in the legislative elections and 0 in the second type of regional elections (“*régionales*”). The 2001 local elections are excluded because the election results are not available at the candidate level.

present but in smaller proportions than in local elections. Over time, independents have made up a larger share of the total number of candidates at the local level. Although the share of pure independents decreased from 19% in 2014 to 16% in 2020, it represents a significant increase from just 3% in 2008. Meanwhile, the proportion of leaning independents increased from 46% in 2008 to 64% in 2020. At the regional level, independents have also constituted a larger share of the total number of candidates over time, albeit to a lesser extent. Pure independents have steadily increased from 2% in 1994 to 5% in 2021. Leaning independents, however, exhibit a non-linear trend, peaking at 34% in 2004 and 31% in 2021, with the lowest point at 19% in 2015. Turnout levels have steadily declined in both election types since the late 1980s, reaching all-time lows of 45% in the 2020 local elections and 34% in the 2021 regional elections. While the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this drop, turnout in regional elections had already fallen below 50% since 2011. Similarly, local election turnout declined from 80% in 1983 to 64% in 2014. The different trends in electoral participation and the presence of independent candidates across election types suggest that their campaign experiences and their impact on voter participation may vary, which is why I will conduct subgroup analyses based on election type.

Table 4.1: Sampled elections and their electoral rules

Election type	Year	Vote threshold second round	Population threshold PR system	Population threshold political nuances	Pure independents sample	Leaning independents sample
Local	2020	10%	1000	3500	✓	✓
	2014	10%	1000	1000	✓	✓
	2008	10%	3500	3500	✓	✓
Regional	2021	12.5%			×	×
	2015	12.5%			×	✓
	2011	12.5%			✓	✓
	2008	10%			✓	✓
	2004	10%			✓	✓
	2001	10%			✓	✓
	1998	10%			×	✓
	1994	10%			×	✓

Figure 4.1: Share of independent candidates (A) and voter turnout (B) by election



Local and regional elections rely on a two-round voting system, but use a different electoral rule. Regional elections rely on a plurality vote, where the candidate pair with the most votes in the second round wins the election.¹¹ Local elections rely on a more uncommon electoral rule, a majority bonus system where the list with the most votes wins 50% of the seats, and the remaining seats are distributed proportionally among all lists present in the second round that received more than 5% of the votes. In both regional and local elections, there is no second round if a candidate receives more than 50% of the total number of valid votes and 25% of the registered voters in their district. Otherwise, a second round takes place one week later, in which the top-two candidates from the first round qualify. Most importantly, all other candidates than the top-two who reach a certain threshold in their vote share are also qualified for the second round. From 1994 to 2008, the two types of elections relied on the same threshold for candidates to qualify for the second round: winning 10% of the votes.¹² Since 2011, the threshold for regional elections has increased to 12.5%.¹³

I only consider electoral contests where two rounds took place, and where at least one independent candidate ran in the first round, resulting in a sample of 2,820 independent candidates in the *Pure independent* category and 23,208 candidates in the *Leaning independent* category. A feature of this two-round system is that a list that has not qualified can decide to form alliances with other lists to take part in the second round. Indeed, in local elections,

¹¹In regional elections before 2015, only one departmental councilor was elected per constituency. After the 2013 reform, candidates run as a pair, a man and a woman. The pairs face the same outcome, either losing or being elected together.

¹²For local elections, this refers to the vote share out of the total number of valid votes, i.e. all votes that were cast for one of the competing candidates. For regional elections it refers to the vote share out of the total number of registered voters.

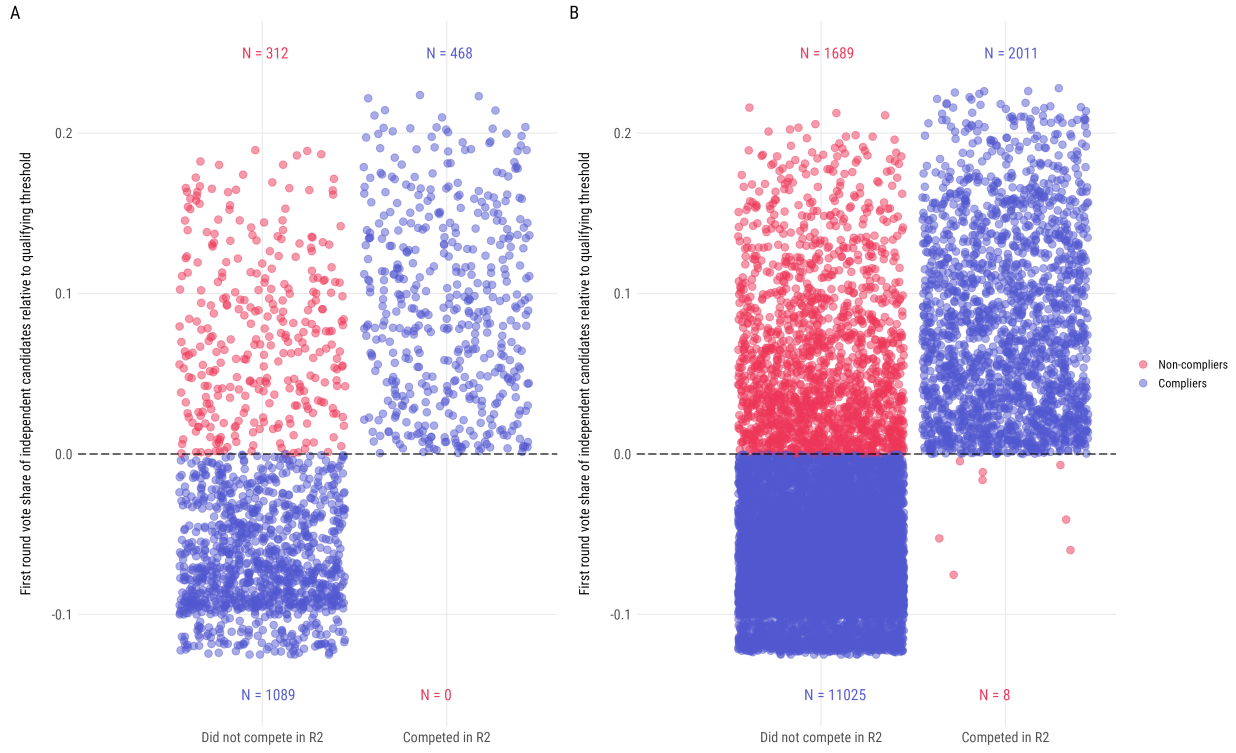
¹³In the 2011 regional elections, the threshold remained at 10% for the Mayotte département.

lists that have received 5% of the votes can merge with other lists that have received more than 10% of the votes. Furthermore, a list that has qualified can also decide to 1) drop out of the race, 2) form alliances with other lists, or 3) change the top candidate of the list.

Figure 4.2 presents the compliance rates at the candidate level. In order to accurately define compliance, independent candidates who changed the top candidate on their list or formed alliances were manually coded. I consider candidates above the threshold who changed the top candidate or who formed alliances with other independents to compete in the second round as compliers, as this does not change their status as independents and citizens in these contests are still treated, i.e., they vote in a contest where an independent is running in the second round. I consider candidates above the threshold who have formed alliances with partisan lists to be non-compliers, as the contest should have been treated as an independent qualified for the second round, but the nature of the alliance with a partisan list diminishes their status as an independent. Candidates below the threshold who enter the second round as part of an alliance with independents are considered non-compliers, as the contest should not have been treated. However, an alliance with a candidate below the threshold can only be formed with a list that has qualified for the second round, so while there is non-compliance at the candidate level, the contest would have been treated regardless of whether the alliance was formed or not.

In total, 83% of pure independents and 88% of leaning independents complied with the treatment assignment. There are non-compliers on both sides of the treatment, and removing these observations would bias the results, as candidates who drop out or form alliances may differ systematically on variables that confound turnout. I therefore follow a fuzzy RDD approach, as this is standard in contexts where the threshold is not a deterministic treatment assignment (Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2020).

Figure 4.2: Independents' first-round vote share by treatment status - A) Pure independents, B) Leaning independents



Using both definitions of independence, Table 4.2 and 4.3 present descriptive statistics of the outcomes and covariates in the two rounds, along with the difference in means between two samples: candidates near the cutoff (those whose vote share falls between 5% below and 5% above the cutoff)¹⁴ and candidates distant from the cutoff (observations outside that window). Overall voter turnout refers to the proportion of votes out of registered voters: this includes both “expressed” votes, i.e., voting for one of the candidates and voting blank and null, i.e., casting an empty envelope, writing something on the ballot or casting multiple ballots in the envelope.

In the pure independents sample, the difference in turnout between the two samples across the first and second rounds ranges from 1 to 2 percentage points, with lower turnout in the sample near the cutoff. In the leaning independents sample, the differences in turnout between the two samples across the rounds are 1 percentage point, with turnout higher near the cutoff in the first round but lower in the second round. The districts are relatively similar in average size, with a difference of 126 to 702 registered voters. Both samples also feature a

¹⁴For elections with a 10% threshold, this refers to candidates who receive between 5% and 15% of the vote, while for elections with a 12.5% threshold, it refers to candidates who receive between 7.5% and 17.5% of the vote.

comparable number of candidates, with around 5 to 6 in the first round and 2 in the second round. The cumulative vote share of the top-two candidates is 4 and 5 percentage points lower in the sample close to the cutoff compared to the sample outside the cutoff. This lower concentration of votes among the leading candidates suggests that there are more “freed-up” voters in these contests. This slight increased availability of persuadable voters likely incentivizes independent candidates to invest more in targeted campaign efforts, as they may perceive a greater opportunity to gain support. Overall, these findings suggest that electoral contests close to the cutoff do not differ greatly from those further away, increasing confidence that the effects observed near the cutoff may generalize beyond the examined window. There is a slight imbalance in turnout patterns, but this is only evident in the pure independent sample and is relatively small.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics for samples distant and close to the cutoff - Pure Independents

	Distant from cutoff		Close to cutoff						
	N = 2165		N = 655						
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Diff. in means	SE	Min	Max	N
First round									
N registered voters	11227.26	22107.80	10524.82	16281.70	-702.43	794.03	637.00	254538.00	2820
Voter turnout	0.60	0.14	0.59	0.14	-0.01	0.01	0.21	0.91	2820
Expressed votes	0.58	0.13	0.57	0.13	-0.01	0.01	0.20	0.91	2820
Blank/null votes	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	2820
N candidates	5.12	2.43	5.64	1.90	0.52	0.09	2.00	16.00	2820
Votes for top two candidates	0.68	0.11	0.64	0.12	-0.04	0.01	0.30	1.00	2820
Votes for top three candidates	0.87	0.13	0.80	0.12	-0.07	0.01	0.41	1.00	2817
Second round									
N registered voters	11230.32	22119.92	10534.11	16310.38	-696.21	795.08	637.00	254547.00	2820
Voter turnout	0.62	0.14	0.60	0.14	-0.02	0.01	0.23	0.92	2820
Expressed votes	0.59	0.14	0.57	0.14	-0.02	0.01	0.16	0.92	2820
Blank/null votes	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.27	2820
N candidates	2.61	0.71	2.76	0.83	0.15	0.04	1.00	6.00	2820

Note: Turnout rates are measured out of registered voters and vote shares are measured out of expressed votes.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics for samples distant and close to the cutoff - Leaning Independents

	Distant from cutoff		Close to cutoff		Diff. in means	SE	Min	Max	N
	N = 17241		N = 5967						
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD					
First round									
N registered voters	12633.40	16507.45	12764.43	15022.75	131.04	231.57	282.00	254538.00	23208
Voter turnout	0.60	0.13	0.60	0.12	0.01	0.00	0.21	0.98	23208
Expressed votes	0.58	0.12	0.58	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.91	23208
Blank/null votes	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.36	23208
N candidates	5.72	2.15	6.04	1.74	0.31	0.03	1.00	16.00	23208
Votes for top two candidates	0.66	0.11	0.61	0.11	-0.05	0.00	0.27	1.00	23206
Votes for top three candidates	0.84	0.12	0.78	0.11	-0.06	0.00	0.38	1.00	23191
Second round									
N registered voters	12636.42	16518.11	12762.46	15031.22	126.05	231.71	282.00	254547.00	23208
Voter turnout	0.60	0.13	0.59	0.12	-0.01	0.00	0.18	0.93	23208
Expressed votes	0.57	0.13	0.56	0.12	-0.01	0.00	0.16	0.92	23208
Blank/null votes	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.29	23208
N candidates	2.40	0.63	2.39	0.67	-0.01	0.01	1.00	6.00	23208

Note: Turnout rates are measured out of registered voters and vote shares are measured out of expressed votes.

Identification

In a sharp RDD, the discontinuity is a deterministic treatment assignment. However, the vote share threshold is not a deterministic inclusion in the second round because, as noted above, candidates have the option of dropping out or forming alliances. In the context of this paper, the threshold creates a discontinuity in the probability of receiving the treatment, hence I follow a fuzzy RDD approach. The discontinuity thus becomes an instrumental variable for the treatment status, thus estimating a two-stage least squares (2SLS) model. In the first stage, I regress the probability of having an independent in the second round on the running variable, i.e., the vote share of the independent in the first round relative to the threshold. In the second stage, I use the predictions from the first stage as an instrumental variable to estimate the effect of the presence of an independent in the second round on voter turnout in the second round. The quantity of interest thus becomes the local average treatment effect (LATE) only for compliers, focusing on units close to the threshold with a treatment status explained only by the vote share cutoff.

The vote share threshold for the second round only affects qualification for the second

round, so there are no compound treatments. However, the design may raise a potential concern about units manipulating their treatment allocation. Independent candidates know about the threshold and could self-select into the treatment, for example by allocating greater financial and organizational resources, increasing campaigning efforts and multiplying media appearances. However, the low-information nature of local elections makes this a more difficult task for candidates, as polls are less frequent and thus candidates have less insight into whether or not and how much to devote to campaigning. To provide empirical support for the independence assumption, I conduct density sorting tests, i.e., plotting the distribution of vote shares in the first round: if there is no discontinuity at the threshold, I can be confident that manipulation effects are limited (McCrary, 2008; Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2024). For both definitions of independence, there is no discontinuity in the running variable, with non-significant results at $p = 0.6155$ and $p = 0.633$. Hence, manipulation effects at the threshold appear to be very limited (see Figure A.1 in the Appendix).

The relevance assumption is empirically validated by reporting the first stage results, i.e., a strong effect of the first round vote share on the probability of qualifying for the second round. Throughout the analyses, I report the first stage F-statistic. I focus on samples where the first stage F-statistic is above 20 (Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2024) and where the density sorting test is not significant (McCrary, 2008), thus bringing support to both assumptions. However, in one sample within the subgroup analysis, the F-statistic falls between 8 and 11. I have noted these exceptions and interpreted the findings accordingly.

The monotonicity assumption is confirmed by the fact that no candidate whose vote share in the first round was below the qualifying threshold was allowed to stand in the second round, unless they decided to stand as part of an alliance with another list whose vote share was above the qualifying threshold. As discussed above, even if the alliance had not been formed, in these cases the municipality would still have been treated because of the qualified list.

The exclusion restriction requires that the independent's first-round vote share to affect the second round turnout solely through its effect on the independent qualifying for the second round. This means that other factors associated with the candidate's vote share in the first round should not independently affect turnout in the second round. To satisfy the assumption, I perform placebo tests by estimating the treatment effect at different values of the treatment assignment, with the lack of discontinuity providing more confidence in the assumptions (Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2020). I run all tests on both the main samples and the subgroup samples, where I find an effect. Figure A.2 in the Appendix displays the p-values for estimated discontinuities in turnout using alternative qualifying thresholds and shows that none are statistically significant. This indicates that the effects

are not driven by unobserved confounders correlated with the running variable and the outcome, that the running variable influences the outcome solely through the treatment, and that there is no contamination of the treatment in the control group. I also estimate the effect by changing the bandwidth, estimating models by increasing the bandwidth every 0.03 points from a $[-0.02, 0.02]$ window to a $[-0.2, 0.2]$ window (see Figure A.4 in the Appendix). I also estimate the effect by changing the kernel functions, where the estimates remain stable over an Epanechnikov, triangular, and uniform kernel (see Figure A.5 in the Appendix).

Lastly, I perform balance checks by examining how covariates vary around the cutoff to ensure that there is no unconfoundedness, with the lack of discontinuity bringing more confidence in the assumptions (Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2020). Figure A.3 in the Appendix displays the p-values for estimated discontinuities of all covariates at the qualifying threshold, revealing that none are statistically significant. This indicates that there are no systematic differences between observations with similar vote shares at the threshold, except for their treatment status, thereby affirming the validity of the research design.

4.5 Results

I follow the standard specification and estimate a local linear regression with an optimal bandwidth around the discontinuity (MSERD) and a triangular kernel weighting function (Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik, 2024). In a first step, I report the analyses for the main effect of the treatment on second round turnout and the share of blank and null votes, as well as the models controlling for the number of candidates in the second round. In a second step, I report the subgroup analyses based on candidates' incumbency status, candidacy experience, election type, by whether the second round opponent is independent or partisan and by the district size. For each figure, the A panel refers to the pure independents definition sample and the B panel to the leaning independents definition sample.

Figure 4.3 shows the results of the first stage for both definitions of independence. In both cases, the first stage is strong, indicating that at the qualifying vote share threshold, the probability of the independent competing in the second round jumps from 0 to 49% in Panel A and 32% in Panel B, with F-statistic values of 92 and 284 respectively.

Figure 4.3: First stage results

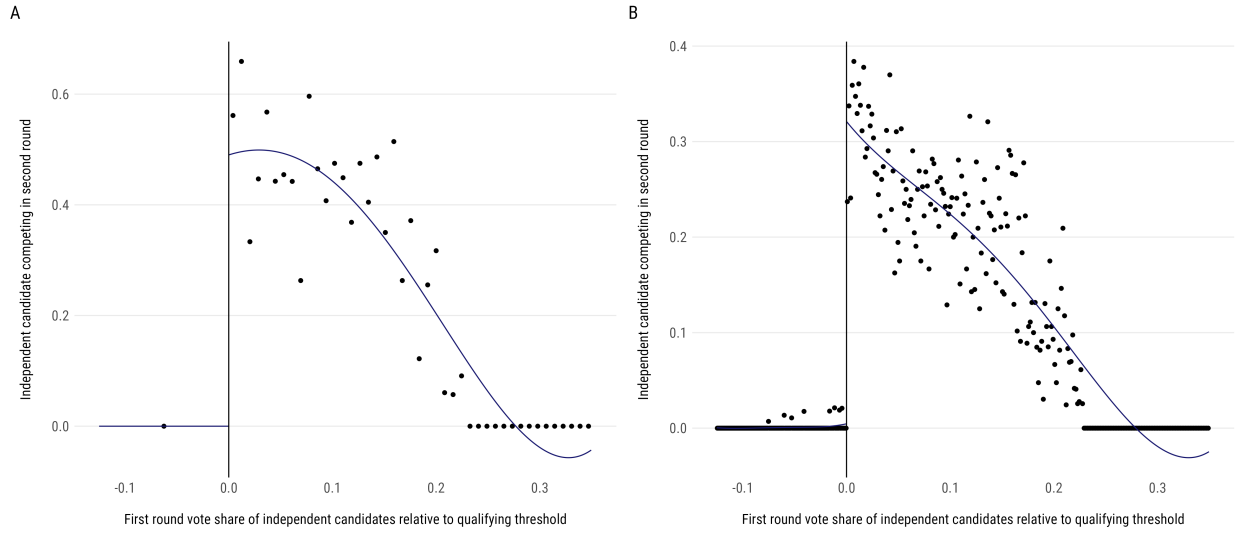


Figure 4.4 shows the results of the second stage using voter turnout measured out of registered voters as the outcome and Figure 4.5 shows the effect on the share of blank and null votes. The results indicate that the presence of independents in the second round has no effect on voter turnout in the second round using both definitions of party independence. Table 4.4 and 4.5 report the detailed results. Using the pure independents definition and controlling for the number of candidates, the share of blank votes increases by 1.3 percentage points, significant at the $p < 0.1$ level and accounting for 65% of a standard deviation, indicating substantial but uncertain treatment effects. Among independents who lean toward an ideological side, the share of blank votes decreases by 1.6 percentage points, but this effect disappears when controlling for the number of candidates. This is consistent with the findings of [Bol and Ivandic \(2022\)](#) and [Pons and Tricaud \(2018\)](#), who find that the presence of a third candidate in the second round reduces the share of blank and null votes by 3.6 percentage points. The differences between our effect sizes may be due to my focus on contests in which independents run, and that, in addition to regional elections, the authors include national elections, while I include local elections.

Figure 4.4: Second stage results - Voter turnout (R2)

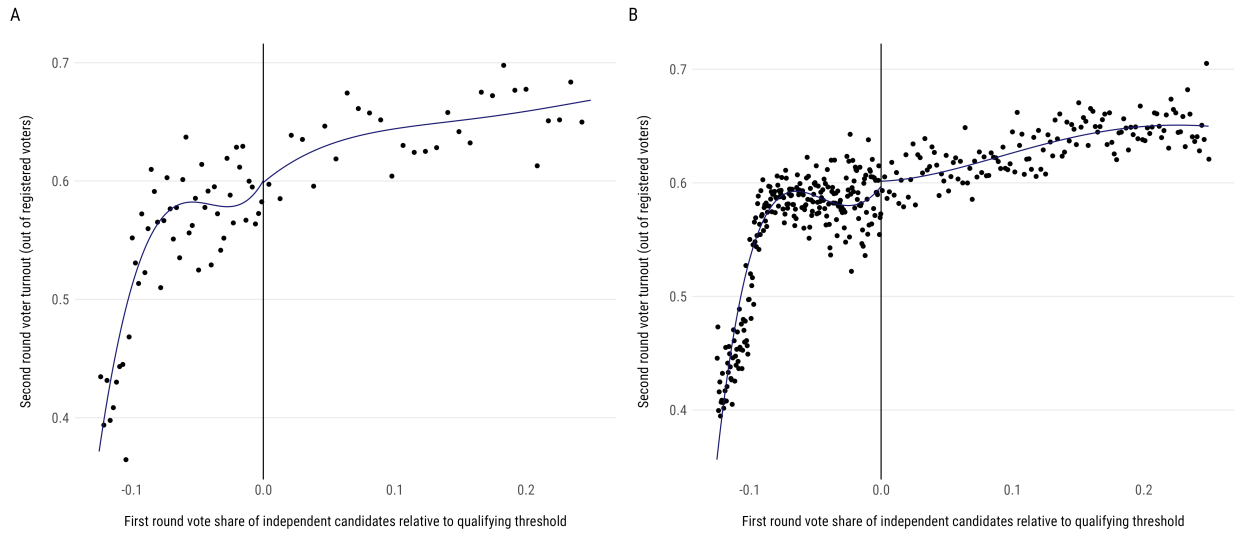


Figure 4.5: Second stage results - Share of blank and null votes (R2)

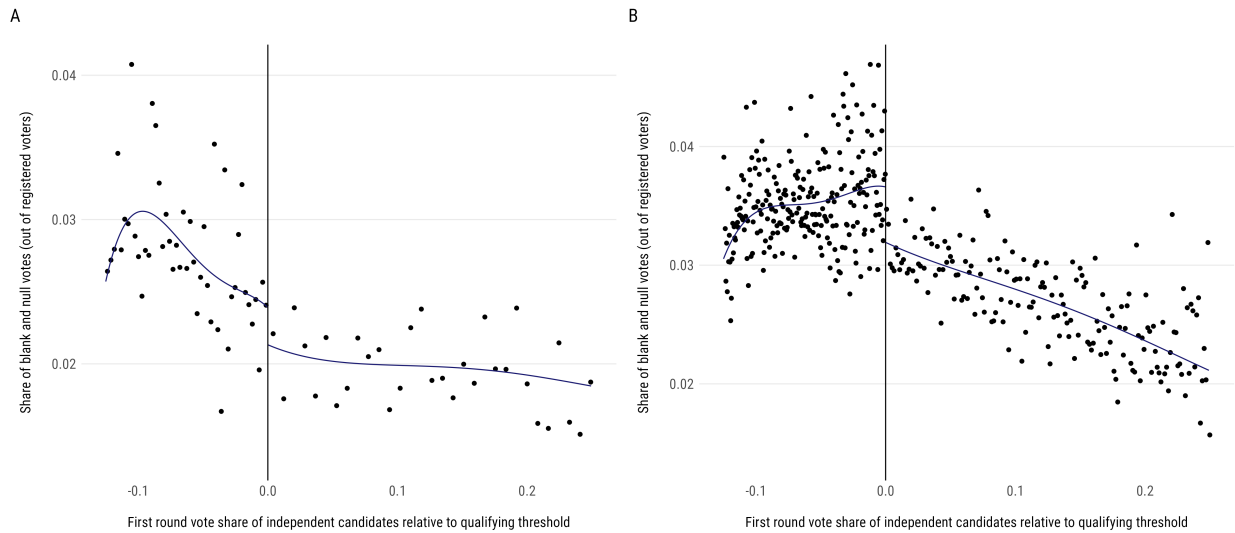


Table 4.4: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout - Pure independents

	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	-0.002 (0.052)	0.032 (0.065)	-0.002 (0.006)	0.013+ (0.007)
First stage estimate	0.578*** (0.070)	0.474*** (0.066)	0.58*** (0.071)	0.467*** (0.074)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
Right bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
Observations	2820	2820	2820	2820
Effective obs. left	260	255	250	183
Effective obs. right	221	215	214	170
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Table 4.5: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout - Leaning independents

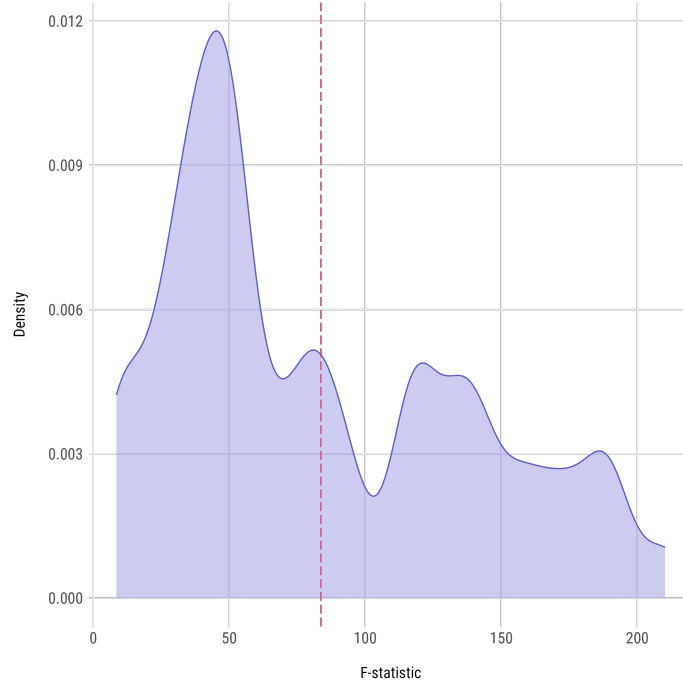
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	0.024 (0.031)	0.040 (0.041)	-0.016*** (0.004)	0.000 (0.005)
First stage estimate	0.305*** (0.025)	0.231*** (0.021)	0.329*** (0.019)	0.247*** (0.018)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04
Right bandwidth	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04
Observations	23208	23208	23208	23208
Effective obs. left	1788	1743	3389	2460
Effective obs. right	1630	1598	2741	2171
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Subgroup Analyses

While the presence of independents in the second round does not appear to affect turnout, in this section I examine whether this varies across subgroups. In the pure independents sample, the first-stage effects are too weak to provide a robust second-stage estimate for different subgroups. Therefore, in this section, I only report the analyses based on the sample of independents who lean toward an ideological side. Figure 4.6 displays the distribution of the first stage F-statistic for all subgroup models, averaging 84 across all reported models below.

Figure 4.6: Distribution of the first stage F-statistic for the subgroup models



The vertical red line shows the average F-statistic value (84).

I first examine whether the treatment varies by the features of the electoral contest, i.e., the differences by the type of election, the partisanship of the opponents and the size of the district. Figure 4.7 displays second-stage estimates by subgroups based on contest characteristics and models for the two outcomes, distinguishing between those that control for the number of candidates in the second round and those that do not.

I first examine how the effect differs by election type, i.e., local and regional elections. Controlling for the number of candidates, the presence of independent candidates in the second round of local elections increase voter turnout by 9 percentage points and increase the share of blank and null votes by 0.5 percentage point, both effects being significant at $p < 0.05$. The treatment increases voter turnout by 69% of a standard deviation and increases the proportion of blank and null votes by 25% of a standard deviation. In contrast, the presence of independent candidates in the second round of regional elections has a null effect on turnout and decreases the share of blank and null votes by 2.5 percentage points and is significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, but this effect does not hold when controlling for the number of candidates in the second round (see Table A.3 in the Appendix for the detailed regression table).

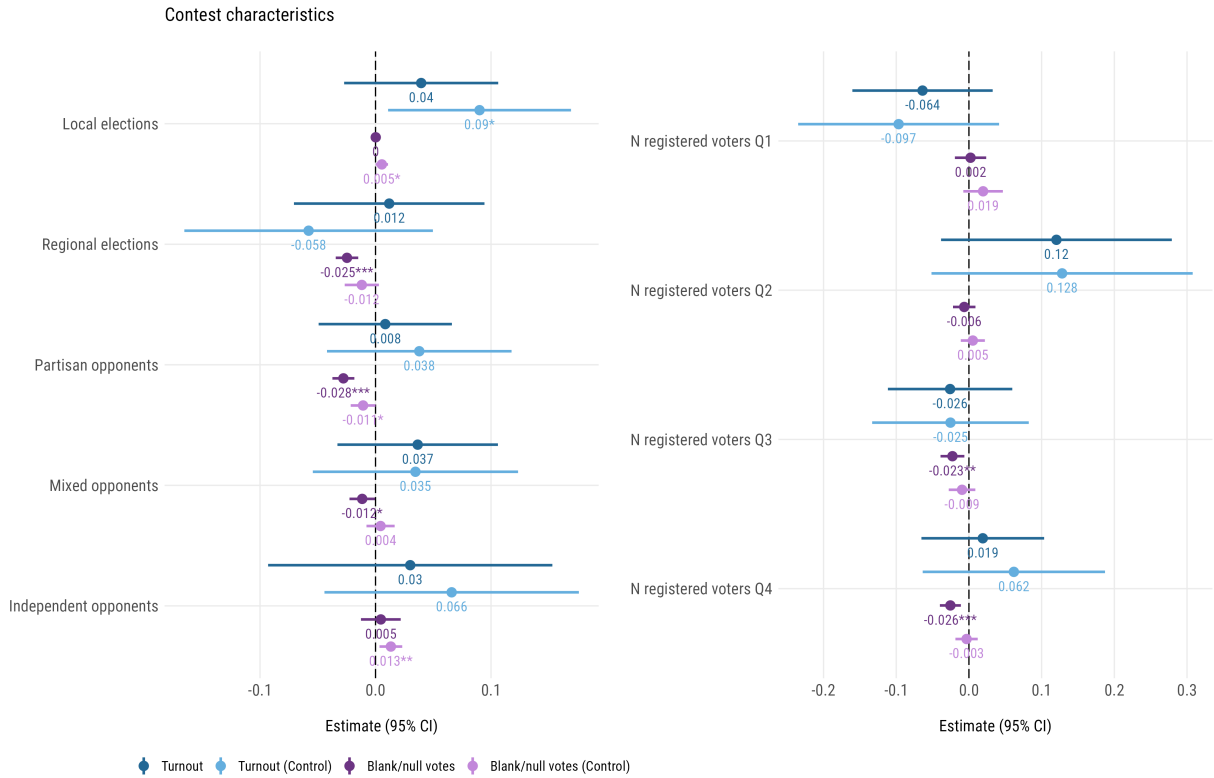
Next, I compare contests in which the top-two candidates are partisans, independents, or a mix of one independent and one partisan. Controlling for the number of candidates,

the presence of independents in the second round against partisan opponents decreases the share of blank and null votes by 1.1 percentage points, an effect significant at $p < 0.05$ and accounting for 55% of a standard deviation. In contrast, when independents face other independents the share of blank and null votes increases by 1.3 percentage points, a result significant at $p < 0.01$ and accounting for 65% of a standard deviation. When opponents are mixed, the presence of an additional independent does not affect the share of blank votes (see Table A.4 in the Appendix for the detailed regression table).

Lastly, I assess whether the effect differs by district size. I operationalized district size as the number of registered voters and divided the sample into quarters based on the distribution of registered voters. The results show that the presence of independents in the second round reduces the share of blank and null votes by 2.3 and 2.6 percentage points in the third and fourth quarters, significant at $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively. This effect does not hold when controlling for the number of candidates in the second round. This suggests that the negative effect of having a third candidate in the second round on the share of blank and null votes found in Bol and Ivandic (2022) and Pons and Tricaud (2018) may be concentrated in larger districts (see Tables A.5 and A.6 in the Appendix for detailed regression tables).

Overall, these results show that the presence of an independent candidate is associated with a significant increase in voter turnout in local elections, but not in regional elections. In addition, the presence of an independent candidate is associated with a decrease in the share of blank and null votes when facing partisan opponents, but it increases when facing independent opponents. Lastly, the effect of the presence of an independent candidate does not vary by district size.

Figure 4.7: Effect on turnout by contest characteristics



Results using the leaning independents sample. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Having examined the effect of features of the electoral contest, I now turn to the effect of candidate characteristics, i.e., the incumbency status of the candidates and the number of times they stood as a candidate in the past. Candidates elected in the last election are considered incumbents, and candidacy experience is defined only by the elections present in the sample.¹⁵ For the effect by incumbency status, the analyses do not include the 2008 local elections and the 1994 regional elections, as this is where the sample stops for the respective election type. Additionally, it does not include the 2015 regional elections, as candidates ran as pairs while in 2011 candidates ran individually, making the definition of incumbency challenging. For this reason, the 2015 elections are also not included in the analyses of the effect by candidacy experience. Due to limited observations and a weak first stage, I have grouped second- and third-time candidates together to define a general category of experienced candidates.¹⁶

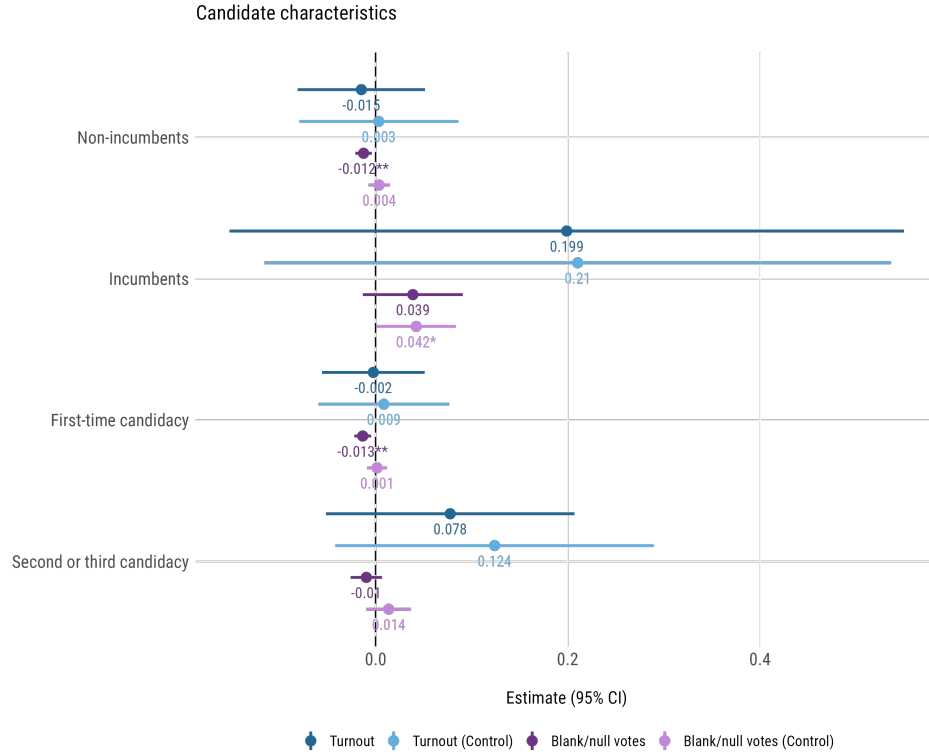
¹⁵Incumbency and candidacy experience are defined separately for local and regional elections, thus a candidate elected in the 2008 local elections is not considered an incumbent for the 2011 regional elections if they ran in those elections.

¹⁶The sample of incumbents is the one in which the first-stage F-statistics range from 8 to 11 in models estimating the effects on the share of blank and null votes and overall turnout.

Figures 4.8 displays second-stage estimates by subgroups based on candidate characteristics and models for the two outcomes, distinguishing between those that control for the number of candidates in the second round and those that do not. When controlling for the number of candidates, the share of blank and null votes increases by 4.2 percentage points (210% SD) in the sample of incumbents, significant at $p < 0.05$. Considering the weak first stage, I assess the robustness of the effect size by examining how the estimates vary with changes in bandwidth and kernel function. When adjusting the bandwidth, estimates range from 3 to 4.6 percentage points, while modifying the kernel function yields estimates between 2.6 and 2.8 (see Figures A.4 and A.5 in the Appendix). Overall, despite a first-stage F-statistic ranging from 8 to 11, the effect size remains robust across specifications. The increase in blank and null votes represents at minimum 132% of a standard deviation and the average effect across all specifications is 3.4 percentage points. While the first-stage strength warrants some caution, the consistency across sensitivity checks strengthens confidence in this finding. Without controlling for the number of candidates, the share of blank and null votes decreases by 1.2 percentage points in the sample of non-incumbents (60% SD) and by 1.3 percentage points (65% of SD) in the sample of first-time candidates, both significant at $p < 0.01$. However, these effects do not hold when controlling for the number of candidates in the second round. None of the estimates reach statistical significance in the sample of experienced candidates.

All in all, these results suggest that when they are incumbents, the presence of an independent candidate is associated with a substantial increase in the share of blank and null votes in the second round and that this is not the case when they are not incumbents (see Table A.1 in the Appendix for the detailed regression table). Furthermore, the null effect of the presence of independents in the second round on voter turnout does not vary by whether the candidates are running for the first time or have run multiple times in the past (see Table A.2 in the Appendix for the detailed regression table).

Figure 4.8: Effect on turnout by candidate characteristics



Results using the leaning independents sample. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

4.6 Conclusion

Do independent candidates mobilize or demobilize citizens? This paper finds that independents do not demobilize the electorate but can enhance participation under specific conditions. Their impact depends on candidate characteristics and the electoral context: they increase mobilization when running in conditions that alleviate information costs and reinforce their outsider appeal. Independents increase voter turnout when they qualify for the second round in local elections and they decrease the share of blank and null votes when facing partisan opponents, reinforcing the idea that they expand voter choice. Local elections maximize independents' ability to mobilize citizens, as they require fewer campaign resources and focus on issues less tied to national party identities, reinforcing their outsider appeal. Blank votes decrease when both citizens who support political parties and those who are dissatisfied with them have an option available on the ballot. While in no case do independents demobilize citizens, they increase the share of blank and null votes when they run as incumbents, face independent opponents or are *pure independents*. As incumbents, they lose outsider appeal, and as pure independents, they lack clear ideological cues, increasing voter uncertainty. Ultimately, independents are most effective in mobilizing citizens

when they balance outsider status with sufficient informational clarity to avoid confusing a broader electorate.

The main part of the analysis shows that the presence of an independent candidate in the second round does not affect voter turnout, but increases blank and null votes by 1.3 percentage points in the pure independents sample. While this may seem like a negligible treatment effect, the proportion of blank and null votes is typically low, on average 3% of the vote. In fact, this effect represents 65% of a standard deviation, and thus represents a substantial effect. I do not find evidence that independents increase information costs in elections to the degree that they lead to overall demobilization, but rather that they make it more difficult for citizens to decide which candidate to vote for and thus lead to more blank ballots. The ambiguity of independents' placement on the left-right scale and their smaller campaign resources contributes to lowering the stakes of elections to the extent that voters are less inclined to choose a candidate, but not to the extent of reducing participation.

These findings also show that a more restrictive definition of party independence has different effects. Indeed, the presence of independents who lean toward one ideological side does not affect the share of blank and null votes. This shows that this effect is most likely due to the lack of information and thus the perceived ambiguity of the political stances of pure independents. Thus, the mere mention of "left," "right," or "center" is enough for citizens to perceive ideological differences between partisan and independent candidates and thus help them reach a voting decision. Pure independents, on the other hand, reduce citizens' perception of partisan and independent candidates as distinct options, making their choice more difficult and increasing doubt that their vote can make a difference, thus opting for a blank vote.

In a second step, I examined the relationship between independent candidates and turnout by splitting the sample into contest characteristics, i.e., election type, the partisanship of opponents and the district size. I find that the presence of independent candidates in the second round increases turnout by 9 percentage points in local elections only, showing a significantly different effect on participation. There are several features of local elections that may make it easier for independents to influence mobilization once they qualify for the second round, as opposed to regional ones. Independents can rely on multiple networks at once by being part of a list, they can devote more campaign efforts as they have a better chance of gaining representation under a majority bonus system than under plurality rule, they campaign in smaller areas than a region, and they can compete on more tangible issues that are not tainted by national partisan debates. This finding also supports the notion that independents broaden the range of candidates available to the electorate. That is, independents may be able to mobilize an electorate skeptical of political parties, disconnected from

national politics and who are instead more concerned with local issues. While independents also increased the likelihood that citizens would cast blank and null votes (0.5 percentage point) only in local elections, the majority of the increase in participation resulted in voters voting for one of the candidates. Therefore, the presence of independent candidates in local elections has resulted in increased electoral representation.

When the top-two candidates are independents, the presence of an additional independent candidate is associated with a 1.3 percentage points increase in the share of blank and null votes. This finding is consistent with the assumption that more independent candidates in the second round would increase information costs, here not to the extent of demobilizing the electorate, but to the extent of increasing the difficulty for voters to make a choice. Indeed, citizens may be less likely to see several independents as distinct alternatives, making it more difficult to reach a voting decision and thus leading to more blank votes. When an independent is present in the second round and the top-two candidates are partisan, there is a decrease in the share of blank and null votes by 1.1 percentage points. In this “best of both worlds” scenario, options are available to both partisan voters and those dissatisfied with party politics, thus reducing the likelihood of blank and null ballots. Alternatively, this finding may be attributed to partisan candidates providing citizens with a reference point to infer the independent’s position on the ideological spectrum. For example, if the top-two candidates are from right-wing parties, citizens may infer that the independent is centrist or left-leaning, thereby reducing information costs and leading to a decrease in blank votes. Lastly, I find that the effect does not vary by district size. This suggests that the lower cost of campaigning in smaller districts relative to larger ones does not significantly affect the ability of independents to mobilize potential voters, nor do they benefit from higher visibility and a larger electorate in larger districts relative to smaller ones.

In a third step, I examined the relationship between independent candidates and turnout by splitting the sample into different candidate characteristics, i.e., incumbency and candidacy experience. When they are incumbents, I find that the presence of an independent candidate in the second round increase the share of blank votes by 3.4 percentage points. After holding office, independents may no longer be seen as an appealing option for citizens dissatisfied with national party politics. Instead, they may come to be perceived as part of the establishment, particularly if citizens view them as having acted like traditional party politicians while in office. While independents may initially represent a blank slate or a novel alternative, their time in office can reduce their perceived status as political outsiders, leading party skeptics to cast blank ballots. However, this finding should be interpreted in light of the fact that we are specifically examining independent incumbents who advanced to the second round without ranking among the top-two candidates in the first round. This sug-

gests that these are competitive races where the incumbent is being challenged, potentially due to a negative performance record. Rather than being solely an effect of incumbency, this finding may reflect more how voters respond to independents when they have held office and are facing electoral defeat, possibly as a result of unpopular policies. Lastly, I find no differences in effect by candidacy experience, meaning that the presence of independents does not mobilize the electorate differently as they gain candidacy experience. The differences between the effects of incumbency and candidacy experience are most likely due to the fact that holding office is a more transformative experience for politicians than standing as a candidate in multiple elections.

Consistent with previous research, the results show a positive effect of independent candidates on turnout in local elections in Western Europe ([Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005](#); [Freire, Martins and Meirinho, 2012](#); [Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020](#); [Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#); [Bernard et al., 2025](#)). However, these studies report a smaller effect, suggesting that the present causal design may have shed light on an underestimated mobilization factor in local elections. While this may also indicate significant country-specific differences, previous attempts to causally estimate this effect have found a similar effect size, with [Kapoor and Magesan \(2018\)](#) reporting a six-percentage-point increase in turnout in Indian elections as more independent candidates participate. The present evidence runs counter to research in the US context on nonpartisan elections, which has shown a negative effect on turnout ([Schaffner and Streb, 2002](#); [Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001](#)). This is most likely due to the fact that, in the European context, nonpartisan candidates compete against partisan candidates.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single case: France. While comprehensive data on the partisanship of candidates in local elections are not widely available, the proportion of independent candidates in France appears to be higher than in other Western European countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany, or Portugal ([Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#); [Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020](#)). In addition, the French party system is characterized by a higher degree of instability than other neighboring countries, which may affect the extent to which candidates depend on political parties for their electoral careers. This instability may make French independents very different from independent candidates in other countries. Within the scope of this paper, I am unable to determine whether the observed effect of election type is due to differences in electoral systems, geographic levels, or both. If the effect is due to the electoral system, I may overstate the positive impact of independents on turnout by generalizing to all other elections that use a majority bonus system or other partially proportional electoral rules. Conversely, if the effect is due solely to the fact that these are local elections, I may underestimate it. Further research could explore

the differences between these contextual factors, in addition to adopting a comparative lens. Additionally, the analysis by incumbency status and candidacy experience could be further refined. In the French data, candidacy experience was identified by tracking candidates with the same first and last name across elections, which may introduce measurement error. Using data sources that assign unique candidate IDs over time would allow for a more robust test. Therefore, this finding should be interpreted with caution and explored further in future research. Future research could also explore the underlying causes of the positive effect of independents on turnout. This could include examining which segments of the electorate are mobilized by the presence of independent candidates, such as politically disaffected citizens, those with anti-party or anti-establishment sentiments, or those with technocratic attitude. Moreover, other mechanisms could be tested, such as whether the positive effect is also driven by citizens projecting their own preferences onto those of the independent candidate, creating the illusion of a better preference fit. We have yet to determine whether independents increase turnout due to the “best of both worlds” explanation or through alternative mechanisms, such as preference projection.

In sum, independent candidates should be encouraged to participate in elections, especially at the local level, as they tend to increase voter turnout. In order to avoid increasing the proportion of blank and null ballots, independents should be encouraged to adopt clear ideological positions and information campaigns about the candidates should be increased when all candidates in the second round are independents. This approach allows for elections in which both citizens inclined to support a party and those dissatisfied with party-based representation have options represented on the ballot.

5 Why Do People Like Technocrats?

with Matthias Kaltenegger and Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik

5.1 Introduction

For as long as democracy has existed, scholars have debated the merits of government based on expertise vs. government based on a popular mandate. Today, this tension is embodied in the contrast between party government and technocratic government (Bertsou and Caramani, 2020).

Party government implies that members of the executive are selected based on their status as party representatives, and that their legitimacy rests on their party’s electoral mandate (Andeweg, 2020; Mair, 2008; Rose, 1974). Technocratic government, by contrast, requires that political leaders are chosen based on subject-matter expertise; their legitimacy as politically neutral governors is based on their ability to implement “rational” solutions without being constrained by public opinion (Costa Pinto, Cotta and Tavares de Almeida, 2018; Bertsou and Caramani, 2020).

Against this background, recent research on technocratic attitudes in democratic societies presents us with a puzzle: Despite lacking an electoral mandate, technocratic or expert government is surprisingly popular with voters (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021; Bertsou and Caramani, 2022; Vittori et al., 2024). This popularity is puzzling, since technocracy separates government actions from the choices available to voters on the ballot, thus undermining governments’ responsiveness and accountability to voters (Müller, 2000; Pereira and Öhberg, 2024).

Our investigation of this tension starts from the premise that, in theory, the defining characteristics of technocrats – expertise and party independence – are two independent dimensions, even though the literature often treats them as one perfectly correlated trait (where ministers are either partisan non-experts or nonpartisan experts) (Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Cotta, 2018; Caramani and Bertsou, 2020; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Rojon et al., 2023).

While some studies go beyond this one-dimensional perspective (Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán, 2015; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021; Vittori et al., 2024), investigating *to what extent* voters value expertise and (non-)partisanship in a minister, we still know very little about *why* they do so (e.g., the specific advantages and disadvantages voters associate with government by experts or partisans). Our study thus advances this burgeoning field by engaging with voters’ reasoning behind their preferences for different types of ministers. Specifically, we contribute the first study on the perceived upsides and downsides

of ministers’ expertise and partisanship, allowing for a more nuanced perspective on voter perceptions of technocracy and party government.

In a pre-registered survey experiment, we examine whether manipulating information about a minister’s partisanship (partisan vs. nonpartisan) and expertise (expert vs. non-expert) affects voters’ views of that person’s competence along two dimensions: *issue competence* (the ability to make informed policy decisions in a given area) and *bargaining competence* (the ability to negotiate political support). Our research design thus allows us to assess both the anti-politics and the expertise basis of technocracy’s popular appeal (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022).¹⁷

Our findings suggest that support for technocratic governance is driven not only by the perceived merits of expert ministers, but also by the disadvantages voters expect from being governed by party politicians. Holding expertise constant, partisan ministers are viewed as having less issue competence. Moreover, partisanship lowers the effect of expertise on issue competence perceptions, and – in one of two experimental scenarios – on perceived bargaining competence, indicating that voter perceptions of these ministerial traits are not independent from each other. However, such negative evaluations of partisan ministers are neither universal nor unconditional. In line with previous research, the partisanship penalty for issue competence disappears for supporters of the minister’s party (Vittori et al., 2024). What is more, partisanship does have important upsides as well. Specifically, partisans are viewed as more effective than nonpartisans in political negotiations, which is a crucial component of democratic governance.

5.2 Theory

Party democracy is increasingly challenged by a tandem of rivaling forms of political representation: populism and technocracy (Bickerton, and Accetti, 2017; Caramani, 2017).

While a rich literature has evolved around the causes and consequences of voters’ affinity towards populist ideas (Erisen et al., 2021; Marcos-Marne, Gil de Zúñiga and Borah, 2023; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018, e.g.), technocratic attitudes among the electorate have only recently begun to attract scholarly interest (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022; Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Chiru and Enyedi, 2022; Ganuza and Font, 2020; Heyne and Costa Lobo, 2021; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Oana and Bojar, 2023). Like their populist counterparts, technocratic attitudes are rooted – at least partly – in a critique of party democracy. In the perception of voters holding such attitudes, party government leads to sub-optimal outcomes, as party politicians seeking re-election are overly responsive

¹⁷While Bertsou and Caramani (2022) describe three dimensions, we find it difficult to implement separate characteristics for expertise and elitism, as significant levels of expertise usually imply some elite status.

towards particularistic interests when taking government decisions ([Bickerton, and Accetti, 2017](#); [Caramani, 2017](#)). In contrast, independent subject-matter experts in government are expected to act more responsibly, to identify what is in the general interest of society through “rational speculation” and to implement optimal solutions for societal problems accordingly ([Caramani, 2017](#)).

Hence, ideal-typical voters with technocratic attitudes are not only anti-politics, they also assume that there are objective best solutions to many problems. These are accessible through expertise and best implemented by a qualified and politically neutral technocratic elite without much interference from less competent ordinary citizens ([Caramani, 2017](#)). Such technocratic attitudes have been found among considerable shares of voters across countries ([Bertsou and Caramani, 2022](#)).

More generally, selecting technocrats for ministerial office resonates well with voter preferences, also beyond the subgroup of voters holding consistent sets of technocratic attitudes ([Rojon et al., 2023](#); [Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022](#); [Bertsou, 2022](#)). Expertise, specifically, has been found to be a much desired trait not only for political outsiders in government but for partisan ministers as well ([Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021](#)). Yet, independence from party politics has also been identified as a substantial component of technocrats appeal to voters, particularly when a minister is nominated by a disliked party ([Vittori et al., 2024](#)).

Studies indicate that voters in favor of technocracy are less likely to go to the polls overall and that they are more likely to vote for new parties – if they vote at all ([Lavezzolo and Ramiro, 2018](#); [Heyne and Costa Lobo, 2021](#)). The apparent rise of technocrat ministers, also in “political” cabinets, might thus relate to a growing distrust in parties’ capability to govern effectively ([Bertsou and Caramani, 2020](#); [Habermas, 1973](#); [Cena and Roccato, 2023](#)).

Indeed, the appointment of technocratic prime ministers is more likely in times of economic crises and scandals ([Wratil and Pastorella, 2018](#)). While party system fragmentation and polarization do not play a role ([Wratil and Pastorella, 2018](#); [Pilet, Puleo and Vittori, 2024](#)), electoral volatility appears to be a significant driver of technocratic appointments ([Emanuele et al., 2023](#)). During crises, technocratic ministers are preferred over experienced politicians under competitive and personalized electoral systems ([Alexiadou and Gunaydin, 2019](#)). In Austria, outsider ministers are more likely to be appointed when party support in the bureaucracy is greater, indicating that parties anticipate the risk of losing agency by appointing outsiders ([Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022](#)). Lastly, a higher share of populist parties within governments increases the likelihood of technocratic appointments ([Pilet, Puleo and Vittori, 2024](#)). Notwithstanding institutional and other political determinants, technocratic appointments are thus related to electoral motives: to avoid blame and

to restore trust in government ([Emanuele et al., 2023](#)).

Hence, technocratic ministers’ expertise and independence may enhance government legitimacy amid party decline. However, the literature has not yet explored *why* voters value each of the two distinct technocratic attributes. Since previous studies have either focused on technocratic attitudes or had respondents choose between politicians’ profiles in survey experiments, we know next to nothing about the specific benefits and drawbacks voters expect from these traits regarding politicians’ performance.

We engage with this gap by focusing on voters’ perceptions along two dimensions of competence closely related to the defining elements of technocracy: *issue competence* and *bargaining competence*. Issue competence (the ability to make informed decisions in a given policy area) should be a function of ministers’ expertise. Bargaining competence (the ability to negotiate political support) should primarily relate to their partisanship. Both qualities are essential for a minister’s performance in office and should factor into voter evaluations of different ministerial types.

Our reasoning proceeds from the premise that expertise will increase perceptions of competence on both dimensions. The issue-specific knowledge and technical skills ministers have acquired are the natural source of their issue competence. Yet, expertise is also an asset in intra-party and inter-party negotiations, as it will increase the authority and credibility of a minister in these processes. Building on this expectation, we test hypotheses on how partisanship and its interactions with expertise and voters’ propensity to vote for the minister’s party affect their issue and bargaining competence perceptions.

Issue Competence

From a technocratic governance perspective, partisan ministers (have to) follow vote- and office-seeking ambitions and are therefore constrained by electoral cycles, by the dynamics of public opinion, and inter- and intra-party competition. These constraints limit their ability to make decisions solely based on expertise, and to the long-term benefit of society ([Bertsou and Caramani, 2020](#)). Partisanship is rejected, as it implies compromise and constraints through citizen involvement. This translates into a growing distrust in the general ability of party politicians to govern competently ([Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002](#)). According to this perspective, voters perceive an inherent tension between partisanship and expertise. As [Vittori et al. \(2024\)](#) show, voters indeed prefer nonpartisan over partisan experts, even when they are nominated by their most preferred party. We therefore expect that voters infer lower levels of issue competence from partisanship:

Hypothesis 1 *Voters perceive partisan ministers as having lower levels of issue competence than nonpartisan ministers.*

In addition, we expect a negative spillover between the two dimensions of partisanship and expertise: The negative view of partisanship that many voters share has the potential to degrade the value of expertise. If partisanship and expertise are seen as fundamentally in tension, the expertise that partisans do bring to the table will be viewed as compromised (in comparison with the “untainted” expertise provided by nonpartisans). For the purpose of our study, this implies that an expertise cue will have a smaller effect on perceived issue competence for partisan than for nonpartisan ministers:

Hypothesis 2 *The positive effect of expertise on issue competence perceptions is lower for partisan ministers than for nonpartisan ministers.*

Lastly, we expect the effect of ministers’ partisanship to be moderated by voters’ party preferences, as citizens typically process information in ways that do not challenge their political predispositions (Taber and Lodge, 2006). Notably, partisanship leads to biases in the perception of candidates: Candidates from one’s own party are seen as possessing more competence, integrity and empathy than those from the opposing party (Martin, 2022; Goren, 2007). Likewise, voters prefer nonpartisan experts over partisan ones, but less so if they view the respective party more favorably (Vittori et al., 2024). We therefore expect that the negative effect of ministers’ partisanship on issue competence perceptions should diminish for supporters of a minister’s party.

Hypothesis 3 *The negative effect of partisanship on perceived issue competence is lower for party supporters than for other respondents.*

Bargaining Competence

Our second dimension of competence refers to a minister’s *bargaining competence* – the ability to negotiate support for their policy proposals from other actors in the political system. While individual ministers have substantial discretion over decisions in their ministry (Laver and Shepsle, 1990, 1996; Bäck et al., 2022), their power to implement policies is not absolute. Notwithstanding the substantive qualities of a policy proposal, turning these proposals into policy output typically requires the support of the appointing party (e.g., in the cabinet and in the legislature) as well as the consent of coalition partners and other veto players.¹⁸

¹⁸For instance, presidents in presidential and semi-presidential systems or sub-national institutions in federal regimes.

Establishing such support coalitions is not a trivial task and should be easier for a minister with greater political weight. Accordingly, [Alexiadou \(2015\)](#) argues that high-ranking party politicians are amongst the most effective ministers in terms of producing their desired policy outcomes, due to their ability to override opposition in intra-party and inter-party negotiations. While such politicians have the most effective means to pressure other actors into accepting their demands (e.g., formal intra-party decision-making powers, mobilizing potential), they have also established political networks and a deeper understanding of party platforms and electoral constraints. These features will help party insiders negotiate with other political actors and to be seen as more competent brokers than nonpartisan ministers.

Hypothesis 4 *Voters perceive partisan ministers as having higher bargaining competence than nonpartisan ministers.*

In contrast to issue competence, we expect *positive* spillover between partisanship and expertise on perceived bargaining competence. While voters may perceive partisanship as a constraint on rational decision-making, there should be no analogous tension between expertise and a minister’s performance in intra-party and inter-party bargaining. On the contrary, expertise may endow partisans with even greater authority in negotiations with their political counterparts. In line with [Alexiadou \(2015, p.26 et seq.\)](#), ministers combining the traits of a party politician with issue-specific expertise – “technopols” ([Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021](#)) – might therefore be the most effective ministerial type in terms of implementing their preferred policies, as they should be able to make better political use of their expertise than nonpartisans.

Hypothesis 5 *The positive effect of expertise on bargaining competence is higher for partisan than for nonpartisan ministers.*

5.3 Empirical Strategy

We test our hypotheses based on a survey experiment fielded in Austria between 10 and 26 October 2022 ($n = 3,072$) ([Partheymüller et al., 2024](#)).¹⁹

Austria is a typical party democracy with exceptionally strong parties ([Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke, 2017](#)) and predominantly partisan appointments to government office. However, Austrian voters are comparatively well accustomed to moderate shares of technocrats in cabinets ([Emanuele et al., 2023](#)). While overall 11% of Austrian ministers (1945–2020)

¹⁹The sample is representative of the Austrian population in terms of gender, age (16–70), region, education, and household size, with only citizens of voting age eligible to participate.

fall into the technocrat category, the country has in recent decades experienced a substantial increase in technocratic appointments (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022) (see Figure B.2 in the Appendix.). Austria is suitable to explore voters’ preferences for different types of ministers, as its citizens are familiar with technocratic ministers and because it is comparable to several other European countries in that regard (see Figure B.5 in the Appendix.).

We use a two-by-two survey-experimental design that randomizes a minister’s partisanship and portfolio-specific expertise.²⁰ Each respondent was shown two versions of the experimental vignette, one describing a recently appointed minister of economic affairs, the other describing a recently appointed minister of education. We deliberately chose valence-type issues to prevent respondents’ perceptions of competence from being shaped by policy positions with which they may strongly agree or disagree. Both portfolios are comparatively likely to see technocratic appointments (Costa Pinto, Cotta and Tavares de Almeida, 2018; Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023) and were held by technocrats in the Austrian government during the data collection phase of the survey, thus ensuring high internal validity.

Ministers were assigned to be either nonpartisans or long-standing members of the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP), the party holding the most important ministerial positions when the survey was fielded.²¹ The focus on the ÖVP provides a high degree of internal validity, yet may come at the expense of external validity. However, because the party has a long history of government participation and is a party whose reputation for handling policy issues is known to voters, a certain degree of external validity is ensured. The mainstream, highly institutionalized character of the party makes it the typical party subject to the technocratic critique of party government and therefore a good fit for our analysis. While voters traditionally consider the ÖVP to be competent on economic policy issues, this applies to a much lesser extent to education policy (Meyer, and Müller, 2013; Wagner, and Meyer, 2015). Hence, the choice of ministerial portfolios in our research design allows us to account for discrepancies in perceived issue competence at the party level, at least to some extent.

As expertise treatment, ministers were assigned prior job experience either as office clerks or as managing director in a retail company (in the economic affairs scenario) or headmaster of a secondary school (in the education scenario). All ministers in the vignettes announce negotiations with other government representatives and the federal states to initiate reforms in their policy areas. Here are the English-language versions of the vignettes:

²⁰The pre-registration can be accessed [here](#). Exploratory analyses are reported in the supplementary materials.

²¹The ÖVP also nominated the technocratic ministers to the two portfolios referred to in the vignettes.

Figure 5.1: Experimental vignettes for the two portfolios

Vignette 1 (economic affairs): [Christoph/Christine] Graf, born 1969, is [not affiliated to a political party/a long-standing ÖVP member] and has recently been appointed Minister of Economic Affairs. Before that, [he/she] had worked as a [office clerk/managing director in a retail company] for over ten years. Shortly after taking office, [he/she] announced that [he/she] would soon start negotiations with representatives of the governing parties and federal states in order to initiate reforms to reduce bureaucracy for domestic companies.

Vignette 2 (education): [Thomas/Angelika] Hartmann, born 1971, is [not affiliated to a political party/a long-standing ÖVP member] and has recently been appointed Minister of Education. Before that, [he/she] had worked as a [office clerk/headmaster of a secondary school] for over ten years. Shortly after taking office, [he/she] announced that [he/she] would soon start negotiations with representatives of the governing parties and federal states to initiate reforms to strengthen school autonomy.

We then ask two outcome questions in random order:

- *Issue competence question:* “How much subject-matter expertise do you think [NAME] has for his/her work as Minister of Economic Affairs/Education?”
- *Bargaining competence question:* “How much support do you think [NAME] will get from the governing parties and states for the planned reform?”

Responses were recorded on 11-point scales, ranging from 0 (“has no subject-matter expertise”, “will get no support at all”) to 10 (“has a lot of subject-matter expertise”, “will get a lot of support for the reform”). These are the dependent variables in our analyses. We provide an overview of the number of respondents per experimental condition in the Appendix.

5.4 Analysis

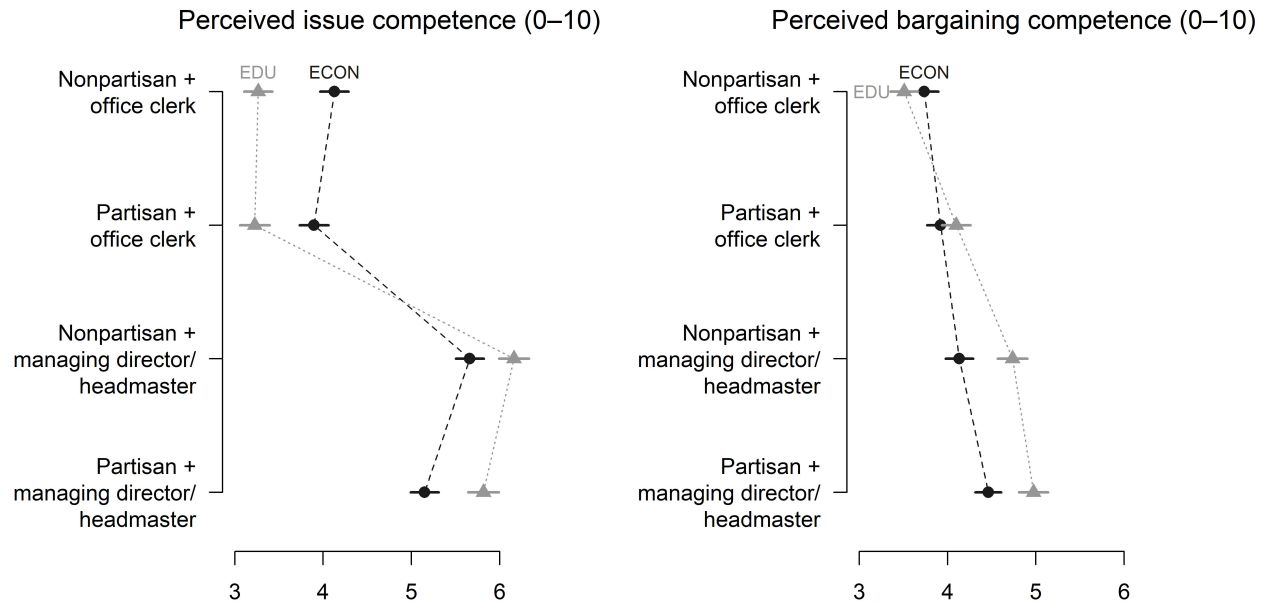
Figure 5.2 presents means and standard errors for the two outcome variables, issue competence and bargaining competence, in all experimental conditions. First, compared with the “office clerk” baseline, perceived levels of issue competence jump markedly in the “managing director” and (even more so) in the “headmaster” condition. This, of course, is in line with our premise: expertise should boost perceived levels of issue competence.

In addition, issue competence perceptions are, on balance, somewhat lower in the partisan conditions than in the nonpartisan ones. This suggests that partisanship has a negative impact on perceived issue competence *independent of actual experience*. Closer inspection

of the left-hand panel in Figure 5.2 reveals that the gap between partisan and nonpartisan ministers is smaller in the “office clerk” conditions than in the conditions featuring the expertise treatments.

By contrast, there is no partisanship penalty for perceptions of bargaining competence. In both scenarios, partisanship and expertise have a positive impact on perceived bargaining competence. As expected, voters thus view partisans with portfolio-specific expertise as the most effective negotiators.

Figure 5.2: Perceived levels of issue competence and bargaining competence across experimental conditions



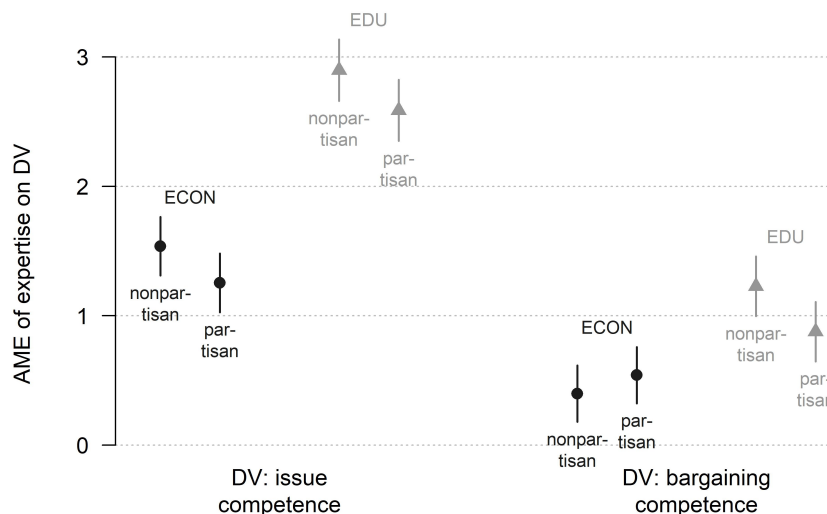
Means and standard errors.

While Figure 5.2 produces results that align well with some of our hypotheses, we specify linear regression models for a more formal test. We use perceived issue (Table 5.1) and bargaining competence (Table 5.2) as the dependent variables. Models marked with an “a” (Ia, IIa, ...) refer to the economic affairs vignettes, whereas models marked with a “b” (Ib, IIb, ...) refer to the education vignettes.

To test Hypothesis 1 (partisanship decreases perceived issue competence) Models Ia and Ib include predictors for the partisanship and the respective job experience treatments in the two versions of the vignette. Whereas experience as managing director or headmaster naturally increases perceived levels of issue competence by a substantial amount (1.4 to 2.7 scale points), there is a negative and statistically significant effect of partisanship: Notwithstanding their expertise, ministers with a party affiliation are viewed as less competent by 0.2–0.4

scale points on average (between 7% and 16% of a standard deviation). These findings provide clear support for Hypothesis 1.

Figure 5.3: Average marginal effect of expertise treatment on perceptions of issue and bargaining competence by partisanship



AMEs with 95-percent confidence intervals, based on models IIa and IIb in Table 5.1 and models Va and Vb in Table 5.2.

Tests of the difference between nonpartisan and partisan AMEs yield p-values of 0.083, 0.070, 0.374, and 0.038, respectively.

In order to test Hypothesis 2 (the positive effect of expertise on issue competence is weaker for partisans), models IIa and IIb include interactions between the partisanship and the managing director/headmaster predictors. While the direct effects in model IIa resemble those found in model Ia, the effect of partisanship disappears in the education scenario (model IIb) when including the interaction term. This means that the partisanship penalty in model IIb is only present for ministers with expertise.

The interaction terms in both models are negative, though only significant at the ten-percent level ($p = 0.086$ and $p = 0.074$, respectively).²² The average marginal effect (AME) of having relevant job experience on perceived issue competence is substantially lower for partisans than for nonpartisans: 1.25 vs. 1.53 for economic affairs, and 2.90 vs. 2.59 for education (see Figure 5.3). The partisanship treatment thus reduces the AME of relevant job experience by 18% (economic affairs) and 11% (education), respectively. Not only do voters view partisan ministers as less competent, they also value their portfolio-specific expertise less than they do in nonpartisans. Partisanship thus taints the value of subject-matter knowledge in politicians, as expected in Hypothesis 2.

²²When stacking the data and running a pooled model for the economic affairs and education scenarios, we obtain an interaction effect of -0.29 with $p = 0.01$, see Table B.1 in the Appendix.

Table 5.1: Regression analysis: treatment effects on perceived issue competence

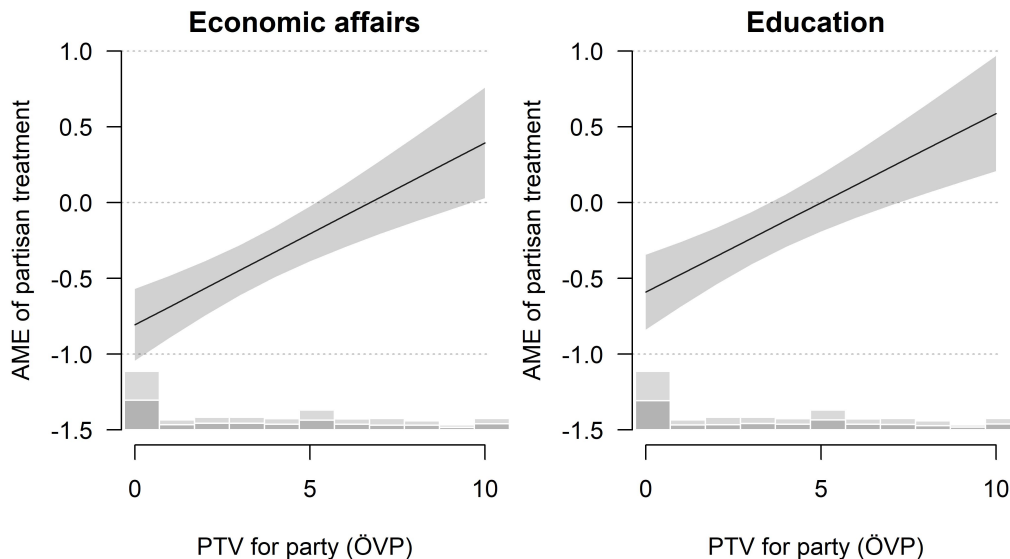
	Ia	Ib	IIa	IIb	IIIa	IIIb
Partisan minister	-0.37** (0.08)	-0.19* (0.09)	-0.23* (0.12)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.80** (0.12)	-0.59** (0.13)
Managing director	1.39** (0.08)		1.54** (0.12)		1.47** (0.08)	
Headmaster		2.74** (0.09)		2.90** (0.12)		2.92** (0.09)
Partisan minister $\times$ managing director			-0.28 ⁺ (0.16)			
Partisan minister $\times$ headmaster				-0.31 ⁺ (0.17)		
PTV for party					0.05** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
Partisan minister $\times$ PTV for party					0.12** (0.03)	0.12** (0.03)
Constant	4.20** (0.07)	3.34** (0.07)	4.13** (0.08)	3.27** (0.09)	3.98** (0.09)	3.10** (0.10)
Num. Obs.	3071	3071	3071	3071	2846	2846
R2 Adj.	0.09	0.25	0.09	0.25	0.14	0.29

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. ⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Models marked with an ‘a’: economic affairs, models marked with a ‘b’: education.

Hypothesis 3 posits that perceived issue competence is shaped by voters’ attitudes towards the party: party sympathizers should display a smaller “partisanship penalty” than non-sympathizers. We test this hypothesis by interacting the partisan treatments with an item capturing the propensity to vote (PTV) for the ÖVP on a scale from 0 to 10. This interaction term is positive and statistically significant for both vignettes. To evaluate Hypothesis 3, Figure 5.4 displays the average marginal effect of the partisan treatment across the empirical range of the PTV variable.

Figure 5.4: Average marginal effect of partisan treatment on perceived issue competence by propensity to vote (PTV) for the ÖVP



AMEs with 95-percent confidence intervals, based on models IIIa and IIIb in Table 5.1. Bars indicate the distribution of the PTV variable for cases with (light gray) and without (dark gray) the partisan treatment (median number of cases per cell = 129).

In both scenarios, PTV is a strong moderator of the partisan treatment. The partisanship penalty is largest for respondents least likely to vote for the minister's party (ÖVP), but shrinks to zero at higher PTV levels (even nudging into positive territory in the education scenario). This suggests that the mechanism behind our findings for Hypothesis 1 is not generic anti-party sentiment, but the sentiment towards a specific party. Nonpartisan ministers are at an advantage because they can more easily avoid hostility from out-partisans and are thus more acceptable to a larger group of respondents.

Next we turn to the hypotheses pertaining to bargaining competence. Hypothesis 4 conjectures that partisan ministers will be viewed as more competent in negotiating support for their policy proposals. This hypothesis is supported by the results of models IVa and IVb in Table 5.2. In both estimations, the partisanship treatment returns a positive and statistically significant coefficient. Respondents award partisan ministers a 0.26-point (economic affairs) and 0.41-point (education) higher score on bargaining competence than their nonpartisan counterparts. In line with our expectation, there are thus positive qualities associated with partisanship. Partisanship is not simply a generically unfavorable attribute that produces negative valence in all contexts, as voters differentiate between different requirements for government office.

Table 5.2: Regression analysis: treatment effects on perceived bargaining competence

	IVa	IVb	Va	Vb
Partisan minister	0.26** (0.08)	0.41** (0.08)	0.19 ⁺ (0.11)	0.58** (0.12)
Managing director	0.47** (0.08)		0.40** (0.11)	
Headmaster		1.05** (0.08)		1.23** (0.12)
Partisan minister $\times$ managing director			0.14 (0.16)	
Partisan minister $\times$ headmaster				-0.35* (0.17)
Constant	3.70** (0.07)	3.59** (0.07)	3.73** (0.08)	3.51** (0.08)
Num. Obs.	3071	3071	3071	3071
R2 Adj.	0.01	0.06	0.01	0.06

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. ⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Models marked with an ‘a’: economic affairs, models marked with a ‘b’: education.

Finally, we expect a positive interaction between expertise and partisanship on bargaining competence (Hypothesis 5). However, models Va and Vb in Table 5.2 display non-significant and negative coefficients, respectively.²³ The average marginal effects calculated from these models are reported in Figure 5.3 above (right-hand side). In the economic-affairs scenario, partisanship does not modify the effect of expertise: the AMEs of expertise are very similar for partisan and nonpartisan ministers. In the education scenario, however, we find that partisanship *decreases* the effect of expertise on bargaining competence. Similar to the effects found for issue competence, the competence boost that ministers gain from their expertise is smaller for partisan ministers than for nonpartisan ones. These findings clearly contradict Hypothesis 5.

²³Pooling the models yields a coefficient of -0.10 with $p = 0.35$.

5.5 Conclusion

Why do people like technocrats? We have broken down this question along two dimensions: issue competence and bargaining competence.

Our findings suggest that the relationship between ministers’ expertise and partisanship and voters’ competence perceptions is complex. To start with, there is a clear trade-off between partisanship and perceived issue competence: Voters believe that partisan ministers have lower issue competence, irrespective of ministers’ actual expertise – an effect driven by out-party supporters (see also [Vittori et al., 2024](#)). In addition, ministers’ expertise becomes less valuable (in terms of boosting issue competence perceptions) if the minister is a partisan as opposed to a nonpartisan.

These findings suggest that technocrats’ perceived issue competence is not merely a function of their expertise, but also of their party independence. Thus, even on the dimension most directly linked to the expertise aspect of technocracy (issue competence), partisanship plays an important role in shaping voter attitudes. Thus, voters do not evaluate expertise and nonpartisanship independently of each other. Instead, there is an attitudinal spillover from one dimension of technocracy (nonpartisanship) to the other (expertise). This “partisanship penalty” implies that voters accept the technocratic critique that views party politicians as constrained by public opinion and electoral cycles, which deflects partisan experts from making decisions based on their expertise ([Bertsou and Caramani, 2020](#)).

In contrast, we find that bargaining competence (a more “political” trait) is positively affected by partisanship. Voters view partisan ministers as more likely to attain their policy goals when bargaining with other political actors. Partisanship is thus no disadvantage across the board, but matters in dimension-specific ways. However, contrary to our expectations, we also find a trade-off between the effects of expertise and partisanship in one of our two scenarios: In the education-portfolio version of the experiment, partisanship decreases the positive impact of expertise on bargaining competence.

While in the former case our findings confirm the view that party politicians are perceived, at least by voters, as the most effective ministers in terms of achieving their policy goals ([Alexiadou, 2015](#)), the latter finding challenges this view. It appears that, for certain issues, nonpartisan experts are actually perceived as having higher bargaining competence than partisan experts. One possible explanation is that voters may see some issues as more politicized – and thus legitimately subject to the logic of party politics – than others. For less politicized issues, partisanship and expertise may be seen as in tension when it comes to achieving negotiation success.

A noteworthy limitation of our study is the measurement of bargaining competence. Our first attempt to capture perceptions of ministers’ bargaining competence focuses on

outcomes, but does not address how politicians achieve them. Respondents who answered “will get a lot of support” may perceive party politicians as effective either through legitimate means or malpractice. This distinction is not captured by our current measure and thus merits further research. An additional limitation is related to effect sizes. While the effects are small, these effect sizes are consistent with the subtle nature of the treatments.²⁴ In reality, voters would have access to more information (e.g., ministerial performance), so the subtle treatments increase external validity. Another limitation is the focus on one party, the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP). While focusing on a currently governing party ensures high internal validity, it reduces external validity. Specifically, we do not know how different party-level characteristics would have affected respondents’ competence evaluations, making it unclear to what extent our findings generalize. However, we believe our findings are relevant for similar mainstream, conservative parties – especially since such parties in Eastern and Western Europe have appointed technocrats to a similar extent as the ÖVP (see Figure B.6 in the Appendix).

Overall, our results support the view that technocracy is best conceptualized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing both expertise and party independence (Caramani and Bertsou, 2020; Vittori et al., 2024). However, in the eyes of voters, these dimensions are not completely separate, but affect each other, as a minister’s partisanship boosts some dimensions of perceived competence (bargaining competence), but decreases others (issue competence). These spillover effects provide an empirical rationale for the strategic use of technocratic appointments to enhance a government’s perceived issue competence. However, forgoing partisan appointments may come at a price in other competence dimensions, as nonpartisan ministers are viewed as less effective negotiators.

²⁴We chose occupations that subtly imply expert status to avoid inflating effects, and partisanship was mentioned only once.

6 Does Electoral Accountability Work When Ministers Are Independent?

6.1 Introduction

While the party government model posits that ministers are recruited *by* and *through* parties (Mair, 2008), there are many examples of ministers being appointed without party affiliation or public office experience. Since 2000, technocratic appointments have increased in European governments from 9.5% to 14.2% in 2020 (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). Notably, technocrats have taken on executive positions in the wake of the Great Recession in Italy and Greece, as well as in the aftermath of domestic political crises in Austria, Romania and Italy. While they may hold office for a short period as part of a caretaker government, other technocratic ministers are part of traditional partisan cabinets and hold office for as long as partisan ministers (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023).

From voters' perspective, the decline in party membership rates since the 1980s (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012), combined with a growing preference for nonpartisan actors in government, has led part of the electorate to reject party politicians altogether (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Pilet et al., 2023). Research on technocratic attitudes finds that voters who can be classified as "technocratic" account for an estimated 12% of the electorate in Europe (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). Voters are also more likely to choose a candidate who has expertise, even if the opposing candidate is from their preferred political party (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021).

These trends can be understood as consequences of the crisis of party-based representation and thus of the growing perception that party democracy is failing to fulfill its representative functions (Mair, 2008; Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Caramani, 2017). As a result, citizens disengage from political parties and elites also withdraw from them (Mair, 2013). The government's electoral legitimacy, rooted in voters' expectations of responsibility and accountability, weakens when parties lose or delegate their role in government to nonpartisan actors. This paper tackles this key and as yet overlooked challenge in contemporary political representation by shedding light on whether, and to what extent, the presence of independents in government poses a threat to democratic accountability.

The proper functioning of democracy hinges on the essential role played by political parties (Schattschneider, 1942). In party-based representation, accountability involves a narrative and a deliberation (i.e., to give an account, justify one's actions) and the possibility of control (i.e., to be held accountable, responsible) (Mansbridge, 2009). Governments

are accountable if citizens are informed of their government’s actions and are able to correctly identify the actors who contribute to the outcome they are (dis)satisfied with, and associate them with a political party (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999). Only then can elections function as mechanisms of retrospective reward or punishment, and thus produce accountability and legitimacy. Scholars have long been concerned with identifying the contextual factors that make it easier or harder for voters to attribute responsibility for political outcomes, a key aspect of ensuring government accountability (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013; Marsh and Tilley, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011; Angelova, König and Proksch, 2016; Silva and Whitten, 2017).

The question of responsibility is thus central to technocratic governance, but has received little scholarly attention. In a comprehensive study, Emanuele et al. (2023) show that technocratic appointments are more likely under high electoral volatility, potentially serving to dilute governing parties’ responsibility. Political scandals and economic crises are some of the main drivers of technocratic actors in government, and the use of nonpartisan actors may function as a blame avoidance strategy for parties (Wrátil and Pastorella, 2018; Alexiadou and Gunaydin, 2019). However, we have yet to determine whether this strategy is effective. Whether nonpartisan ministers can be held to account in elections depends on how and to whom voters attribute responsibility for their actions. This paper addresses this research gap with two key contributions. First, it introduces a more nuanced operationalization of elites’ partisan ties, encompassing both the length of party membership and the extent of involvement within the party organization. Second, it provides the first evidence on how voters attribute responsibility in contexts with varying degrees of partisan ties.

To contribute to this literature, this paper takes a significant step forward by examining how voters attribute responsibility for policy outcomes when ministers have varying degrees of party ties. I distinguish between long-time party members, recent party members and independents. Research indicates that strong partisan ties play a critical role in voters’ attribution of responsibility. These ties help voters identify who is responsible for government outcomes and place greater constraints on elites, forcing them to fulfill their mandates to avoid potential electoral costs (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999). However, the growing crisis of party-based representation - manifested in the disengagement of both citizens and elites from parties - may increase the risk of undermining these key processes that underpin democratic accountability.

In a first step, I test whether voters can trace responsibility to a political party and translate it into a vote choice when ministers’ partisan ties are weaker. While weaker party ties may weaken accountability, it may also be the case that voters need only minimal information to trace responsibility to a party, such as knowing which party has appointed

the independent ministers. Through the link of appointment, voters may be able to credit or blame political parties, thereby achieving effective political accountability. In a second step, I investigate variations in this mechanism among subgroups. I assess whether weaker party ties moderate the influence of technocratic attitudes and partisan motivated reasoning in assigning credit or blame for government performance. Therefore, I will determine whether the degree of association of the government with political parties, i.e., the *partyness* of government (Katz, 1986; Blondel and Cotta, 2000), has the capacity to activate or inhibit voters' party affiliation and attitudes as cognitive shortcuts when deciding who should be credited or blamed for government performance. The extent to which this leads to accurate attribution has implications for fostering effective political accountability.²⁵

I answer these questions by conducting a factorial vignette experiment in Italy, a case relevant both for its experience with technocratic governments and for the prevalence of technocratic attitudes among citizens (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). I expose voters to fictional scenarios describing the consequences of a policy reform enacted by a minister, with information about the strength of their ties to the party that appointed them. Regardless of whether a minister is an independent or a long-standing party member, I find evidence that voters consistently hold parties responsible for the policy failures and successes of the minister they appoint. This confirms that nonpartisan ministers are subject to similar electoral accountability mechanisms as partisan ministers. Consequently, political parties appointing independents as a way of diluting and shifting responsibility away from them is an ineffective strategy. Regarding subgroup differences, I find that partisan ties do not moderate the role of voters' party identity and technocratic attitudes in responsibility attributions, or only to a limited extent. These findings support the view that ambiguity about the party affiliation of government members does not affect partisan bias in responsibility attribution. Therefore, appointing nonpartisan ministers in government does not seem to be a fruitful avenue to reduce the influence of partisan bias on voters' behavior and attitudes. As for the role of technocratic attitudes, these findings suggest that such attitudes may not be strong and salient enough to trigger a particular pattern in responsibility attributions. In short, this paper highlights a significant constraint placed on elites where they have limited room to distort public perceptions of responsibility, as electoral accountability is maintained even in low party clarity contexts.

²⁵Evidently, political processes are complex and accurately identifying a responsible actor is not straightforward. Here, accuracy of responsibility is defined in relative terms: while all government members and parties are responsible for government performance, some ministers or parties are more responsible than others according to their portfolio.

6.2 How Voters Assign Responsibility

Attributing responsibility is a fundamental step in the retrospective voting mechanism. Several factors affect voters' ability to accurately attribute responsibility for political outcomes where research has both identified individual-level factors and contextual ones. In this paper, I apply mechanisms from research in social psychology on group perception and attitude formation to explain the effect of a contextual dimension: the clarity of responsibility at the level of government members. Building on the current literature in these fields, it can be expected that weaker party ties of ministers will make it more difficult for voters to identify a single party to hold responsible, as they may perceive the government as a less unified and cohesive group.

Clarity of Responsibility in Government

The literature has focused on the institutional rules that make it more or less possible for voters to attribute responsibility for government performance. In particular, coalition complexity and the level of division and cohesion in government inhibit voters' ability to sanction government for poor performance by reducing the clarity of responsibility (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 1995; Lewis-Beck, 1988). As expected, economic voting is more prevalent in "high clarity" contexts than in "low clarity" ones (Powell and Whitten, 1993).

Rather than a high vs. low category, other scholars have conceptualized the clarity of responsibility as separate dimensions and focused on specific characteristics of policy-making. It has thus been understood as the clarity of available alternatives, i.e., the number of effective parties (Anderson, 2000) and the level of party polarization (Stiers and Dassonneville, 2020). In coalition governments, the party of the prime minister is consistently seen as the incumbent and therefore the responsible actor (Lewis-Beck, 1986; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Fisher and Hobolt, 2010; Williams and Whitten, 2015; Vinæs Larsen, 2016; Silva and Whitten, 2017). Furthermore, voters' perceptions of responsibility depend on proposal power, party size (Angelova, König and Proksch, 2016; Debus, Stegmaier and Tosun, 2014; Duch, Przepiorka and Stevenson, 2015; Duch and Stevenson, 2013), parties' bargaining strength (Bowler, Gschwend and Indridason, 2020) and time in office (Bengtsson, 2004).

Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci (2013) introduced the distinction between "institutional clarity" referring to the level of concentration of institutional power, and "governmental clarity" referring to the degree of cohesion among government members.²⁶ They find that

²⁶Governmental clarity refers to whether the government is a single party or a coalition, the dominance of one party in a coalition and the ideological cohesion within a coalition (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013).

government clarity better captures contextual variation in retrospective voting and that institutional clarity has a null effect. This null effect is replicated by [Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck \(2017\)](#) who distinguish between power distribution and institutional rules and show a null effect of these indices on economic voting across a large sample of countries and over time. This implies that voters' ability to vote retrospectively and hold the government accountable is more influenced by their ability to identify a single political party to credit or blame for performance than to identify which part of the political system is responsible. Thus, for electoral accountability, the political context of *government* is of primary importance compared to institutional rules.

The Role of Perceived Party Clarity

The psychological process underlying voters' response to the clarity of responsibility in government can be linked to the way in which individuals rely on categorical thinking to facilitate information processing and simplify decision-making processes. Individuals perceive others as belonging to social categories (e.g., class, gender, party affiliation), which allows them to retain a large amount of information and shorten the process of perception and judgment ([Macrae and Bodenhausen, 2000](#)). As the environmental complexity of their task increases, so does the cognitive strain when forming attitudes. Research on group perception defines group entitativity as the degree to which a group of individuals is perceived as similar, unified and coherent ([Campbell, 1958](#)). For instance, a single-party government has higher group entitativity than a coalition government, which itself has higher group entitativity than a government, including both partisan and nonpartisan actors. Group entitativity plays a crucial role in information processing, as it impacts cognitive strain and the ability to recall information ([Hamilton and Sherman, 1996](#)). Consequently, it has significant implications for social perception and judgment, supported by numerous studies ([McConnell, Sherman and Hamilton, 1997](#); [Yzerbyt, Rogier and Fiske, 1998](#); [Lickel et al., 2000](#); [Rubin and Badea, 2012](#)). These studies indicate that perceived group homogeneity is closely associated with prejudice and stereotyping ([Agadullina and Lovakov, 2018](#)). Notably, group entitativity affects attitude generalization, i.e., how individuals transfer their attitudes about outgroup members to their attitude about other outgroup members or the outgroup itself ([Ratliff, 2023](#)). When perceived group entitativity is lower, people are less likely to transfer their attitudes toward an outgroup member to the outgroup itself ([Crawford, Sherman and Hamilton, 2002](#)).

Drawing on the literature on group perception and voters' response to the clarity of responsibility in government, I take a new approach to government clarity ([Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013](#)) by focusing on the perceived *party clarity* at the level of ministers. This approach sheds light on the importance of understanding how the clear identification of

ministers' party affiliations affects voters' ability to assign responsibility and hold government accountable. In particular, if voters can easily identify whether ministers belong to a party and, if so, to which one, they can more accurately attribute successes and failures to the appropriate political party, thereby increasing accountability.

I expose voters to biographical information about ministers' strength of partisan ties, defined by their party membership and their party career, and the consequences of a policy reform plan they enacted. Given the extensive evidence that low responsibility clarity weakens retrospective voting, it can be expected that perceived low party clarity also weakens it, by shifting responsibility away from political parties and onto individual ministers, leading to an accountability deficit. The mechanism underlying this expectation comes from the current literature on attitude generalization, which states that low group entitativity, i.e., low party clarity, weakens attitude transfer from individuals to the group they belong to. Since I provide respondents with information on which party appointed the minister, an alternative case may be that voters are able to hold parties accountable with minimal information, such as the link through appointment, potentially enabling retrospective voting to function even in contexts with weaker party ties. To establish which of these possibilities holds true, I formulate the following Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 *The weaker the minister's ties to the party, the more likely voters will perceive the minister to be more responsible than the party for policy outcomes.*

Hypothesis 2 *The weaker the minister's ties to the party, the less likely voters will reward (punish) the incumbent parties for good (poor) policy outcomes.*

6.3 Partisan Motivated Reasoning

When attributing responsibility, people commonly exhibit a "group-serving bias", in which they favor their in-group for positive outcomes and their out-group for negative ones (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Hewstone, 1989). This bias extends to partisanship, where voters tend to make political decisions and judgments in ways that are consistent with their party identity (Downs, 1957; Lupia, 1994; Bartels, 2002). Indeed, partisans are more likely to blame a sitting president of the opponent party for economic conditions than a past president from their own political party (Peffley, 1984; Lebo and Cassino, 2007). Along with economic conditions (Rudolph, 2003, 2006; Evans and Andersen, 2006), research finds that partisan rationalization in responsibility attributions occurs in several policy areas, such as health, education, crime (Marsh and Tilley, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011), and natural disasters (Malhotra and Kuo, 2008).

The implications of partisan motivated reasoning for political representation have been discussed, as it renders a part of the electorate insensitive to political conditions and decreases democratic accountability (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Little, Schnakenberg and Turner, 2022). However, some argue that partisan stripes will acknowledge facts when provided with unambiguous real-world conditions or with monetary incentives to be more accurate (Bullock et al., 2015; Prior, Sood and Khanna, 2015; Bolsen, Druckman and Cook, 2014). Yet, research suggests that incentives still drive partisans to produce arguments that fit their preferred responsible actor to blame or credit for political outcomes (Gaines et al., 2007; Bisgaard, 2015, 2019).

This approach has helped explain variations in partisan bias by bringing in political contexts to achieve a better understanding of this psychological process. Key findings show that the likelihood of partisan motivated reasoning increases with political sophistication (Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan, 2014), strength of opinion (Taber and Lodge, 2006), high media coverage (Jerit and Barabas, 2012), high clarity of responsibility (Parker-Stephen, 2013; Jilke, 2018), and elite polarization (Bullock, 2011). Indeed, elite polarization has been found to amplify the effect of elite party endorsements on opinions at the expense of substantive information (Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013). Additionally, voters respond more favorably to an issue frame their party endorsed rather than from another party (Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010). If party elites convey a common message, partisan perceptual differences decrease (Bisgaard and Slothuus, 2018). Consistent with the clarity of responsibility literature, partisan motivated reasoning is more likely to occur when contextual cues cause individuals to pay more attention to behave and think in ways consistent with their partisan identity.

These findings show that party elites are fundamental actors in the activation or inhibition of partisan bias. Partisan motivated reasoning is an adaptive psychological process (Bisgaard, 2015), and this paper contributes to how cues from political elites moderate this process, focusing on ministers' biographies and how they reflect their partisan ties. I examine how partisans assign responsibility for the consequences of a policy reform enacted by ministers with various levels of ties to the party who appointed them. As the literature indicates that low group entitativity decreases attitude transfer, I expect low party clarity to decrease partisan bias, leading partisans to assign responsibility similarly for poor and good performance.²⁷ Therefore, I expect the strength of ministers' partisan ties to moderate partisan motivated reasoning:

²⁷In this empirical setting, there is partisan bias when, as opposed to out-partisans, in-partisans attribute more responsibility to the minister than to their party for negative performance, while the opposite is true for positive performance. Therefore, a smaller gap between the responsibility attributed to the minister and the party describes a lower partisan bias.

Hypothesis 3 *The weaker the minister’s ties to the party, the more partisans will perceive the party and the minister as equally responsible for both poor or good policy outcomes.*

6.4 Technocratic Attitudes

Party democracy faces challenges from populism and technocracy as alternative forms and claims to representation (Caramani, 2017). Scholars have sought to understand to what extent and under what conditions citizens value the involvement of experts and technocrats in policy-making. This research is crucial, as technocrats break the chain of delegation between parties and voters, alienating voters from representation and potentially undermining political accountability. Research shows that giving more power to experts is one of the five dimensions in which European citizens want to be governed (Pilet et al., 2023). Research measuring technocratic attitudes shows that voters with a technocratic profile account for an estimated 19% of the electorate in Greece and Poland, 13.5% in Italy and as little as 6.5% in Germany (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). It is also found that technocratic attitudes are more prevalent in countries that have experienced a party-based authoritarian regime (Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017).

The literature suggests that voter support for the involvement of experts in policy-making depends on several factors. In particular, voters’ preferences depend on specific steps in the policy-making process, with independent experts being preferred over elected representatives to be in charge of policy design and implementation (Bertsou, 2022). Support is also stronger for technical issues than for positional issues (Bertsou, 2022; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022; Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023) and is influenced by external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022). Preferences for independents also depend on their professional background. University professors are preferred to party politicians, but professions such as business leaders and civil servants do not make outsiders more appealing than party politicians (Rojon et al., 2023). Moreover, preferences for expertise may even override voters’ partisanship, with voters preferring expert candidates running for an out-party to non-experts from their preferred party (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021, 2022). Lastly, policies proposed by technocrats are more widely accepted than those proposed by party politicians when voters’ preferences do not match the direction of the policy proposal (Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023).

While this literature has contributed to explaining when and why voters support disaffection from party representation, little research has focused on the behavioral consequences of technocratic attitudes. Voters with strong technocratic attitudes are more likely to ab-

stain and vote blank, and when they do vote, they are more likely to vote for new parties (Heyne and Costa Lobo, 2021). Voters who strongly support involving independent experts in political decision-making tend to be better educated, less trusting of national parliaments (Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Rojon et al., 2023) and more right-leaning (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022).

This paper contributes to a better understanding of the behavioral consequences of holding technocratic attitudes by examining for the first time how voters with strong technocratic attitudes attribute responsibility for the actions of independent vs. partisan ministers. Since lack of accountability is a fundamental trait of technocracy, it is sensible to focus on responsibility attributions. First, given the literature on the multidimensional nature of technocratic attitudes, which includes anti-party and anti-politics sentiments (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022), I expect the party to be held more responsible than the minister for negative performance and the opposite for positive performance:

Hypothesis 4 *In case of poor (good) policy outcomes, voters with high technocratic attitudes are more (less) likely to perceive the party to be more responsible than the minister, compared to voters with lower technocratic attitudes.*

In contrast to expectations regarding the effect of voters’ party identity, I expect low party clarity to increase bias: when the minister is strongly tied to the party, I expect technocratic voters to attribute similar responsibility for negative or positive performance to the party and the minister, as their anti-party sentiment is also directed towards the minister. Since low group entitativity decreases attitude transfer, I expect technocratic voters to make larger differences in attributing responsibility between the party and the minister when the minister is independent, as their anti-party sentiment is not transferred to the minister. This leads to the following Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 *The weaker the minister’s ties to the party, the less voters with high technocratic attitudes will perceive the party and the minister as equally responsible for both poor or good policy outcomes.*

6.5 Experimental Design

In order to investigate the way voters respond to elite partisan ties when assigning responsibility, this paper adopts an experimental approach. I conduct a survey experiment with a factorial vignette design (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015) in Italy, where respondents were asked to read fictional newspaper articles describing a hypothetical scenario of a policy reform implemented by a minister. A newspaper is a typical setting in

which citizens would read about the ministers appointed to the new government, along with a description of their political experience and their ties to the party, thus providing external validity. To ensure response quality (Bansak et al., 2018), respondents read 9 paragraphs and answered 3 questions related to responsibility attribution and voting intentions after each vignette. The survey was fielded from April 26th to May 9th 2023.²⁸ A total of 2,130 respondents (19 170 observations) were recruited via a representative sample of online panel respondents (Bilendi-Respondi). The sample contains 1,315 respondents who identify with any of the following parties: Lega, Forza Italia, Fratelli d'Italia, Movimento 5 Stelle, Partito Democratico, Azione.²⁹ The sample was recruited on quota-based sampling based on the gender, age, region and education of the population in Italy, with only citizens being allowed to take the survey (For detailed descriptive statistics of the sample, see Table C.9 in the Appendix.).

Each article presented a randomized set of attribute options. First, the vignette provides information on the ideological direction of the government and the goal and effect of a policy reform. Second, the vignette provides information on the minister's portfolio, name, previous occupation, age, gender, region of origin, appointing party and strength of ties to that party. All possible attribute options are listed in Table 6.1.³⁰ The choice of policy area is based on what Italians believed to be the most important issues facing their country in February 2023 (Eurobarometer, 2023). The vignettes are thus related to three possible portfolios as named in the current Meloni Cabinet: Economy and Finance, Environment and Energy Security, and Health. However, the design is based on fictional profiles of ministers, making it less likely that respondents' prior beliefs about real ministers will influence their responses. In order to avoid illogical scenarios, some combinations were restricted: The only constraint concerns the attributes "Government" and "Appointing party", where the ideological direction of the government must align with the party who appointed the minister. Therefore, a left-wing government is only possible with PD and M5S and a right-wing government with Lega and FdI. Vignettes are introduced once with the following sentence: "In the next screens, you will be shown excerpts from fictional newspaper articles describing hypothetical scenarios. Please read the articles very carefully and answer the questions that follow.". Figure 6.1

²⁸The pre-registration can be accessed [here](#).

²⁹A sample size calculation of an AMCE of 0.05, $\alpha < 0.05$, an attribute with 3 values, and a power of .8 with 9 tasks and 1 profile, indicates that a sample of 522 is needed to estimate the effect of "Partisan ties". A sample size calculation of an AMCE of 0.05, $\alpha < 0.05$, an attribute with 3 values, another with 2, and a power of .8 with 9 tasks and 1 profile, indicates that a sample of 2,080 is needed to estimate the effect of "Partisan ties" interacted with "Performance". Power calculations were performed using the `cjpowR` package (Freitag and Schuessler, 2023).

³⁰In addition, the vignette showed a random date between July and December 2023 and ministers' first and last names, see Table C.11 in the Appendix.

presents one example of the vignette for the policy on purchasing power as it was displayed in the survey.³¹

Table 6.1: Vignette attribute levels

Attributes	Levels
Age	38, 50, 63
Gender	Male, Female
Region	Lombardia, Lazio, Campania, Veneto, Puglia
Profession	Civil servant, Lawyer, Business manager, Journalist
Appointing party	Lega, Partito Democratico, Movimento 5 Stelle, Fratelli d'Italia
Government	left-wing, right-wing
Performance	Positive, Negative
Policy	Tax, Energy, Health
Partisan ties ¹	a long-term party member, a recent party member, an independent
Partisan ties ²	has been a prominent member of the party and has held a high-ranking position within the party, has recently become a member of the party and has never held a position within the party, has never held a membership to any political party

Italy stands out as one of the European countries with the highest share of nonpartisan members in government ([Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023](#)) and has experienced fully partisan governments, fully technocratic governments (1995-1996, 2011-2013), technocrat-led governments (1993-1994, 2021-2022) and governments with both partisan and nonpartisan members. During data collection, the Meloni cabinet consisted of 20% of members who are not affiliated with any political party, and the previous Draghi government (2021-2022) had 36% nonpartisan members. This diversity in the composition of governments provides a rich empirical setting in which to examine the attribution of responsibility in the context of varying strength of party ties in government. In this context, it is possible to define realistic scenarios, as independent ministers implementing policies within a party-led government are a credible occurrence in Italy. The literature on technocratic attitudes also demonstrates that an estimated 13.5% of the Italian electorate can be classified as “technocratic voters” ([Bertsou and Caramani, 2022](#)), and this allows enough variation to test mechanisms at different levels of technocratic attitudes. Italian citizens are most likely to have a clear idea

³¹Examples of vignettes for each policy area are presented in Appendix [C.6](#).

Figure 6.1: Example of a vignette displayed as a newspaper article



of the issues surrounding the responsibility of independent ministers, and the Italian context holds significant relevance to test for the first time how voters attribute responsibility for the performance of independent ministers.

Measures

Responsibility attribution. For each vignette, respondents were asked questions related to responsibility attribution. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 10 the extent to which they believe the minister to be responsible for the political conditions depicted in the vignette and the same question was asked for the party, the order of which is randomized. The dependent variable is operationalized as the difference between the value given to the party and the value given to the minister. I measure the outcome in this way, as it allows for a direct test of the theoretical argument, which is that the strength of ministers' party affiliation will affect the extent to which they transfer their opinion of the individual, i.e., the minister, to their opinion of the group, i.e., the party. Therefore, I consider that when respondents attribute more responsibility to the minister than to the party, electoral accountability is weakened. The wording of the question reminded respondents of the name of the minister, the party and the policy issue presented in the vignette: "To what extent is the Minister Maria Rossi responsible for the state of Italians' purchasing power described in the article you just read?", "To what extent is Partito Democratico responsible for the state of Italians' purchasing power described in the article you just read?".

Propensity to vote. As a second outcome measure, respondents were also asked to state how likely they would be to vote for the party mentioned in the vignette, within this hypothetical context: “Within the context described in the article you have just read, how probable is it that you would ever vote for Partito Democratico?”.

Before the experiment, all respondents answered a series of background questions as well as questions on political sophistication, technocratic attitudes, vote choice, and party identity. Table 6.2 presents the statements used to measure these indexes.

Technocratic attitudes. To measure technocratic attitudes, I follow the approach of Bertsou and Caramani (2022), who introduced a multidimensional measure of technocratic attitudes consisting of three dimensions: affinity for expertise, anti-politics and elitism. Citizens with a technocratic profile are in favor of a greater role for expertise and experts in political decision-making, they reject politicians and party politics, and they mistrust the political skills of citizens, preferring elites instead. As the statements only reached a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.48, principal component analysis (PCA) was performed to calculate the index of technocratic attitudes. Three components were selected based on their contribution to the cumulative variance proportion, explaining 72% of the total variance. The index was then transformed to a scale ranging from 1 to 5. For analytical purposes, it is transformed into a dummy variable comparing respondents in the lower and upper quartiles of the index.³²

Party identity strength. Research on partisan bias suggests that bias is restricted to strong partisans (Bisgaard, 2015). I therefore measure party identity strength with a single question “How close are you to [party]?” (A simple sympathizer, Somewhat close, Very close), as well as with a series of statements to capture party identification as a social identity, as introduced by Bankert, Huddy and Rosema (2017). Party identity strength is thus controlled for in models testing Hypothesis 3. The party identity strength index is derived from averaging the following statements, which demonstrate sufficient internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.71.

Political sophistication. Because levels of political sophistication lead to different patterns of blame attribution (Gomez and Wilson, 2001), and partisan bias is more prevalent among sophisticated voters (Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan, 2014), I report all models with controls for

³²The factor analysis was performed using the `FactoMineR` package. The scree plot is presented in Figure C.8 in the Appendix.

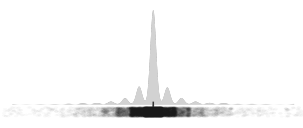
political sophistication in Appendix C.1. The index represents the average score of political interest, attention and knowledge, and it exhibits good internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.77. Before answering political knowledge questions, respondents were asked to take a pledge to not look up outside sources, as suggested by [Munzert et al. \(2022\)](#).³³

Table 6.2: Survey items

Variable	Survey items
Technocratic attitudes	I’d rather put my trust in the wisdom of ordinary people than the opinions of experts.
	The leaders of my country should be more educated and skilled than ordinary citizens.
	The best political decisions are taken by experts who are not politicians.
	Political parties do more good than harm to society.
	The problems facing my country require experts to solve them.
	Politicians spend all their time seeking re-election instead of fixing problems.
Party identity strength	When I talk about this party, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.
	When someone praises this party, it feels like a personal compliment.
	When someone criticizes this party, it feels like a personal insult.
	I don’t act like the typical person of this party.
	I have a number of qualities typical of members of this party.
	That I feel close to this party is not at all important to me.
	When I meet someone who supports this party, I feel connected with this person.
Political knowledge	Which political party is the current Minister of Justice, Carlo Nordio, a member of? (FdI)
	Which political party is the current Minister of Interior, Matteo Piantedosi, a member of? (Independent)
	Which political parties are forming the current government coalition in Italy? (FdI-Lega-FI)
	How high is the current inflation rate in Italy? (8%)

³³“When reading these next questions, please do not consult outside sources or other people for the answers. We are interested in what you believe. If you are unsure, please just take your best guess. Will you answer the following questions without help from outside sources?” (Yes/No) ([Clifford and Jerit, 2016](#); [Munzert et al., 2022](#)).

Table 6.3: Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Distribution
Responsibility gap	19170	0.02	1.59	-10.00	10.00	
Responsibility minister	19170	6.23	2.55	0.00	10.00	
Responsibility party	19170	6.21	2.58	0.00	10.00	
Propensity to vote	19170	4.05	3.06	0.00	10.00	
Technocratic attitudes	19170	3.43	0.74	1.00	5.00	
Party identity strength	10908	3.08	0.62	1.00	5.00	
Political sophistication	19170	2.13	0.75	0.67	4.00	

6.6 Analysis

Do Voters Blame Parties for What Independent Ministers Do?

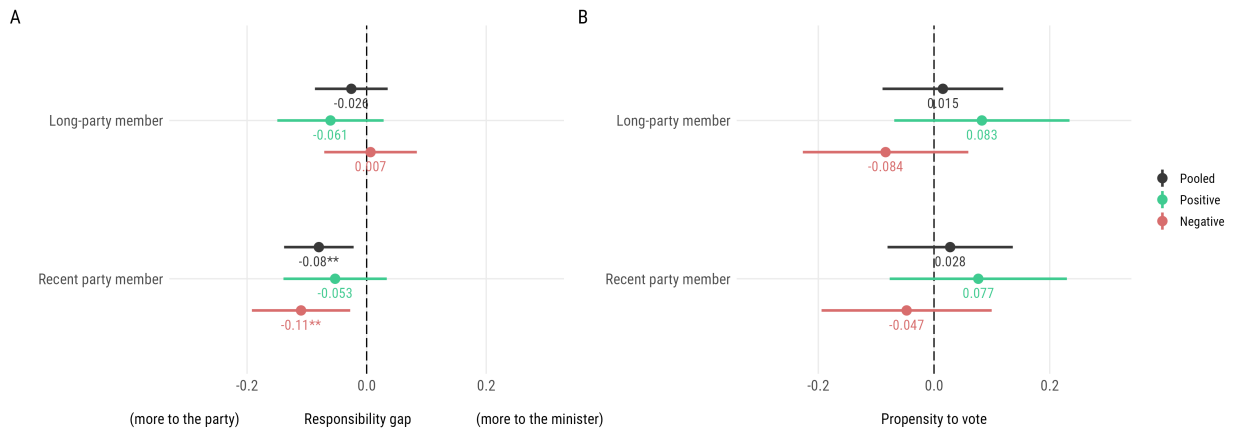
The main outcome measure is the attribution of responsibility to the minister minus the attribution of responsibility to the party. A positive value indicates a higher attribution of responsibility to the minister, while a negative value indicates a higher attribution of responsibility to the party. For all hypothesis tests, I estimate linear regression models with clustered standard errors at the respondent level. Hypothesis 1 states that weaker partisan ties are expected to result in a higher attribution of responsibility to individual ministers than to the party. Panel A in Figure 6.2 shows the responsibility gap explained by the strength of party ties for each performance, pooled by performance and with being independent as the reference category.

Compared to being independent, the results show that being a long-term party member and having held office for the party has no effect on the responsibility gap. In other words, independent ministers are seen to be just as responsible as the party that appointed them, regardless of their performance, and to the same extent as long-standing members of the party. The results also indicate a negative relationship between being a recent party member and the responsibility gap compared to being independent. The negative relationship is observed for negative performance (-0.11) and for the pooled performance model (-0.08) and is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Being a recent party member reduces the responsibility

gap compared to independent ministers, suggesting that more responsibility is attributed to the party than to the minister. However, this effect is very small, representing 7 to 5% of a standard deviation, indicating that the magnitude of the effect is relatively limited in terms of practical significance.

The finding of a negative, albeit small, significant relationship for the effect of recent party membership on the responsibility gap, while a null effect for long-term party membership is surprising. Indeed, the strongest effect was expected at the level of long-term party member, defined as having the strongest ties to the party, indicating both time commitment (party office) and ideological loyalty (length of membership). The party and the minister should be considered as one entity to a greater extent than for recent party members. This may be explained by the possibility that respondents interpreted being a recent party member as opportunistic, possibly joining the party with the sole intention of securing a ministerial position. This opportunistic motive may have led respondents to view the minister as less credible and less committed to the party's overall ideology. Because the party is seen as a more credible and established entity than the minister who recently joined the party, this may have led respondents to attribute more responsibility to the party itself.

Figure 6.2: Average marginal effect of partisan ties on the responsibility gap (A) and the propensity to vote (B) by performance



Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models I, III and IV in Table C.1 in the Appendix.

Reference category: Independent.

Turning to Hypothesis 2, which expected that weaker party ties would lead to less reward and punishment for the appointing party, Panel B in Figure 6.2 shows the propensity to vote explained by the strength of party ties for each performance type, and pooled by performance. Compared with independent ministers, being a recent or long-term party member does not lead to significantly different patterns in propensity to vote, and hence appointing parties are not subject to different rewards or punishments. This is consistent with the findings on

attribution of responsibility, and confirms that independent ministers are subject to similar electoral accountability mechanisms as recent party members and long-term party members who have held office within the party. Overall, the findings do not support Hypotheses 1 and 2.³⁴

Examining Subgroup Differences

Having investigated the main hypotheses, I now focus on exploring subgroup differences, first looking at how respondents' party identity affects patterns of responsibility attribution in contexts of strong and weak party ties.³⁵ Hypothesis 3 posits that the strength of party ties moderates partisan bias in responsibility attribution and thus reduces the responsibility gap. Copartisanship takes the category "in-party" if the respondent's party with which they identify or for which they intend to vote is the same as the appointing party on the vignette, and "out-party" otherwise. Figure 6.3 shows the effect of party ties interacted with copartisanship on the responsibility gap. Hypothesis 3 would be confirmed if, for policy success, in-partisans would attribute more responsibility to the party when ministers are party members than when they are independents, i.e., we would find a significant negative interaction term. For policy failure, on the other hand, we would find a positive interaction term, as more responsibility is attributed to the minister (rather than the party) for ministers who are party members as opposed to when they are independents. The results show no statistically significant interaction effects, indicating that party ties do not moderate the effect of partisan bias on the responsibility gap. The findings do not support Hypothesis 3.³⁶

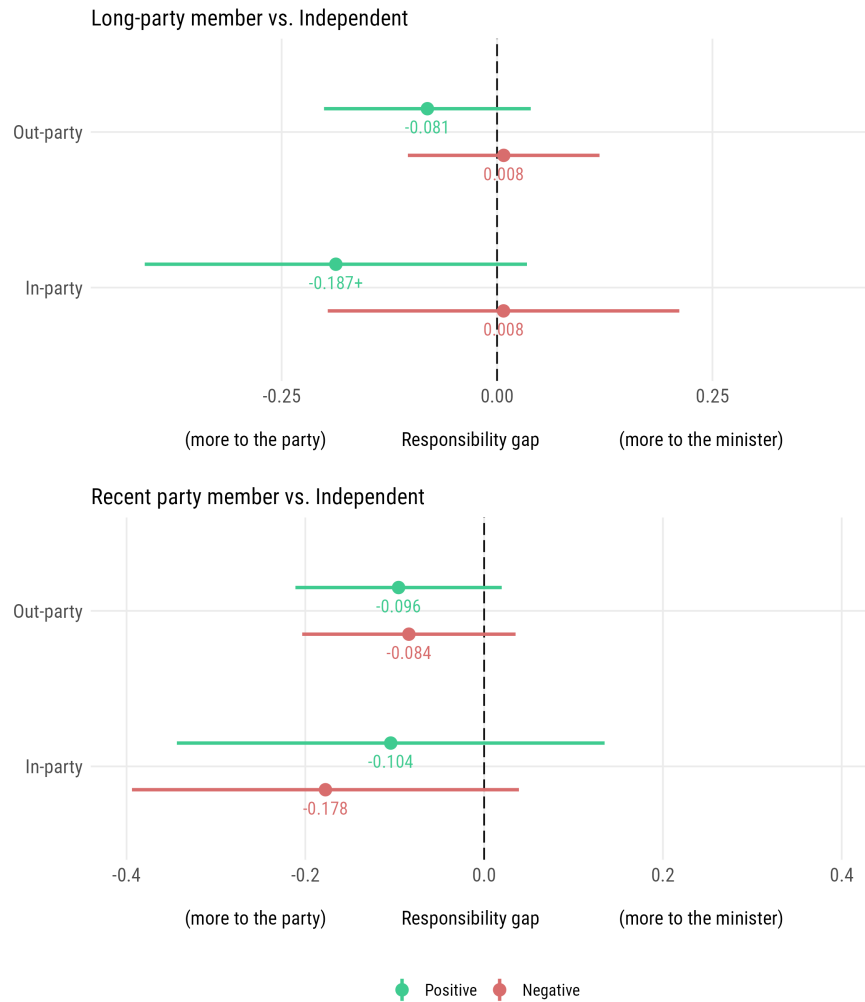
Shifting the focus to the effect of technocratic attitudes on responsibility attribution, Hypothesis 4 posited that technocratic attitudes will increase the attribution of responsibility to the minister rather than the party for good performance and to the party rather than the minister for poor performance. Technocratic attitudes are a dummy variable comparing respondents in the lower and upper quartiles of the index. Figure 6.4 presents the effect of technocratic attitudes on the responsibility gap. The results indicate a positive relationship

³⁴Controlling for political sophistication yields similar results, as shown in models II, V, VI in Table C.1 and Table C.2 in the Appendix.

³⁵The pre-registration included an hypothesis describing the direct effect of copartisanship on the responsibility gap. I expected to find that partisans of the governing party engage in motivated reasoning when attributing responsibility. Models I and II in Table C.3 in the Appendix shows the effect of copartisanship on the responsibility gap by performance type. The effect is in the expected direction, indicating partisan bias, but is only significant for poor performance (0.1) at $p < 0.1$. Thus, the results show that for negative performance, inpartisans attribute more responsibility to the minister than to the party compared to out-partisans. Controlling for political sophistication and party identity strength yields similar results, as shown in models III and IV in Table C.3 in the Appendix.

³⁶Controlling for political sophistication and party identity strength yields similar results, as shown in models VII and VIII in Table C.3 in the Appendix.

Figure 6.3: Average marginal effect of partisan ties by copartisanship and performance on responsibility gap

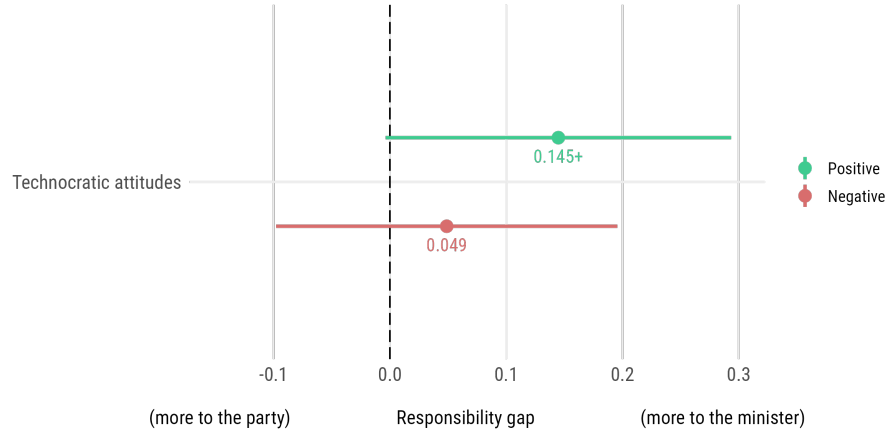


Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models V and VI in Table C.3 in the Appendix.

between technocratic attitudes and the responsibility gap for positive performance. The positive relationship (0.14) is statistically significant at $p < 0.1$. This means that technocratic attitudes may lead to a greater attribution of responsibility to the minister rather than the party in the context of policy success, but that the party and the minister are equally blamed for policy failure. In addition to being marginally significant, the magnitude of this effect is relatively limited in terms of practical significance, as it represents only 9% of a standard deviation.

Hypothesis 5 expected that the effect in Figure 6.4 will be more likely when the minister is independent, and that this bias will disappear the stronger the minister is tied to the party, as they would be perceived as one entity. Figure 6.5 shows the effect of technocratic attitudes

Figure 6.4: Average marginal effect of technocratic attitudes on responsibility gap by performance

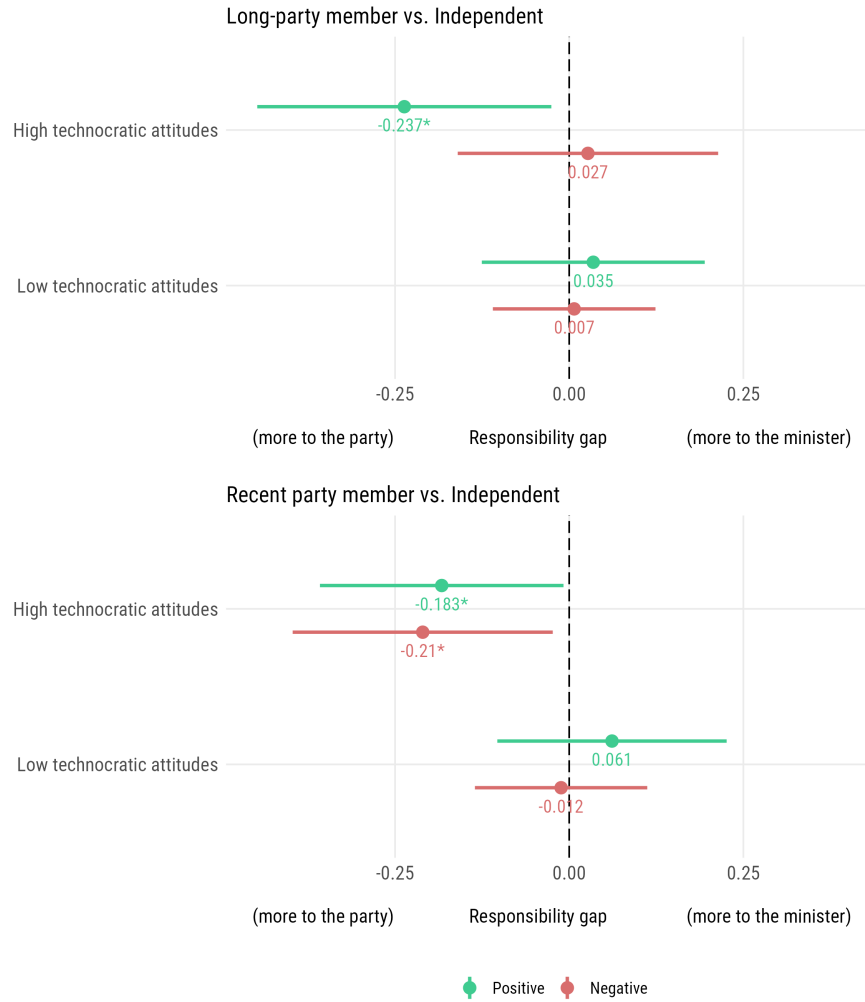


Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models I and II in Table C.4 in the Appendix.

interacted with party ties on the responsibility gap. Compared to independent ministers, respondents with high technocratic attitudes assign more responsibility to the party than to the minister when evaluating partisan ministers. This holds for policy successes at both levels of partisan ties (-0.24 ; -0.18 , $p < 0.05$) and for policy failures only in the recent party member condition (-0.21 , $p < 0.05$). The interaction effects correspond to 15 to 17% of a standard deviation. Overall, the findings do not support Hypothesis 4, as technocratic attitudes do not shape patterns in responsibility attributions on average. However, I do find partial, albeit weak, support for Hypothesis 5, showing that respondents with higher technocratic attitudes appear to be the only group responsive to the partisan ties treatment.³⁷

³⁷Controlling for political sophistication yields similar results, as shown in models VII and VIII Table C.4 in the Appendix.

Figure 6.5: Average marginal effect of partisan ties by technocratic attitudes and performance on responsibility gap



Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models V and VI in Table C.4 in the Appendix.

Robustness Checks

As robustness checks, I estimated the models on the most attentive part of the sample.³⁸ This is defined as the sample that passed the comprehension check and for respondents who took at least 5 minutes to complete the survey, with a final sample of 12,321 observations (64% of the total sample). The comprehension check question was included for the 7th task, where respondents were asked whether the scenario described negative or positive consequences, with 31% of the sample failing this question. The models are shown in the Appendix C.3.

³⁸For quality control, the survey also included an attention check where respondents were asked to select a specific answer in a multiple choice question. Respondents who failed to do so were excluded from the survey.

While the effect sizes are slightly higher, they are still not highly substantively significant and therefore do not change the findings. Additionally, I tested all hypotheses using marginal means, and the minimal differences across conditions reinforce the conclusion that the statistically significant effects are negligible (see Figures C.4 and C.5 in the Appendix). Lastly, I have tested Hypothesis 1, which consists of the main test of this paper, on several specifications: I have estimated the effect 1) by the number of completed tasks, 2) on a subset of four randomly drawn tasks, 3) using the three possible reference categories of partisan ties, and 4) by policy issues, i.e., energy, health, and tax reforms (see Appendix C.3). The results indicate that the null effect of partisan ties is not driven by respondent task fatigue or the choice of a specific reference category. Under these specifications, all other hypothesis tests would lack sufficient power, as they require splitting by performance.

6.7 Conclusion

Do voters blame and credit political parties for independent ministers' policy failures and successes? Regardless of whether a minister is an independent or a long-standing party member, I find robust evidence that voters consistently hold parties responsible for the policy failures or successes of the minister they appoint, and voters reward and punish the party accordingly. The link through appointment is therefore sufficient for voters' evaluation of the minister to be generalized to their evaluation of the party. This confirms that independent ministers are subject to similar electoral accountability mechanisms as recent and long-term party members who have held office within the party. Consequently, low party clarity does not weaken retrospective voting and political parties appointing independents as a way of diluting and shifting responsibility away from them is an ineffective strategy. This may also explain the paradox of technocrats' lack of electoral legitimacy and yet considerable voter support for their increased involvement in government, as voters may expect that technocrats and independents can always be associated with a party through their appointment, thus bridging the accountability gap. Altogether, this main finding is consistent with previous research showing that some dimensions of responsibility clarity do not play a role in moderating retrospective voting (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013; Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2017), and this paper finds that party clarity at the level of government members is one of them.

Regarding subgroup differences, I find no evidence that partisans attribute responsibility in a way that is consistent with their party identity and this does not vary according to a minister's ties to the party. Based on the current findings, it appears that partisan bias in responsibility attribution is not a significant factor in Italy, and thus does not undermine

democratic accountability. Moreover, the findings go against prior research showing a decrease in partisan bias in low clarity contexts ([Parker-Stephen, 2013](#); [Jilke, 2018](#); [Bisgaard and Slothuus, 2018](#)), as I find that ambiguity about government members' party affiliation does not affect partisan bias. Secondly, I find no to weak support that technocratic attitudes shape patterns in responsibility attributions. When looking at the effect by party ties, the findings suggest that the stronger technocratic attitudes are, the stronger the perception of the independent minister and the party as separate entities. For voters with higher technocratic attitudes, the party ties of ministers may be a more salient cue when it comes to making sense of their political context. Although these effects are rather small in terms of practical significance, this shows that the role of technocratic attitudes in shaping voting behavior deserves further investigation.

The limitations of this study are twofold. First, these findings are specific to party-appointed governments, which is the only government composition I examine. Therefore, caution should be taken when generalizing the findings to technocrat-led and fully technocratic (i.e., caretaker) governments, as this could imply different levels of information costs for voters. While these governmental configurations are still marginal ([Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023](#)), they are more likely to occur in times of economic, health and political crisis, and thus when issues of responsibility and accountability are more salient. As we know little about how accountability works in these contexts, future research should examine how voters understand the political responsibility of ministers in these government compositions. Second, the Italian case is an outlier with regards to its experience with nonpartisan ministers. Therefore, we have yet to know whether these findings are conditional on a learning effect. In other words, it is unsure whether Italian citizens blame the party regardless of party membership, for the reason that they were previously unable to hold technocratic governments accountable. This would mean that this finding depends on a country's past experience with technocratic government. While the overall findings suggest that political elites cannot shift blame away from themselves by appointing independents, we have yet to examine moderating factors. For example, further research could consider how government communication about the policy failures or successes of independent ministers may affect public perceptions of their responsibility.

In conclusion, this paper addresses a central question with important implications for democratic governance. The expectation held by elites that they can escape accountability by appointing independents poses a potential threat to democracy. This belief may foster the harmful assumption that unpopular policy reforms can be implemented without facing electoral costs. It is therefore of the utmost significance to highlight the finding that voters are actively engaged in holding their government to account, regardless of the strength

of ministers' party ties. The present findings resonate with the real-world fate of Italian parties where Lega, M5S, and PD all suffered electorally following the Conte governments (2018-2019; 2019-2021) and Draghi government (2021-2022). In these instances, the parties governed alongside independents and were led by independent prime ministers. Indeed, the parties lost 77% (M5S), 47% (Lega), and 61% (PD) of their seats after the 2022 Italian general elections. This electoral outcome illustrates that the presence of independents does not spare parties from the consequences of unpopular measures, as the experimental evidence presented in this study also supports. This aligns with [Pastorella \(2016\)](#)'s proposition that voters may be aware of the break in the chain of delegation when nonpartisan representatives emerge, and may therefore respond in the same way as they would under fully partisan governments. This experimental evidence sheds light on a crucial constraint placed on elites, preventing them from distorting public perceptions of political accountability. In essence, this study reinforces the notion that citizens play a vital role in upholding democratic principles and in ensuring that those in power remain accountable to the electorate.

7 Raising Standards? Citizen Sanctions for Corruption by Independent and Partisan Ministers

7.1 Introduction

In recent years, parties have increasingly turned to outsiders and independent experts to fill government positions. Technocratic appointments have become more common, with these ministers serving in caretaker governments or holding ministerial portfolios for as long as their partisan counterparts (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). Given that political parties play a vital role in ensuring accountability through electoral mechanisms (Mair, 2008), the growing trend towards technocratic appointments raises the question of how these ministers are held accountable for their actions. Accountability is a thus central concern in technocratic representation (Caramani, 2017), yet we still know little about how accountability functions for nonpartisan politicians.

Independent ministers, like their partisan counterparts, are not immune to political scandals and corruption. These scandals often stem from independent ministers' prior ties to private industries, which may make them particularly susceptible to conflicts of interest. Their movement between public office and the private sector, coupled with limited familiarity with political ethical norms and the incentive to please future employers, further increases the risk of misconduct. Voters may hesitate to hold independent ministers accountable, particularly when they are appointed during political or economic crises and perceived as essential for providing effective solutions. This reluctance could potentially contribute to the normalization of corruption. However, voters may also hold independents to higher ethical standards, as they may associate political corruption with party politics. As a result, they may sanction independent ministers more harshly for failing to meet these higher standards, thereby enforcing norms against corruption. We have yet to know how voters navigate these competing pressures. This paper fills this research gap by uncovering how corruption accountability operates in both partisan and nonpartisan representation.

While research has largely focused on how partisan loyalty leads voters to overlook corruption (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Frederiksen, 2022), less is known about whether and to what extent citizens sanction independents involved in corruption scandals. My approach is grounded in the argument that voter expectations play a critical role in shaping the severity of sanctions imposed on politicians. I posit that voters' sanctioning of politicians depends on the standards they hold them to, which are shaped by both party affiliation and demographic traits. I hold the overall expectation that the higher the standards voters hold politicians to, the more severely they will punish misconduct.

First, I compare the severity of sanctions against partisan and nonpartisan ministers. Second, I examine whether party independence exacerbates double standards in corruption sanctions based on ministers' gender and ethnicity. Following this approach, I make two key contributions. I determine whether the presence of independent ministers has the potential to reinforce or weaken anti-corruption norms. In addition, I determine whether members of underrepresented groups benefit from adopting a party label, as this may reduce voters' use of demographic cues as cognitive shortcuts, and thus reduce biases. Together, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the quality and effectiveness of accountability mechanisms for both partisan and nonpartisan ministers. Empirically, I test my hypotheses through two complementary survey experiments. The first, conducted in Austria, examines how minister gender and party affiliation shape responses to malpractice. The second broadens the analysis to four additional countries—France, Germany, Sweden, and Romania—, incorporating both minister gender and ethnicity to explore their impact on voter accountability judgments in various malpractice scenarios. These studies allow for a comprehensive understanding of how party and demographic cues influence responses to elite misconduct.

My findings shed light on how voters enforce accountability for partisan and nonpartisan ministers, opening opportunities for future research on corruption sanctions in various government configurations. I find that voters impose harsher sanctions on independents and out-party ministers compared to those from their own party. In fact, independent ministers are penalized just as severely as out-party ministers. This indicates that a greater presence of independents in government does not undermine corruption accountability. Rather, voters uphold anti-corruption norms by imposing sanctions on elites, regardless of partisanship and their policy successes. While harsher sanctions towards out-party ministers stem from party loyalty, the severe treatment of independents suggests that they are held to high ethical standards, giving them further to fall when involved in misconduct. Additionally, demographic cues play a limited role in shaping accountability judgments, which are primarily driven by partisanship. The results also indicate that the absence of party cues does not increase the weight of demographic cues. Instead, independence may constitute a distinct and substantive cue of its own, keeping the weight of demographic cues unchanged. This paper underscores the role of voters in maintaining democratic accountability, creating strong incentives for elites to avoid malpractice and reinforcing anti-corruption norms regardless of partisanship.

7.2 Setting Standards and Corruption Accountability

Voters' likelihood of sanctioning politicians' transgressions is shaped by the standards to which they hold them, which are influenced by multiple intersecting characteristics of politicians, such as party affiliation and demographic traits. The higher the standards voters hold politicians to, the more severely they will punish their actions. However, I expect that partisan identity strongly moderates this process, with sanctions driven primarily by partisan loyalty when voters evaluate partisan ministers. The interaction between party cues and demographic cues is informed by research on lexicographic preferences in vote choice, where party cues come first and demographic cues come second (Hjortskov and Andersen, 2024). For partisan ministers, this means sanctions are dominated by partisan motivated reasoning, where effects due to demographic cues should be minimal. For independent ministers, I expect voters' sanctions to be affected more by demographic cues.

Party Cues

Voters often make decisions aligned with their party identity, showing bias in how they attribute responsibility for economic conditions or policy failures (Downs, 1957; Lupia, 1994; Bartels, 2002; Peffley, 1984; Lebo and Cassino, 2007). Partisan rationalization extends to areas like health, education, crime (Marsh and Tilley, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011), and natural disasters (Malhotra and Kuo, 2008). Research shows that partisans exhibit double standards when responding to corruption scandals, being more lenient toward misconduct by their own party while condemning similar behavior more harshly when it involves opposing parties (Solaz, De Vries and de Geus, 2019). In the UK, following the 2009 expenses scandal, constituencies with lower partisan stakes imposed greater punishment (Eggers, 2014). Partisans tolerate in-party corruption more readily, viewing out-party scandals as more severe (Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz, 2013), with double standards also evident in low-level malpractice, like unethical campaign tactics (Claassen and Ensley, 2016). In high-corruption contexts, government supporters remain less critical and hold higher trust of the political system than opponents (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003). These findings are also found in the context of violations of democratic norms, where strong partisans remain more supportive of in-party governments that engage in electoral malpractice than of out-party governments that do not (Aarslew, 2023). Voters are also more tolerant of violations of democratic norms when polarization, strength of partisanship and policy extremism is greater (Graham and Svolik, 2020).

Partisan motivated reasoning has significant implications for political representation, as it makes segments of the electorate less responsive to political realities and undermines demo-

cratic accountability (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Little, Schnakenberg and Turner, 2022). However, partisans may acknowledge facts when confronted with clear real-world evidence or incentivized to prioritize accuracy (Bullock et al., 2015; Prior, Sood and Khanna, 2015; Bolsen, Druckman and Cook, 2014). Partisan motivated reasoning is thus more likely to occur when contextual cues cause individuals to pay more attention to their partisan identity (Parker-Stephen, 2013; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010; Bisgaard and Slothuus, 2018), prompting experimental research into how party cue salience influences accountability mechanisms (Broockman, Kalla and Westwood, 2023).

While removing party cues may eliminate partisan bias, a nonpartisan context could activate other biases, such as voters' expectations of independent ministers. Research indicates that, all else being equal, voters perceive nonpartisan politicians as more competent than their partisan counterparts (Marlier, Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2025). This perception may be due to the empirical overlap between party independence and expertise (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022; Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023), leading voters to associate independence with higher competence over time. Nonetheless, independence from party politics is itself seen as a highly desirable trait (Vittori et al., 2024; Pilet et al., 2023; Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2021), particularly in the context of delivering effective policy solutions (Bertsou, 2022; Vittori, Paulis, Pilet and Rojon, 2023). This suggests that while voters may hold independent politicians to higher standards, these higher expectations may lead to harsher penalties for malpractice. In contrast to partisan contexts, where party loyalty may lead to selective accountability and a portion of the electorate excusing in-party malpractice, nonpartisan contexts may encourage broader and more uniform sanctions. Without an in-party to protect, voters may be more likely to enforce universal accountability, motivated by the high standards they associate with independent politicians. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 *Voters prefer more severe sanctions for nonpartisan ministers (A) and out-party ministers (B) than for in-party ministers.*

Demographic Cues

Voters often use demographic traits as a decision-making heuristic, since they are easily accessible cues for categorizing politicians (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993a,b; McDermott, 1998; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Jones and Brewer, 2019). While these cues can help citizens reach voting decisions (McDermott, 2005), they can also be misleading (Carnes and Sadin, 2015). Voters rely on these cues in a variety of contexts, such as evaluating candidates in elections or determining sanctions for politicians involved in scandals (Bauer, 2020b). Concerning

the demographic groups in this study, women and racial and ethnic minorities are often associated with higher integrity and a stronger commitment to honest governance (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019; McDermott, 1998; Schneider and Bos, 2011). This perception, along with other factors, feeds into a broader pattern: voters tend to hold female and ethnic minority politicians to higher standards of performance and qualification than men and ethnic majority groups (Bauer, 2020b; Costa, 2021; Bauer, 2020a; Lawless and Pearson, 2008; Butler, Naurin and Öhberg, 2022; Berinsky et al., 2011; Niven, 2025).

Double standards are particularly evident in research showing that higher levels of women’s descriptive and substantive representation are associated with lower levels of perceived corruption (Watson and Moreland, 2014; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010), with also evidence of a bidirectional relationship (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2019). These findings have led to a general expectation that female politicians may face harsher sanctions for corruption and poor performance, as voters hold them to a higher standard, thus giving them “further to fall”. A number of studies have found negative gender bias in corruption sanctions: In Latin America, female presidents suffer lower approval ratings than their male counterparts during comparable presidential scandals and in similar contexts of heightened perceptions of executive corruption (Reyes-Housholder, 2020). Some studies find that the negative gender bias is conditional on voter characteristics. Voters with hostile sexist attitudes disproportionately punish female politicians involved in sex scandals, while benevolent sexists punish equally (Barnes, Beaulieu and Saxton, 2020). Similarly, Eggers, Vivyan and Wagner (2018) find that the negative gender bias in corruption sanctions is conditional on voter gender, with only female voters being more likely to sanction female politicians over male politicians. Outside the context of corruption and scandals, the evidence on whether voters punish female politicians more harshly remains mixed (Costa, 2021; Vraga, 2017; Sevi, Crabtree and Blais, 2024; Kaslovsky and Rogowski, 2022; de Geus et al., 2021).

Limited research has examined whether politicians from racial or ethnic minorities face harsher punishment for corruption or poor performance, with most studies focusing on the US context. Berinsky et al. (2011) show that Black candidates accused of sexual impropriety are more likely to be judged unfavorably by voters than their similarly compromised White candidates. However, a large-scale experiment shows a null effect of candidate race on electability following corruption scandals (Rajan and Pao, 2022). Niven (2025) shows that White voters punished Black candidates more severely than White candidates with identical misconduct records. Similarly, Niven (2004) finds that Black members of Congress received more unfavorable media coverage than their White counterparts during the 1992 U.S. House banking scandal, despite equal wrongdoing.

Beyond voters' perceptions of women as more honest and trustworthy, several other theoretical explanations have been proposed to account for these findings (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018; Barnes, Beaulieu and Saxton, 2018; Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019). Barnes and Beaulieu (2019) identifies key mechanisms underlying gender differences in corruption sanctions: perceptions that women are more risk-averse and perceptions that women are political outsiders with fewer resources and less access to corrupt networks. Indeed, numerous studies show that women tend to be more cautious and take fewer risks than men (Byrnes, Miller and Schafer, 1999; Croson and Gneezy, 2009; Eckel and Grossman, 2008). In contexts where legal and electoral sanctions are expected following corruption scandals, women may be perceived as less likely to engage in corruption due to their greater risk aversion. Furthermore, engaging in corruption often requires access to extensive networks within and beyond political institutions, which female politicians are less likely to possess due to their marginalization in professional political circles (O'Brien, 2015; Bjarnegård, 2013; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). As a result, women's descriptive under-representation in politics may reinforce the perception of them as political outsiders, limiting their perceived opportunities for corrupt behavior. Similar to findings on gender bias, penalties against ethnic minority politicians are also linked to perceptions of greater integrity and empathy compared to majority counterparts (Schneider and Bos, 2011). In addition, ethnic minority groups have also been found to be more risk-averse than majority groups, which may further shape voter expectations (Finucane et al., 2000). Research also highlights the role of being perceived as a political outsider in shaping these outcomes (Niven, 2025, 2004). Similar to female politicians, politicians from ethnic minorities may be perceived as having less access to the networks necessary for engaging in corruption, due to their under-representation in politics. As a result, their presence in positions of power may be seen as atypical, leading to harsher sanctions following malpractice.

In sum, voters tend to apply double standards when judging political malpractice, holding certain demographic groups - such as women and ethnic minorities - to higher ethical standards. These groups are often perceived as more honest, of higher integrity, and more risk-averse, and their under-representation in politics reinforces the perception that they are political outsiders lacking the networks and resources typically associated with corruption. As a result, voters hold higher standards for these groups by assuming they are less likely to engage in malpractice. When such transgressions occur, the perceived breach of trust is more severe, leading to harsher sanctions. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 *Voters prefer more severe sanctions for female ministers than for male ministers.*

Hypothesis 3 *Voters prefer more severe sanctions for ministers from ethnic minorities than for ministers from majority groups.*

Demographic Cues in Nonpartisan Elections

Findings on the extent to which voters in nonpartisan, low-information elections rely on demographic cues to make voting decisions can inform our expectations about how these cues may shape accountability of nonpartisan ministers. When voters lack substantive information about candidates, they may rely on first and last names to infer the candidates' demographic groups—a cue available directly on the ballot (Matson and Fine, 2006). In nonpartisan elections, voters tend to compensate for the lack of partisan information by relying on other cues to make informed decisions, such as incumbency and name recognition (Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001; Matson and Fine, 2006), professional and political experience (Kirkland and Coppock, 2018) and overall candidate quality (Lim and Snyder, 2015). Without partisan labels, voters are more likely to infer candidates' policy positions and personal traits from demographic cues such as race and gender (Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Mcdermott, 1998; Matson and Fine, 2006). They are also more likely to engage in gender affinity voting, i.e., female voters are more likely to vote for female politicians (Badas and Stauffer, 2019; Matson and Fine, 2006; Badas and Stauffer, 2018; Ondercin and Fulton, 2020). This gender effect is particularly pronounced in local elections that do not coincide with national elections, where voters tend to be less informed (Anzia and Bernhard, 2022). A similar pattern is observed in partisan elections among independent voters, who rely more heavily on a candidate's gender as a voting cue compared to partisan voters (Plutzer and Zipp, 1996). Overall, gender cues become more salient in nonpartisan and low-information electoral settings.

A body of research highlights the increased importance of ethnicity in nonpartisan elections compared to partisan elections. The presence of party labels influences how voters categorize candidates by race and ethnicity, making race a more salient factor in nonpartisan elections (Pomper, 1966; Collins, 1980; Squire and Smith, 1988; Citrin, Green and Sears, 1990; Badas and Stauffer, 2018; Burnett and Kogan, 2021). Without party labels, voters are more likely to engage in ethnicity affinity voting, e.g., Hispanic voters are more likely to vote for Hispanic politicians (Matson and Fine, 2006). In addition, the presence of party cues reduces the impact of voters' attitudes toward Hispanics on their likelihood of voting for a Hispanic candidate (Kam, 2007). Polish-American voters are also more likely to vote for a candidate with a Polish surname in the absence of party labels (Lorinskas, Hawkins and Edwards, 1969). In Canada, English and French speakers show a preference for candidates with names in their own language when political affiliation is not indicated, an effect

that disappears when party labels are provided (Kamin, 1958). Beyond party cues, research also suggests that the added presence of the candidate’s occupation reduces the effect of demographic cues on candidate support (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian and Trounstein, 2020). However, some studies find no difference in the weight of race and gender in voters’ candidate preferences between partisan and nonpartisan contexts (Kirkland and Coppock, 2018; Jones and Brewer, 2019; Rajan and Pao, 2022).

The absence of clear party cues may therefore activate biases based on other candidate characteristics, which could be detrimental, as they may lead voters to make choices based on superficial traits rather than a comprehensive evaluation of a candidate’s propositions. Efforts to implement nonpartisan elections in the United States were motivated by a rejection of the divisiveness and perceived corruption of traditional party politics (Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001). Similar to the model of technocratic governance (Caramani, 2017), the reforms sought to shift the focus of the electorate towards evaluating the competence of candidates, thereby promoting policies that serve the common good. In fact, the displacement of party ties may simply result in the substitution of other influences. Instead of being based on party loyalties, politics comes to emphasize more the demographic affiliations of voters (Pomper, 1966). This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4 *The positive effect of the minister’s gender (A) and ethnicity (B) on the severity of sanctions is higher for nonpartisan ministers than for partisan ministers.*

Another way to test the increased salience of demographic cues in nonpartisan contexts is by examining whether attitudes towards demographic groups have a stronger influence in nonpartisan settings compared to partisan ones. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 *The effect of group affect on the severity of sanctions is higher for nonpartisan ministers than for partisan ministers.*

7.3 Empirical Strategy

To test the hypotheses, I employ two complementary survey experiments. The first study, conducted in Austria shortly after the 2024 European elections, relies on a 2×5 design to investigate how minister gender and party affiliation influence responses to a malpractice scenario involving phantom jobs for family members. Building on these findings, the second study expands this design to four additional countries—France, Germany, Sweden, and Romania—where respondents evaluated ministers involved in corruption scandals of varying

severity. In this second study, I not only re-examine the effect of minister gender but also assess the impact of minister ethnicity. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive analysis of how demographic and party cues influence accountability judgments in response to elite malpractice.

7.4 Study 1

Experimental Design

I first test the hypotheses with a short survey experiment conducted in Austria after the European elections from June 10 to July 6, 2024 ($N = 3,139$).³⁹ The survey experiment was included in the 20th wave of the Austrian National Election Study and respondents were recruited from a standing panel administered by MarketAgent.⁴⁰ The design consists of a 2×5 vignette experiment. Respondents read a vignette describing a fictitious minister who had committed a malpractice consisting of creating phantom jobs for family members. The treatments consisted of manipulating the minister’s gender (man, woman) and party affiliation (independent, ÖVP, SPÖ, FPÖ, Greens). Half of the sample was assigned to the independent condition, while the other half was exposed to a random party condition, with each party being equally likely. Below is the English version of the vignette:

Minister [Martin/Anna] Hofmann is **[independent/a long-standing member of the [ÖVP/SPÖ/FPÖ/Greens]]**. However, [he/she] is strongly suspected of having created phantom jobs for family members, which led to a loss of 50,000 euros in public funds.

Measures

Sanction severity and reappointment disapproval. After reading the vignette, respondents were asked two questions, with their order randomized. The first question asked how severely they think the minister should be punished, with the following wording: “Based on the scenario described above, to what extent should Minister [Martin/Anna] Hofmann be punished? (0=should not be punished at all, 10=should be punished very severely)”. The second question asked about their support for Minister Hofmann’s reappointment, with the following wording: “Based on the scenario described above, to what extent would you be for or against Minister [Martin/Anna] Hofmann becoming a minister again in the next government? (0=very much against, 10=very much in favor)”. The expected effects are the

³⁹The sample is representative of the Austrian population in terms of gender, age (16-70), region, education and household size. Only citizens of voting age eligible to participate.

⁴⁰The pre-registration is hosted on the Open Science Framework and is accessible [here](#).

same for the two outcome questions. The variable for reappointment approval is transformed so that a score of 10 corresponds to “very much against” and 0 corresponds to “very much in favor”. Therefore, in the following section, it will be referred to as “reappointment disapproval”.

Partisanship treatment. The partisanship treatment is divided into three groups based on respondents’ party identity. When party identity is unavailable, voting intentions for the September 2024 national election are used as a proxy. The partisanship treatment takes the category “independent” if the minister is independent, “in-party” if the minister belongs to the party the respondent feels close to or intends to vote for, and “out-party” if the minister belongs to any political party ideologically distant from their in-party.⁴¹

Results

I estimate linear regression models for all hypothesis tests. The results are presented in Table D.1 and D.2 in the Appendix. Based on the design of the first study, I can test Hypotheses 1, 2 and 4. Figure 7.1 presents the effect of minister partisanship, gender and the interaction between the two on the severity of sanctions and reappointment disapproval. Hypothesis 1 states that voters will be more severe towards nonpartisan and out-party ministers than in-party ministers. The results support Hypothesis 1 for both outcomes: respondents assign harsher sanctions to out-party ministers compared to in-party ministers, with effect sizes of 0.63 and 0.72, both significant at $p < 0.001$, confirming the presence of partisan bias.⁴² This represents 27% of a standard deviation for both outcomes. Respondents also impose stricter sanctions on independent ministers, with both estimates at 0.41, significant at $p < 0.05$. The penalty is slightly smaller than for out-party ministers, with the effect being 16% and 17% of a standard deviation.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, which anticipated a gender bias in punishment severity, the results offer only partial support. Being a female minister increases punishment in only one of the two outcomes: reappointment disapproval (0.21), significant at $p < 0.05$. This corresponds to a relatively small effect size, representing just 8% of a standard deviation. This suggests that individuals may exhibit a slight tendency to apply double standards when

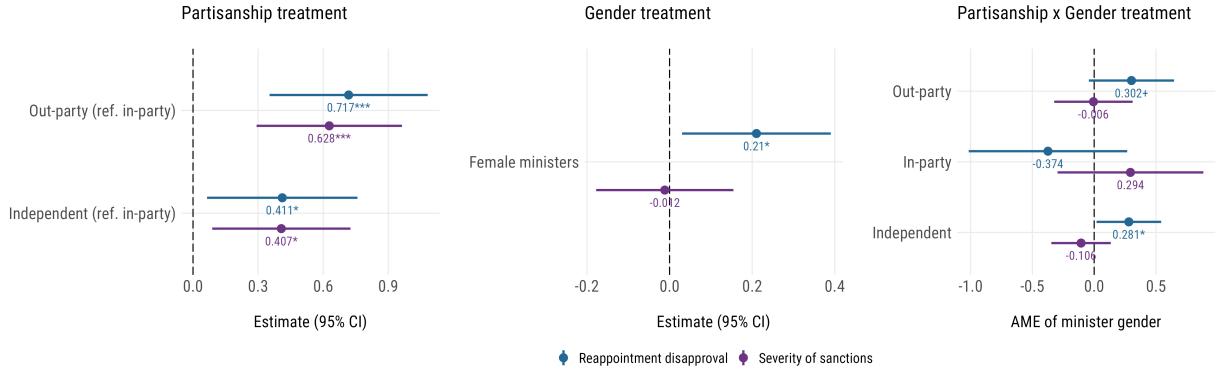
⁴¹To test Hypothesis 4, I deviate from the pre-analysis plan. While the plan proposed simplifying the minister’s party affiliation into a binary variable—categorized as “independent” if the minister is independent and “partisan” otherwise. Instead, for greater clarity and consistency, I report the partisanship effect across three categories: in-party, out-party, and independent. Table D.3 demonstrates that the effect remains consistent when using a binary measure of partisanship.

⁴²The mean values for in-party ministers are 6.83 for the severity of sanctions and 7.54 for reappointment disapproval.

evaluating whether corrupt politicians should remain in office but there is no evidence to support overall differences in sanction severity based on gender.

Turning to Hypothesis 4, I expected that demographic cues would become more salient when ministers are independent than when they are partisan. To test this, I set the reference category to independents, as the focus is on how the gender penalty changes when moving from the absence of party cues to their presence. The right-hand panel of Figure 7.1 presents the average marginal effect of minister gender across partisanship conditions. The effect of minister gender is significant only in the independent condition (0.28, $p < 0.05$) and only for disapproval of reappointment to government. The interaction term is null when comparing independents to out-partisans (see Table D.2 in the Appendix). When comparing independents to in-partisans, the interaction term is in the expected direction but reaches only marginal significance at the $p < 0.1$ threshold. Overall, I do not find strong evidence that the gender penalty varies substantively across partisan conditions.

Figure 7.1: Effect of minister partisanship and minister gender on outcomes



Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models in Tables D.1 and D.2 in the Appendix.

7.5 Study 2

Experimental Design

To explore these findings further, a second study was conducted in France, Germany, Sweden, and Romania. I carried out a survey experiment using a factorial vignette design where respondents were presented with descriptions of ministers involved in corruption scandals of varying severity. To ensure response quality (Bansak et al., 2018), each respondent evaluated six vignettes and answered one question after each vignette, indicating their level of support or opposition to the minister's reappointment to government. The survey was fielded in

November 2024.⁴³ A total of 2,152 respondents per country (8,608 in total and 51,648 observations overall) are recruited via a representative sample of online panel respondents (Dynata). The sample was recruited on quota-based sampling based on the gender, age, region and education of the population in each country, with only citizens of voting age being allowed to take the survey.

Each vignette presented a randomized set of attribute options, all of which are listed in Table 7.1. The design used fictional minister profiles, reducing the likelihood that respondents' prior beliefs about real ministers would bias their responses. The vignettes provided information about the ministers' socio-demographic background and partisan ties. Ethnicity was signaled through first and last names, detailed in Table D.19. One attribute described the malpractice committed by the minister, while another detailed their response to the scandal. The malpractice scenarios encompass three high-level malpractices, including two cases of bribery and one case of phantom jobs. Additionally, two low-level malpractices were selected: non-disclosure of assets and misuse of government cars for private purposes. Although the described malpractices are hypothetical, they draw inspiration from real-world scandals involving politicians.⁴⁴ In addition, all profiles included positive information about the minister, a positive policy record, and a favorable character trait. By counterbalancing the negative information about wrongdoing with these positive attributes, I expect that if effects are observed despite this positive framing, they are likely to be even stronger with negative information instead. Vignettes are introduced once with the following sentence: "In the next screens, you will be shown a series of short texts describing hypothetical scenarios involving fictional politicians. Please read each text carefully and answer the questions that follow."⁴⁵ The order of attributes is not randomized and follows the order in the baseline vignette below. Examples of vignettes for each policy area are presented in Section D.10 in the Appendix.

Minister **Thomas Moreau**, **independent from any political party**, has been widely praised for his ability to drive key reforms that have increased citizens' pur-

⁴³The pre-registration is hosted on the Open Science Framework and is accessible [here](#).

⁴⁴Cases of bribery include former Romanian Prime Minister Adrian Năstase and CDU politicians implicated in Germany's Azerbaijan affair. In France, phantom job scandals have involved high-profile figures, such as former Prime Minister François Fillon, Front National Members of the European Parliament, and former minister Bruno Le Roux. In Sweden, former governor Maria Arnholm has been involved in the alleged misuse of a government car for personal purposes. Meanwhile, incomplete asset disclosures have led to controversies involving French ministers Alain Griset and Caroline Cayeux.

⁴⁵At the end of the survey, respondents are debriefed with the following text: "The first part aims at better understanding how voters perceive the actions of independent ministers. Please note that the information in the texts, from the ministers to the malpractice scenarios, was entirely fictional, although the study was based on real political parties. All respondents were randomly exposed to different scenarios, and which political party or socio-demographic group appeared in the texts did not depend on the type of malpractice."

chasing power. His efforts earned him recognition from consumer rights advocates and public support for his **leadership**. However, recent substantial evidence suggests that Minister Thomas Moreau has **accepted €40,000 in bribes for personal gain**. The 54-year-old has not yet responded to the accusations.

Table 7.1: Attributes and levels

Attributes	Levels
Age	30, 42, 54, 66
Gender	Male, Female
Name	[Country name list in Table D.19 in the Appendix]
Partisan ties	Long-term member of the [Country party list in Table D.20 in the Appendix], Independent from any political party
Malpractice	Accepted €100,000 in bribes for personal gain, Accepted €40,000 in bribes for personal gain, Created phantom jobs for family members, resulting in the misuse of €75,000 in public funds, Failed to provide a complete disclosure of their assets, Used their government-issued car for private purposes
Response	No response, Denied blame, Accepted blame
Policy	Decreased waiting times in emergency rooms, Increased citizens' purchasing power, Decreased crime rates
Policy group	patient rights organizations, consumer rights advocates, public safety organizations
Character	Leadership, Determination, Commitment

The selection of countries was based on several criteria: the presence of an ethnic minority likely to have a member serve as a minister, corruption levels, the level of gender inequalities in politics, and experience with independent ministers. In terms of independent ministers, France is about average for the EU, Romania has more independent ministers than the EU average, and Germany and Sweden have fewer (Vittori et al., 2022). Corruption levels, as indicated by the Corruption Perceptions Index, vary: Romania is considered medium (48), while Sweden (82), Germany (78) and France (71) have relatively low levels of corruption (Transparency International, 2024). I also rely on the V-Dem indicator “Power distributed by gender”, which reflects gender disparities in influence and political power, on a scale from

1 to 4. Sweden (3.4) and France (3.21) have more equal distributions, Germany is in the middle (2.9), and Romania ranks the least equal (1.51) (V-Dem Institute, 2024). For ethnic minority representation, I selected names of North African origin for France, Turkish origin for Germany, Middle Eastern Arab origin for Sweden, and Hungarian origin for Romania. Romania is particularly relevant because this is a case where there is an ethnic party, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania.

Lastly, I selected parties with prior government experience, focusing on those with the current largest vote shares. For France, I also included newer parties that have not been in government but are split-parties from other parties who have governing experience or feature members who have held government positions (e.g., EELV and La France Insoumise) (see Table D.20 in the Appendix).

Measures

Reappointment disapproval. I use one of the questions used in the first study on reappointment disapproval, with the following wording: “Based on the scenario described above, to what extent would you be for or against [Name] becoming a minister again in the next government? (0=very much against, 10=very much in favor)”. As in the first study, the reappointment approval variable is transformed so that a score of 10 corresponds to “very much against” and 0 corresponds to “very much in favor”. This is referred to as “reappointment disapproval”.

Partisanship treatment. The partisanship treatment follows the same measurement strategy as the first study. The partisanship treatment is categorized into three groups based on respondents’ party identity. For respondents who do not answer the party identity question, voting intentions are used as a proxy. Respondents’ party identity is measured using the following question: “Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party? If so, which party do you feel closest to?”. Respondents also had to select which party they feel most distant from. The partisanship treatment takes the category “independent” if the minister is independent, “in-party” if the minister belongs to the party the respondent feels close to or intends to vote for, and “out-party” if the minister belongs to the party the respondent feels most distant from or from any political party ideologically distant from their in-party.⁴⁶

Group affect. Attitudes towards social groups were measured using the following prompt:

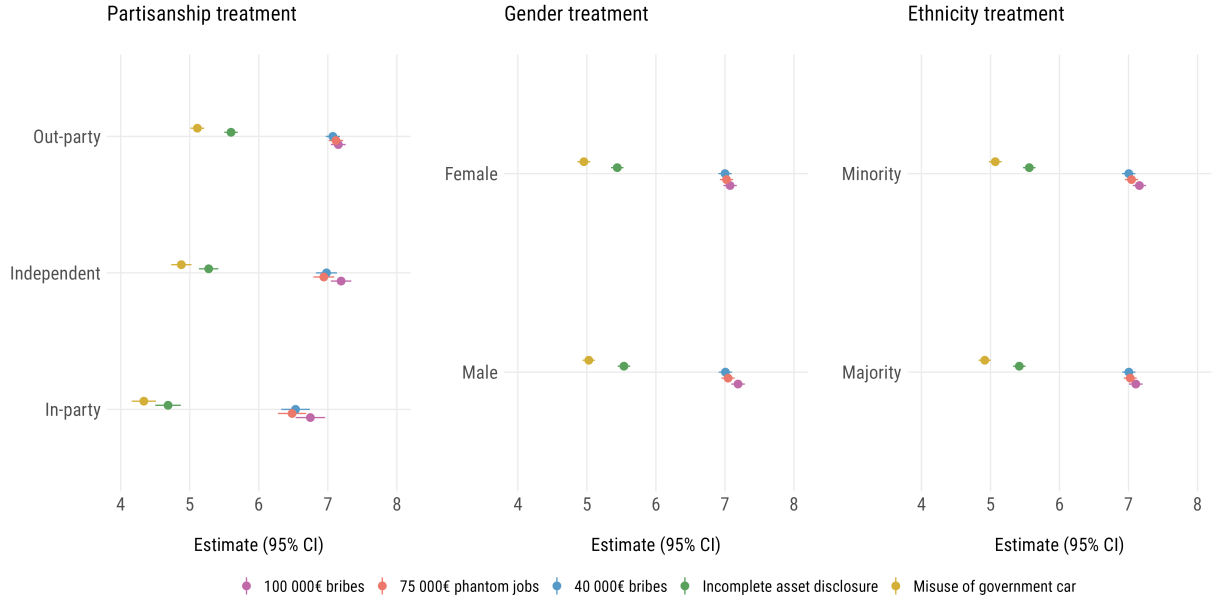
⁴⁶Table D.10 shows that the effect remains consistent when using a binary measure of partisanship (i.e., categorized as “independent” if the minister is independent and “partisan” otherwise).

“In [Country], people can hold different opinions about various social groups. Generally speaking, how sympathetic do you feel toward each of the following groups on a scale from 0 (not at all sympathetic) to 10 (very sympathetic)?” Respondents rated 14 groups in total, including women, feminists, foreigners, and Muslims. Additionally, respondents rated the group featured in the vignette, that is, Maghrebis in France, Turks in Germany, Middle Eastern Arabs in Sweden, and Hungarians in Romania. A measure of sexist attitudes was included in anticipation of women receiving higher ratings, potentially limiting the ability to estimate the interaction. Sexism was assessed using three hostile sexism items, two modern sexism items and two benevolent sexism items (Glick and Fiske, 1997; Schaffner, 2022) (See Table D.21 in the Appendix). The scale showed strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.81.

Results

I estimate linear regression models for all hypothesis tests, using clustered standard errors at the respondent level. The results are presented in Table D.7, D.8 and D.9 in the Appendix. Figure 7.2 shows the mean values of reappointment disapproval by minister partisanship, gender, and ethnicity, differentiating by type of malpractice. As expected, more severe forms of malpractice, particularly the misuse of public funds, receive stronger disapproval. At first glance, demographic characteristics do not appear to play an important role in shaping sanctions, with little difference between men and women and between ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities. This is particularly evident when compared to the role of party affiliation, where independent and out-party ministers seem to be punished the most, in contrast to in-party ministers.

Figure 7.2: Mean values of reappointment disapproval by minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity



For a more formal test, Figure 7.3 presents the effect of minister partisanship, gender, and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval and by the type of malpractice. The results support Hypothesis 1 and align with findings from Study 1. Respondents express greater disapproval for the reappointment of out-partisans (0.66, 21% SD) and independents (0.5, 16% SD) compared to in-partisans, with both effects significant at $p < 0.001$ (see Table D.7 in the Appendix). While harsher sanctions against independent ministers appear to be largely unaffected by the severity of malpractice, the differences in responses between out-party and in-party ministers are more pronounced for less severe malpractice and smaller for more severe cases. As the severity of the malpractice increases, in-partisans may face greater social pressure to impose harsher sanctions on their own party, thus narrowing the gap between the groups.⁴⁷

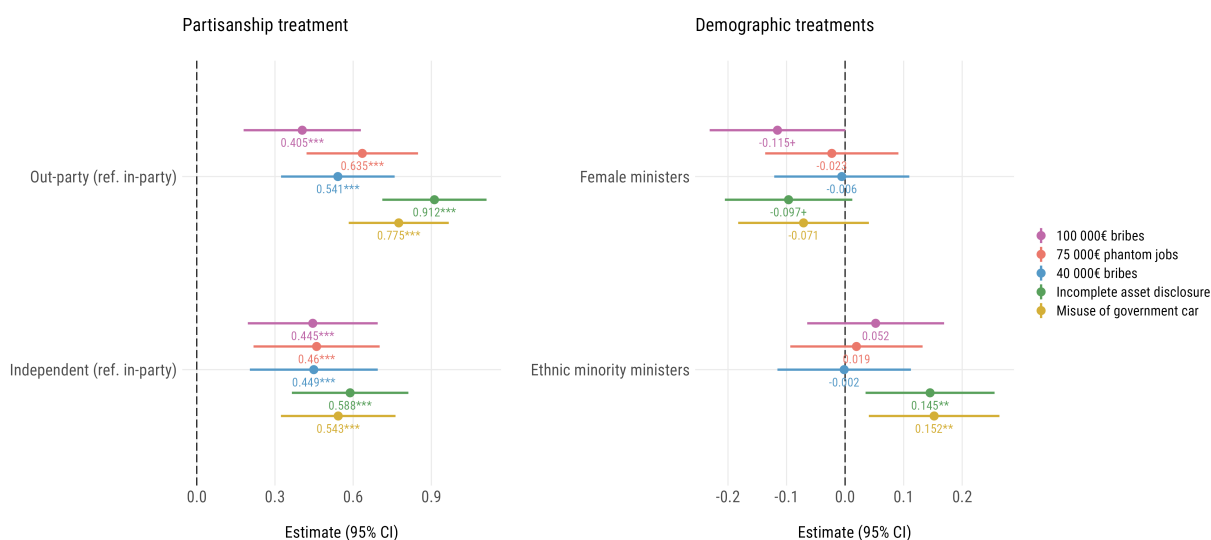
Regarding Hypothesis 2, the gender penalty observed in Study 1 is not replicated in Study 2. On the contrary, I find a greater tendency for men to receive harsher sanctions than women (-0.06), significant at $p < 0.05$ (see Table D.7 in the Appendix). However, the effect size is negligible, representing only 1.9% of a standard deviation, reinforcing the initial uncertainty surrounding this effect. The variation by malpractice severity does not reveal any specific pattern.

⁴⁷Model IV in Table D.7 estimates the interaction between partisanship and malpractice severity. The gap in disapproval between out-party and in-party ministers decreases significantly as the severity of malpractice increases, while the interaction term for independents is not significant.

Figure 7.3 shows that ethnic minority ministers do receive harsher sanctions than those from the majority group (0.077), significant at $p < 0.01$. The effect size is again negligible, representing only 2.5% of a standard deviation. Interestingly, sanctions appear to be stronger in cases of lower-severity scandals. This suggests that less severe scandals may allow more room for interpretation, leading respondents to rely more on other superficial cues.

Overall, while there is a slight tendency for respondents to apply double standards in evaluating corruption scandals involving ethnic minorities and women, the evidence suggests that demographic characteristics play a minimal role in driving accountability judgments, thus failing to support Hypotheses 2 and 3.

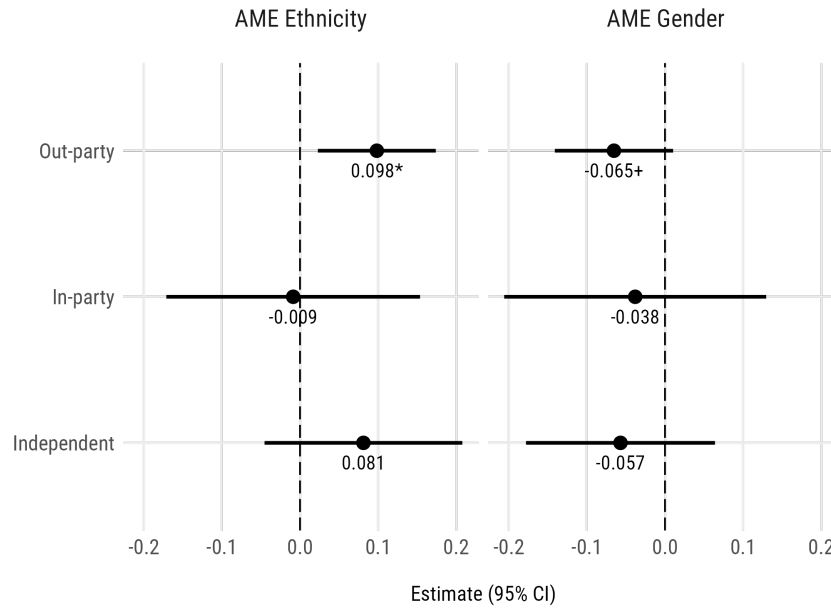
Figure 7.3: Effect of minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval



Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals.

Regarding Hypothesis 4, I anticipated that demographic cues would carry greater weight in respondents' evaluations among independents than partisans. As in Study 1, I set the reference category to independents for this test, focusing on how the gender and ethnicity penalty shifts from the absence of party cues to their presence. Figure 7.4 presents the average marginal effect of minister gender and ethnicity across partisanship conditions. The effect of minister ethnicity is significant only in the out-party condition (0.098, $p < 0.05$). However, for both gender and ethnicity, the interaction terms are not significant when comparing independents to out-partisans or in-partisans (see Table D.8 in the Appendix).

Figure 7.4: Average marginal effect of minister gender and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval by minister partisanship



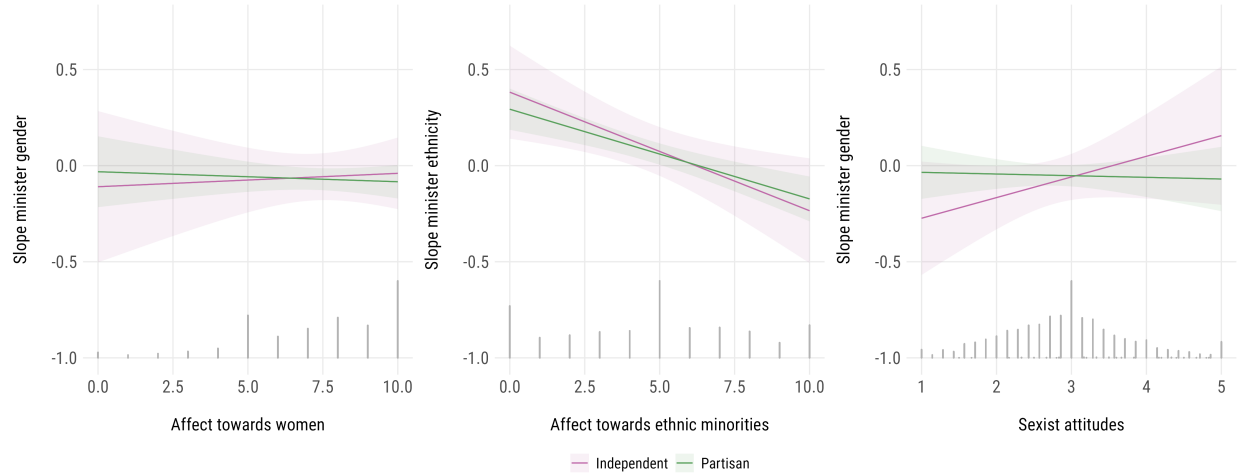
Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models I and II in Table D.8 in the Appendix.

To further examine whether the salience of demographic cues varies across partisanship conditions, I analyze whether Hypothesis 4 is conditional on attitudes towards the demographic groups, as outlined in Hypothesis 5. Figure 7.5 shows the average marginal effect of demographic cues by partisanship and attitude scales. Given the three-way interaction, I estimate this model using a binary measure of partisanship to retain all observations. The first two panels display effects by attitudes toward women ($\bar{x} = 7.4$) and ethnic minorities ($\bar{x} = 4.7$), where higher values indicate more positive ratings. In the first panel, the results indicate that the effect of minister gender does not vary by partisanship or by attitudes toward women. In the second panel, the results show that ethnic minority ministers face greater penalties among respondents who hold more negative views of ethnic minorities, but this penalty does not vary by partisanship.

Given the limited variance in attitudes toward women, I also estimate the three-way interaction using a sexism scale, shown in the third panel, where higher values reflect greater sexist attitudes. The results suggest that women face greater penalties among respondents with higher sexist attitudes, but only in the independent condition. The interaction term between minister partisanship, gender, and sexism is in the expected direction, but is not significant (see Table D.9 in the Appendix). Consistent with findings in Study 1, I do not find strong evidence that the effect of demographic cues or attitudes towards demographic groups varies substantively across partisan conditions, thus failing to support Hypotheses 4

and 5.

Figure 7.5: Average marginal effect of minister gender and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval by minister partisanship and by group affect



Linear regression models with 95% confidence intervals, based on models I, II and III in Table D.9 in the Appendix.

Simulations

To better understand and visualize how the severity of accountability judgments varies across different scenarios, I estimate the mean value of reappointment disapproval for various government compositions. This approach allows for a comparison of accountability levels under varying configurations of government composition, specifically on the share of independents in government and the popularity of the governing party (i.e., the share of in-party citizens among the population).

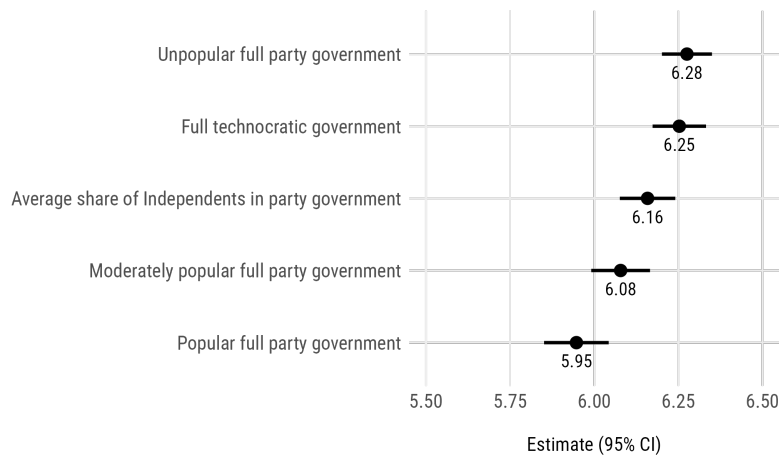
Five scenarios are defined to capture a range of possible government compositions. The first is a full technocratic government, consisting entirely of independents (100%). The next three scenarios represent full-party governments with different levels of popularity: a highly popular government with 70% in-party, an unpopular government with 20% in-party, and a moderately popular government with equal proportions of in-party and out-party citizens (50% each). Lastly, a typical case is included, consisting of 12% independents⁴⁸, 35% in-party, and 53% out-party.

Figure 7.6 presents the results, showing that the highest levels of disapproval occur in an unpopular party government (6.28) and a fully technocratic government (6.25), while the lowest disapproval is observed in a popular party government (5.95). However, the results also reveal that disapproval levels vary within a range of a third of a point on a 10-point

⁴⁸This reflects the average share of independents in governments in Europe (Vittori et al., 2022).

scale, indicating relatively limited differences. These findings suggest that citizens enforce accountability in corruption cases regardless of government partisanship. In the context of corruption scandals, technocratic representation does not undermine accountability. While partisan bias is evident, it does not shield in-party ministers from sanctions. Instead, bias manifests in the severity of sanctions and, potentially, in differing perceptions of the severity of corruption scandals. Ultimately, this indicates that while accountability is maintained across all partisanship conditions, its intensity varies.

Figure 7.6: Mean reappointment disapproval for various government scenarios



7.6 Robustness Checks

Robustness checks are conducted for both studies to strengthen confidence in the estimates and investigate null results. In Study 1, I estimate the models on the most attentive part of the sample. This is defined as the sample of respondents who took at least 10 minutes to complete the survey, with a final sample of 2,162 observations (68% of the total sample). The models are shown in Table D.4 and D.5 in the Appendix. The effect size of partisanship increases slightly but does not alter the findings. The effect of gender becomes null and the interaction terms between partisanship and gender remain unchanged, reinforcing the uncertainty around these effects. Additionally, I estimate marginal means and conduct exploratory analyses based on respondent gender (Figures D.1 and D.2 in the Appendix). Conditional marginal means yield similar findings to the main analysis, confirming that partisanship exerts a stronger influence than demographic traits. I find no significant differences in effects based on respondent gender.

In Study 2, I test the hypotheses across several specifications: 1) using the attentive sample, 2) by the number of completed tasks, 3) using a subset of three randomly drawn tasks, 4) based on marginal means, 5) by country, and 6) by respondent socio-demographics

(see Section D.7 in the Appendix). The robustness checks show that the null effects of demographic cues are not driven by task fatigue, may be conditional on respondent gender but not on immigration background, and are consistently null in Germany and France but somewhat more pronounced in Sweden and Romania. Moreover, the effect of partisanship does not depend on the inclusion of any one specific task.

The attentive sample includes respondents who took at least five minutes to complete the survey and passed both an attention check and a comprehension check. The comprehension check was asked after the 6th task and required respondents to identify the type of malpractice described in the last scenario they read. Overall, 41% of the sample failed this check.⁴⁹ The final attentive sample comprises 28,932 observations, or 56% of the total sample. In this subsample, the effect of partisanship remains significant but slightly smaller in magnitude. The effects of demographic cues become null, and the interaction terms between partisanship and demographic traits also remain null. However, the three-way interaction between minister partisanship, gender, and sexism becomes significant (-0.29 , $p < 0.05$), suggesting that greater punishment toward female ministers may be concentrated among highly sexist respondents, but only when the minister is independent. This may suggest that such patterns only emerge when respondents are sufficiently attentive to integrate their underlying attitudes with both gender and partisanship cues.

7.7 Conclusion

How severely do citizens sanction independent ministers involved in corruption scandals? Both studies provide strong evidence that, on average, voters sanction independents and out-party ministers more severely than ministers from their own party. In fact, independent ministers face sanctions as severe as those imposed on out-party ministers. This suggests that a greater presence of independents in government does not weaken corruption accountability. Instead, the electorate enforces anti-corruption norms and imposes greater constraints on elites through social sanctions, regardless of their policy successes.

The severe sanctions against out-party ministers stem from partisan loyalty and negative attitudes toward opposing parties. However, the similarly harsh treatment of independents occurs outside the framework of party loyalty. The evidence hints at the possibility that citizens hold independent ministers to higher ethical standards. Because voters may associate political corruption with the mechanics of party politics, voters may expect independents to embody transparency and impartiality. Moreover, independents are perceived as more competent than their partisan counterparts (Marlier, Kaltenegger and Enns-Jedenastik,

⁴⁹Failure rates for both checks were relatively consistent across countries, ranging from 39-44% for the comprehension check and 5-11% for the attention check.

2025). These factors likely contribute to the perception that independents have “further to fall”, making ethical misconduct appear more severe and warranting stronger sanctions.

The evidence on whether women face harsher punishment for corruption than men is mixed. While the first study finds evidence of gender bias, a larger comparative study examining various types of malpractice does not replicate this finding. This aligns with recent research that also fails to identify a consistent gender penalty in accountability mechanisms (de Geus et al., 2021; Kaslovsky and Rogowski, 2022; Sevi, Crabtree and Blais, 2024). One possible explanation is the growing normalization of women in politics, as double standards partly stem from their status as political outsiders (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019). As women’s representation increases, voters may perceive them as having the same opportunities to engage in misconduct as men. In contrast, ethnic minority ministers face harsher sanctions than majority-group ministers, indicating the presence of a double standard, albeit with a relatively small effect size. Future research could further explore how contextual factors condition the presence of such double standards. Overall, in the context of corruption scandals, demographic cues appear to play a secondary role in shaping voters’ accountability judgments, which are primarily driven by partisanship.

Across several tests, I find limited evidence that demographic cues are more influential for independent ministers. While Study 1 suggests a slightly stronger effect of gender in the nonpartisan condition, this result is not replicated in a larger comparative study. Moreover, the effect of ethnicity remains consistent across partisanship conditions. Similarly, positive affect toward ethnic minorities reduces the impact of ethnicity equally in both partisan and independent conditions. For gender, higher sexist attitudes amplify its effect, with a slight difference by partisanship: this seems to be more pronounced in the independent condition. Taken together, the evidence suggests no substantive difference between independent and partisan ministers in how voters rely on demographic cues when sanctioning corruption. This finding aligns with recent research showing no difference in the influence of demographic cues on vote choice between partisan and nonpartisan candidates (Kirkland and Coppock, 2018; Jones and Brewer, 2019; Rajan and Pao, 2022). This suggests that prior studies, primarily based on observational data from US local elections (Mcdermott, 1998; Matson and Fine, 2006; Pomper, 1966; Squire and Smith, 1988), may be less robust to experimental tests. Moreover, in the context of accountability judgments, the independent label itself may operate as an informational heuristic for voters. Consequently, the absence of party cues does not necessarily lead to an increased reliance on alternative heuristics, such as demographic cues. Instead, independence may constitute a distinct and substantive cue on its own.

The limitations of this paper are twofold. In the context of independent ministers serving in party-led governments, the generalizability of the findings is conditional on voters

being aware of ministers' partisanship. However, many voters may not distinguish between independent and partisan ministers, especially during corruption scandals where the public discourse may focus more on the scandal itself than the minister's independence. This could limit the applicability of the findings, as voters may not consider a minister's nonpartisan status and instead perceive them as part of the ruling party. If the governing party is popular, I may overestimate the effectiveness of accountability for independent ministers. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating observational data on ministerial approval ratings collected in the context of corruption scandals. The second limitation concerns the estimation of the impact of demographic cues. Double standards often stem from the perception of women and ethnic minorities as political outsiders. However, repeated exposure to scenarios involving severe corruption may have diminished these perceptions, thereby reducing the manifestation of double standards. This priming effect could lead to an underestimation of the extent to which voters apply double standards based on demographic traits. In the real world, citizens may still rely on double standards, particularly when a sudden corruption scandal arises. Additionally, double standards against ethnic minorities may persist when scandals align with group stereotypes, as discussed by [Berinsky et al. \(2011\)](#). Future research could further explore this dynamic to better understand how biases influence accountability judgments in corruption cases.

This paper reveals important implications for the state of corruption accountability. The effectiveness of accountability can be assessed by examining the extent to which voter biases shape accountability judgments, first through party cues and second through demographic cues. Corruption accountability is strongest when a greater share of independents hold government positions and when governments are unpopular, meaning out-party voters make up a larger portion of the electorate. Conversely, it is weaker in popular governments, where in-party voters dominate. While voters are generally more lenient toward ministers from their own party, they still express disapproval. Partisan bias is evident across both studies, but rather than eliminating accountability, it slightly weakens its effectiveness. Biases based on demographic cues are not a prominent factor in shaping corruption sanctions, and independents are subject to them at similar levels as partisans. As a result, demographic biases do not pose a significant threat to the effectiveness of accountability, regardless of partisanship. All in all, citizens play a crucial role in enforcing anti-corruption norms by expressing disapproval of ministers involved in malpractice. If independents expect greater leniency due to their detachment from party-voter ties, this could lead to the harmful assumption that they can evade social sanctions while in office. However, this paper highlights that voters actively uphold democratic accountability, providing strong incentives for elites to refrain from malpractice and reinforcing anti-corruption norms regardless of partisanship.

8 Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation was to examine how citizens respond to party-independent politicians. Given the essential functions of political parties in representative democracy, the dissertation explored how party independence affects citizens at three stages of the electoral cycle: during elections, when politicians enter office, and in response to their actions while in office. Specifically, it assessed the impact of party independence on electoral participation (RQ1), competence perceptions (RQ2), and accountability mechanisms (RQ3). In light of the democratic shortcomings of technocratic representation, this research provides insights into the quality of democratic processes when nonpartisan representation emerges within party-based democracy. This final section discusses and contextualizes the main findings, identifies limitations and proposes avenues for future research.

8.1 Summary and Implications

In this section, I discuss the findings for the overarching research question and sub-questions in relation to existing research and highlight their theoretical and societal implications.

Independents on the Ballot

Citizens may first encounter independent candidates at the ballot box. But do they mobilize or demobilize voters? In Paper 1, I show that independents can enhance participation under certain conditions. Turnout increases when independents qualify for the second round in local elections and blank and null votes decrease when they face partisan opponents, consistent with the idea that they expand electoral choice. However, independents are not universally mobilizing. Blank and null votes increase when independents run as incumbents, face independent opponents or are *pure* independents. As incumbents, they lose outsider status, and as pure independents, they provide fewer cues to guide voter decisions. While independents may initially represent a blank slate or a novel alternative, their time in office may reduce their perceived status as political outsiders, leading party skeptics to cast blank ballots.

The findings align with previous research showing a positive association between independents and turnout in Central and Western European local elections ([Aars and Ringkjøb, 2005](#); [Freire, Martins and Meirinho, 2012](#); [Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020](#); [Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#); [Bernard et al., 2025](#)). However, these studies report a smaller effect, suggesting that independents may constitute an underestimated mobilization factor in local elections. Previous attempts to causally estimate this effect have found a similar effect size, with [Kapoor](#)

and Magesan (2018) reporting a six percentage point increase in turnout in Indian elections as more independent candidates participate. The present evidence contrasts with findings on nonpartisan elections in the US, likely because, in the European context, independent candidates compete against partisan opponents (Schaffner and Streb, 2002; Schaffner, Streb and Wright, 2001).

The findings support the “best of both worlds” perspective, suggesting independents broaden voter choice, thereby increasing participation (Tavares, Raudla and Silva, 2020). It also advances the field in two key ways: it identifies the types of independents and contextual factors most likely to mobilize citizens, and it offers alternative theoretical interpretations of why independents may increase turnout. Together, these insights improve our understanding of the relationship between party independence and electoral participation.

The findings have implications for the definition of party independence and the accuracy of its estimated effect on turnout. The mere mention of “left,” “right,” or “center” is enough for citizens to help them reach a voting decision. In the absence of party labels, independents should adopt clear ideological positions to aid decision-making. In addition, information campaigns about the candidates should be increased when all candidates in the second round are independents.

The findings support the idea that independent candidates should be encouraged to participate in elections, particularly at the local level. For citizens who distrust parties and political institutions, independents may serve as a vehicle to restore political engagement. If their presence encourages citizens to vote for the first time, this can open the door to future engagement, potentially even through political parties. As parties do not always offer citizens their ideal representatives, viable alternatives are beneficial, especially when they manage to broaden participation without alienating the rest of the electorate.

Independents in Office

The remainder of the dissertation shifts focus to how citizens respond to party independence in government. Specifically, Paper 2 asks: when technocratic ministers are appointed, are voters’ competence evaluations driven more by expertise, party independence or both?

While expertise has the stronger effect, the findings reveal that party independence also increases competence perceptions. Hence, support for technocratic representation stems not only from the perceived benefits of expertise but also from the drawbacks voters associate with partisanship. When expertise is held constant, partisan ministers are evaluated as less competent on policy issues. Moreover, partisanship weakens the impact of expertise on perceptions of both issue competence and, to a lesser extent, bargaining competence, indicating that voters do not assess these ministerial qualities in isolation. Rather than

assessing expertise and independence independently, voters appear to blend the two, with attitudes about one dimension influencing the other. The findings align and build on prior research following a multidimensional understanding of technocratic support (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022).

This “partisanship penalty” reflects an endorsement of the technocratic critique: voters view partisan ministers as constrained by electoral cycles and public opinion, making them less able to govern on the basis of expertise. Importantly, the penalty for partisanship is conditional: it disappears among citizens who support the minister’s party. Partisan ministers benefit from in-party loyalty and are perceived as more capable negotiators than independents. Hence, preferences for independent ministers depend on how respondents feel towards other partisan options. In this respect, the findings align with earlier work showing that support for party independence is shaped by voters’ own partisan attachments, particularly their negative views of parties (Vittori et al., 2024; Titelman and Sajuria, 2024; Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). As Strøm (2002) put it, “political parties are as attractive as the alternatives permit.”, these findings highlight the corresponding dynamic: party independence is attractive only to the extent that parties are not. Support for technocracy, then, is fundamentally relative to the strength of party loyalty within the electorate.

Yet, independents are not universally seen as more competent. Because they break from the traditional mold of party politicians, voters appear more uncertain about their political skills, particularly their ability to negotiate and build political support. While independents may offer a novel alternative, many voters still value the strengths associated with party politicians, especially their capacity to navigate political processes and deliver outcomes. This suggests that even in times of distrust with parties, citizens may retain a sense of what parties are good for and recognize the limits of nonpartisan alternatives.

Just as it is important to investigate when and where citizens prefer technocrats (Bertsou, 2022; Haesevoets et al., 2025; Ganuza and Font, 2020), these findings build on this understanding of technocratic support by highlighting the possible disadvantages citizens associate with having independents in office. While this has been explored by varying the scenarios in which technocrats are appointed, this contribution proposes that variation in outcome measures can also reveal the limitations citizens perceive in being represented by technocrats. In doing so, these findings bring us closer to a comprehensive understanding of the limits of technocratic support.

These findings also have implications for the effectiveness of party strategy in the use of technocratic appointments. Appointing independent experts may boost the perceived competence and problem-solving capacity of the government. However, it may also introduce doubts about whether these ministers can implement reforms or manage political opposition

effectively. If technocrats are appointed to deliver immediate policy solutions, this may not be an issue. But if they are expected to deliver complex or contested reforms, voters may view them as less effective.

Since expertise has greater explanatory power than party independence, this points to a clear incentive for parties to recruit, train, and appoint ministers with relevant subject-matter expertise to the portfolio they oversee. Strengthening the link between expertise and partisanship may be a more effective way for parties to recalibrate their image than relying on independent appointments. While independent experts may be advantageous because their expertise is perceived as less “tainted” by politics, parties in government still benefit significantly from appointing party politicians who possess substantive expertise.

Independents Leaving Office

I have examined the accountability of independent ministers serving in partisan governments across two key areas: electoral accountability for policy performance and accountability in the context of corruption scandals. Concerns about accountability have long been at the core of critiques of technocratic representation ([Meynaud, 1964](#); [Putnam, 1977](#); [Fischer, 1990](#); [Pastorella, 2016](#); [Caramani, 2017](#)), and this part of the dissertation offers empirical insights into these concerns.

Do voters blame or credit political parties for the actions of independent ministers? The findings indicate that, regardless of whether a minister is independent or a long-standing party member, voters consistently hold the appointing party responsible for the minister’s successes and failures. This suggests that independent ministers are subject to similar electoral accountability mechanisms as partisan ministers, and that low party clarity does not weaken retrospective voting. As such, appointing independents in hopes of diluting or deflecting blame appears to be an ineffective strategy for parties. These findings align with [Pastorella \(2016\)](#)’s interpretation that citizens may be aware of the break of the chain of accountability, and continue to hold parties responsible. While parties may view technocratic appointees as a form of “smoke screen”, voters appear to see through the strategy. This main finding also supports earlier research suggesting that some aspects of responsibility clarity do not condition retrospective voting ([Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013](#); [Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2017](#)). In particular, party clarity at the level of individual government members does not appear to be a decisive factor in shaping responsibility attribution.

Furthermore, I find limited evidence that the strength of a minister’s partisan ties moderates the influence of voters’ party identities or technocratic attitudes on responsibility attributions. This stands in contrast to earlier studies that find a reduction in partisan bias under conditions of low clarity ([Parker-Stephen, 2013](#); [Jilke, 2018](#); [Bisgaard and Slothuus, 2018](#)).

Instead, much like the effects of party endorsements ([Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013](#)), simply knowing which party appointed a minister seems sufficient for partisans to engage in motivated reasoning.

Moreover, technocratic attitudes show little to no consistent influence on patterns of responsibility attribution. While stronger technocratic attitudes may make voters more likely to perceive ministers and parties as distinct, these attitudes do not appear strong enough to translate into meaningful differences in how voters assign blame or credit for policy performance. While the “independent identity” has been suggested to work similarly to party attachments, providing voters with heuristics to make voting decisions ([Titelman and Sajuria, 2024](#)), these findings build on this perspective and show that technocratic attitudes do not serve as a perceptual lens in the same way party identity does.

In a second step, I have examined the question of accountability in the context of corruption scandals. The findings show that voters impose harsher sanctions on independent ministers and those from out-parties compared to ministers from their own party. Independents are sanctioned just as severely as out-party ministers. This indicates that the growing presence of independents in government does not weaken corruption accountability. Rather, the public enforces anti-corruption norms and imposes meaningful social sanctions, regardless of ministers’ partisan ties.

The strong sanctions imposed on out-party ministers can be attributed to partisan loyalty and negative affect toward opposing parties. By contrast, the similarly severe treatment of independents occurs outside the mechanism of partisan loyalty. The findings imply that voters may hold independents to higher ethical standards. Because corruption may be seen as a byproduct of party politics, independents may be expected to embody impartiality and transparency. As shown in Paper 2, they are also perceived as more competent than their partisan counterparts. Altogether, this may amplify the perceived severity of corruption scandals, leading to harsher sanctions. The findings emphasize the role of citizens in upholding anti-corruption norms: by expressing disapproval of misconduct, they create reputational costs for political elites. If independent ministers assume they will be shielded from these costs due to their detachment from party-voter ties, they may be operating under a misguided assumption.

In addition, demographic cues play a limited role in shaping accountability judgments, which are primarily driven by partisanship. Importantly, the absence of party cues does not increase the weight of demographic characteristics. This aligns with recent research showing that demographic cues exert similar influence on vote choice in both partisan and nonpartisan contexts ([Kirkland and Coppock, 2018](#); [Jones and Brewer, 2019](#); [Rajan and Pao, 2022](#)). It also suggests that findings from US local elections ([Mcdermott, 1998](#); [Matson and](#)

Fine, 2006; Pomper, 1966; Squire and Smith, 1988) may not fully translate to other contexts or hold as strongly under experimental conditions.

In the context of accountability, the independent label itself appears to function as an informational heuristic. Rather than prompting reliance on demographic cues, the absence of party cues leads voters to draw on the independent status as a substantive informational shortcut. This is consistent with recent research suggesting that the independent label itself can be a meaningful heuristic for voters (Titelman and Sajuria, 2024). As a result, biases based on demographic traits do not substantially shape corruption sanctions, and independents are treated similarly to partisans in this respect. Overall, demographic biases do not undermine the effectiveness of accountability, regardless of whether a minister is partisan or independent.

Overall Key Implications

This dissertation started from the premise that political parties play a central role in democracy by simplifying citizens' political tasks. However, it shows that party independence does not necessarily make these tasks universally more difficult. Under the right conditions, party independence can foster greater public engagement, enhance perceptions of competence, and citizens still find ways to enforce accountability. In response to the perceived failures of party democracy, citizens find democratic meaning in party independence rather than being hindered by greater information costs.

As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis, party democracy is likely to face increasing pressure in the future. In response, governments are likely to rely more heavily on independent experts to navigate these complex challenges. In this context, it becomes essential to underscore that citizens remain a cornerstone of democratic accountability, even when represented by nonpartisan actors. The expectation held by elites that accountability can be avoided through the appointment of independents poses a potential threat to democracy. This belief may foster the harmful assumption that unpopular reforms can be implemented without electoral costs (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999). Indeed, the expectation of accountability is central to representation, as representatives prepare reasons and justifications for what they do in office (Pitkin, 1967). The findings presented in this dissertation show that voters do not remain passive in such cases. Instead, they are actively engaged in holding their governments to account, regardless of the strength of ministers' partisan ties.

This pattern also holds in the context of corruption: while independents may assume they are exempt from public disapproval due to the absence of an electoral contract, the findings indicate otherwise. Corruption accountability is enforced regardless of partisanship. These

findings point to an important constraint on elites, both for partisans and independents, preventing them from distorting public perceptions of political accountability. Across both policy and corruption scenarios, the findings highlight that citizens uphold core democratic principles and enforce accountability even as parties rely on alternative forms of representation. While accounts of technocratic representation often imply that citizens are deceived by a technocratic “smoke screen”, the findings presented here suggest otherwise: citizens adapt to changes in party-based representation and contribute to democratic resilience ([Pastorella, 2016](#)). Taken together, the findings point to an electorate that adapts to the presence of nonpartisan actors.

The findings offer several lessons for political parties. Throughout this dissertation, the findings show the extent to which parties can rely on party independence for strategic reasons. Appointing nonpartisan ministers means that a party will still be blamed for policy failures but will benefit from successes. This dynamic is equivalent to appointing partisan ministers. Moreover, voters perceive the government as more competent when independents are appointed, which could increase the governing party’s legitimacy. However, the effect of expertise is greater than that of party independence. In short, appointing independents does not offer benefits for accountability for parties, and parties have more to gain from having partisan experts govern. Partisan experts reduce the risk of agency loss, improve competence perceptions, and increase expectations of positive policy outcomes. This lowers uncertainty, maximizes policy benefits, and maintains input legitimacy through the electoral mandate.

Technocracy can address the failures of party-based representation by enhancing output legitimacy, and this dissertation demonstrates that citizens can correct the accountability deficits inherent in technocracy. However, a key issue remains: political parties must appoint representatives that citizens have consented to, as their central role is to mediate the chain of delegation. While segments of the population may support greater involvement of experts, delegating authority to nonpartisan actors still disrupts this delegation process. Moreover, while support for independent experts in political decision-making exists, it does not equate to a broad electoral mandate. Over time, depoliticizing certain policymaking areas may erode citizens’ political efficacy and undermine their perception of political parties as essential vehicles for policy implementation. This ongoing tension between technocracy and democracy requires continued investigation, particularly regarding how technocracy evolves within party-based representation and how citizens respond to it over time ([Bertsou, 2020](#)).

8.2 Limitations and Future Research

While the approach taken in this dissertation offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The following section reflects on these limitations and considers how future research might extend and refine the findings.

While this dissertation prioritizes identifying causal relationships with quasi-experimental designs and survey experiments, this approach inevitably limits external validity. The vignette experiments were designed to approximate real-world conditions, yet they cannot fully capture the complexity of the information environment in which citizens form political judgments. Although this method allows for the isolation of the effect of party independence, it relies on the assumption that voters are aware of ministers' precise party affiliations, a condition that may not consistently hold in practice. Independent politicians are relatively uncommon, and while their appointments may initially attract media attention and raise public knowledge, this visibility is likely to decline as technocratic appointments become more routine.

The effect of party independence on electoral participation (RQ1) was tested through a single case, France, where independent candidates are more common and the party system more unstable than in many other European countries. As a result, findings may not generalize to contexts with stronger or more stable party systems, where independents may attract less attention. However, at least at the local level, independent candidates are similarly common in several other Western and Eastern European countries ([Reiser and Holtmann, 2008](#)). Moreover, the analysis cannot disentangle whether the observed effect of independents on turnout is driven by the electoral system, the local level of the election, or both. The use of name matching to identify repeated candidates may also introduce measurement error and should be improved through more comprehensive data. Lastly, while the results show a positive relationship between independents and turnout, further research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind this effect. It is still unknown whether independents mobilize disaffected voters, technocratic citizens, or benefit from preference projection. These mechanisms matter: if technocratic appeal drives turnout, this may suggest meaningful representation. If preference projection dominates, the quality of vote choice becomes more uncertain.

The effect of party independence on competence perceptions (RQ2) was also examined through a single case, Austria. In the partisan condition, the focus was limited to one party, the ÖVP. While this enhances internal validity, it limits external validity, as the findings may be shaped by party-specific characteristics. However, given the ÖVP's similarities with other mainstream conservative parties in Europe, particularly in terms of technocratic appointments, popularity, and government experience, the results may be more transferable to

these cases. A further limitation concerns the measurement of bargaining competence, which captures perceptions of outcomes without distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate means. This means respondents who answered ‘will get a lot of support’ may perceive party politicians as effective either through legitimate means or malpractice. Given the ÖVP’s involvement in multiple scandals during the fieldwork period, it is plausible that some respondents interpreted bargaining competence as the ability to achieve outcomes through illegitimate means. However, our current measure cannot fully capture this distinction, underscoring the need for future research to disentangle these interpretations. The findings from this study offer important theoretical insights into the meaning of technocratic appeal. Future research could build on these insights by developing a more multidimensional understanding of competence. While subject-matter expertise is undoubtedly central to policymaking, political skills such as negotiation and bargaining can be critical to achieving concrete results.

The effect of party independence on accountability mechanisms (RQ3) was investigated through two empirical chapters. In Paper 3, I examined electoral accountability in the context of policy performance. A key limitation is that the analysis focuses exclusively on party-led governments. This weakens the generalizability of the findings to technocrat-led or fully technocratic governments, where information costs for voters may differ. Although concerns about technocracy’s lack of accountability are particularly relevant in fully technocratic governments, I chose to examine this question within the most common form of technocratic representation: technocratic ministers serving in party-led governments (Vittori, Pilet, Ronjon and Paulis, 2023). Future research should investigate how citizens attribute responsibility in technocrat-led or caretaker governments, where parties may still face electoral costs for supporting technocratic cabinets (Pastorella, 2016). Paper 3 also focused on a single case, Italy, which has an extensive history of technocratic governance. It remains unclear whether Italian citizens blame parties regardless of ministers’ affiliations due to past experiences of limited accountability in technocratic governments. Future studies could examine whether such findings are conditional on a country’s prior exposure to technocratic representation.

In Paper 4, I investigated accountability in the context of corruption scandals. One limitation is the inability to fully distinguish between differential punishments and differential baseline levels of disapproval. Although independents received harsher sanctions than in-party ministers, this may not stem from a principled preference for stricter punishment. While the outcome still indicates stronger sanctions for independents, future research could refine the methodology to better isolate the underlying mechanisms behind the harsher punishment. Across both papers on accountability, a final limitation is that political parties may still shape public perceptions of responsibility through strategic communication. Fur-

ther research could explore how government messaging about the successes or failures of independent ministers influences how voters assign responsibility.

There are also important future research avenues concerning technocratic representation and its implications for representative democracy. As technocratic appointments become more frequent, the profile of technocrats has evolved. Some technocrats transition into party politicians, while others remain formally independent yet rely heavily on a particular party for their political careers. We still know little about whether and to what extent citizens perceive these politicians as party-independent. Do citizens once inclined to support technocrats become just as cynical towards them as they are towards party politicians once technocrats adopt more partisan roles? Is support for technocratic representation partially driven by a novelty effect? Given that prior research shows that experience with technocratic governance can strengthen or weaken support for it depending on the context, it is crucial to investigate whether citizens support technocrats simply because they are new. Moreover, when technocratic support declines, is it due to technocrats forming their own political parties, thereby resembling the very institutions they were meant to stand apart from? These questions remain underexplored.

While this dissertation has focused on how citizens respond to party independence among ministers and electoral candidates, future research could expand our understanding of the quality of representation that independents provide once in office. A central aspect of the technocratic critique is that parties are overly responsive to public opinion, at the expense of effective policymaking. Yet we still know relatively little about how responsive technocrats themselves are once they assume office (see [York \(2024\)](#)). At the local level, independent representatives may be more attuned to public opinion precisely because they are not constrained by the party organization. However, they may also place greater weight on expert knowledge, and when expert consensus conflicts with public preferences, they might prioritize the former. At the national level, technocrats' responsiveness may depend on their political ambitions: those aiming to build a political career may be more attentive to public sentiment, while others may remain less responsive. Even when personal ambition is absent, technocrats serving in party-led governments may still be constrained by the preferences of their appointing party or by the party group in parliament.

As early research on technocratic elites has shown, technocrats' responsiveness to public opinion may also be shaped by their professional backgrounds ([Putnam, 1977](#)). This constitutes a promising avenue for future research. While this dissertation has demonstrated that, from the voter side, citizens do hold independent ministers accountable, thereby correcting some democratic concerns associated with technocratic representation, our understanding of elite behavior remains incomplete. To fully assess the democratic implications of techno-

cratic representation, future research could thus further investigate how technocrats behave in office and how responsibly they represent the public.

Party change can be interpreted as the decline of parties, or as their adaptation to a constantly evolving political landscape ([Dalton, Farrell and McAllister, 2011](#)). Parties are unlikely to vanish. But as they increasingly share power with less institutionalized alternatives to party-based representation, examining how these changes influence democratic processes remains essential. Parties have long been the cornerstone of democracy ([Schattschneider, 1942](#)). Understanding what happens when their role is being challenged is not only timely but also crucial to understanding the future of democracy itself.

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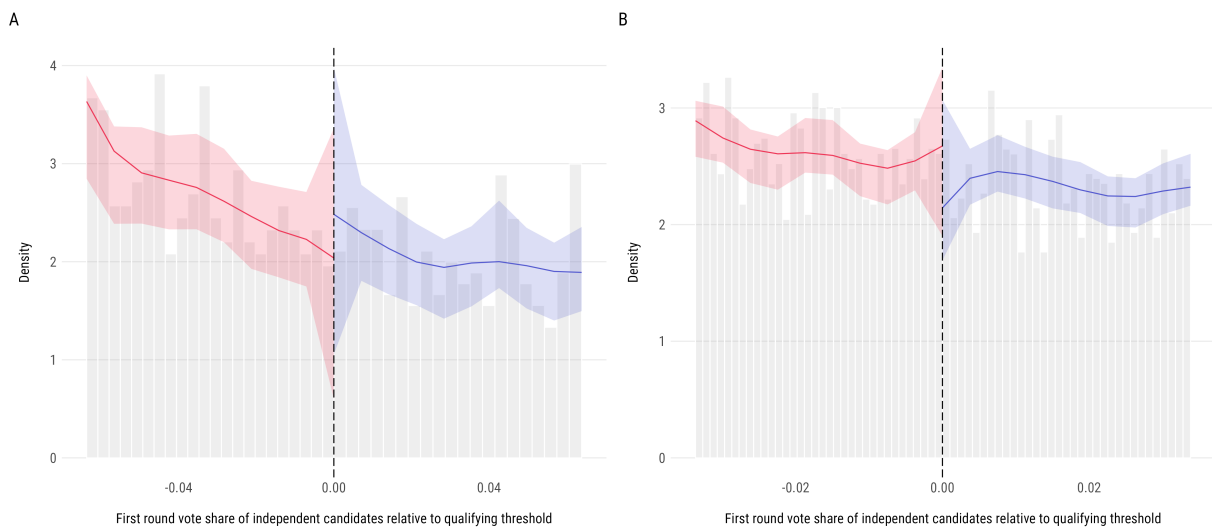
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Appendices

A The Causal Effect of Independent Candidacies on Electoral Participation: the French Case

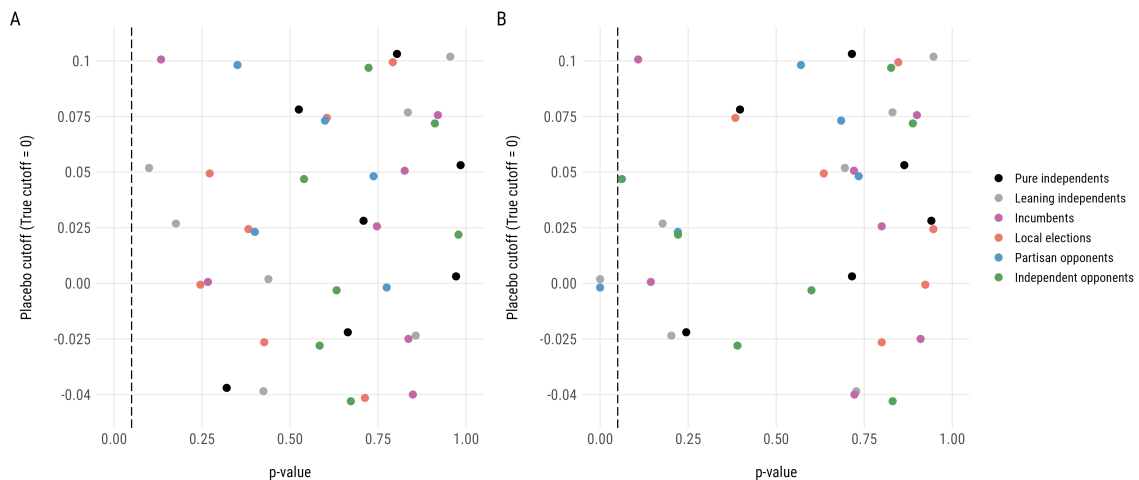
A.1 Density of Running Variable

Figure A.1: Density sorting test - A) Pure independents, B) Leaning independents



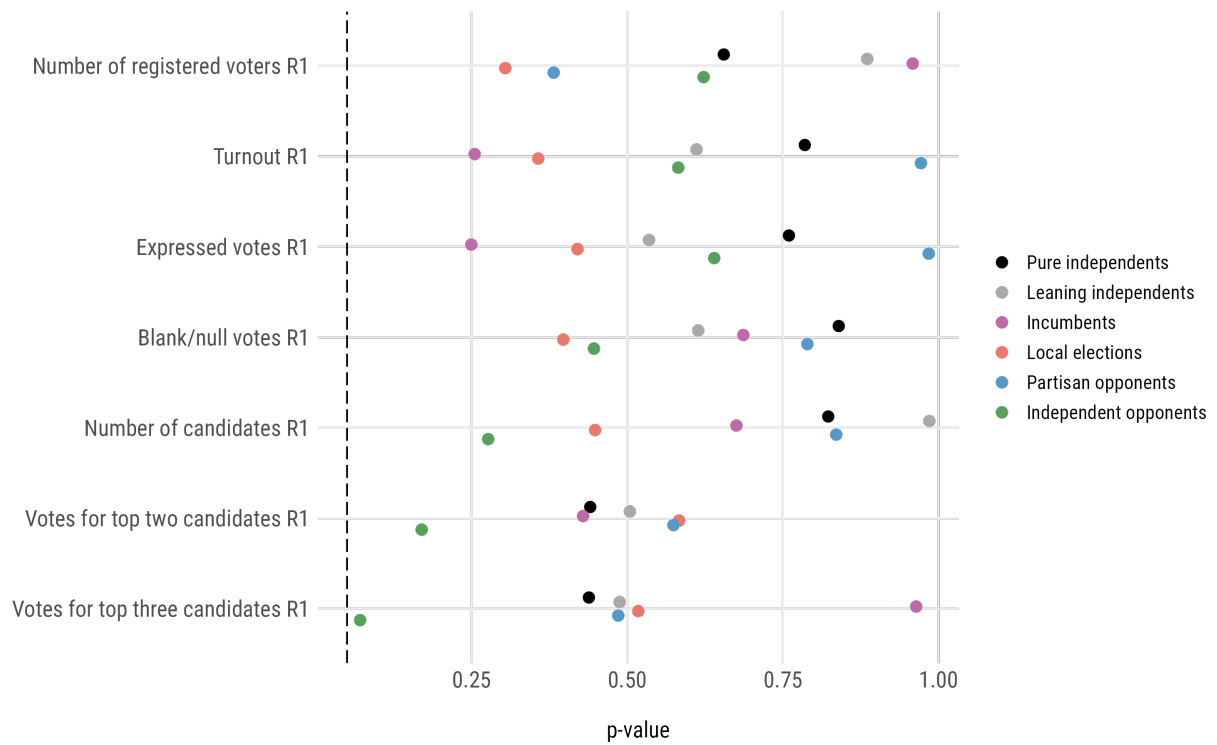
A.2 Placebo Cutoffs

Figure A.2: P-values for estimated discontinuities at alternative cutoffs - A) Voter turnout, B) Blank and null votes



A.3 Predetermined Covariates

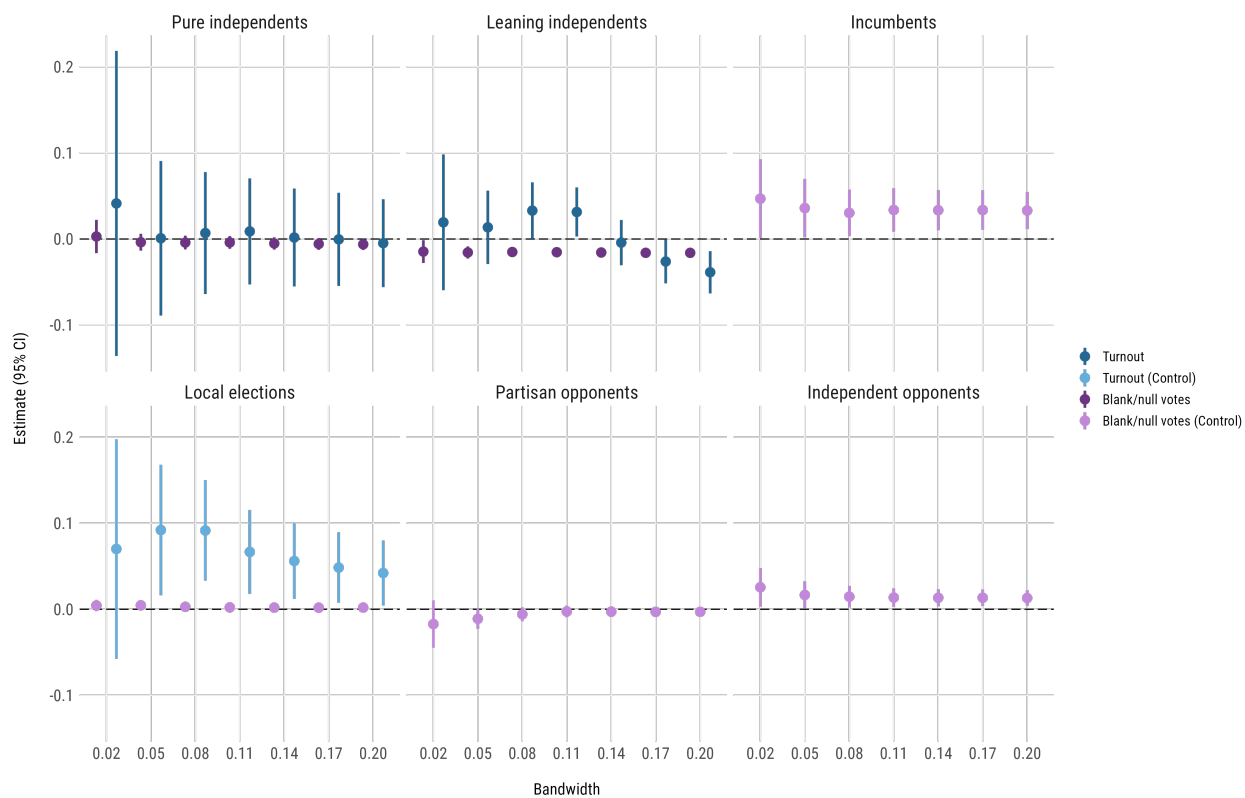
Figure A.3: P-values for estimated discontinuities of covariates at the qualifying threshold



A.4 Sensitivity to Bandwidth Choice

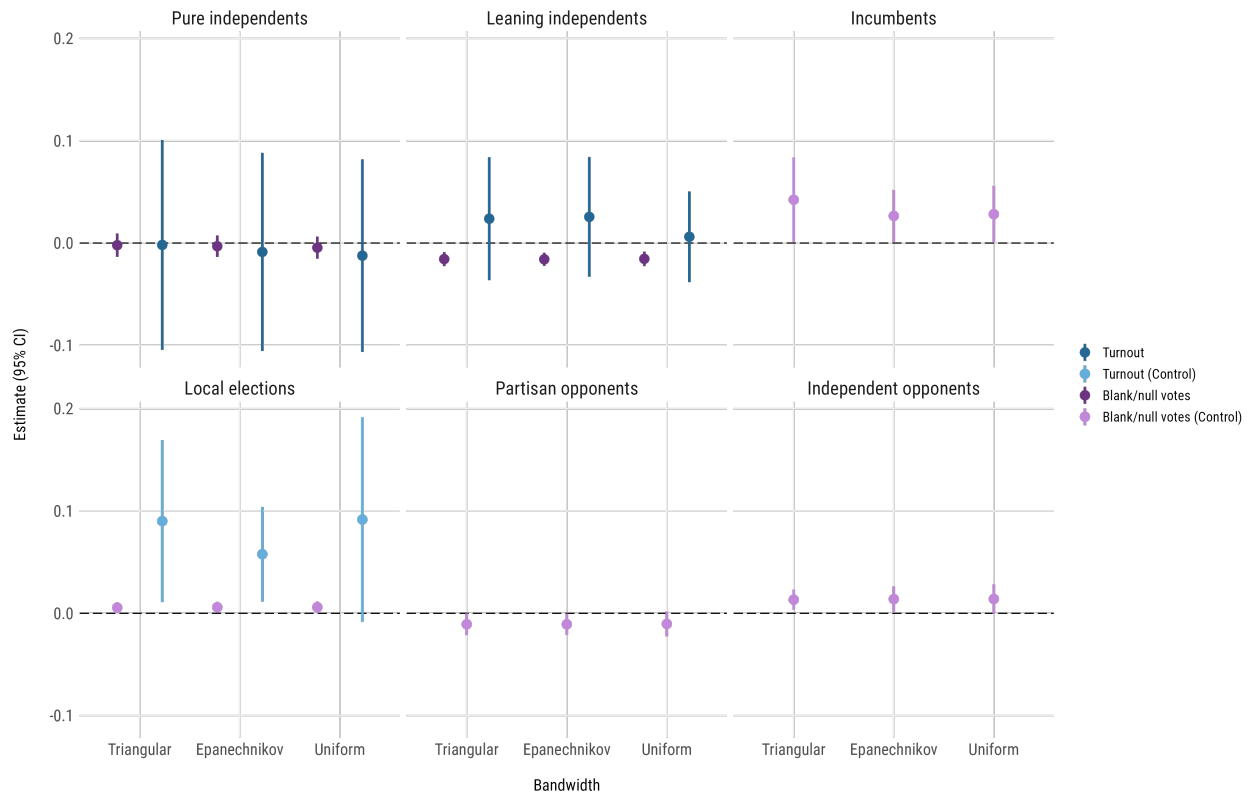
In Figure A.4, I estimate the effect by changing the bandwidth, estimating models by increasing the bandwidth every 0.03 points from a $[-0.02, 0.02]$ window to a $[-0.2, 0.2]$ window.

Figure A.4: Estimates by alternative bandwidth choices



A.5 Sensitivity to Kernel Function

Figure A.5: Estimates by alternative kernel functions



A.6 Regression Tables

Candidate Characteristics

Table A.1: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout by incumbency

	Non-incumbents				Incumbents			
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	-0.015 (0.034)	0.003 (0.042)	-0.012** (0.004)	0.004 (0.006)	0.199 (0.179)	0.210 (0.166)	0.039 (0.027)	0.042* (0.021)
First stage estimate	0.309*** (0.027)	0.248*** (0.023)	0.328*** (0.024)	0.251*** (0.022)	0.283** (0.097)	0.266** (0.081)	0.283** (0.096)	0.259*** (0.076)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04
Right bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04
Observations	15437	15437	15437	15437	2134	2134	2134	2134
Effective obs. left	1556	1516	2234	1602	76	80	80	84
Effective obs. right	1308	1289	1698	1333	98	100	100	119
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Table A.2: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout by candidacy experience

	First-time candidacy				Second or third candidacy			
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	-0.002 (0.027)	0.009 (0.035)	-0.013** (0.004)	0.001 (0.005)	0.078 (0.066)	0.124 (0.085)	-0.010 (0.008)	0.014 (0.012)
First stage estimate	0.336*** (0.025)	0.264*** (0.021)	0.337*** (0.024)	0.26*** (0.022)	0.325*** (0.052)	0.237*** (0.039)	0.33*** (0.047)	0.228*** (0.041)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.05
Right bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.05
Observations	18441	18441	18441	18441	3167	3167	3167	3167
Effective obs. left	1962	1948	2020	1821	372	411	485	353
Effective obs. right	1735	1723	1783	1631	379	412	456	360
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓		✓		

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Contest Characteristics

Table A.3: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout by election level

	Local elections				Regional elections			
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	0.040 (0.034)	0.090* (0.040)	0.000 (0.002)	0.005* (0.003)	0.012 (0.042)	-0.058 (0.055)	-0.025*** (0.005)	-0.012 (0.008)
First stage estimate	0.516*** (0.041)	0.407*** (0.034)	0.514*** (0.039)	0.394*** (0.044)	0.229*** (0.026)	0.168*** (0.021)	0.256*** (0.019)	0.183*** (0.019)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.04
Right bandwidth	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.04
Observations	8371	8371	8371	8371	14837	14837	14837	14837
Effective obs. left	642	740	697	444	1440	1527	3279	2094
Effective obs. right	727	809	786	504	1185	1247	2151	1602
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Table A.4: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout by the partisanship of the opponents

	Partisan opponents				Independent opponents			
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	0.008 (0.029)	0.038 (0.041)	-0.028*** (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)	0.030 (0.063)	0.066 (0.056)	0.005 (0.009)	0.013** (0.005)
First stage estimate	0.429*** (0.048)	0.313*** (0.042)	0.436*** (0.040)	0.336*** (0.035)	0.335*** (0.049)	0.278*** (0.030)	0.335*** (0.048)	0.277*** (0.019)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.15
Right bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.15
Observations	7703	7703	7703	7703	6870	6870	6870	6870
Effective obs. left	908	924	1758	1762	383	687	393	1224
Effective obs. right	456	458	584	584	481	915	505	2423
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Table A.5: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout by the number of registered voters (Q1-Q2)

	N registered voters Q1				N registered voters Q2			
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	-0.064 (0.049)	-0.097 (0.070)	0.002 (0.011)	0.019 (0.014)	0.120 (0.081)	0.128 (0.092)	-0.006 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)
First stage estimate	0.295*** (0.042)	0.215*** (0.035)	0.27*** (0.048)	0.2*** (0.040)	0.251*** (0.053)	0.221*** (0.044)	0.324*** (0.038)	0.266*** (0.033)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.04
Right bandwidth	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.04
Observations	5804	5804	5804	5804	5801	5801	5801	5801
Effective obs. left	479	448	357	334	285	292	681	646
Effective obs. right	595	565	441	405	295	305	669	636
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Table A.6: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout by the number of registered voters (Q3-Q4)

	N registered voters Q3				N registered voters Q4			
	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes	Turnout	Turnout	Blank/null votes	Blank/null votes
RDD estimate	-0.026 (0.044)	-0.025 (0.055)	-0.023** (0.008)	-0.009 (0.009)	0.019 (0.043)	0.062 (0.064)	-0.026*** (0.007)	-0.003 (0.008)
First stage estimate	0.351*** (0.051)	0.278*** (0.044)	0.35*** (0.051)	0.274*** (0.045)	0.323*** (0.044)	0.216*** (0.036)	0.323*** (0.044)	0.229*** (0.032)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05
Right bandwidth	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05
Observations	5803	5803	5803	5803	5800	5800	5800	5800
Effective obs. left	527	527	522	496	696	677	697	1044
Effective obs. right	391	391	388	382	501	497	502	609
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout refers to the share of total votes (expressed, blank and null) out of registered voters. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

Turnout Differences

Table A.7: The effect of the presence of independents in the second round on turnout differences between the two rounds

	Pure independents		Leaning independents	
	Turnout diff.	Turnout diff.	Turnout diff.	Turnout diff.
RDD estimate	0.005 (0.016)	-0.002 (0.019)	0.009 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.013)
First stage estimate	0.565*** (0.059)	0.468*** (0.054)	0.325*** (0.021)	0.253*** (0.016)
Kernel type	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular	Triangular
Bandwidth type	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD	MSERD
Left bandwidth	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.05
Right bandwidth	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.05
Observations	2820	2820	23208	23208
Effective obs. left	379	377	2623	3213
Effective obs. right	306	305	2287	2643
Order local polynomial	1	1	1	1
Order bias	2	2	2	2
Controls		✓		✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Turnout difference refers to the difference in turnout between the second and first round. Control variable: number of candidates in the second round.

B Why Do People Like Technocrats?

B.1 Pooled Regression Models

Table B.1 below reports regression models pooled across the two portfolio scenarios (economic affairs and education). The dependent variable is issue competence in the first three models and bargaining competence in the fourth and fifth. These models confirm the findings from the separate models presented in the main body of the paper: We find a negative effect of ministerial partisanship on issue competence (Hypothesis 1), but a positive one on bargaining competence (Hypothesis 4). We also find that the positive effect of expertise on issue competence is smaller for partisan ministers (Hypothesis 2), and that the negative effect of partisanship on issue competence is conditional on party support (Hypothesis 3). Finally, the pooled models show no support for Hypothesis 5 that posited a positive interaction between expertise and partisanship for the effect on bargaining competence.

Table B.1: Pooled regression models

	Issue C.	Issue C.	Issue C.	Barg. C.	Barg. C.
Partisan minister	-0.27*** (0.06)	-0.13 (0.08)	-0.67*** (0.09)	0.34*** (0.06)	0.39*** (0.08)
Managing director / Headmaster	2.07*** (0.06)	2.22*** (0.08)	2.19*** (0.06)	0.76*** (0.06)	0.81*** (0.08)
Partisan minister $\times$ Man. dir. / Headm.		-0.29** (0.12)			-0.10 (0.11)
PTV for party			0.05*** (0.01)		
Partisan minister $\times$ PTV for party			0.11*** (0.02)		
Education scenario	-0.09* (0.05)	-0.09* (0.05)	-0.08* (0.05)	0.26*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.04)
Constant	3.81*** (0.06)	3.74*** (0.07)	3.57*** (0.08)	3.51*** (0.06)	3.49*** (0.07)
Num. Obs.	6142	6142	5692	6142	6142
R2 Adj.	0.17	0.17	0.21	0.04	0.04

Note: Standard errors clustered by respondent; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

B.2 Distribution of Respondents Across Conditions

Table B.2: Number of respondents per experimental condition

Scenario	Condition	Respondents
Minister of Economic Affairs	Nonpartisan + office clerk	766
	ÖVP member + office clerk	775
	Nonpartisan + managing director	770
	ÖVP member + managing director	761
Minister of Education	Nonpartisan + office clerk	773
	ÖVP member + office clerk	770
	Nonpartisan + headmaster	757
	ÖVP member + headmaster	772

B.3 Descriptive Statistics

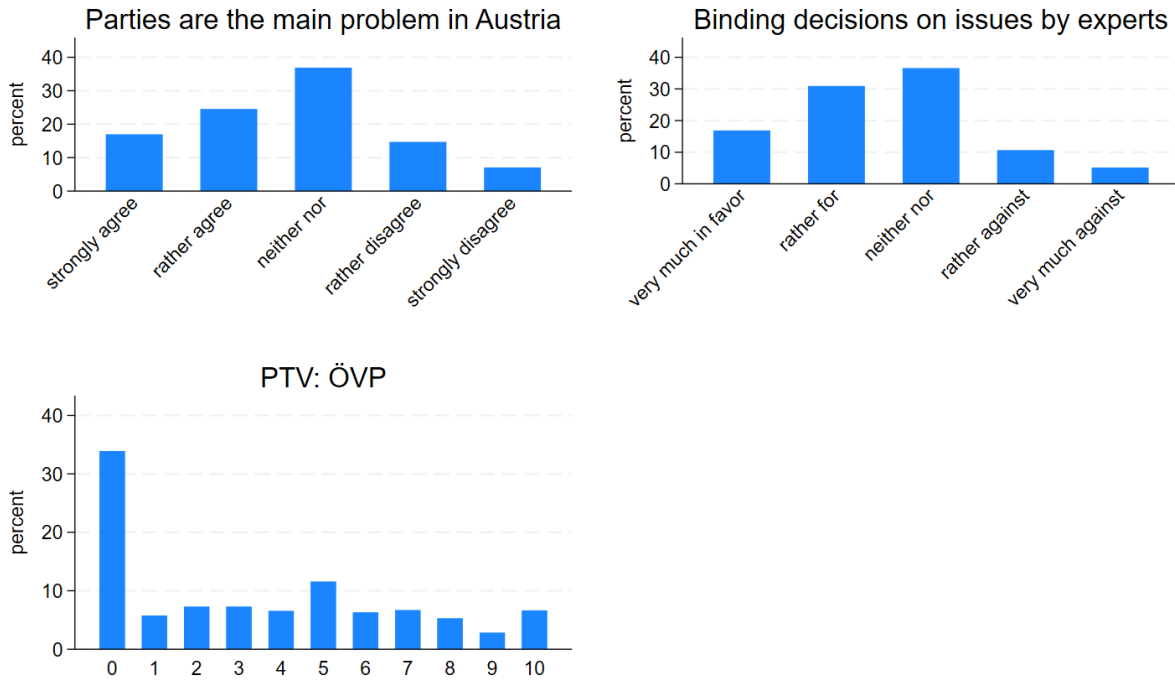
Table B.3 displays summary statistics for the two outcome variables (issue competence and bargaining competence) in the economic affairs and education scenarios. Figure B.1 provides additional information on the distribution of generic anti-party sentiment, voter support for binding policy decisions by experts and for the propensity to vote for the ÖVP.

Note that roughly 40 percent of respondents, respectively, strongly or rather agree with the statement that parties are the main problem in Austria and support a dominant role of experts in policy-making. In line with previous research, we also find a moderate correlation between anti-party and pro-technocracy attitudes ($\rho=.16^{***}$) (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022; Pilet et al., 2023).

Table B.3: Summary statistics: competence perceptions

Scenario	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Issue competence: minister of economy	4.71	2.38	0.00	10.00
Issue competence: minister of education	4.61	2.74	0.00	10.00
Bargaining competence: minister of economy	4.06	2.19	0.00	10.00
Bargaining competence: minister of education	4.33	2.37	0.00	10.00
Num. Obs.	3071			

Figure B.1: Anti-party sentiment, support for binding policy decisions by experts and PTV for the ÖVP



Shares based on wave 15 of the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES). Note that the anti-party sentiment question is only available for a subset of respondents (N=751)

We also report the correlations (Pearson's r) between the four dependent variables in the Table B.4 below. There is a moderately strong positive association between issue competence and bargaining competence in both scenarios (0.40 and 0.51, respectively), suggesting that respondents' evaluations of ministers on different dimensions go hand in hand (which may

in part be driven by the fact that these evaluations are given under the same experimental conditions). By contrast, correlations within the same competence dimension across portfolio scenarios are considerably weaker (between 0.20 and 0.37).

Table B.4: Correlations between dependent variables

	IC (econ.)	IC (educ.)	BC (econ.)	BC (educ.)
Issue competence (econ.)	1.00			
Issue competence (educ.)	0.25	1.00		
Bargaining comp. (econ.)	0.40	0.20	1.00	
Bargaining comp. (educ.)	0.20	0.51	0.37	1.00
Num. Obs.	3071			

B.4 Power Calculations

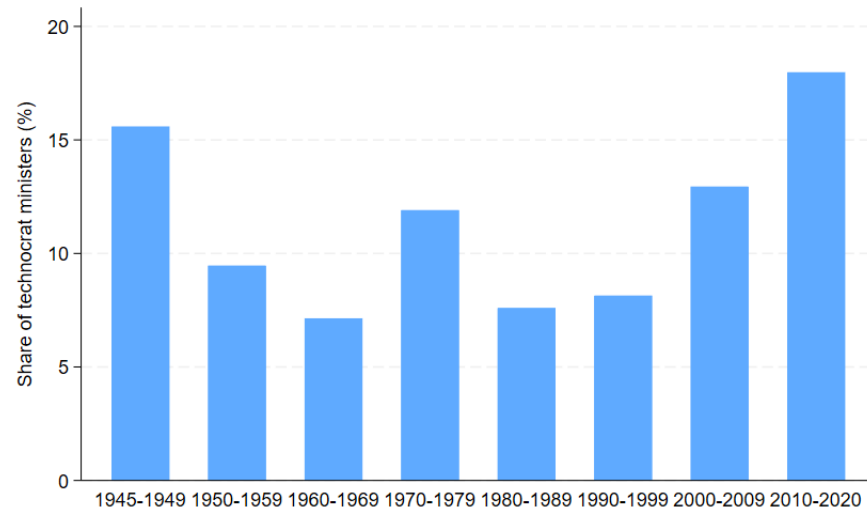
The power calculations were performed using the following tool: https://markhw.shinyapps.io/power_twoway/. The criteria used were sample N=3,071, number of simulations N=100, and alpha = 0.05.

Table B.5: Power calculations per dependent variables and portfolios

	Power
Issue competence (econ.)	1.00
Issue competence (educ.)	0.82
Bargaining comp. (econ.)	0.82
Bargaining comp. (educ.)	0.99
Num. Obs.	3071

B.5 Technocrats in Austrian Cabinets

Figure B.2: Shares of technocrats among Austrian ministers by decade (1945-2020)



Note: Ministers with a) subject-matter expertise relating to their portfolio and b) no party affiliation before their appointment were coded as technocrats.

Figure B.3 shows the total number of appointed technocrats per party. When in government, both major parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, have appointed technocrats at similar rates. Figure B.4 shows the portfolios to which both parties have appointed technocrats. Both parties have appointed technocrats to the ministries of justice, foreign affairs, education and women's affairs at similar rates. While the ÖVP tends to appoint more in the finance ministry, the SPÖ tends to appoint more in the social policy and defense ministries.

Figure B.3: Number of appointed technocrat ministers by Austrian parties (1945-2020)

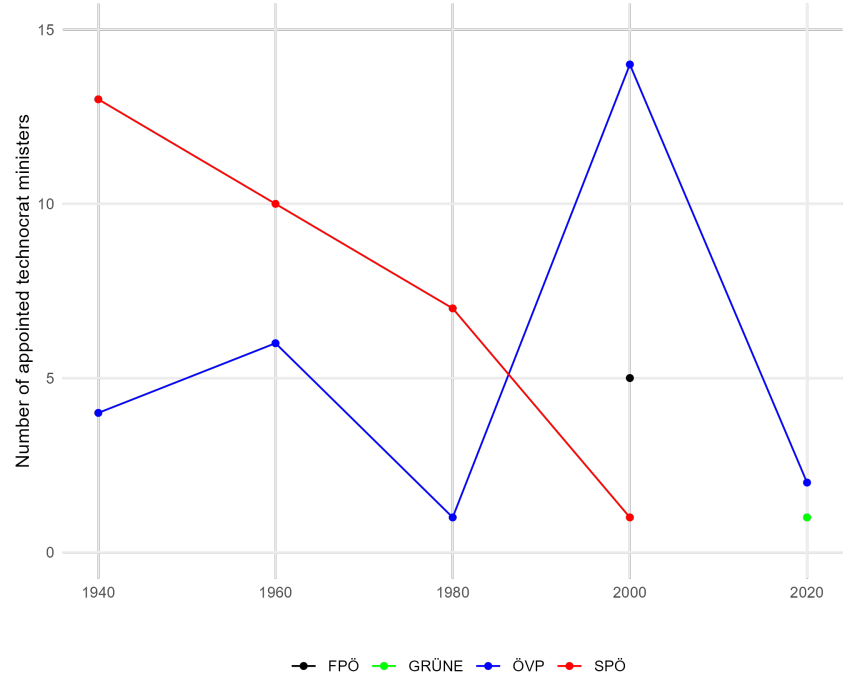
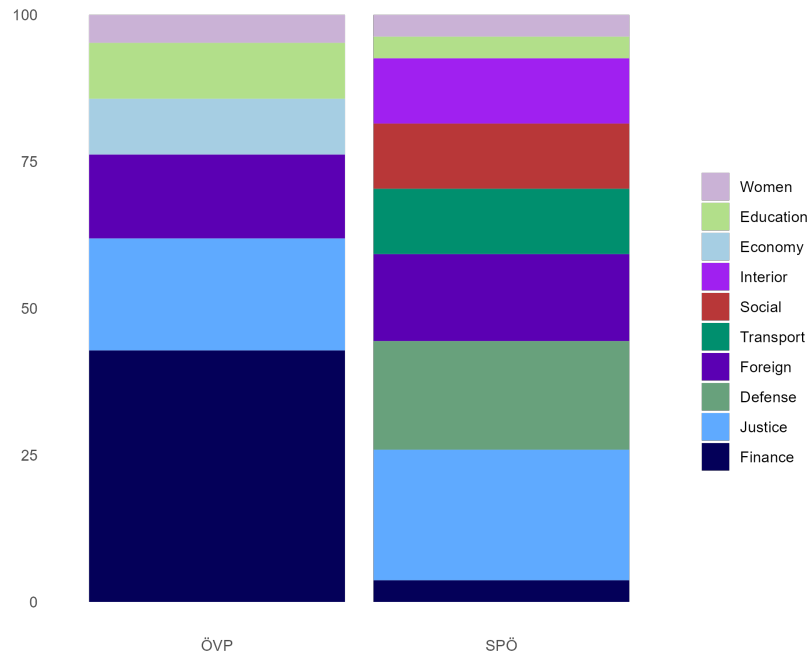


Figure B.4: Shares of technocrat ministers in selected portfolios by Austrian parties (1945-2020)



From the late 1990s to today, Austria’s ministers of the economy have been civil servants,

entrepreneurs, or have a background in business administration. Nonpartisan ministers in this portfolio have been economist Martin Kocher (2022-present) and top civil servant Elisabeth Udolf-Strobl (2019-2020). Education ministers have been school teachers and academics in various fields, including economics, biology, geography, and law. Nonpartisan ministers in this portfolio have been academics Heinz Faßmann (2017-2019, 2020-2021) and Martin Polaschek (2021-present).

B.6 Technocrats in European Cabinets

Figure B.5 shows the average share of technocrat ministers in Europe between 1997 and 2022. While Austria (25%) is above the European average (11%), its experience with technocrats is similar to that of countries such as Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Cyprus, which all fall between an average of 21% and 29%. Austria's share of technocrats in government is therefore far from being an outlier.

Figure B.5: Average share of technocrat ministers in Europe (1997-2022) ([Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023](#))

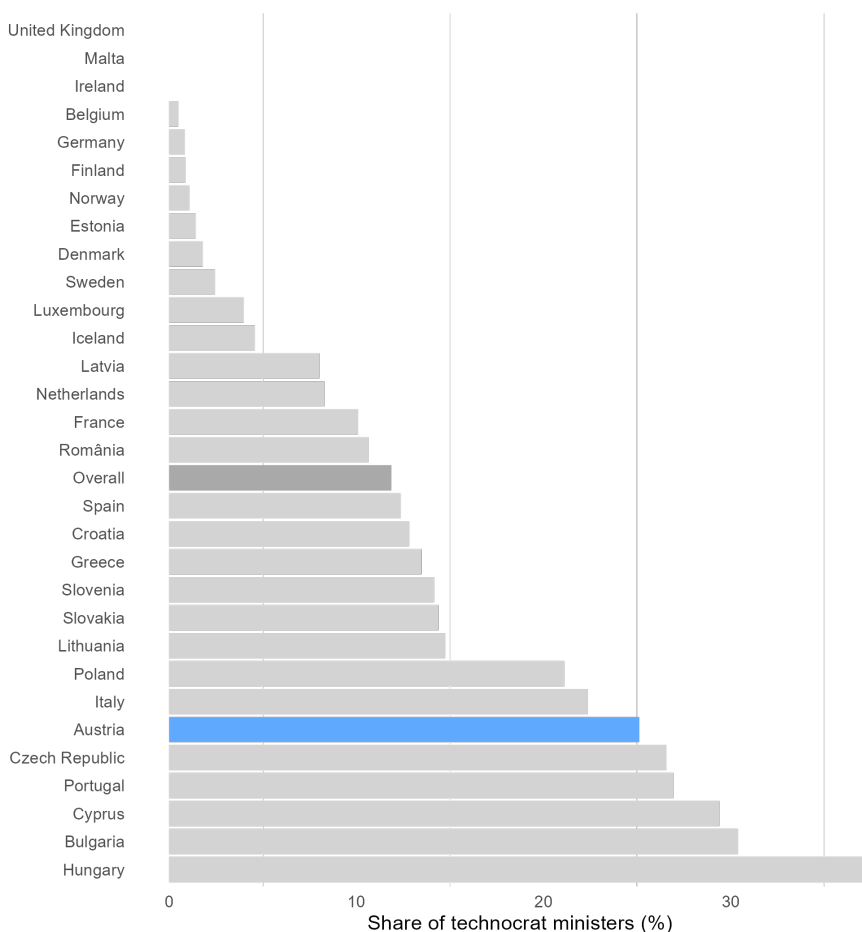
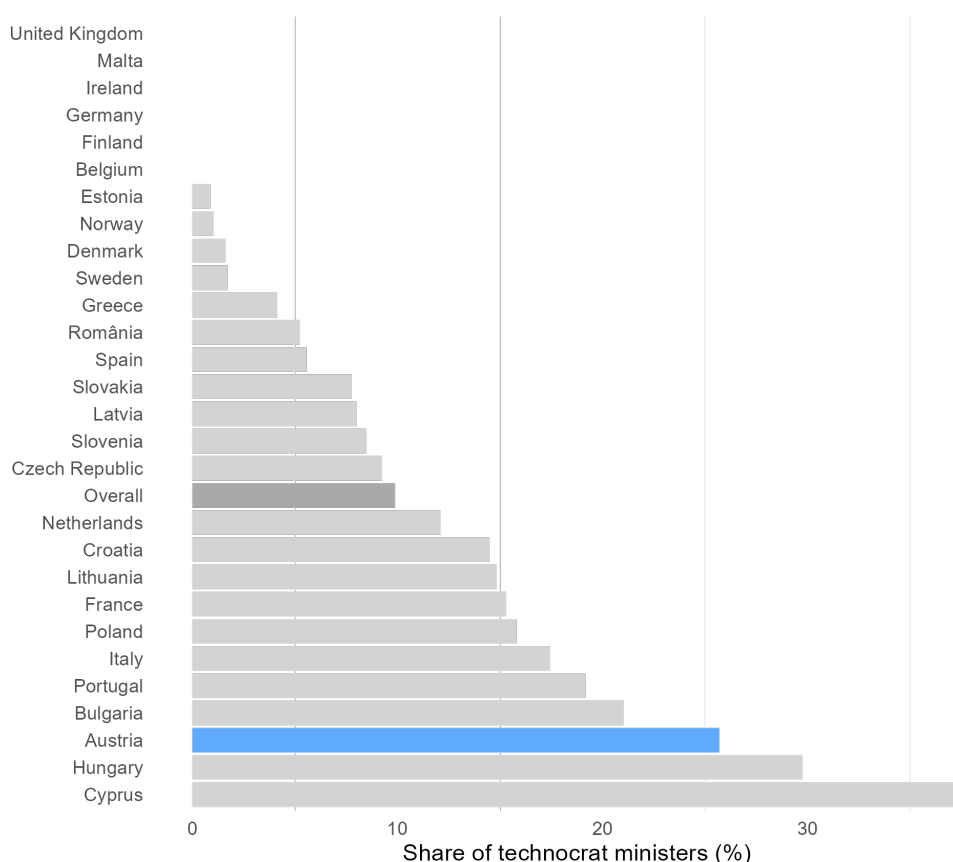


Figure B.6 shows the average share of technocrat ministers in right-wing European governments between 1997 and 2022. Since information on which party appointed each minister is often missing, and since parties vary over time in their classification as mainstream right-wing parties, we rely on the overall cabinet-level rating on the left-right scale. The scores are weighted averages of the parties' left-right ratings from expert survey data (CHES) (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023). Therefore, we only select cabinets that were rated between 6 and 10 on the left-right scale. Focusing on this subset of cases, Austria becomes more of an outlier (25% vs. overall average of 10%), but still has an average share of technocrat ministers similar to Bulgaria, Portugal, Hungary, and Cyprus. Thus, right-wing parties such as GERB in Bulgaria, Fidesz in Hungary, the PSD in Portugal, Forza Italia and the Lega Nord in Italy have appointed technocrat ministers to a similar extent as the Austrian ÖVP.

Figure B.6: Average share of technocrat ministers in right-wing European government (1997-2022) (Vittori, Pilet, Rojon and Paulis, 2023)



B.7 Party vs. Technocrats: Anecdotal Evidence on Technocratic Ministers' Behavior in Austrian Cabinets

The assumption that nonpartisan ministers (including technocrats) are less likely to toe the party line than partisan ministers are is well established in the literature on party government and political delegation (Rose, 1974; Mair, 2008; Müller, 2000). For one, nonpartisan ministers are less likely to be socialized into party norms and ideology. Secondly, the nominating party's ability to exercise ex-ante (e.g., screening) and ex-post (e.g., positive and negative career incentives) control over these ministers is more limited when compared to their partisan counterparts (Müller, 2000).⁵⁰ To be sure, this does not automatically imply that real-world technocrats are actually ideologically neutral. Most likely, parties also take such ideological leanings into account when appointing technocrats to ministerial office (e.g., by selecting technocrats whom they expect to be ideologically close to the party). Yet, in contrast to partisan-appointment scenarios, the nominating party likely has less information to judge the appointee's ideological leaning and – if conflict between the party and the minister occurs – the party's options to put pressure on the minister are limited.

This section seeks to further substantiate this assumption by providing anecdotal evidence on individual episodes where technocratic ministers in Austrian governments have acted contrary to the interests of the appointing party. Although such cabinet-internal conflicts are typically difficult to observe, as party actors will try to conceal them for electoral reasons, the following instances are documented for the Austrian case.

Egmont Foregger, a renowned party-independent criminal law expert, was appointed as minister of justice in the SPÖ-led Vranitzky II coalition government in 1987. Before that – although vaguely characterized by some accounts as a 'liberal-national' rather than a social democrat – Foregger had gained the party's trust, playing an important part in realizing one of the SPÖ's prestige projects (modernization of the Austrian criminal law) as a senior bureaucrat in the SPÖ-led justice ministry. During his tenure as minister, however, criminal investigations against formerly leading proponents of the SPÖ were ongoing and the party expected Foregger to avoid indictments via ministerial directive, much like his partisan predecessors had done it before in comparable situations. Foregger, however, refrained from exercising such political interventions in line with the rule of law principle. Subsequently, charges were filed and the corresponding cases were brought before the court, which naturally turned out to be very damaging for the party.

Karin Kneissl, foreign minister in the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government Kurz I, was nomi-

⁵⁰By tendency, this is also supported by previous empirical work indicating that the strength of a minister's party ties affects their effectiveness in implementing the party's policy agenda (Alexiadou, 2015).

nated by the FPÖ as a party-independent foreign-policy expert. Reportedly, Kneissl threatened to resign if the coalition parties insisted on voting against the UN-migration treaty. Eventually, Kneissl claims, her threat led to a compromise with Austria abstaining from the vote instead of voting against the treaty. Not least, Karin Kneissl also broke the FPÖ-ministers' united front when the government collapsed in 2019 in the wake of the so-called 'Ibiza' scandal. When chancellor Kurz initiated the removal of FPÖ heavy-weight Herbert Kickl as minister of the interior, all other FPÖ-nominated ministers – except for Kneissl – resigned out of protest, which de-facto ended the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition.

Other conflicts between technocrat ministers and their appointing parties have received less publicity and accounts mentioning their existence are primarily based on rumors among political insiders. SPÖ-nominated defense minister Johann Freihsler, for instance, officially resigned for health reasons in 1971 after holding this position for less than a year. Supposedly, however, the actual, 'unofficial' reason for his resignation had been his opposition to the party's plans of reducing mandatory military service to a duration of six months. While this reduction was eventually implemented, it was heavily opposed by the leadership of the Austrian military, where Freihsler had served for years before his appointment to ministerial office. This opposition from military leaders stemmed from concerns that the reduction would significantly hamper the country's self-defense capabilities.

B.8 Exploratory Hypotheses

The pre-registration included a number of exploratory hypotheses regarding the following effects:

- The direct effect of expertise on bargaining competence perceptions (strong positive effect, see models IVa and IVb in Table 5.2 in the main text).
- How the interaction of ministers' partisanship and respondent partisanship affects perceived bargaining competence (null effect, see Table B.6).
- How the interaction of anti-party attitudes and respondent partisanship affects perceived issue competence (anti-party attitudes moderate partisanship penalty but only in economic affairs scenario, see Table B.7).
- How ministers' gender affects the impact of ministers' partisanship on both competence dimensions (no effect, see Table B.8).
- How the impact of ministers' gender varies by respondents' age, gender, and partisanship (no effects, see Tables B.9, B.10, B.11, and B.12).

We examine these effects here in the appendix. First, we look at how the interaction between the partisan-minister treatment and the propensity to vote for the minister's party

(ÖVP) affects perceptions of bargaining competence.

The models in Table B.6 suggest that the positive effect of partisanship on a minister’s perceived bargaining competence is not moderated by respondents support for the minister’s party.

Table B.6: Regression analysis: effects of partisan treatments on bargaining competence, conditional on propensity to vote (PTV)

	DV: Barg. C.	DV: Barg. C.
Partisan minister	0.26** (0.12)	0.41*** (0.12)
Managing director	0.47*** (0.08)	
Headmaster		1.12*** (0.09)
PTV for party	0.09*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)
Partisan minister $\times$ PTV for party	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Constant	3.35*** (0.09)	3.22*** (0.10)
Num. Obs.	2847	2847
R2 Adj.	0.04	0.08

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Next, we examine whether partisanship effects on perceived issue competence are conditional on anti-party sentiment. To that end, we make use of a question asked in the panel wave preceding the one that included the experiment. Respondents were asked to evaluate the statement “the parties are the main problem in Austria” on a five-point scale (from “very true” to “not true at all”). We interact the partisanship treatment with this variable in the models in Table B.7.

The first model in Table B.7 displays a strong moderation effect. Thus, in the managing-director scenario, the effect of the partisanship treatment is strongly conditional on anti-party sentiment. The average marginal effect of the treatment is insignificant for people with very

low anti-party sentiment (0.21 ± 0.77), but negative and highly significant for respondents with very high anti-party sentiment (-0.96 ± 0.38). By contrast, no such moderation effect is found in the headmaster scenario.

Table B.7: Regression analysis: effects of partisan treatments on issue competence, conditional on anti-party sentiment

	DV: Issue C.	DV: Issue C.
Partisan minister	0.75** (0.30)	-0.07 (0.32)
Managing director	1.54*** (0.10)	
Headmaster		2.87*** (0.10)
Anti-party sentiment	0.08 (0.06)	-0.11* (0.06)
Partisan minister $\times$ anti-party sentiment	-0.34*** (0.08)	-0.05 (0.09)
Constant	3.88*** (0.23)	3.71*** (0.23)
Num. Obs.	2113	2113
R2 Adj.	0.12	0.27

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

The models in Table B.8 examine whether the partisanship and the expertise effects in our experimental design vary with ministers' gender. This is not the case. The interaction of ministers' gender and their partisanship yields coefficients that are statistically insignificant. The same is true for interactions of ministers' gender and expertise.

Table B.8: Regression analysis: effects of partisan treatments on issue and bargaining competence, conditional on ministers' gender

	DV: Issue C.	DV: Barg. C.
Partisan minister	-0.45*** (0.12)	-0.28** (0.12)
Managing director	1.35*** (0.12)	
Headmaster		2.80*** (0.12)
Female minister	-0.18 (0.14)	-0.10 (0.15)
Partisan minister $\times$ female minister	0.16 (0.16)	0.18 (0.17)
Managing director $\times$ female minister	0.08 (0.16)	
Headmaster $\times$ female minister		-0.12 (0.17)
Constant	4.29*** (0.10)	3.39*** (0.10)
Num. Obs.	3072	3072
R2 Adj.	0.09	0.25

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Next, we examine whether the effect of ministers' gender on issue competence and bargaining competence varies by respondent gender. To that end, Tables B.9 and B.10 report separate regression models for male and female respondents. We find no support for this conjecture. The female-minister coefficients are small and statistically insignificant in all models.

Table B.9: Regression analysis: effects of partisan treatments and ministers' gender on issue competence, by respondent gender

	ECO (male R's)	ECO (female R's)	EDU (male R's)	EDU (female R's)
Partisan minister	-0.48*** (0.12)	-0.28** (0.11)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.28** (0.12)
Female minister	-0.05 (0.12)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.13 (0.12)	0.00 (0.12)
Managing director	1.64*** (0.12)	1.18*** (0.11)		
Headmaster			2.87*** (0.12)	2.62*** (0.12)
Constant	4.11*** (0.12)	4.33*** (0.11)	3.24*** (0.12)	3.51*** (0.12)
Num. Obs.	1545	1516	1545	1516
R2 Adj.	0.12	0.07	0.26	0.24

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table B.10: Regression analysis: effects of partisan treatments and ministers' gender on bargaining competence, by respondent gender

	ECO (male R's)	ECO (female R's)	EDU (male R's)	EDU (female R's)
Partisan minister	0.35*** (0.12)	0.17 (0.11)	0.61*** (0.12)	0.20* (0.12)
Female minister	-0.02 (0.12)	0.04 (0.11)	0.05 (0.12)	-0.18 (0.12)
Managing director	0.48*** (0.12)	0.48*** (0.11)		
Headmaster			1.02*** (0.12)	1.10*** (0.12)
Constant	3.62*** (0.12)	3.75*** (0.11)	3.32*** (0.12)	3.93*** (0.12)
Num. Obs.	1545	1516	1545	1516
R2 Adj.	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.06

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

We also investigate whether the effect of ministers' gender on issue competence and bargaining competence varies by respondent age. The regression models in Table B.11 include interaction of the female-minister term with respondents' age. The models indicate no age-dependent variation in the effect of ministers' gender on either outcome variable (issue competence, bargaining competence).

Table B.11: Regression analysis: interaction effects of ministers' gender and respondent age on issue and bargaining competence

	DV: Issue C.	DV: Issue C.	DV: Barg. C.	DV: Barg. C.
Partisan minister	-0.37*** (0.08)	-0.19** (0.09)	0.26*** (0.08)	0.41*** (0.08)
Female minister	0.05 (0.24)	0.30 (0.26)	-0.29 (0.23)	-0.22 (0.25)
Age (years)	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Female minister $\times$ age (years)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Managing director	1.39*** (0.08)		0.47*** (0.08)	
Headmaster		2.74*** (0.09)		1.05*** (0.08)
Constant	4.91*** (0.18)	3.60*** (0.19)	4.83*** (0.17)	4.64*** (0.18)
Num. Obs.	3071	3071	3071	3071
R2 Adj.	0.10	0.25	0.04	0.08

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Finally, we study the interaction of ministers' gender and partisanship (measured by PTV scores for the minister's party). The results in Table B.12 suggest that partisanship does not moderate the effect of ministers' gender on either issue or bargaining competence. All the interaction effects are close to zero and statistically not significant.

Table B.12: Regression analysis: interaction effects of partisan and ministers' gender on issue competence, by respondent gender

	DV: Issue C.	DV: Issue C.	DV: Barg. C.	DV: Barg. C.
Partisan minister	-0.39*** (0.08)	-0.18** (0.09)	0.28*** (0.08)	0.47*** (0.09)
Female minister	-0.13 (0.12)	0.05 (0.13)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.09 (0.12)
PTV for party	0.10*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)
Female minister $\times$ PTV for party	0.03 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)
Managing director	1.48*** (0.08)		0.47*** (0.08)	
Headmaster		2.91*** (0.09)		1.13*** (0.09)
Constant	3.84*** (0.10)	2.87*** (0.11)	3.38*** (0.10)	3.23*** (0.11)
Num. Obs.	2,846	2846	2846	2846
R2 Adj.	0.13	0.29	0.04	0.08

Note: Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

C Does Electoral Accountability Work When Ministers Are Independent?

C.1 Regression Models

Table C.1: The effect of partisan ties on the responsibility gap by performance

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
	Responsibility gap					
Performance	Pooled	Pooled	—	+	—	+
Party ties (Ref. Independent)						
Long-party member	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)
Recent party member	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.11** (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.11** (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)
Constant	0.05+ (0.03)	0.00 (0.06)	0.01 (0.03)	0.10* (0.04)	0.02 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.08)
Num.Obs.	19170	19170	9665	9505	9665	9505
R2	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.001
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.001
Controls		✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

Table C.2: The effect of partisan ties on the propensity to vote by performance

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
	PTV					
Performance	Pooled	Pooled	–	+	–	+
Party ties (Ref. Independent)						
Long-party member	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.08)	-0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.08)
Recent party member	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.08)	0.08 (0.08)	-0.05 (0.08)	0.08 (0.08)
Constant	4.03*** (0.06)	3.63*** (0.15)	3.61*** (0.07)	4.49*** (0.07)	3.54*** (0.17)	3.74*** (0.17)
Num.Obs.	19170	19170	9665	9505	9665	9505
R2	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.008
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.007
Controls		✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

Table C.3: The effect of copartisanship, partisan ties and the interaction between the two on responsibility gap by performance

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
	Responsibility gap							
Performance	–	+	–	+	–	+	–	+
Copartisanship = 1	0.11*	-0.11+	0.13*	-0.07	0.14	-0.07	0.14	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
Party ties (Ref. Independent)								
Long-party member					0.01	-0.08	-0.03	-0.10+
					(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Recent party member					-0.08	-0.10	-0.06	-0.07
					(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Copartisanship $\times$ Long-party member					0.00	-0.11	0.05	-0.05
					(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Copartisanship $\times$ Recent party member					-0.09	-0.01	-0.09	-0.04
					(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Constant	-0.03	0.08**	0.15	0.11	-0.01	0.15**	0.18	0.18
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.24)	(0.23)
Num.Obs.	6839	6688	5511	5397	6839	6688	5511	5397
R2	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.002
R2 Adj.	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001
Controls			✓	✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

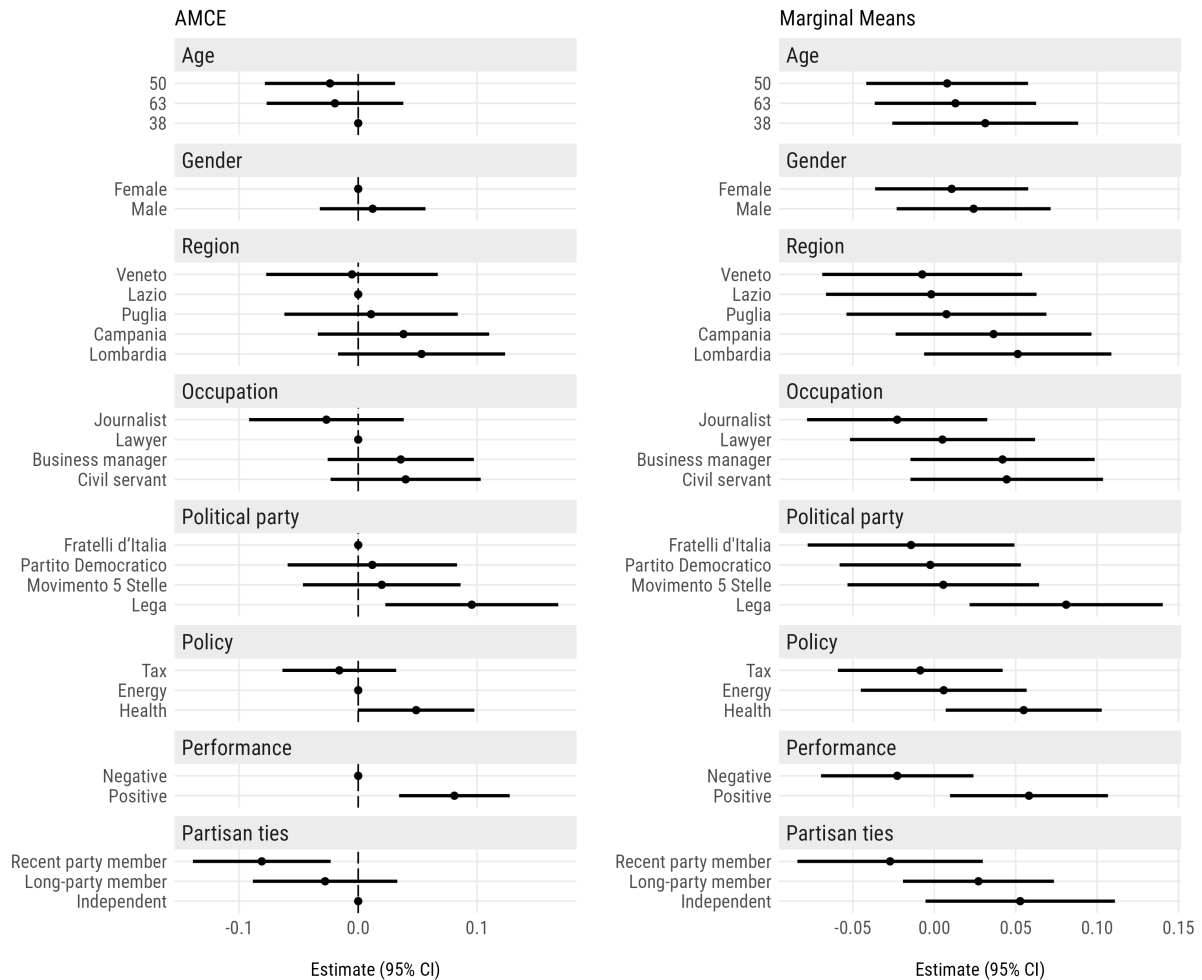
Table C.4: The effect of technocratic attitudes, partisan ties and the interaction between the two on responsibility gap by performance

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
	Responsibility gap							
Performance	–	+	–	+	–	+	–	+
Technocratic attitudes	0.05 (0.07)	0.14+ (0.08)	0.05 (0.07)	0.14+ (0.08)	0.11 (0.10)	0.32** (0.12)	0.10 (0.10)	0.32** (0.12)
Party ties (Ref. Independent)								
Long-party member					0.01 (0.06)	0.03 (0.08)	0.01 (0.06)	0.03 (0.08)
Recent party member					-0.01 (0.06)	0.06 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.06 (0.08)
Technocratic attitudes × Long-party member					0.02 (0.11)	-0.27* (0.14)	0.02 (0.11)	-0.27* (0.13)
Technocratic attitudes × Recent party member					-0.20+ (0.11)	-0.24* (0.12)	-0.20+ (0.11)	-0.25* (0.12)
Constant	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.18+ (0.10)	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.22+ (0.12)
Num.Obs.	4990	4973	4990	4973	4990	4973	4990	4973
R2	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.002	0.004	0.002	0.005
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.004
Controls			✓	✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

C.2 AMCE and Marginal Means Across All Attributes

Figure C.1: AMCE and marginal means across all attributes



C.3 Robustness Checks

Attentive Sample

The attentive sample is defined as the sample that passed the comprehension check and for respondents who took at least 5 minutes to complete the survey, with a final sample of 12,321 observations (64% of the total sample).

Table C.5: The effect of partisan ties on responsibility gap and propensity to vote by performance - Robustness check

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
	Responsibility gap					
Performance	Pooled	Pooled	—	+	—	+
Party ties (Ref. Independent)						
Long-party member	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.07)
Recent party member	-0.12** (0.04)	-0.12** (0.04)	-0.16** (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.16** (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)
Constant	0.09* (0.04)	0.06 (0.09)	0.02 (0.05)	0.16** (0.06)	0.05 (0.10)	0.09 (0.12)
Num.Obs.	12321	12321	6345	5976	6345	5976
R2	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001
R2 Adj.	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.000
Controls		✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

Table C.6: The effect of partisan ties on the propensity to vote by performance

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
	PTV					
Performance	Pooled	Pooled	–	+	–	+
Party ties (Ref. Independent)						
Long-party member	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.09)	0.00 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.09)	0.00 (0.10)
Recent party member	0.02 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)	0.02 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.10)	0.02 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.10)
Constant	3.79*** (0.07)	3.50*** (0.19)	3.09*** (0.09)	4.56*** (0.09)	3.21*** (0.22)	3.89*** (0.23)
Num.Obs.	12321	12321	6345	5976	6345	5976
R2	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.005
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.005
Controls		✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

Table C.7: The effect of copartisanship, partisan ties and the interaction between the two on responsibility gap by performance
- Robustness check

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
	Responsibility gap							
Performance	–	+	–	+	–	+	–	+
Copartisanship = 1	0.10 (0.07)	-0.12 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.08)	0.07 (0.13)	-0.16 (0.14)	0.07 (0.13)	-0.09 (0.14)
Party ties (Ref. Independent)								
Long-party member					-0.08 (0.08)	-0.18* (0.08)	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.12 (0.08)
Recent party member					-0.17* (0.08)	-0.15+ (0.08)	-0.15+ (0.09)	-0.09 (0.08)
Copartisanship × Long-party member					0.05 (0.15)	0.08 (0.17)	0.07 (0.15)	0.03 (0.17)
Copartisanship × Recent party member					0.04 (0.19)	0.06 (0.18)	0.02 (0.19)	0.00 (0.18)
Constant	-0.06 (0.05)	0.13** (0.04)	0.30 (0.33)	0.31 (0.29)	0.03 (0.06)	0.25*** (0.07)	0.38 (0.33)	0.38 (0.30)
Num.Obs.	4034	3895	3658	3542	4034	3895	3658	3542
R2	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.004	0.003
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001
Controls			✓	✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

Table C.8: The effect of technocratic attitudes, partisan ties and the interaction between the two on responsibility gap by performance - Robustness check

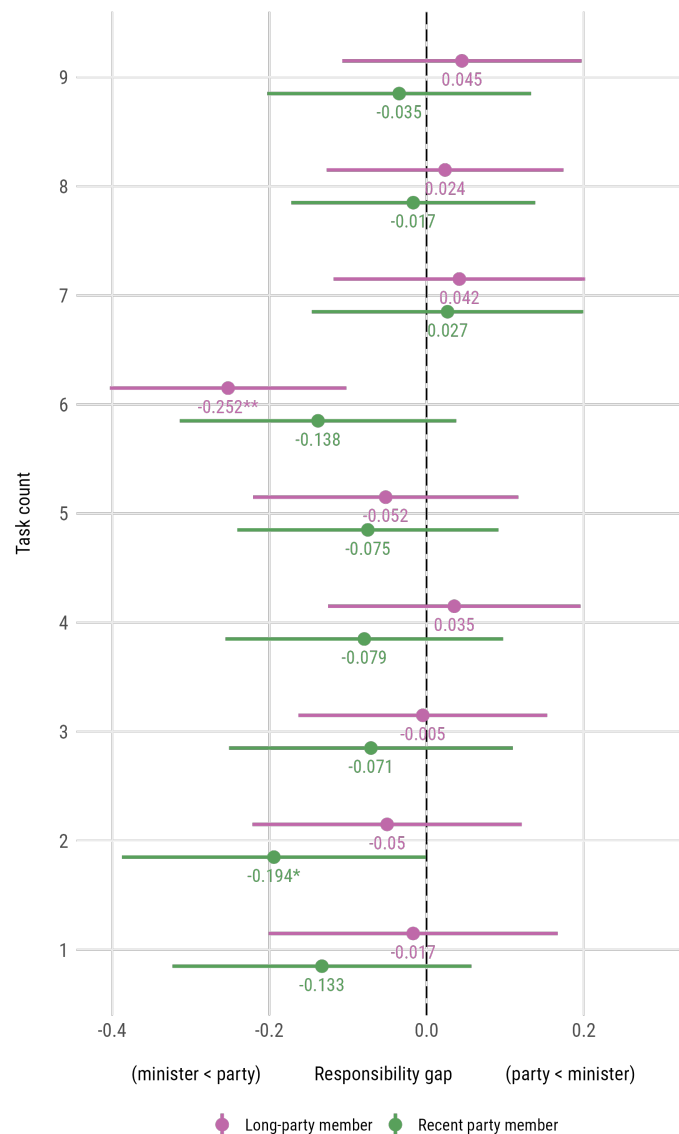
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
	Responsibility gap							
Performance	–	+	–	+	–	+	–	+
Technocratic attitudes	0.12 (0.11)	0.22* (0.11)	0.12 (0.11)	0.21* (0.11)	0.25+ (0.13)	0.48** (0.18)	0.25+ (0.13)	0.47** (0.18)
Party ties (Ref. Independent)								
Long-party member					-0.01 (0.09)	0.13 (0.14)	-0.01 (0.09)	0.13 (0.14)
Recent party member					0.04 (0.10)	0.12 (0.14)	0.04 (0.10)	0.12 (0.14)
Technocratic attitudes $\times$ Long-party member					0.00 (0.15)	-0.46* (0.20)	0.00 (0.15)	-0.46* (0.20)
Technocratic attitudes $\times$ Recent party member					-0.40* (0.16)	-0.31+ (0.18)	-0.40* (0.16)	-0.32+ (0.18)
Constant	-0.11+ (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.20 (0.15)	-0.12 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.13)	-0.17 (0.15)	-0.29 (0.20)
Num.Obs.	3054	2931	3054	2931	3054	2931	3054	2931
R2	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.005	0.005	0.007	0.005	0.009
R2 Adj.	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.005	0.004	0.005	0.003	0.007
Controls			✓	✓			✓	✓
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

Task Count

Figure C.2 displays the estimated effect of partisan ties on the responsibility gap as a function of the number of tasks completed. I find a relatively stable null effect for recent party members with an estimate ranging from -0.19 to 0.027. The effect is significant at $p < 0.05$ for the second task with a coefficient of -0.19. As for long-party members, I find estimates ranging from -0.25 to 0.05. The effect is significant at $p < 0.01$ on the sixth task with a coefficient of -0.25, representing 39% of a standard deviation, thus a relatively small effect. Overall, the null effect is not due to task fatigue, as evidenced by the fact that the null effect remains relatively stable across all task completion levels.

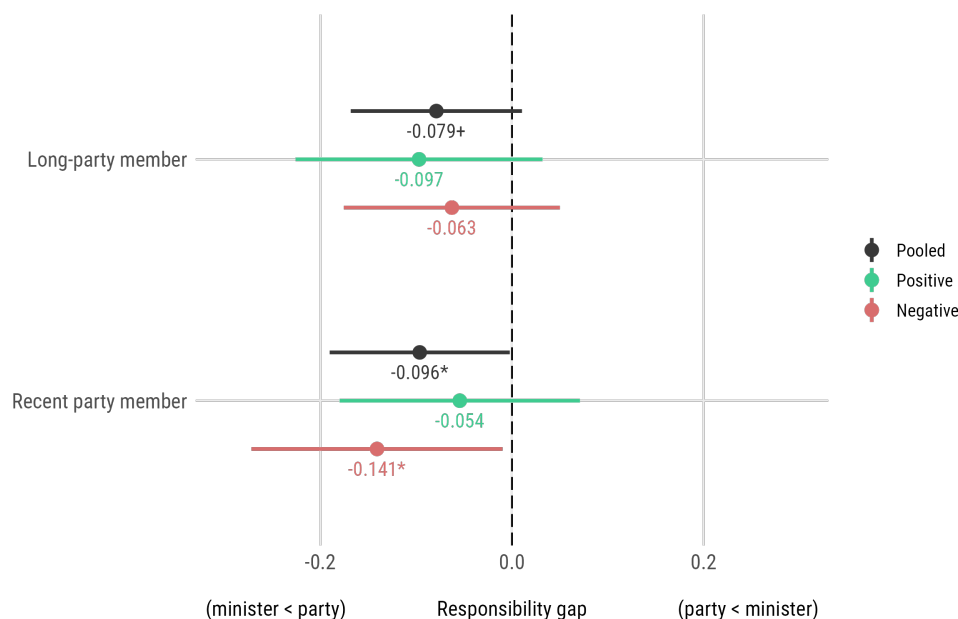
Figure C.2: Average marginal effect of partisan ties on responsibility gap by the number of completed tasks



Subset of Four Random Tasks

Figure C.3 displays the estimated effect of partisan ties on the responsibility gap on a subset of four randomly drawn tasks ($N = 8,520$). The significance and magnitude of the effect remain stable for both levels of partisan ties. This shows that the effect does not depend on the inclusion of a specific task.

Figure C.3: Average marginal effect of partisan ties on responsibility gap on a subset of four random tasks



Marginal Means

Figures C.4 and C.5 show the marginal means for all hypothesis tests. For Hypothesis 1, the means across levels of partisan ties are consistent with the null effect found in the main analysis. For Hypothesis 3, the means across levels of respondents' partisanship and partisan ties are consistent with the results, showing no significant differences across levels of partisan ties. For Hypothesis 4, the means by technocratic attitudes show no substantive differences. For Hypothesis 5, the means by technocratic attitudes and partisan ties levels are consistent with the significance and minimal effect size found in the main analyses. For Hypothesis 2, the means for propensity to vote as an outcome are shown in Figure C.5 and show that parties are rewarded and punished similarly across partisan ties levels.

Figure C.4: Marginal means of responsibility gap by partisan ties and performance

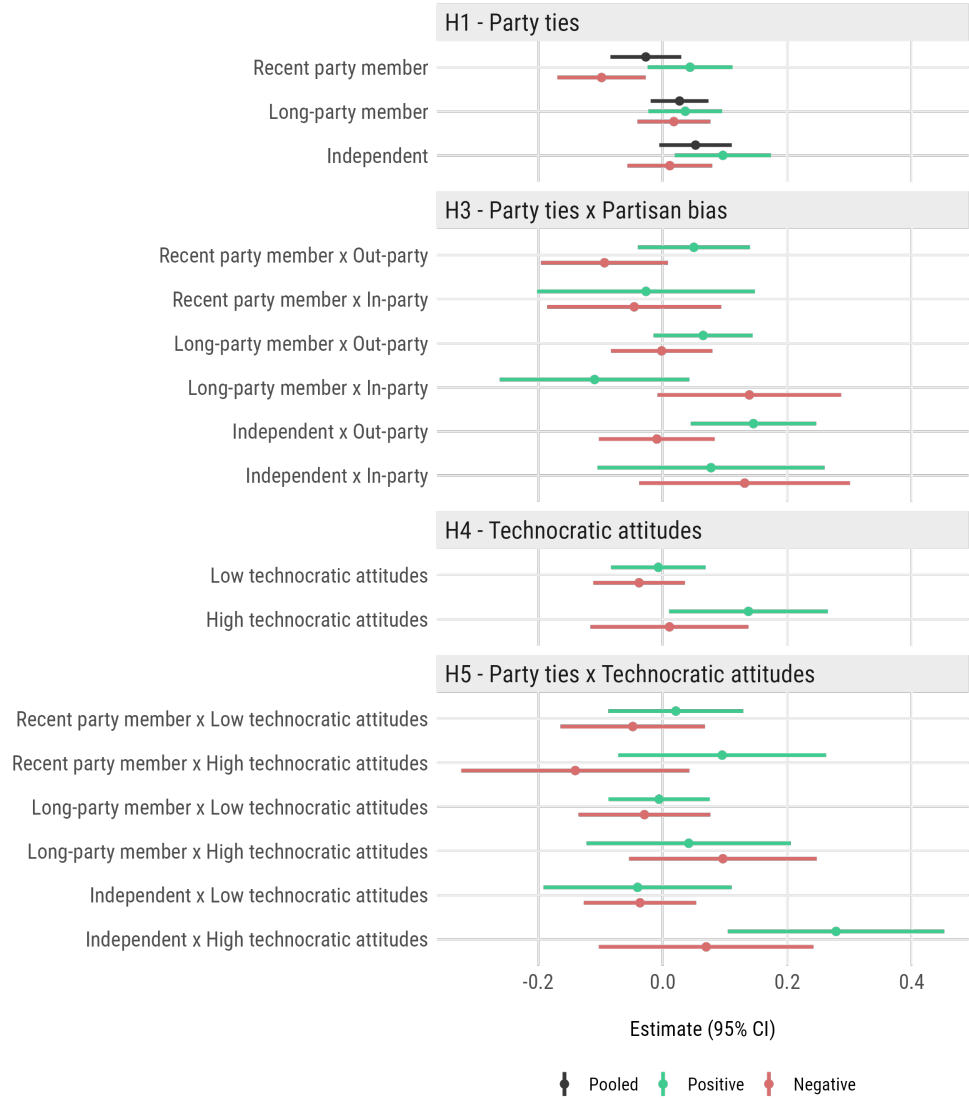
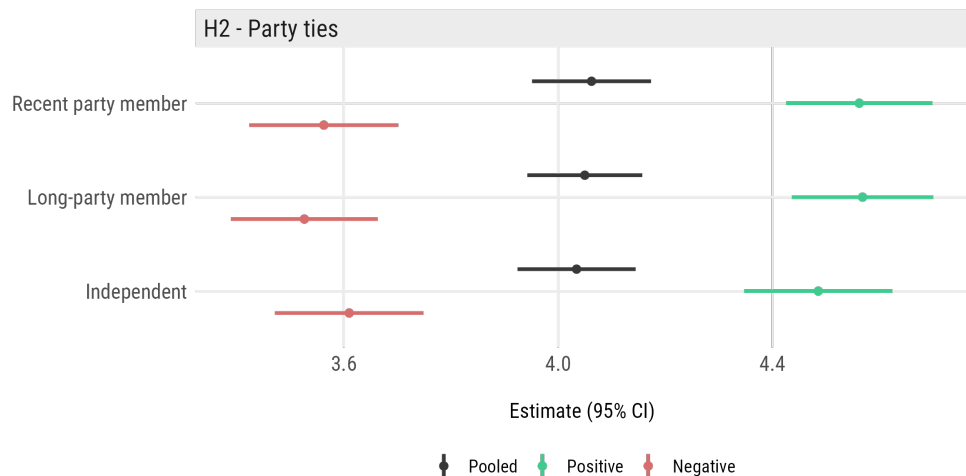


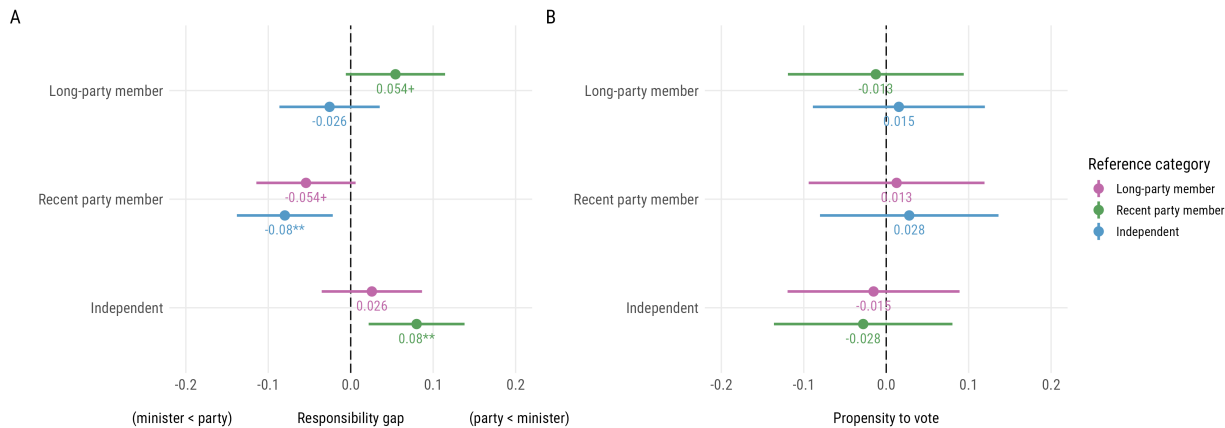
Figure C.5: Marginal means of the propensity to vote by partisan ties and performance



Reference Categories

Figure C.6 displays the estimated effect of partisan ties on the responsibility gap and the propensity to vote when changing the reference category of partisan ties. The estimates indicate a null effect and remain relatively stable.

Figure C.6: Average marginal effect of partisan ties on responsibility gap (A) and propensity to vote (B) by reference categories

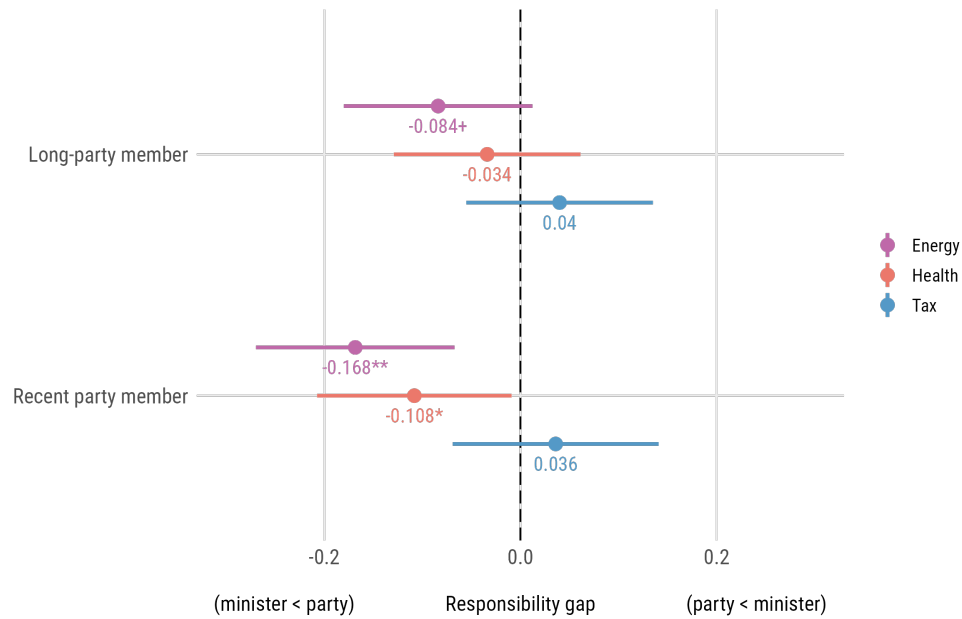


C.4 Exploratory Analyses

Presented in Figure C.7 is the estimated effect of partisan ties on the responsibility gap by policy issues. Respondents were exposed to three possible policy areas: energy prices, health care, and tax reform. I find a stable null effect for long-term party members with an estimate ranging from -0.08 to 0.04. Regarding the effect for recent party members, I find

that the small but significant negative effect found in the main analyses is mostly driven by responses assigned in the context of energy prices (-0.16 , $p < 0.001$) and health care reform (-0.11 , $p < 0.05$).

Figure C.7: Average marginal effect of partisan ties on responsibility gap by policy issues



C.5 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Table C.9: Distribution of socio-demographic variables

		N	Percent
Age	23-34	659	30.9
	35-44	404	19.0
	45-54	548	25.7
	55-64	499	23.4
	65+	20	0.9
Gender	Women	1228	57.7
	Men	900	42.3
	Other	2	0.1
Education	Low	756	35.5
	Med	1236	58.0
	High	138	6.5
Region	Abruzzo	43	2.0
	Calabria	50	2.3
	Emilia Romagna	152	7.1
	Lazio	177	8.3
	Veneto	180	8.5
	Puglia	148	6.9
	Lombardia	463	21.7
	Toscana	100	4.7
	Sardegna	87	4.1
	Sicilia	192	9.0
	Trentino Alto Adige	21	1.0
	Campania	149	7.0
	Friuli Venezia Giulia	51	2.4
	Marche	50	2.3
	Piemonte	171	8.0
	Liguria	54	2.5
	Umbria	16	0.8
	Basilicata	14	0.7
	Molise	9	0.4
	Valle d'Aosta	3	0.1

Table C.10: Distribution of socio-demographic variables by gender

		Women (N=1228)		Men (N=900)		Other (N=2)	
		N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.
Age	23-34	391	31.8	268	29.8	0	0.0
	35-44	240	19.5	164	18.2	0	0.0
	45-54	309	25.2	237	26.3	2	100.0
	55-64	278	22.6	221	24.6	0	0.0
	65+	10	0.8	10	1.1	0	0.0
Education	Low	471	38.4	285	31.7	0	0.0
	Med	676	55.0	559	62.1	1	50.0
	High	81	6.6	56	6.2	1	50.0

C.6 Additional Details on Research Design

List of Names Used in the Vignette

Table C.11: Selected first and last names by gender

Male	Female
Antonio Rossi	Anna Bianchi
Marco Sartori	Maria Rossi
Giovanni Moretti	Giulia Romano
Davide Gallo	Sofia Conti
Alessandro Vitale	Francesca Russo
Pietro Giordano	Valentina De Luca
Giuseppe Marino	Martina Costa
Vincenzo Rinaldi	Giorgia Marchetti

Vignette Examples for Each Policy Issue

Tax. The Italian left-wing government, which includes Partito Democratico, has made changes to the nation's tax policy. In an effort by the government to bolster the purchasing power of its citizens, this tax reform significantly decreased Italians' purchasing power. This means that Italians now have to spend less money on goods and services.

The reform was drafted and implemented by the Minister of Economy and Finance, Lucia Mancini, a former civil servant. Mancini, a 38-year-old from Lazio, was appointed by Partito Democratico. She has never held a membership to any political party.

Energy. The Italian right-wing government, which includes Lega, has made changes to the nation's energy policy. In an effort by the government to bring down energy prices for its citizens, this energy reform significantly decreased energy costs for Italian households. This means that Italians now have to spend less money on basic necessities.

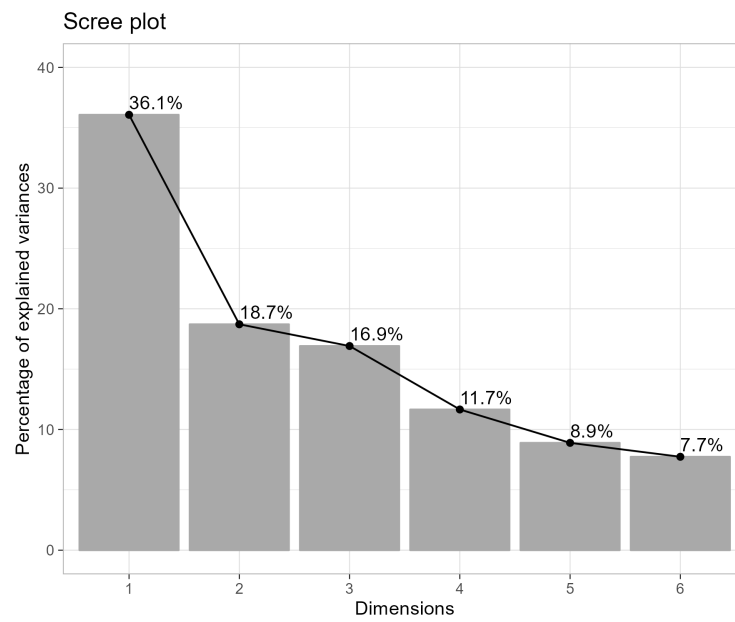
The reform was drafted and implemented by the Minister of Environment and Energy Security, Caterina Castelli, a former lawyer. Castelli, a 50-year-old from Lombardia, was appointed by Lega. She has recently become a member of the party and has never held a position within the party.

Health. The Italian left-wing government, which includes Movimento 5 Stelle, has made changes to the nation's healthcare policy. In an effort by the government to tackle overcrowding in hospitals across the country, this healthcare reform significantly increased waiting times in emergency rooms. This means that Italians now have to wait for more time to receive treatment.

This reform was drafted and implemented by the Minister of Health, Pietro Russo, a former business manager. Russo, a 63-year-old from Campania, was appointed by Movimento 5 Stelle. He has been a prominent member of the party and has held a position within the party's leadership body.

Principal Component Analysis - Technocratic Attitudes

Figure C.8: Scree plot



D Raising Standards? Citizen Sanctions for Corruption by Independent and Partisan Ministers

Study 1

D.1 Regression Models

Table D.1: OLS Regression models for Hypotheses 1 and 2

	H1 S	H1 R	H2 S	H2 R
Partisanship (Ref. In-party)				
Out-party	0.63*** (0.17)	0.72*** (0.19)		
Independent	0.41* (0.16)	0.41* (0.18)		
Female minister			-0.01 (0.08)	0.21* (0.09)
Constant	6.83*** (0.15)	7.54*** (0.16)	7.29*** (0.06)	7.93*** (0.06)
Num.Obs.	2615	2615	3139	3139
R2	0.005	0.006	0.000	0.002
R2 Adj.	0.005	0.006	0.000	0.001

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. S: Sanction severity.

R: Reappointment disapproval.

Table D.2: OLS Regression models for Hypothesis 4

	H4 S	H4 R
Partisanship (Ref. Independent)		
Out-party	0.17 (0.14)	0.29+ (0.16)
In-party	-0.60** (0.23)	-0.09 (0.25)
Female minister	-0.11 (0.12)	0.28* (0.13)
Out-party $\times$ Female minister	0.10 (0.20)	0.02 (0.22)
In-party $\times$ Female minister	0.40 (0.33)	-0.65+ (0.35)
Constant	7.29*** (0.09)	7.81*** (0.09)
Num.Obs.	2615	2615
R2	0.006	0.010
R2 Adj.	0.004	0.008

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. S: Sanction severity. R: Reappointment disapproval.

Table D.3: OLS Regression models estimated using a binary measure of partisanship

	H1 S	H1 R	H4 S	H4 R
Partisan minister	0.08 (0.08)	0.15+ (0.09)	-0.01 (0.12)	0.22+ (0.13)
Female minister			-0.11 (0.12)	0.28* (0.13)
Partisan minister $\times$ Female minister			0.18 (0.17)	-0.14 (0.18)
Constant	7.24*** (0.06)	7.95*** (0.07)	7.29*** (0.09)	7.81*** (0.09)
Num.Obs.	3139	3139	3139	3139
R2	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.003
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.002

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. S: Sanction severity. R: Reappointment disapproval.

D.2 Robustness Checks

Attentive Sample

The attentive sample is defined as the sample of respondents who took at least 10 minutes to complete the survey, with a final sample of 2,162 observations (68% of the total sample).

Table D.4: OLS Regression models estimated on the attentive sample (H1, H2)

	H1 S	H1 R	H2 S	H2 R
Partisanship (Ref. In-party)				
Out-party	0.92*** (0.17)	0.95*** (0.19)		
Independent	0.48** (0.16)	0.54** (0.18)		
Female minister			-0.07 (0.09)	0.11 (0.10)
Constant	6.96*** (0.15)	7.71*** (0.17)	7.57*** (0.06)	8.29*** (0.07)
Num.Obs.	2162	2162	2589	2589
R2	0.015	0.013	0.000	0.001
R2 Adj.	0.014	0.012	0.000	0.000

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. S: Sanction severity.

R: Reappointment disapproval.

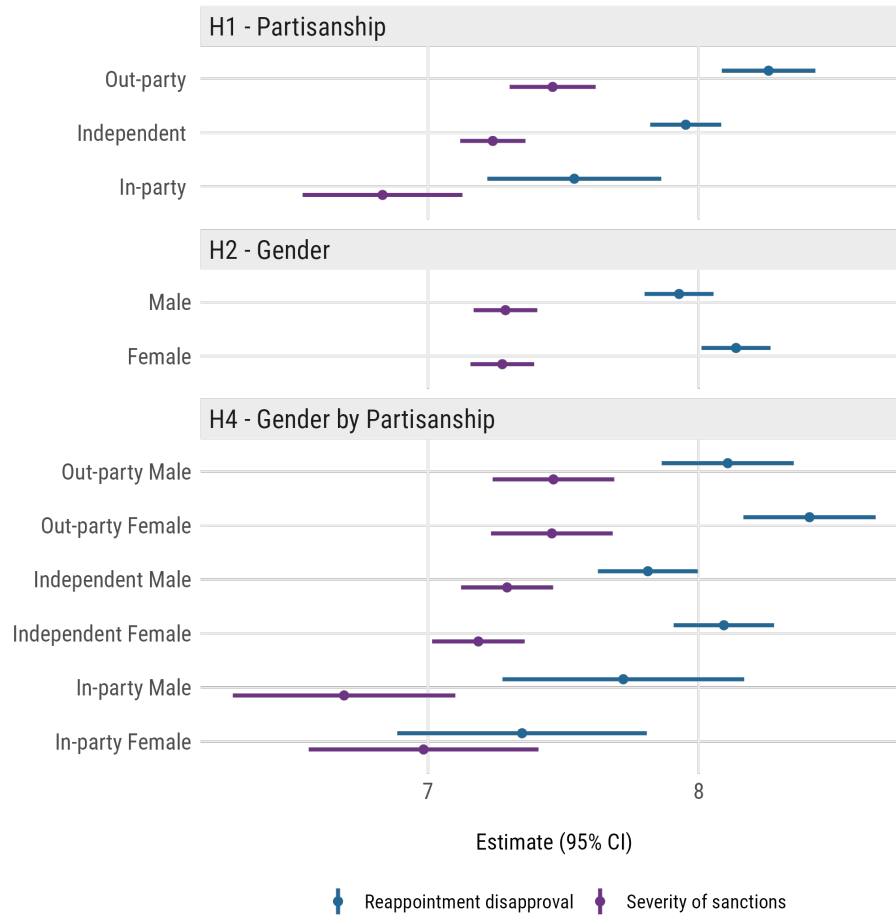
Table D.5: OLS Regression models estimated on the attentive sample (H4)

	H4 S	H4 R
Partisanship (Ref. Independent)		
Out-party	0.31*	0.33*
	(0.15)	(0.17)
In-party	-0.62**	-0.26
	(0.23)	(0.26)
Female minister	-0.21+	0.13
	(0.13)	(0.14)
Out-party $\times$ Female minister	0.26	0.18
	(0.21)	(0.23)
In-party $\times$ Female minister	0.28	-0.55
	(0.33)	(0.36)
Constant	7.55***	8.18***
	(0.09)	(0.10)
Num.Obs.	2162	2162
R2	0.017	0.015
R2 Adj.	0.014	0.013

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. S:
Sanction severity. R: Reappointment disapproval.

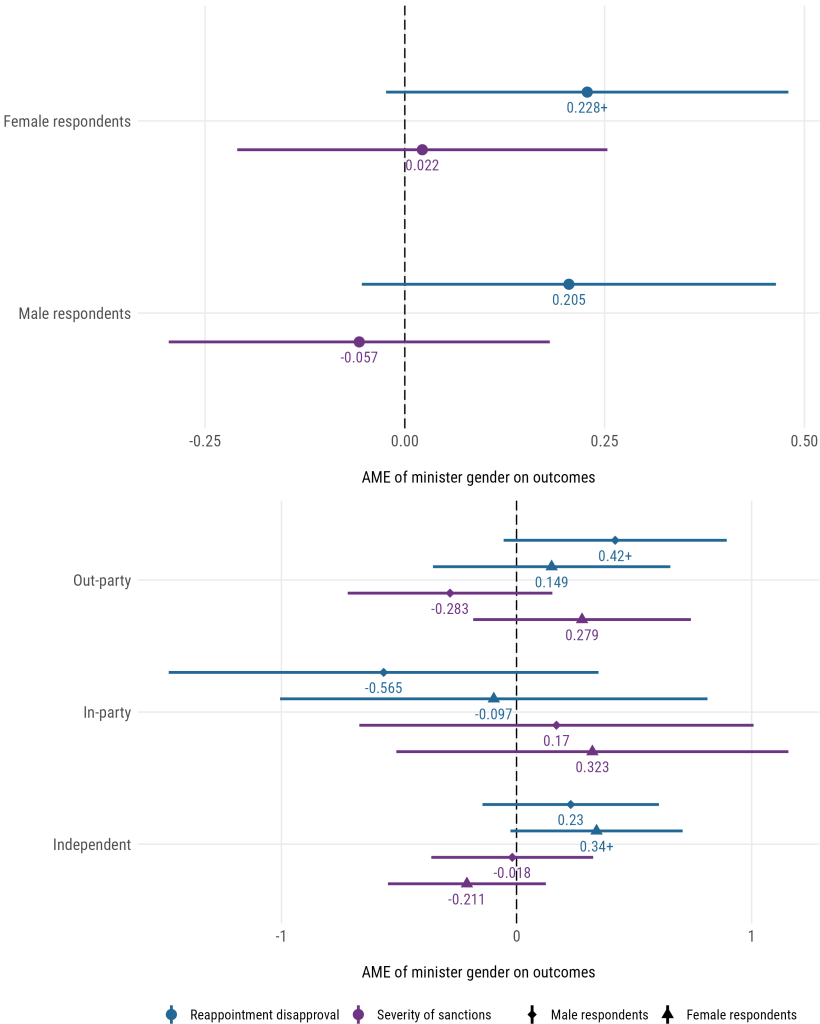
Marginal Means

Figure D.1: Marginal means by minister partisanship and minister gender



D.3 Exploratory Analyses

Figure D.2: Gender effects by respondents' gender



D.4 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Table D.6: Distribution of socio-demographic variables

		N	Percent
Age	16-24	328	10.4
	25-34	543	17.3
	35-44	563	17.9
	45-54	569	18.1
	55-64	606	19.3
	65+	530	16.9
Gender	Men	1512	48.2
	Women	1602	51.0
Education	Elementary or lower secondary school	269	8.6
	Polytechnic, BMS	106	3.4
	Vocational school	1629	51.9
	Upper secondary school	590	18.8
	University degree	511	16.3
Region	Burgenland	110	3.5
	Carinthia	183	5.8
	Lower Austria	617	19.7
	Salzburg	185	5.9
	Styria	412	13.1
	Upper Austria	526	16.8
	Vienna	728	23.2
	Vorarlberg	366	11.7
Household size	1 person	613	19.5
	2 persons	1069	34.1
	3+ persons	786	25.0

Study 2

D.5 Regression Models

Table D.7: OLS Regression models for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

	I	II	III	IV
Partisanship (Ref. In-party)				
Out-party	0.66*** (0.05)			0.84*** (0.07)
Independent	0.50*** (0.06)			0.56*** (0.08)
Female minister		-0.06* (0.03)		
Ethnic minority minister			0.07** (0.03)	
Misuse of public funds				2.07*** (0.09)
Out-party $\times$ Misuse of public funds				-0.31** (0.09)
Independent $\times$ Misuse of public funds				-0.10 (0.11)
Constant	6.57*** (0.06)	7.16*** (0.04)	7.09*** (0.04)	4.52*** (0.07)
Num.Obs.	38626	51648	51648	38626
R2	0.092	0.087	0.087	0.090
R2 Adj.	0.091	0.087	0.087	0.089
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	

Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice. Malpractice severity is transformed into a dichotomous variable, where 1 represents malpractices related to misuse of public funds, and 0 refers to disclosure of assets or using government-issued cars for private purposes.

Table D.8: OLS Regression models for Hypothesis 4

	I	II
Partisanship (Ref. Independent)		
Out-party	0.16** (0.05)	0.15** (0.05)
In-party	-0.51*** (0.08)	-0.45*** (0.08)
Female minister	-0.06 (0.06)	
Ethnic minority minister		0.08 (0.06)
Out-party $\times$ Female minister	-0.01 (0.07)	
In-party $\times$ Female minister	0.02 (0.11)	
Out-party $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		0.02 (0.07)
In-party $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		-0.09 (0.10)
Constant	7.10*** (0.06)	7.03*** (0.06)
Num.Obs.	38626	38626
R2	0.092	0.092
R2 Adj.	0.091	0.092
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓

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

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice.

Table D.9: OLS Regression models for Hypothesis 5

	I	II	III
Female minister	-0.11 (0.20)		-0.38+ (0.22)
Ethnic minority minister		0.38** (0.12)	
Partisan	0.11 (0.16)	0.22* (0.10)	-0.11 (0.18)
Affect women	0.06** (0.02)		
Affect women $\times$ Female minister	0.01 (0.03)		
Partisan $\times$ Female minister	0.08 (0.22)		0.35 (0.25)
Partisan $\times$ Affect women	0.00 (0.02)		
Partisan $\times$ Affect women $\times$ Female minister	-0.01 (0.03)		
Affect ethnic minorities		-0.14*** (0.02)	
Affect ethnic minorities $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		-0.06** (0.02)	
Partisan $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		-0.09 (0.13)	
Partisan $\times$ Affect ethnic minorities		-0.02 (0.02)	
Partisan $\times$ Affect ethnic minorities $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		0.02 (0.02)	
Sexism			-0.98*** (0.06)
Sexism $\times$ Female minister			0.11 (0.08)
Partisan $\times$ Sexism			0.07 (0.06)
Partisan $\times$ Sexism $\times$ Female minister			-0.12 (0.09)
Constant	6.64*** (0.16)	7.69*** (0.10)	9.95*** (0.18)
Num.Obs.	51264	51324	51630
R2	0.091	0.123	0.151
R2 Adj.	0.090	0.123	0.150
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓

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

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice.

Table D.10: OLS Regression models estimated using a binary measure of partisanship

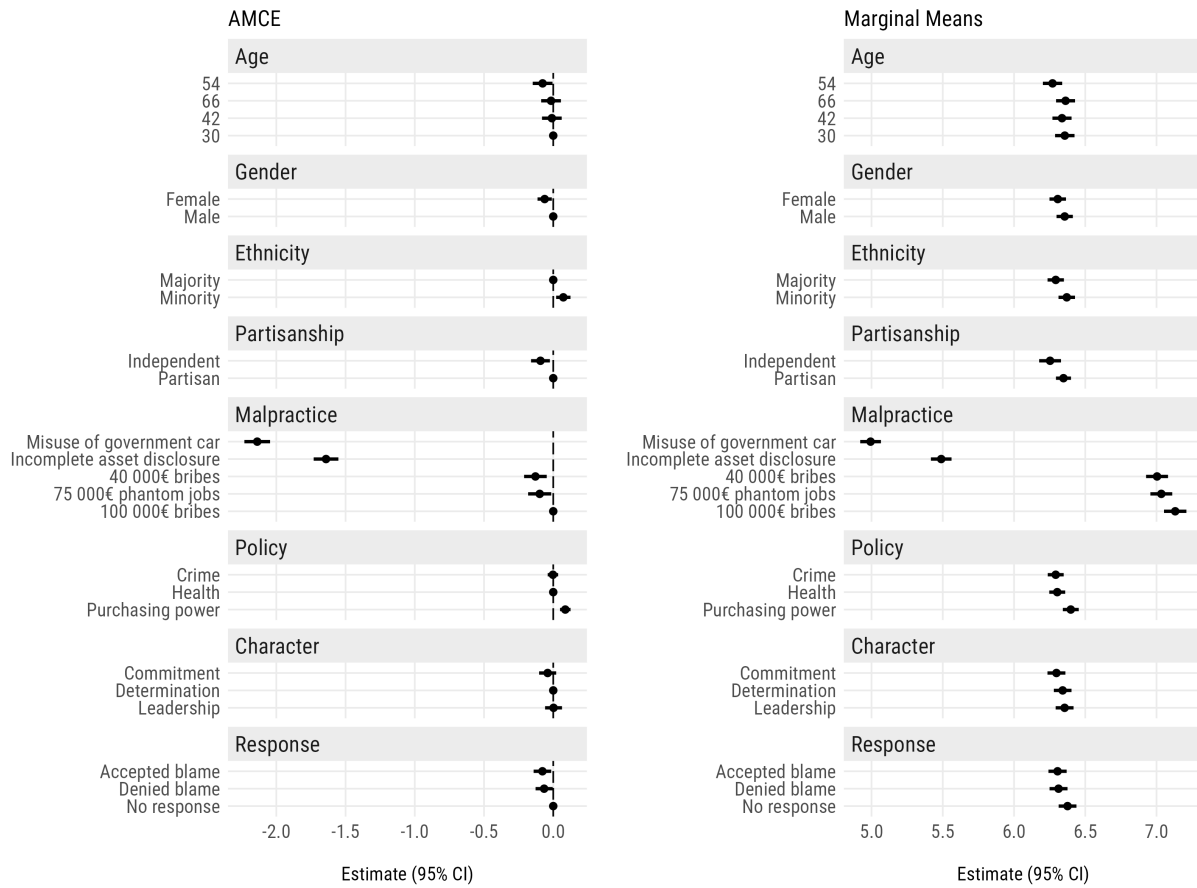
	I	II	III
Partisan	0.09** (0.03)	0.09+ (0.05)	0.10* (0.05)
Female minister		-0.06 (0.06)	
Partisan $\times$ Female minister		-0.01 (0.07)	
Ethnic minority minister			0.08 (0.06)
Partisan $\times$ Ethnic minority minister			-0.01 (0.07)
Constant	7.05*** (0.05)	7.08*** (0.06)	7.01*** (0.06)
Num.Obs.	51648	51648	51648
R2	0.087	0.087	0.087
R2 Adj.	0.087	0.087	0.087
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓

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

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice.

D.6 AMCE and Marginal Means Across All Attributes

Figure D.3: AMCE and marginal means across all attributes



D.7 Robustness Checks

Attentive Sample

Table D.11: OLS Regression models estimated on the attentive sample for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3

	I	II	III
Partisanship (Ref. In-party)			
Out-party	0.53*** (0.06)		
Independent	0.36*** (0.07)		
Female minister		-0.05 (0.03)	
Ethnic minority minister			0.06+ (0.03)
Constant	7.68*** (0.07)	8.11*** (0.05)	8.06*** (0.05)
Num.Obs.	21820	28932	28932
R2	0.193	0.192	0.192
R2 Adj.	0.193	0.192	0.192
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓

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

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice.

Table D.12: OLS Regression models estimated on the attentive sample for Hypothesis 4

	I	II
Partisanship (Ref. Independent)		
Out-party	0.17** (0.06)	0.19** (0.06)
In-party	-0.35*** (0.09)	-0.36*** (0.09)
Female minister	-0.04 (0.07)	
Ethnic minority minister		0.09 (0.08)
Out-party $\times$ Female minister	0.01 (0.09)	
In-party $\times$ Female minister	-0.02 (0.12)	
Out-party $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		-0.04 (0.09)
In-party $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		0.02 (0.12)
Constant	8.06*** (0.07)	7.99*** (0.07)
Num.Obs.	21820	21820
R2	0.193	0.193
R2 Adj.	0.193	0.193
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓

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

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice.

Table D.13: OLS Regression models estimated on the attentive sample for Hypothesis 5

	I	II	III
Female minister	-0.01 (0.29)		-0.76** (0.30)
Ethnic minority minister		0.42** (0.15)	
Partisan	0.04 (0.24)	0.22* (0.11)	-0.29 (0.23)
Affect women	-0.01 (0.03)		
Affect women $\times$ Female minister	0.00 (0.04)		
Partisan $\times$ Female minister	-0.08 (0.32)		0.79* (0.33)
Partisan $\times$ Affect women	0.00 (0.03)		
Partisan $\times$ Affect women $\times$ Female minister	0.01 (0.04)		
Affect ethnic minorities		-0.08*** (0.02)	
Affect ethnic minorities $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		-0.07** (0.03)	
Partisan $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		-0.11 (0.16)	
Partisan $\times$ Affect ethnic minorities		-0.03 (0.02)	
Partisan $\times$ Affect ethnic minorities $\times$ Ethnic minority minister		0.02 (0.03)	
Sexism			-0.47*** (0.09)
Sexism $\times$ Female minister			0.26* (0.11)
Partisan $\times$ Sexism			0.13 (0.09)
Partisan $\times$ Sexism $\times$ Female minister			-0.29* (0.12)
Constant	8.13*** (0.24)	8.36*** (0.12)	9.35*** (0.23)
Num.Obs.	28854	28878	28926
R2	0.193	0.212	0.201
R2 Adj.	0.192	0.212	0.201
Clustered SE (Respondent-level)	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓

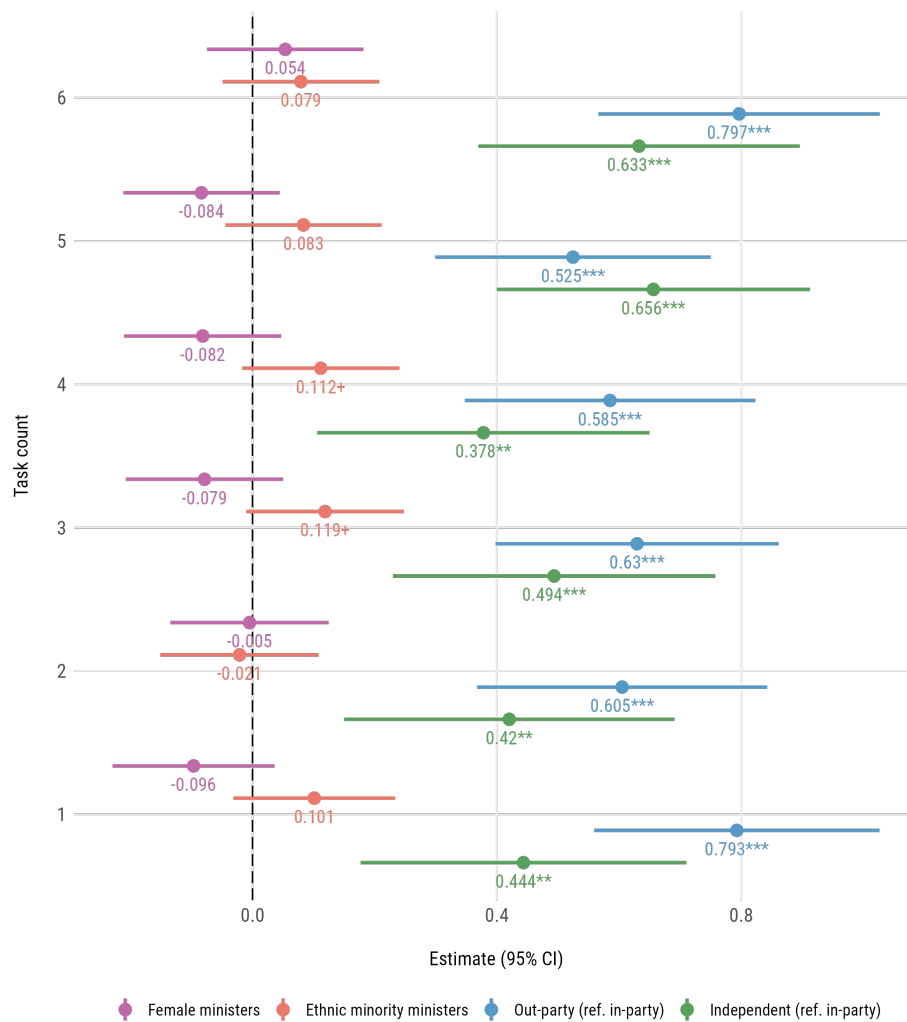
Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models. Controls: type of malpractice.

Task Count

Figure D.4 displays the effect of minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity by the number of completed tasks. The direction of these effects remains consistent with the main analyses. This analysis confirms that the null to small effect sizes of demographic traits are not attributable to task fatigue. If task fatigue were a factor, the effect of demographic traits would likely be more pronounced in the first task and diminish as the number of tasks increased. However, the estimates remain stable across all stages of task completion.

Figure D.4: Average marginal effect of minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval by the number of completed tasks

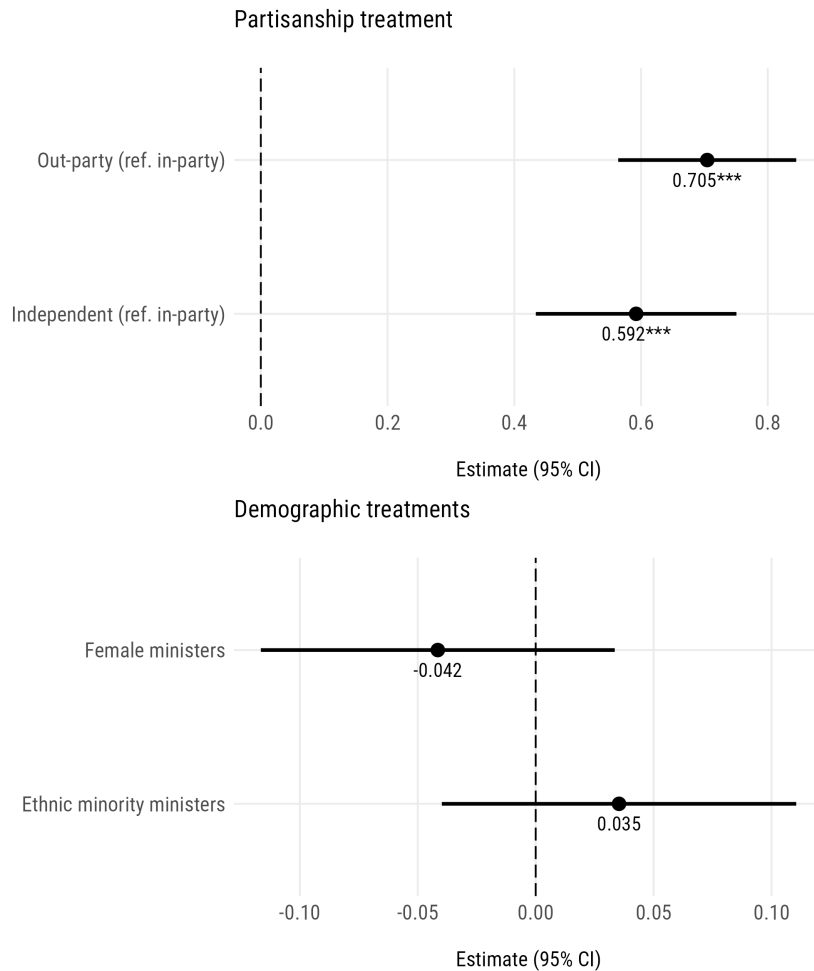


Subset of Three Random Tasks

Figure D.5 displays the effect minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity on a subset of three randomly drawn tasks ($N = 25\,824$). The effects of minister partisanship and gender

remain consistent with the main analyses. However, the effect of minister ethnicity becomes null, suggesting that its significance may depend on the specific tasks included. This further reinforces the uncertainty surrounding this finding.

Figure D.5: Effect of minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval on a subset of three random tasks



Marginal Means

Figures D.6 and D.7 display the marginal means for all hypothesis tests. For Hypothesis 1, the means across partisanship conditions align with the main findings: out-party and independent ministers receive harsher sanctions than in-party ministers. For Hypothesis 2, the means by gender largely overlap, indicating minimal differences. This is consistent with the null effect observed in the main analysis. For Hypothesis 3, the means by ethnicity are similar to the differences observed by gender, despite ethnicity having a significant effect in the main analysis. As discussed, the effect size is small, and examining the means sug-

gests that, substantively, the differences by ethnicity are negligible. For Hypothesis 4, the means by partisanship and demographic traits confirm the finding that partisanship trumps demographic factors in shaping voter sanctions.

Figure D.6: Marginal means of reappointment disapproval by minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity

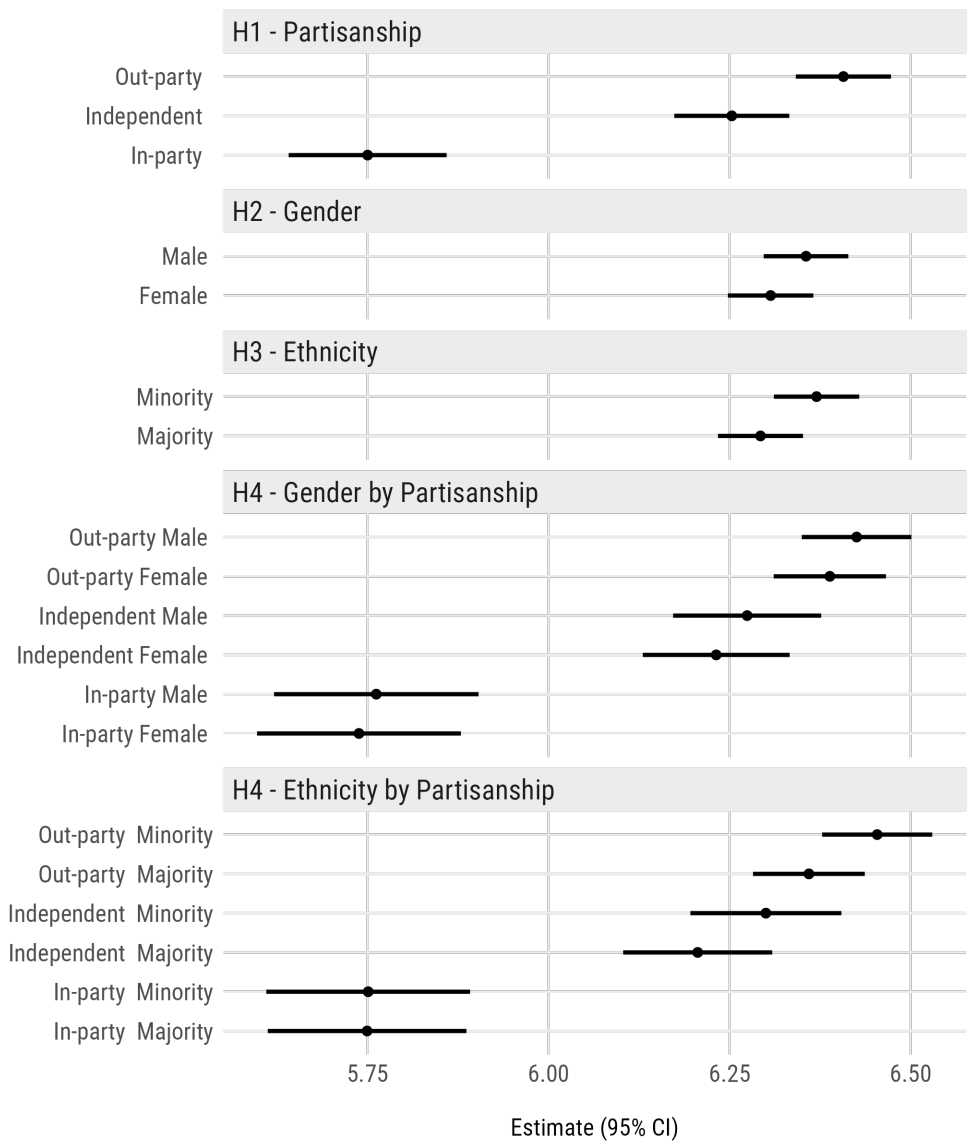
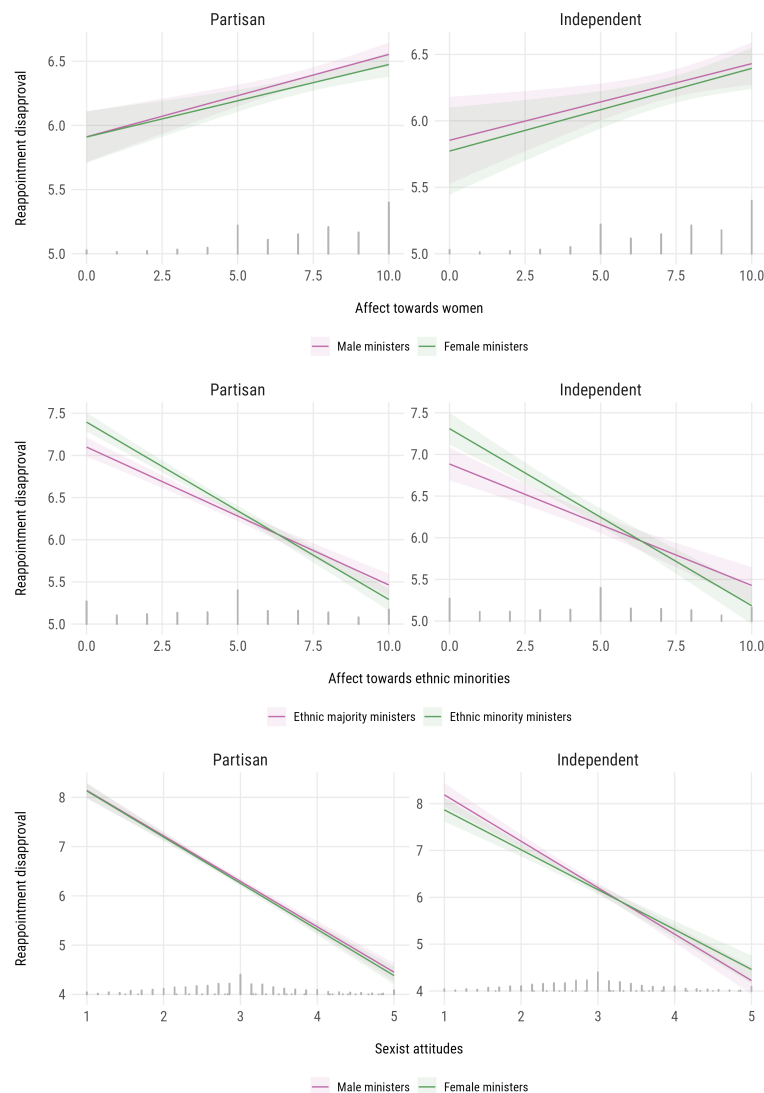


Figure D.7 presents the means for Hypothesis 5. For example, the hypothesis would be supported if the slope differences between gender levels varied by partisanship and independence across group affect levels. In the first panel, the means for male and female ministers remain similar across both partisan and independent conditions, regardless of respondents' affect toward women. In the second panel, respondents with lower affect toward

ethnic minorities impose higher sanctions on all ministers, with a slightly greater sanction for minorities. However, the slope differences remain similar across partisanship and independence. In the third panel, respondents with lower sexist attitudes impose higher sanctions on all ministers in the partisan condition, while in the independent condition, they impose slightly higher sanctions on male ministers. In contrast, respondents with higher sexist attitudes impose slightly higher sanctions on female ministers. However, the results indicate that partisanship does not substantively alter the weight of demographic cues, even across varying levels of group affect.

Figure D.7: Marginal means of reappointment disapproval by minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity and by group affect



D.8 Exploratory Analyses

In the following section, I conduct exploratory analyses examining differences by country, respondent gender, and immigration background, as well as interactions between minister gender and ethnicity.

Figure D.8 shows the effect of minister partisanship, gender, and ethnicity by country. The effect of partisanship is consistent across countries, with a slightly stronger effect in Germany and France and a weaker effect in Romania and Sweden, but the hypothesis is confirmed across all cases. The effect of minister gender varies by country. Consistent with the main analysis, the effect is null in Germany and France. However, in Sweden and Romania, respondents tend to impose lower sanctions on female ministers compared to male ministers. This difference could reflect gender norms and expectations in these countries. In Sweden, strong gender egalitarian values may lead to a perception that female ministers are less blameworthy or should be judged more leniently. In Romania, traditional gender norms may similarly result in greater leniency toward female ministers, potentially due to a perception of them as less politically dominant or responsible for governance failures. The estimates for the effect of ethnicity overlap across countries, with a slightly larger effect in Romania. This could be due to the salience of the selected ethnic minority group in Romania, Hungarians, who have an ethnic party, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania. As a result, ethnicity may serve as a stronger political cue in Romania.

Table D.14 presents the regression models for the remaining exploratory analyses. The interaction between minister gender and minister ethnicity is not significant (Model I). The interaction between minister gender and respondent gender is significant at $p < 0.05$ and indicates that female respondents tend to give lower sanctions to female ministers compared to male respondents (Model II). Respondent immigration background refers to individuals from the first, second, or third generation of immigrants from any country, comprising a sample of $N = 1,589$ (18%). While restricting the sample to respondents from countries representing the chosen ethnic minority in each country would provide more accurate insights, it reduces the sample size to only $N = 280$. The interaction between minister ethnicity and respondents' immigration background is not significant (Model III).

Figure D.8: Effect of minister partisanship, gender and ethnicity on reappointment disapproval by country

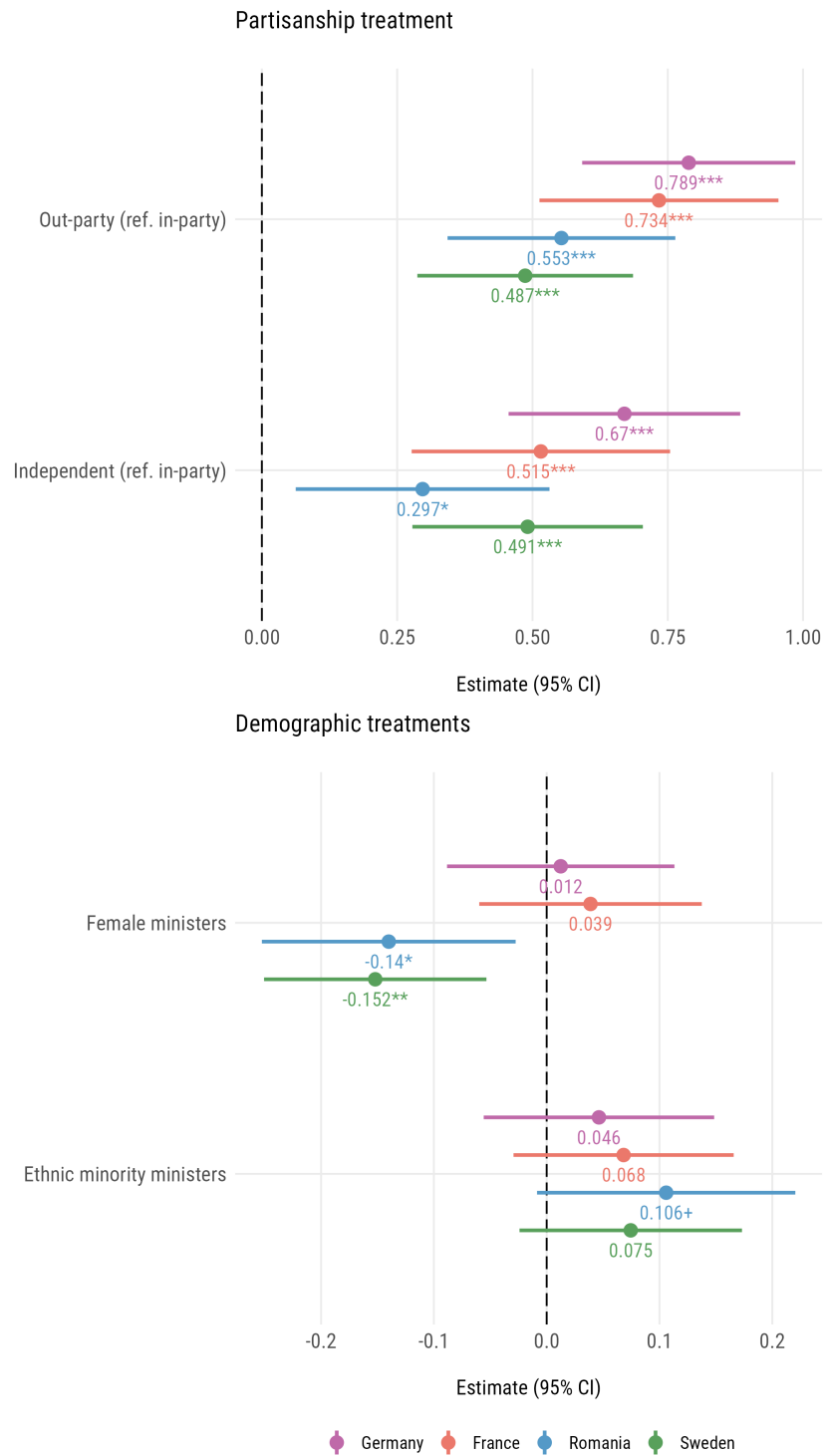


Table D.14: Regression models - Exploratory analyses

	I	II	III
Female minister	-0.07* (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	
Ethnic minority minister	0.06+ (0.04)		0.08** (0.03)
Female minister $\times$ Ethnic minority minister	0.02 (0.05)		
Female respondents		0.12* (0.06)	
Female minister $\times$ Female respondents		-0.13* (0.05)	
Immigrant-background respondents			0.05 (0.07)
Ethnic minority minister $\times$ Immigrant-background respondents			-0.06 (0.07)
Constant	7.13*** (0.05)	7.10*** (0.05)	7.09*** (0.04)
Num.Obs.	51648	51486	51648
R2	0.087	0.087	0.087
R2 Adj.	0.087	0.087	0.087
Clustered SE (Respondent level)	✓	✓	✓

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

Coefficients and standard errors from OLS models.

D.9 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample by Country

Table D.15: Distribution of socio-demographic variables - Germany

		N	Percent
Age	18-29	401	18.6
	30-39	387	17.9
	40-49	511	23.7
	50-59	447	20.7
	60-69	412	19.1
	70+	2	0.1
Gender	Men	1010	46.8
	Women	1145	53.0
Education	Low	233	10.8
	Med	1379	63.8
	High	548	25.4
Region	Baden-Württemberg	257	11.9
	Bayern	332	15.4
	Berlin	107	5.0
	Brandenburg	71	3.3
	Bremen	15	0.7
	Hamburg	53	2.5
	Hessen	165	7.6
	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	40	1.9
	Niedersachsen	191	8.8
	Nordrhein-Westfalen	486	22.5
	Rheinland-Pfalz	104	4.8
	Saarland	23	1.1
	Sachsen	112	5.2
	Sachsen-Anhalt	64	3.0
	Schleswig-Holstein	80	3.7
	Thüringen	60	2.8
Immigration background	Majority group	1778	82.3
	First generation	89	4.1
	Second generation	194	9.0
	Third generation	99	4.6

Table D.16: Distribution of socio-demographic variables - France

		N	Percent
Age	18-29	517	24.0
	30-39	452	21.0
	40-49	461	21.4
	50-59	427	19.8
	60-69	287	13.3
	70+	11	0.5
Gender	Men	1019	47.3
	Women	1132	52.5
Education	Low	55	2.6
	Med	1347	62.5
	High	753	34.9
Region	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	288	13.4
	Bourgogne-Franche-Comté	84	3.9
	Bretagne	152	7.1
	Centre-Val de Loire	112	5.2
	Corse	12	0.6
	Grand Est	134	6.2
	Guadeloupe	1	0.0
	Guyane	1	0.0
	Hauts-de-France	107	5.0
	Île-de-France	547	25.4
	La Réunion	2	0.1
	Martinique	2	0.1
	Mayotte	1	0.0
	Normandie	74	3.4
	Nouvelle-Aquitaine	147	6.8
	Occitanie	133	6.2
	Pays de la Loire	157	7.3
	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	201	9.3
Immigration background	Majority group	1660	77.0
	First generation	44	2.0
	Second generation	252	11.7
	Third generation	199	9.2

Table D.17: Distribution of socio-demographic variables - Romania

		N	Percent
Age	18-29	508	23.6
	30-39	539	25.1
	40-49	493	22.9
	50-59	397	18.5
	60-69	207	9.6
	70+	5	0.2
Gender	Men	1053	49.0
	Women	1089	50.7
Education	Low	183	8.5
	Med	1445	67.2
	High	522	24.3
Region	București - Ilfov	316	14.7
	Centru	239	11.1
	Nord-Est	373	17.3
	Nord-Vest	219	10.2
	Sud-Est	283	13.2
	Sud-Vest Oltenia	210	9.8
	Sud - Muntenia	310	14.4
	Vest	200	9.3
Immigration background	Majority group	2071	96.3
	First generation	9	0.4
	Second generation	31	1.4
	Third generation	39	1.8

Note: Centru (Alba, Brașov, Covasna, Harghita, Mureș, Sibiu), Nord-Est (Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui), Nord-Vest (Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj), Sud-Est (Brăila, Buzău, Constanța, Galați, Tulcea, Vrancea), Sud-Vest Oltenia (Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt, Vâlcea), Sud - Muntenia (Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova, Teleorman), Vest (Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, Timiș)

Table D.18: Distribution of socio-demographic variables - Sweden

		N	Percent
Age	18-29	516	24.1
	30-39	418	19.5
	40-49	419	19.6
	50-59	391	18.2
	60-69	389	18.2
	70+	10	0.5
Gender	Men	1000	46.7
	Women	1133	52.9
Education	Low	227	10.6
	Med	1002	46.8
	High	914	42.7
Region	Blekinge	40	1.9
	Dalarnas	65	3.0
	Gävleborgs	61	2.8
	Gotlands	7	0.3
	Hallands	66	3.1
	Jämtlands	23	1.1
	Jönköpings	68	3.2
	Kalmar	52	2.4
	Kronobergs	37	1.7
	Norrbottnens	41	1.9
	Örebro	70	3.3
	Östergötlands	104	4.9
	Skåne	304	14.2
	Södermanlands	68	3.2
	Stockholms	508	23.7
	Uppsala	88	4.1
	Värmlands	59	2.8
	Västerbottens	41	1.9
	Västernorrlands	53	2.5
	Västmanlands	41	1.9
	Västra Götalands	347	16.2
Immigration background	Majority group	1510	70.5
	First generation	215	10.0
	Second generation	291	13.6
	Third generation	127	5.9

D.10 Additional Details on Research Design

Selected First and Last Names by Country

Table D.19: Selected first and last names by country

Country	Male first name	Female first name	Last names
France	Thomas, Vincent, Alexandre, Mehdi, Karim, Nabil	Marie, Claire, Camille, Samira, Yasmine, Amina	Martin, Moreau, Guillot, Vasseur, Lefèvre, Bertrand, Ziani, Ben Salah, Bouzid, Amrani, Othmani, Ayari
Germany	Andreas, Christoph, Martin, Hasan, Ali, Osman	Anna, Sandra, Katharina, Meryem, Yasemin, Leyla	Wagner, Fischer, Gruber, Mayer, Hofmann, Müller, Kaya, Demir, Şahin, Yıldız, Şimşek, Çetin
Sweden	Johan, Erik, Lars, Ahmed, Omar, Samir	Emma, Sofia, Karin, Layla, Hana, Fatima	Andersson, Lindberg, Svensson, Larsson, Bergström, Nilsson, Jaber, Nassar, Yusuf, Kadir, Hassan, Al-Sayed
Romania	Andrei, Gabriel, Mihai, István, László, Gábor	Maria, Ana, Angelika, Anikó, Zsófia, Eszter	Ionescu, Popescu, Dumitru, Radu, Stanescu, Marinescu, Kovács, Szabó, Nagy, Tóth, Kocsis, Molnár

Note: First names in bold are only shown in combination with last names in bold and vice versa.

Selected Political Parties by Country

Table D.20: Selected political parties by country

Country	Political parties
France	Renaissance, Parti socialiste, Les Républicains, Europe Écologie Les Verts, La France Insoumise
Germany	SPD, CDU, GRÜNE, FDP, Die Linke
Sweden	Socialdemokratiska, Moderaterna, Kristdemokraterna, Miljöpartiet, Liberalerna
Romania	Partidul Social Democrat, Partidul Național Liberal, Uniunea Salvați România, Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România

Question Wording for Sexism Scale

Table D.21: Question wording for sexism scale

Variable	Survey items
Sexist attitudes	Women who complain about harassment cause more problems than they solve. Sexual harassment of women in the workplace is no longer a problem. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men. Many women are seeking special favors under guise of equality. Women are too easily offended. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess. Compared to men, women have a better sense of what is right and wrong in society.

Vignette Examples

Purchasing power. Minister Thomas Moreau, independent from any political party, has been widely praised for his ability to drive key reforms that have increased citizens' purchasing power. His efforts earned him recognition from consumer rights advocates and public support for his leadership. However, recent substantial evidence suggests that Minister Thomas Moreau has accepted €40,000 in bribes for personal gain. The 54-year-old has not yet responded to the accusations.

Health. Minister Marie Lefèvre, a long-term member of the Parti socialiste, has been widely praised for her ability to drive key reforms that have decreased waiting times

in emergency rooms. Her efforts earned her recognition from patient rights organizations and public support for her determination. However, recent substantial evidence suggests that Minister Marie Lefèvre has failed to provide a complete disclosure of her assets. The 30-year-old responded to the accusations and denied any wrongdoing.

Crime. Minister Samira Bouzid, a long-term member of the *Républicains*, has been widely praised for her ability to drive key reforms that have decreased crime rates. Her efforts earned her recognition from public safety organizations and public support for her commitment. However, recent substantial evidence suggests that Minister Samira Bouzid has created phantom jobs for family members, resulting in the misuse of €75,000 in public funds. The 42-year-old responded to the accusations and denied any wrongdoing.

9 Abstracts

9.1 English

Mass democracy cannot function properly without political parties. Electoral participation, accountability, and competence are central to a functioning democracy, with political parties serving as key actors in these processes. Political legitimacy may weaken when parties lose their importance in democratic representation and alternatives to party-based representation emerge. Yet we know little about how voters respond to these alternatives, particularly in technocratic governance. This dissertation examines democratic processes in European democracies when voters are presented with an alternative to party-based representation: nonpartisan politicians. It considers the impact of independent politicians on citizens at three key moments: at the time of elections, when they enter political office, and in response to their actions while in office. First, it analyzes how the presence of independent politicians on the ballot influences electoral participation. Using a fuzzy regression discontinuity design on ten French local and regional elections (1994–2020), Paper 1 demonstrates that independent candidates increase turnout in local elections. Second, it examines how party independence shapes perceptions of ministerial competence. Using a survey experiment in Austria, Paper 2 shows that technocratic support is determined not only by the perceived advantages of expertise, but also by the disadvantages voters expect from partisan politicians. However, while partisan ministers are perceived as having lower issue competence, they are seen as more effective in negotiations than independents. Third, it investigates how voters hold independents accountable for their performance in office. Paper 3 assesses how electoral accountability works under nonpartisan representation. Based on a survey experiment in Italy, it demonstrates that voters hold parties accountable for the policy failures or successes of the minister they appoint, regardless of whether the minister is an independent or a long-standing party member. Paper 4 explores the question of democratic accountability in the context of corruption scandals. Through a multi-country survey experiment, it finds that voters sanction independents engaged in corruption as severely as out-partisans, while they punish in-partisans the least severely. This dissertation advances debates on the merits and challenges of party government and technocracy by addressing key empirical puzzles, introducing novel theoretical insights, and opening new avenues for research on citizens' role in democratic processes under technocratic representation.

9.2 German

Die Massendemokratie kann ohne politische Parteien nicht korrekt funktionieren. Wahlbeteiligung, Verantwortlichkeit und Kompetenz sind tragende Elemente einer funktionierenden Demokratie, wobei politische Parteien als zentrale Akteure in diesen Prozessen agieren. Die politische Legitimität kann geschwächt werden, wenn Parteien an Bedeutung für die demokratische Repräsentation verlieren und Alternativen zur parteibasierten Repräsentation entstehen. Dennoch wissen wir wenig darüber, wie Wähler:innen auf diese Alternativen reagieren, insbesondere im Kontext technokratischer Regierungsführung. Diese Dissertation untersucht demokratische Prozesse in europäischen Demokratien, in denen Wähler:innen mit einer Alternative zur parteibasierten Repräsentation konfrontiert sind: parteiunabhängige Politiker:innen. Sie betrachtet den Effekt den unabhängige Politiker:innen auf Bürger:innen zu drei entscheidenden Zeitpunkten haben: bei Wahlen, beim Eintritt in ein politisches Amt und als Reaktion auf ihr Verhalten im Amt. Zuerst wird analysiert, wie sich die Präsenz unabhängiger Kandidat:innen auf dem Stimmzettel auf die Wahlbeteiligung auswirkt. Auf Grundlage eines “fuzzy regression discontinuity design” für zehn französische Kommunal- und Regionalwahlen (1994–2020) zeigt Papier 1, dass unabhängige Kandidat:innen die Wahlbeteiligung auf lokaler Ebene erhöhen. Zweitens wird untersucht, wie sich parteipolitische Unabhängigkeit auf die Wahrnehmung ministerieller Kompetenz auswirkt. Mithilfe eines Umfrageexperiments in Österreich zeigt Papier 2, dass technokratische Unterstützung nicht nur von den wahrgenommenen Vorteilen durch ihre Expertise bestimmt wird, sondern auch durch die Nachteile, die Wähler:innen mit parteigebundenen Politiker:innen verbinden. Während parteigebundene Minister:innen zwar in Sachfragen als weniger kompetent gelten, werden sie jedoch in Verhandlungen als effektiver als parteiunabhängige Minister:innen empfunden. Drittens wird analysiert, wie unabhängige Politiker:innen von den Wähler:innen für ihre Leistungen im Amt zur Verantwortung gezogen werden. Papier 3 untersucht, wie politische Rechenschaft unter nicht-parteigebundener Repräsentation funktioniert. Auf Basis eines Umfrageexperiments in Italien zeigt sich, dass Wähler:innen Parteien für politische Erfolge oder Misserfolge der von ihnen ernannten Minister:innen verantwortlich machen – unabhängig davon, ob es sich um unabhängige Minister:innen oder langjährige Parteimitglieder handelt. Papier 4 widmet sich der Frage demokratischer Rechenschaftspflicht im Kontext von Korruptionsskandalen. Ein länderübergreifendes Umfrageexperiment zeigt, dass Wähler:innen unabhängige Politiker:innen, die in Korruption verwickelt sind, genauso streng sanktionieren wie Politiker:innen aus anderen Parteien, während sie Parteifreunde am wenigsten hart bestrafen. Diese Dissertation trägt zu aktuellen Debatten über die Vor- und Nachteile parteigebundener Regierungsführung und technokratischer Repräsentation bei, indem sie zentrale empirische Fragen beleuchtet, neue theoretische Perspektiven entwickelt

und neue Forschungswege zur Rolle der Bürger:innen in demokratischen Prozessen unter technokratischer Repräsentation aufzeigt.