

**If Only Citizens Had a Cue:  
The Process of Opinion Formation over Time**

Thomas J. Leeper  
Assistant Professor in Political Behaviour  
Department of Government  
London School of Economics and Political Science

Rune Slothuus  
Professor  
Department of Political Science  
Aarhus University

*Version:* March 14, 2016

*Word Count:* 10,831

*Abstract*

Politics is complicated. Given the number of issues on the political agenda and the challenges of following nuanced aspects of politics, how do citizens form opinions on political questions? One answer is that they turn to political parties as opinion leaders for insight into what issues to form opinions about and for how to judge complex policies; an expansive literature documents that party endorsements can sway the views of the public. We advance this literature by examining the degree to which learning the policy stance of one's preferred party leads citizens to form an opinion and – when they do – to form an opinion consistent with the party's position. To do so, we leverage a unique panel survey that studies citizens' preferences before and during a national referendum campaign on the question of Denmark's membership in a new European institution. Using pre-campaign measures of party identification and predispositions toward the European Union, we find that party identifiers who learn their party's position adopt the party line when it aligns with their predispositions toward Europe, as well as when they are ambivalent toward Europe, but resist party influence when their party and value predispositions conflict. The findings suggest that parties help citizens to translate their predispositions into preferences and vote choices without leading them astray.

*Acknowledgements*

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, DC, the 2015 European Political Science Association General Conference in Vienna, and the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. The authors thank Stanley Feldman, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Sara Hobolt, Samara Klar, Hanspeter Kriesi, Peter B. Mortensen, C. Dan Myers, Helene Helboe Pedersen, Paul Sniderman, Kim Mannemar Sønderskov, and seminar participants at Aarhus University, University of Amsterdam, and University of Copenhagen for helpful comments and feedback. At time of publication, all data, code, and survey materials will be made available via the Harvard Dataverse:  
<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/leeper>.

William James (1890) described an infant's views of the world as a "blooming, buzzing confusion." Lippmann (1922) was concerned that the same could be said for most citizens' views of politics. In short, politics is complicated. A continuous finding since the very beginnings of the behavioral revolution has been that many citizens are not particularly knowledgeable about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997) and the degree of political disengagement is such that many citizens would rather think about other matters if they had the chance (Neuman 1986; Prior 2007). How then do citizens form opinions about political questions?

One answer is that they turn to political parties as opinion leaders for insight into what issues to form opinions about and for how to judge complex policies; an expansive literature documents that party endorsements can sway the views of the public. We advance this literature by examining the degree to which learning the policy stance of one's preferred party leads citizens to form an opinion and – when they do – to form an opinion consistent with the party's position. To do so, we leverage a unique panel survey that studies citizens' preferences before and during a national referendum campaign on the question of Denmark's membership in a new European institution. Using pre-campaign measures of party identification and predispositions toward the European Union, we find that party identifiers who learn their party's position adopt the party line when it aligns with their predispositions toward Europe, as well as when they are ambivalent toward Europe, but resist party influence when their party and value predispositions conflict. The findings suggest that parties help citizens to translate their predispositions into preferences and vote choices without leading them astray.

### **Party Endorsements in Political Debates**

One of the most common pieces of information transmitted over the course of a political debate is endorsements. Party cues—explicit information about which political party supports

or opposes a given policy—are considered essential to opinion formation because they are assumed to help citizens form opinions toward public policy, even when those citizens have little grasp of the substance of the issue (Lupia 1994; Gilens 2001; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). The citizen in modern democracy, Downs noted (1957: 233), “cannot be expert in all fields of policy that are relevant to his decision. Therefore he will seek assistance from men who are experts in those fields, have the same political goals he does, and have good judgment.” Such assistance often comes from political parties. The authors of *The American Voter* argued that, “In the competition of voices reaching the individual the political party is an opinion-forming agency of great importance.” Indeed, they saw “the role of party as a supplier of cues by which the individual may evaluate the elements of politics” (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960: 128).

#### *Why Should Learning a Party Position Affect Opinionation?*

The literature largely characterizes party cues as either a low-information shortcut, which citizens might use to form an opinion in a heuristic reasoning process in lieu of more detailed gathering and consideration of evidence. Alternatively, cue-taking may reflect an affective or identity-reinforcing allegiance to a party brand such that citizens follow party elites in order to bolster their partisan attachment. Both views – to varying extents – derogate citizens for their reliance on endorsements as cues about policy. While the heuristic perspective is sometimes read as a sophisticated alternative to high-information rationality, neither perspective suggests that citizens are doing anything more with partisan endorsements than following them quite blindly. The reason for such an interpretation of cue-taking is probably the consistency and scope of experimental evidence of cue-taking: although studies find effects of party cues on opinion of very different magnitude (e.g., Aarøe 2011; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Bullock 2011; Carmines and Kuklinski 1990; Druckman 2001; Kam 2005; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Lupu 2013; Mondak 1993; 1994; Nicholson 2012;

Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; studies with smaller effects: e.g., Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2008: 689; Nicholson 2012; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012: 130), most studies find that citizens' opinions are influenced by party cues.<sup>1</sup> This leads us to our first expectation:

*Opinionation Hypothesis:* Knowing the issue position taken by one's own political party increases opinionation.

In short, when citizens learn that their preferred political party has taken a position in an issue debate, citizens will be more likely to form an opinion on the issue (regardless of what particular position they take) because partisan involvement in the debate implies the issue is worth thinking about (in the sense of Schattschneider's notion of conflict escalation).

#### *Why Should Learning a Party Position Affect Preferences?*

More recently, some work compared the relative influence of party cues to policy information or substantive arguments (Bullock 2011; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014) and found that policy information can be just as influential as partisan endorsements and partisans might go against their party if the opposing party presents stronger arguments. These findings suggest that citizens do not always follow their party "blindly" as they might instead be pushed by the arguments advanced during a debate. However, these studies do not address our question: whether citizens resist the influence of partisan endorsements when the partisan position conflicts with their general orientation on the issue. To address our question, we need to compare the extent citizens follow their party conditional on each citizen's general orientation or value. Indeed, like most communication effects research, the study of party endorsements rarely considers the meaning of the opinion shifts observed in experimental and observational studies. And other

---

<sup>1</sup> Note, though, that in a careful review, Bullock (2011: 498) calculated that in the evaluated studies, "party cues have average effects on attitudes between 3% and 43% of the range of attitude scales" and he noted: "Variation this great makes generalization difficult." Thus, existing experimental research does not point to any clear-cut influence of party cues on opinion formation.

predispositions, such as policy principles and general orientations on the issue, are rarely taken into account when examining opinion formation in response to partisan endorsements (Zaller 1992; Lenz 2012).

This is a serious shortcoming and one worthy of further investigation. Because parties are known to emphasize particular policies (Petrocik 1996; Budget and Farlie 1983), hold identifiable ideological stances (Downs 1957), and represent particular groups in society (Campbell et al. 1960; Stubager 2010; Stubager and Slothuus 2013), party cues are potentially information-rich communications. They communicate not only what position a party's supporters might do well to hold to be in-line with partisan elites, but also have the potential to suggest the general nature of a policy, hint at its possible beneficiaries, or suggest what core values or principles might be advanced by the policy. Because of this, we might expect that citizens exposed to political debate containing explicit party position-taking may be able to use party information to arrive at positions that not only align with the preferences of the party elite but also align with their political principles, even when those two predispositions are in conflict. This leads us to our second expectation:

*Opinion Leadership Hypothesis:* Knowing the issue position taken by one's own political party increases *party consistency* (the correspondence between a citizens' opinion and that of their political party).

*Critical Followership Hypothesis:* Knowing the issue position taken by one's own political party increases party consistency only to the extent that citizens have no other reason for "critical followership."

Our focus on party consistency as the outcome of interest in assessing elite influence is worth some discussion. Most research on partisan influence focuses on "raw" effects: the degree to which opinions change in response to an endorsement (see Lupia 1994; Slothuus 2010; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2015). Focusing instead on consistency – the degree of correspondence between a partisan's position and the party's position provides a clearer

empirical and normative benchmark. We are interested in both the average causal effect of a partisan endorsement across the population as a whole, but also in the conditional average causal effects of knowing the party line across those for whom party position and general orientations are aligned or matched. That is, for those for whom party position and orientation are mismatched, and those who have a neutral orientation.

Focusing on party consistency allows us to see the extent to which matched and mismatched partisans adopt their party's position. If party influence trumps other factors, then citizens should be party consistent regardless of their other predispositions and the causal effect of endorsement should be uniform in direction and size. If party influence is moderated by other factors, however, then citizens should be party consistent only to the extent that their party takes a position that does not conflict with that citizen's other relevant predispositions. A review of the literature suggests we are among the first to provide this kind of test of effect heterogeneity and the first to focus on party consistency *per se*.

The normative implications of these results are likely even more important than their novelty. When citizens resist the party line when that position conflicts with their own relevant predispositions, it suggests an observed pattern of political competence that is masked by a general tendency toward adoption of party positions. By contrast, the average effect of party followership might accurately summarize a pattern of effect homogeneity across individuals with different political orientations – a form of critical followership. If that is the case, then we must reckon with the question of whether strong party leadership of opinion implies an incompetence public whose preferences are highly endogenous (Disch 2011) or whether it is democratically acceptable for citizens to fully and perhaps blindly outsource opinion formation to trusted elites (Downs 1957; Lupia and McCubbins). We withhold judgment on this point until the results are clear.

## **Studying the Impact of Policy Debate through a Referendum Campaign**

Unlike most recent research on partisan influence, which rests on artificial issues studied in survey and laboratory experimental contexts, we test for the influence of partisan endorsements in the course of a real world debate using both observed variation in awareness of partisan positions as well as well-identified survey experimental manipulation. We assess the our hypotheses in the context of a public policy issue that rose suddenly on the political agenda and – unexpectedly to most people – became the subject of a nationwide referendum. To understand the consistency between citizens’ opinion on this specific issue and their standing political predispositions, we adopted a high-risk data collection strategy: namely, conducting a panel survey over the course of a debate from before the issue emerged on the national political agenda until the final days before that issue was put to a public vote.

Our case country is Denmark, a Western European parliamentary democracy with a typical system of multi-party competition and coalition government. At issue is the European Unified Patent Court (UPC), which will handle legal cases regarding patents in the participating European Union (EU) member states.<sup>2</sup> In a recent article, Chong and Druckman (2013: 14) write: “it would be illuminating to monitor opinion dynamics on a novel issue as it emerges on the agenda and evolves over time as competing parties settle on their preferred frames—*the trick here of course is to anticipate such issues*” (emphasis added). When Denmark signed the UPC treaty in February 2013, we saw an opportunity to do just that in order to understand how citizens form political opinions.

Even though the issue had received virtually no public or parliamentary debate, we had reason to believe it would soon be an important issue on the political agenda. In an analysis

---

<sup>2</sup> While Europe has had a unified patent system since 1973, legal cases regarding patents are to-date handled separately in each member state. The UPC would unify litigations with a common court of specially trained judges whose decisions would apply uniformly across all member states. For technical reasons, the Unified Patent Court is not a European Union entity and, as such, was negotiated as a separate international treaty (the “Agreement on a Unified Patent Court”) among the EU member states in 2013. The Unified Patent Court treaty has not yet been ratified by all member states (indeed while most member states have signed the treaty, only five have ratified it).

released on May 7, 2013, the Danish Ministry of Justice concluded that Denmark joining the UPC would limit Danish national sovereignty by making it subject to decisions of an international court. Following standard (though rarely occurring) procedure in such cases, legislation implementing the UPC must either be passed in the Danish Parliament (*Folketinget*) by a 5/6 majority or require a majority vote in a national referendum (in tandem with a minimum turnout threshold). The same day the Ministry of Justice report was announced, two political parties – the Danish People’s Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*) and the Red-Green Alliance (*Enhedslisten*)<sup>3</sup> – that collectively hold 34 of 179 seats (or about 19%) in Parliament announced that they favored a referendum on the UPC. With these two parties indicating initial support for a public referendum (despite the issue not yet being discussed in Parliament), we began designing a panel survey instrument to test our expectations about the effects of debate on opinion consistency, which would be launched before the issue reached Parliament. Fortunately for our design, despite some short-lived negotiations to avoid a referendum, the government eventually called for a referendum to be held on May 25, 2014. Notably such referenda are relatively rare in Denmark, the last one relating to European integration having been held in 2000 when Denmark narrowly rejected joining the Euro currency union.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of whether Denmark should join the UPC provides an excellent case for studying opinion dynamics in response to elite debate for several reasons. First, it is an issue where citizens are clearly dependent on information provided by the debate in order for them to form an opinion. While there have previously been discussions of and referenda on Denmark’s relation to the EU dating back to its accession in 1973, the patent court issue is entirely novel. When our study began in the summer of 2013, the issue had received little to

---

<sup>3</sup> A third party, the Liberal Alliance, that controls 9 seats in parliament also initially implied its support for a referendum but later supported Denmark’s membership in the UPC.

<sup>4</sup> Since then, one referendum took place, in 2009, to determine the order of succession of Danish monarchs, a very different issue where a change of law always requires approval by public referendum.



no domestic media attention and (as we will show empirically) few citizens were aware of – let alone knowledgeable about – the issue and it was not even known whether the issue would ever be widely debated, politicized, or moved to referendum. Indeed, despite two parties calling for a referendum, no parties had explicitly recommended voting “yes” or “no.” Thus, when we initially see our respondents and ask for their views on the UPC, we can be quite confident that we observe them in an “untreated” state, because the debate has yet to occur. As we describe below, however, as the referendum approached, the media increasingly covered the issue, featuring political parties, interest groups, and other actors taking positions and attempting to persuade the public. Therefore, as recent framing research has called for, we follow Chong and Druckman’s (2013) advice regarding “the next generation of research” to study the impact of elite influence on citizen decision making in a realistic, natural context which “emphasize[s] the complexity of any over-time competitive campaign context” (Chong and Druckman 2013: 14; also see Kinder 2007; Lecheler and de Vreese 2013: 162-63).

Second, in contrast to most policy issues, the question of Danish membership in the Unified Patent Court concerns a concrete policy choice (i.e., joining the patent court versus maintaining the status quo). Whereas typical experiments on elite influence study opinion formation on unimportant issues without much ecological encouragement to form opinions (Druckman and Leeper 2012), the referendum provides an exogenous encouragement for citizens to form opinions on what might otherwise be a non-salient issue (Kriesi 2005). Indeed, that a large part of the electorate not only took a stance on the issue but eventually acted on it is evidenced by the fact that the referendum saw 55.9% turnout (a rate comparable to United States Presidential elections) with 62.5% of voters supporting Denmark’s membership in the patent court.<sup>5</sup> While few political issues – in any country context – are ever put to a national vote, the issue itself is representative of many of those that enter the

---

<sup>5</sup> Note, however, that the referendum was held simultaneous to the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, which offers a partial explanation for the high turnout.

political agenda. It is somewhat technical, but the debate evoked a broad swatch of arguments spanning concerns about economics, rights and law, and sovereignty. Indeed, it is neither symbolic, nor ends-focused, nor “long on the political agenda” (ibid. 80). An observer informed by extant public opinion research would be unlikely to expect much coherence from citizens on this issue. And, as we will show, citizens at the beginning of the UPC knew little and cared little about the issue when we initially interviewed them; few were willing to speculate about the policy’s implications and many reported holding no opinion on the issue at all. The UPC debate therefore provides a fruitful context in which to study opinion formation outside the experimental laboratory.

Third, the UPC issue provides an obvious predisposition that citizens can apply in forming opinions on the novel issue: specifically, their general orientation toward the European Union (Hobolt 2005; Hobolt and Brouard 2011; Schuck and de Vreese 2008; Svensson 2002). The UPC issue is on face value technical and complicated, meaning that citizens cannot be expected to automatically form consistent opinions nor are they likely to have already formed a specific attitude toward the UPC through which they might view new information. Yet under the surface, the issue is unequivocally a question of Denmark’s integration into Europe; indeed the reason for the referendum at all is because Denmark’s participation in the UPC would legally modify national sovereignty. As such, one’s orientation toward European integration – the extent to which an individual favors further European integration or less integration – serves as a single, clear principle that is likely to strongly shape citizens’ preference formation (e.g., Hobolt 2007; de Vreese and Semetko 2004: 23, 157-168). Given enough time, one could probably find other principles that might be at-stake in the UPC but whatever those may be, it is clear that one’s general orientation

toward the EU is clearly an important principle here.<sup>6</sup> This means that the UPC debate allows us to easily test how citizens respond to party policy endorsements not only on average, but conditional on a significant general orientation.

## **Survey Design and Measures**

To study opinion formation in response to political debate surrounding the UPC, we rely on a two-wave panel survey using a rolling reinterview design (Leeper and Slothuus N.d.). Respondents were recruited from the TNS Gallup GallupForum panel, a nationally representative online panel of the 40,000 members of the Danish public who complete approximately 25 studies per year in exchange for entry into giftcard lotteries. Approximately 90% of panel members are recruited by Gallup via earlier telephone interviewing of representative samples of the Danish public and panelists are monitored for satisficing behaviors.

The initial wave of interviewing took place between July 10 and August 28, 2013 just before the opening of the Danish parliamentary session and before the UPC issue gained substantial domestic media attention. In this wave (Time 1), a total of 6,418 respondents were interviewed online and this sample was representative of the Danish population with respect to sex, age, region, and education.<sup>7</sup> After completing the Time 1 interview, respondents were randomly assigned to three subpanels. Each subpanel completed only one additional interview, but the timing of these reinterviews were staggered over the course of the

---

<sup>6</sup> One could also argue that the UPC relates to citizens' predispositions about the positive or negative role of business in society (i.e., whether the ease with which businesses can operate should be high or low). Regardless of whether citizens even hold stable predispositions with regard to that, it is also not obvious how such a predisposition would apply to the UPC. Whereas the UPC has unequivocal implications for the relationship between Denmark and the European Union, there was quite some disagreement about the impact of the UPC on businesses. Indeed, some have argued that the UPC will simplify operations for businesses and reduce the costs of defending patent rights by unifying litigation under one supranational court. Others, however, argued that just such an umbrella institution might impose undue burdens on small businesses that now must contend with a European-wide patent system far larger than the domestic one with which they might typically do business.

<sup>7</sup> Additionally 1187 individuals invited to participate in Time 1 refused, and Gallup further excluded 422 potential participants who were screened out prior to beginning the Time 1 questionnaire (e.g., because they entered a sex or age that mismatched their profile data or because they were ineligible to participate) and 783 respondents who began but did not finish Time 1.

subsequent debate, thus providing us with observations of the campaign at four points in time and each respondent interviewed only twice. In essence, the sample is representative of the Danish public at each of four points in time, while also providing two-wave panel data for respondents to each of the reinterview rounds at Times 2, 3, and 4.<sup>8</sup>

The first of these reinterview rounds, Time 2, was fielded between September 26 and October 23, 2013, the next, Time 3, was fielded between April 28 and May 11, 2014, and the final, Time 4, was fielded in the final days before the election (May 12-25, 2014). As is typical in Denmark, response rates were high across all waves. In the follow-up rounds, 1900 respondents were contacted to complete the Time 2 survey of whom 1691 (89%) completed the survey. Of 1975 respondents contacted for Time 3, 1629 (82.5%) completed the round. And, of 1973 contacted for Time 4, 1611 (81.7%) respondents completed the survey. Thus of the initial 6,418 respondents in Time 1, a total of 4,931 (76.8%) completed both waves and response rates were high across all rounds, as is typical for surveys conducted in Denmark.<sup>9</sup> Table 1 provides sample demographics by panel wave.

The unique panel structure allows us to base almost all of our analysis on within-subjects comparisons between Time 1 and each respondent's reinterview wave, while also being able to track aggregate opinion dynamics from the very beginning of the campaign until the final days before the referendum. The risk, of course, with any panel design is attrition and loss of representativeness. Table 1 reports a demographic comparison of the

---

<sup>8</sup> All surveys were completed in Danish and we provide English translations of all questions and stimulus materials. Danish language versions of the questionnaires are included in our replication materials. The majority of respondents completed a survey within 2 to 3 days of initial contact. In addition to email reminders, respondents selected for Waves 2b and 2c were additionally contacted via telephone reminders if they had not completed the survey after approximately one week.

<sup>9</sup> Of those not responding to Times 2 and 3, 163 respondents were re-invited to participate in a later reinterview wave did so but we exclude them from the analysis. Thus a total of 1510 of the original respondents did not complete any follow-up wave. Of those not responding to a reinterview wave, 572 left the GallupForum panel entirely after Time 1, making them ineligible. As such, the cross-sectional response rate for all Time 2 reinterview rounds combined is 81.2% once these ineligibles are excluded. Individuals were invited to participate in each wave via email and reminders were sent via both email and SMS to initial nonrespondents. For Time 4, phone calls were additionally made to encourage responding given the short field window and the proximity of the field dates to the election.

initial panel of respondents, respondents to each subsequent panel wave, non-respondents to reinterview waves, and the Danish population as a whole. The panel as a whole was largely representative of the population as a whole and retained this representativeness throughout the field period, with a slight loss of younger, lower-income respondents.

We are also reasonably confident that the panel as a whole constituted a representative sample of the Danish public given both the survey design and the resulting sample estimates. As we have said, the sample was designed to be representative of the Danish adult population with respect to several demographics and we have shown that to a great extent the panel was representative on these measures. But because the survey was also aimed at understanding opinions toward an issue that was soon thereafter subject to a national referendum, we can use election results to validate the representativeness of the sample on non-demographic measures. The UPC referendum passed with 62.5% of the vote. In the final wave of data collection (Time 4) collected in the days leading up to the referendum, we estimated support to be 62.6% with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 59.8% to 65.4%. The referendum was also held in connection with elections for the European Parliament and separate measures of party support for that election accurately captured a late surge in support for the Danish People's Party at expense of the center-right Liberals (for a full discussion, see Leeper and Slothuus n.d.). In short, our respondents almost perfectly reflected the Danish population on both of these population-validated measures of opinion, which highlights the value of relying on high-quality population-representative samples. We are therefore quite comfortable generalizing our sample results to the Danish population as a whole.

#### *Initial Interview Measures at Time 1*

We included the variables necessary to study how exposure to political debate on the Unified Patent Court shaped citizens' opinions.

European Orientation. To operationalize one's general orientation toward the EU, we asked respondents: "What is your general attitude towards the EU?" The response options form a five-point scale from "Very positive," "Mainly positive," "Neither positive nor negative," "Mainly negative," to "Very negative," or "Don't know."<sup>10</sup>

Party Affiliation. To measure partisan attachments, we asked respondents "Which party do you see yourself as supporting?" and offered them a list of all political parties in Denmark, or a "don't know" option; among those answering "don't know" we asked a follow-up "Is there still a party to which you feel closer compared to other parties?" with the same response options as the previous item.<sup>11</sup> Respondents were organized into supporters of one of the eight parliamentary parties, the one very small non-parliamentary party (the Christian Democrats), or an unaffiliated category. In most of our analysis we collapse these categories further into a binary measure based on each party's stance on the UPC: those supporting "no" parties (the Red-Green Alliance or "Unity List" and the right-wing Danish People's Party) and those supporting "yes" parties (all others with a party affiliation).

Opinion. To measure opinion toward the UPC, we asked respondents: "If a referendum were held tomorrow on Denmark joining the European Unified Patent Court, would you vote yes or no?"<sup>12</sup> We use this measure in three ways. First, we examine the proportion of respondents reporting a "don't know" response, as a measure of *opinionation*. Second, we examine responses as a continuous measure of opinion, varying from positivity

---

<sup>10</sup> We also created a scale of one's orientation toward Europe consisting of six items combined into a simple averaged scale: "I feel as much as a European as I feel Danish," "Extensive economic equalization should be implemented in the EU so that the rich countries pay to pull the poor countries up," "Denmark should support a common policy for refugees in the EU," "EU should play a role internationally and militarily that matches the EU countries' economic significance," "We should strive for a society with more international orientation and less emphasis on borders between countries and their people,"<sup>10</sup> and This scale ( $\alpha = 0.76$  ranges from -1 (most negative towards European integration) through +1 (most positive towards European integration).

<sup>11</sup> We also separately asked respondents to indicate which party they would support in a hypothetical national parliamentary election and in an election to the European Parliament. Given disagreement about how to measure party identification in a multi-party context, we rely on the "closeness" measures mentioned in the text rather than party identification. Unlike party identification measures in a U.S. or other bipartisan context, however, the measure is categorical rather than ordinal.

<sup>12</sup> The response options were "Would vote YES," "Don't know, but leaning towards YES," "Don't know, but leaning towards NO," "Would vote NO," and "Don't know."

or negativity toward the UPC. And finally, we map respondents' positions onto their stated party affiliations at Time 1 in order to create a measure of *party consistency*. This measure is created by sorting respondents into groups affiliating with pro-UPC "yes" parties, affiliating with anti-UPC "no" parties, and not affiliating with any party. We then code respondents as party-consistent (1) if they express an opinion consistent with the position of their preferred party and party-inconsistent (0) if they express an opinion inconsistent with the position of their preferred party.<sup>13</sup>

Attention. To measure attention to the debate surrounding the UPC, we asked respondents: "There has recently been a debate about a European unified patent court. How closely have you been following the debate about the patent court?" Responses were recorded on a fully labelled four-point scale: "I have followed the debate very closely," "I have followed the debate closely," "I have not followed the debate very closely," and "I have not followed the debate at all" and rescaled to range from 0 to 1.

Knowledge. We measured two forms of issue-relevant knowledge. The first, and most relevant for our analysis, is based on a multi-item measure assessing respondents' knowledge of the positions of all political parties. Recall that two parties – the right-wing Danish Peoples' Party and the left-wing Unity List – took anti-UPC positions, while all other parties eventually committed to pro-UPC positions. This means that knowledge of party positions is not easily achieved through an ideological heuristic alone. The main government and opposition took similar positions, further making "second-order" considerations (e.g., opposition parties opposing the UPC simply to oppose the government's position) another

---

<sup>13</sup> We also included two other measures of opinion toward the UPC. The first asked "To what extent do you agree or disagree that it is a good idea that Denmark joins the European Unified Patent Court?" and the second asked "To what extent do you agree or disagree that it is a good idea to establish a European unified patent court?" Responses to both were recorded on fully labelled 7-point scales from "totally disagree" to "totally agree". We focus on the voting measure in the paper for the simplicity of presentation. As a robustness check, we repeated all of our analyses using average responses to all three measures. To do so, we combined responses into a simple 0 (oppose) to 1 (support) scale, which is highly reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.95$ ), and transformed it based on whether the respondent supported a "yes" or "no" party into a continuous measure of party consistency. Our results using this measure are substantively identical (learning the in-party cue increases opinion consistency by about a one-half standard deviation) and we report them in a supplemental appendix.

problematic heuristic. As such, knowledge of party positions is a robust measure of issue understanding. We focus on two measures of party knowledge. First, we measure knowledge of the position taken by one's own party specifically. With this measure, we split our sample by party affiliation expressed at Time 1 into "yes" party and "no" party supporters and code partisans knowing their own party's position as 1 or 0 otherwise.<sup>14</sup> The second measure assesses knowledge of all *other* parties (out of seven possible).

*Reinterview Measures.* During the reinterview waves, respondents provided answers to all of the same questions as at time 1, including those measuring attention, opinion, and issue knowledge. Responses were coded the same as at time 1. While the unique rolling panel structure allows us to analyze the data in two ways: as a balanced two-wave panel or as an unbalanced four-wave panel, most of our analysis focuses on the two-wave structure where all reinterview round are pooled and we control for round with a simple indicator variable.

#### *Plan of the Analysis*

Our analysis begins with a comprehensive description of citizens' attention to, learning about, beliefs toward, and opinions on the Unified Patent Court over the course of the public debate. We describe citizens' attention and the degree to which they learned their own party's position on the issue, relative to learning about other aspects of the issue.

We then test the *opinionation hypothesis*: the extent to which learning the position of one's own party influenced the formation of opinions on the issue. To do so, we examine the correlation between knowing the position of one's own party and opinionation at each of the four interview rounds. Because this treatment variable is not randomly assigned, we first conduct cross-sectional regression analysis controlling for observable confounding factors (issue knowledge, debate attention, knowledge of other party positions, evaluations of government performance, left-right ideology, demographics, party affiliation, and European

---

<sup>14</sup> Those providing a "don't know" response are coded as not knowing the party position. Those affiliating with no party are obviously excluded from this measure.



orientation). The test of this effect is first performed in a “pooled” fashion across all respondents and then subsequently by assessing effect heterogeneity across those for whom there is a match between party position and European orientation (“matched partisans”), those for whom party position and European orientation disagree (“mismatched partisans”), and those who have a neutral orientation toward Europe (“EU Neutral”).<sup>15</sup>

Second, we leverage the panel structure of the data, which enables within-subjects comparisons. We estimate both fixed effects and random effects specifications, with the former controlling for time-variant factors (debate attention, issue knowledge, knowledge of party positions) and the latter controlling for both time-variant and –invariant factors. In both cases, we also estimate these models for only the subset of respondents who “learn” their party position (i.e., do not know the position at Time 1 but do know during their second interview).

Finally, we test for further opinionation in response to the party endorsement experiments embedded at the end of the reinterview round (Times 2, 3, and 4) to assess whether a randomized exposure to the position of one’s own party further affects opinionation, especially among those who had not yet heard the cue.

Our final set of tests focus on the *opinion leadership* and *critical followership* hypothesis: the extent to which learning the position of one’s own party led citizens to form opinions consistent with their political party leadership. The form of this analysis exactly mirrors that for our tests of the opinionation hypothesis. We begin with cross-sectional analysis, then estimate fixed and random effects panel regression models, and finally examine opinions after exposure to the party endorsement experiment. In each case we examine the average effect of knowing the party’s position and separately examine heterogeneity in this effect across matched, mismatched, and neutral respondents.

---

<sup>15</sup> We ignore those who have no stated party affiliation because the variable “know own party’s position” is undefined for these respondents.

## Results

During the summer of 2013, few members of the Danish public were aware of, knowledge about, attentive to, or opinionated on the issue of the Unified Patent Court. Fully 67% of our respondents reported that they were “not following the debate at all” during this time. By the last wave of interviewing, however, that number declined steadily to 28% (with earlier declines to 55% at Time 2 and 38% at Time 3). Both issue knowledge and knowledge of party positions on the UPC were similarly low. At Time 1, nearly 70% of respondents failed to correctly answer any of the five questions about fundamental facts of the UPC. Party positions, which might be easier to guess, were fully unknown to over 60% of our respondents.

These numbers are not surprising given the patterns of media attention to the issue over time. Figure 1 shows the salience of the Unified Patent Court issue in the Danish news media over the course of our study. The media data, based on a count of articles in the major Danish news media, showed that the issue was almost absent from the media agenda during the collection of the first wave of our survey.<sup>16</sup> Just before the first round of reinterviews (i.e., recall that reinterviews were conducted in three rounds with three different subsets of respondents), the UPC gained some attention in the news. This modest spike in attention was driven by the opening of the parliamentary season where debate revolved around the prospects of the government would call for a referendum on the issue. As the referendum neared, the UPC was increasingly covered by the media. As attention increased, so too did both types of knowledge. By Time 4, fewer than 50% of respondents were fully ignorant of

---

<sup>16</sup> Details on media content analysis to follow.

the issue and more than 40% could correctly identify the positions of all eight parliamentary parties. Only one-fifth of respondents were entirely ignorant of party positions.

In this time, respondents' knowledge of their own party's position on the UPC had also increased dramatically. At Time 1, roughly one-third (32%) of respondents could place their own party correctly. At Time 2, this number was 44%, at Time 3 it was 62%, and by the time of the referendum it was 74%. This change appears to be pivotal to how citizens formed opinions on the UPC. Across the course of the campaign, nearly every segment of the electorate developed a knowledge of where their own party stood. This was regardless of whether they supported "no" parties (the right-wing Danish Peoples party and left-wing Unity List) or the "yes" parties (all other parties) and irrespective of their own favorable or unfavorable predispositions toward the European Union. To summarize the scope of changes, only 42% of those who were EU-negative supporters of "no" parties knew their party's anti-UPC position at Time 1 but 73% knew it at Time 4.<sup>17</sup> Among EU-positive supporters of "yes" parties, the number increased from 38% to 82%. And these changes were not limited to those whose EU orientation and partisan affiliation aligned; EU-negative "yes" party supporters increased their knowledge from a mere 26% to fully 70% and the EU-positive backers of "no" parties saw a similar gain in knowledge (from 28% to 71%). And those with neutral orientations toward the EU also gained knowledge of their "no" party's position (from 28% to 72%) or "yes" party's position (from 18% to 63%). In short, the campaign made citizens aware of the UPC for the first time and exposed as much as 40% of the electorate to the position of their preferred political party.

---

<sup>17</sup> We calculate these numbers based on self-reported EU orientation and party affiliation at Time 1. This ensures that there is not sorting into parties in response to learning the party positions. A consequence is that we are much more certain of our estimates of knowledge at Time 1 (a margin of error of 2-5 percentage points) compared to at the other time period. For the smallest subpopulation (EU-positive, "no" party supporters), the margin of error is +/- 14 percentage points at Time 4. Even with this degree of uncertainty, the over-time changes in knowledge are still incredibly large.

What explains this gain in knowledge? Table 2 shows that knowledge of one's party cue is associated with many usual suspects, including gender. Women are slightly less likely to know their party's position, as are those supporting "yes" parties" and those with negative EU orientations (because most parties endorsed the UPC despite some Eurosceptic leanings). A few other factors seemed to matter, depending on the specific model specification. By far, however, the most substantial contributor to knowledge of the position taken by one's party was following the debate. Those following the debate were, from the linear probability estimates, between 69% and 70% more likely to know their party's position than those not following the debate. Indeed, the factors have a bivariate correlation of 0.46 at Time 1 and 0.45 thereafter. The only factor more strongly correlated with knowledge of the position of one's preferred party is knowledge of the other parties' positions (point biserial correlations of 0.80 at Time 1 and 0.76 across Times 2 to 4). Debate was clearly exposing citizens to the positions of the political parties, especially the position of one's preferred party.

### *Opinionation*

There is a strong over-time correspondence, at the aggregate level, between the increasing intensity of political debate surrounding the UPC, the gains in knowledge of the in-party cue, and citizens' opinion formation. Whereas at Time 1, the percentage of our respondents reporting no opinion on the UPC was 38% (s.e. 1%). This percentage declined steadily over time: at Time 2 it was 27% (s.e. 1%), at Time 3 it was 19% (s.e. 1%), and at Time 4 it was 12% (s.e. 1%). From initial inattention, ignorance, and indecision, the public debate helped citizens to form opinions on the UPC. What changed this? Simply comparing those who knew their party's position to those who did not, it would seem that the in-party awareness was valuable. Among those who knew the position, only 10% (s.e. 1%) were undecided at Time 1 and only 6% (s.e. 1%) were undecided at Time 4. Among those who were ignorant of their party's position, 45% (s.e. 1%) were undecided at Time 1 and 24% (s.e. 2%) were still

undecided at Time 4. These *between-subjects* comparisons say nothing about the effect of *learning* the position taken by a preferred party. To answer that requires looking at *within-subjects* comparisons. If we look at those who learned their party's position between the initial interview and their assigned reinterview round, 38% (s.e. 1%) were undecided at Time 1 when they did not know the party's position, but by their reinterview they were much more likely to have formed an opinion: 13% (s.e. 2%) were undecided at Time 2, 12% (s.e. 2%) at Time 3, and 8% (s.e. 1%) at Time 4 (see Figure 3). These latter three figures not precisely comparable because those interviewed at Time 4 had a longer exposure to the debate and therefore it should have been easier for them to learn the party line, but they provide compelling within-subjects changes associating cue knowledge with opinionation.

To highlight just how large these shifts are, Figure 4 shows the proportion of respondents who are undecided at their first and second interview, separating out those who always knew their party's position (the "always-treated"), those who never learned their party's position (the "never-treated"), and those who learned their party's position after Time 1. The dramatic decline in "don't know" responses to the UPC opinion question after Time 1 among the "learned" group indicates just how much the partisan position-taking during the debate induced citizens to form opinions about the UPC. Those who never learned their party's position also became less undecided over time, but even in the final days before the referendum, 25% (s.e. 2%) had no opinion a number three-times larger than among those who learned their party's stance.

These descriptive results are validated by a more formal analysis. As described in our methods section, the rolling-reinterview design enables several ways to test the influence of in-party knowledge on opinionation. We are able to assess the correlation between cue knowledge and opinionation cross-sectionally, at each point in time, with and without controls for possibly confounding factors. And, we can leverage the panel design to assess the

influence of within-subjects changes to better control for unobservable individual heterogeneity as well as other time-variant factors. Table 3 reports the average marginal effect of knowledge of the in-party position resulting from each of these possible estimation strategies. Column 1 reports a bivariate, cross-sectional regression of opinionation on in-party knowledge. Column 2 does the same with covariates – party identification, issue knowledge, debate attention, government performance evaluations, left-right ideology, sex, age, education, and region. Columns 3-4 repeat this, with pooled analysis of responses to the reinterview rounds. Column 5 reports fixed effects panel regression without controls. Column 6 adds time-variant controls – issue knowledge, debate attention, government performance evaluations.<sup>18</sup> Column 7 is based on a random effects specification without controls and Column 8 includes both time-variant controls (as in the fixed effects specifications) and time-invariant factors (as in the cross-sectional regressions).

While the estimated size of the influence of the cue varies slightly, knowledge of the position taken by one's preferred political party consistently decreases indecision, leading people to form opinions about the UPC. Given that this is controlling for debate attention and issue knowledge, the results are striking in size. Knowledge of the cue leads to an increase in opinionation of between 12% and 35%, depending on the model specification. The most conservative estimate – the panel analyses – is the smallest in substantive size, but indicates a substantial influence on opinionation. But even these approaches leverage information from those who do not change on the independent variable. An even more conservative test is to examine only those who learn. Table 4 replicates Columns 5-8 of Table 3 among only those who did not know the party position at Time 1 but learned it before being reinterviewed. The results closely parallel those in Table 3 with no reduction in uncertainty.

---

<sup>18</sup> Also included is an indicator for participation in an experimental condition included on the reinterview survey.

Yet even here there is some reason to be skeptical. Does learning the in-party position uniformly reduce uncertainty? Or are the results being driven by the large proportion of citizens who have a match between party affiliation and EU orientation? To assess this, we repeat our analyses but this time estimate the effect of in-party knowledge separately for those whose predispositions are matched, those who are mismatched, and those who have a neutral EU orientation.<sup>19</sup> Table 5 replicates Table 3, based on regression specifications that include an interaction between cue knowledge and indicators for this predisposition match.<sup>20</sup> The results are strikingly similar to what we saw before. And there is actually little heterogeneity in the influence of in-party knowledge across the three groups of respondents. But as before, a more conservative test is to examine only those for whom the independent variable changes over time. Table 6 reports these results and Figure 5 shows the main conclusions. We again see a consistent influence of cue knowledge on opinionation that holds regardless of the combination of EU orientation and party affiliation. Only for the very small group of respondents who are mismatched does the effect ever become indistinguishable from zero. For those who are EU neutral and thus most likely to benefit from exposure to a party endorsement, given their lack of other predispositions to leverage in forming an opinion, the effect of the cue appears to be quite large. Between 15% and 35% of these individuals form an opinion in response to learning their preferred party's position.

#### *Party Consistent Opinion Formation*

The next question is what these changes in opinionation mean. What have citizens done with the knowledge of their party's position? To understand that, we have to look beyond opinionation per se. We therefore turn our attention to whether our respondents formed opinions consistent with their party's position as a test of the opinion leadership hypothesis.

---

<sup>19</sup> Our approach to pool EU positive and EU negative respondents in this way is reasonable given that the outcome is not valenced: we are only measuring changes in opinionation, not the direction of opinionation.

<sup>20</sup> The fixed effects specification in Columns 5-6 must be estimated separately given that predisposition match is time invariant.

Our measure of consistency is a binary: respondents are scored 1 if they express an opinion consistent with their preferred party's (i.e., pro-UPC opinions for supporters of "yes" parties and anti-UPC opinions for supporters of "no" parties) and 0 if they are inconsistent with their preferred party (i.e., anti-UPC opinions for supporters of "yes" parties and pro-UPC opinions for supporters of "no" parties).<sup>21</sup> At Time 1, 48% (s.e. = 1%) of respondents held an opinion consistent with their preferred party. This number increased steadily over the course of the debate to 52% at Time 2, 61% at Time 3 and 65% at Time 4 (see Figure 6). On a purely descriptive basis, there was a substantial difference in consistency between those who knew the position of their preferred party and those who did not. Fully 74% (s.e. = 1%) held party-consistent opinions at Time 1 and this number held steady throughout the period of reinterviewing. Among those who did know the party position, however, rates of consistency were only 36% at Time 1 (s.e. = 1%) and 40% (s.e. = 1%) thereafter (pooling response from Times 2-4).

Such aggregate differences suggest that knowledge of the position taken by one's preferred party was influential. But the difference might simply reflect some form of selection bias with those who know the party position differing in other ways from those who do not know the position. A simple alternative is to examine within-subjects changes over time. To do so, we compare the consistency of those who never knew their party's position, to those who always knew the position, and those who only learned it over the course of the campaign. To address heterogeneity across those various European orientations, we divide the sample by the degree of match between party and European predispositions (see Figure 7). The results show some clear trends. Those who always knew their party's position changed little over the course of the debate, and those who never learned the party's position increased their consistency slightly but remained much less consistent than the "always know" group.

---

<sup>21</sup> Those who express no party preference at Time 1 are excluded from the analysis.



More interesting are the results among those who learned their party's position because of the political debate. These individuals became substantially more party consistent over the course of the debate. If we pool across respondents with different partisan/values match, 43% (s.e. = 1%) were party consistent as Time 1 but 69% (s.e. = 1%) were party consistent at the time of reinterviewing.<sup>22</sup>

In a more formal test, we estimate the influence of knowing the position taken by one's preferred party on the degree of party consistency. Table 7 reports these results. Save for the dependent variable, the model specifications are identical to those reported earlier for our analysis of opinionation. Columns 1-4 report cross-sectional analyses, separately from Time 1 and Times 2-4. Columns 5-8 shift to panel regression models using fixed effects (Columns 5-6) or random effect (Columns 7-8) specifications. The story across all eight model specifications is similar: knowing the position taken by one's preferred political party substantially increases the degree of party consistency. In absolute terms, the size of these effects are very large: between 18% and 38% of the response scale, or about one-half of a standard deviation change in consistency. A more conservative test restricted to within-subjects changes among learners is reported in Table 8. The results are statistically and substantively unaffected by this restriction in sample.

The implication thus far is that learning an in-party endorsement dramatically increase party consistency. But does this effect hold evenly across all citizens? Results reported in Table 9 suggest that the effect is to some extent conditional on the match between one's partisanship and orientation toward Europe. The results replicate those of Table 7 but separately for those with matched or mismatched predispositions, or a neutral orientation toward Europe. Table 10 repeats the analyses using only within-subject comparisons. In the case of those who are matched or neutral, learning the in-party cue increases party

---

<sup>22</sup> This estimate was essentially constant across the three reinterview waves: 70% (s.e. = 3%) at Time 2, 67% (s.e. = 2%) at Time 2, and 70% (s.e. = 2%) at Time 3.

consistency. This is a novel albeit unsurprising result: for those with little reason to vote against their party, learning the party's position leads to a substantial increase in the proportion of these individuals taking the party's position. This is clear opinion leadership.

Those who hold orientations toward Europe that are incongruent with their party affiliation, however, appear to respond to learning a party endorsement quite differently. Rather than increasing their consistency with their party, these individuals appear to have been relatively unmoved. Figure 8 puts these results into perspective by displaying average marginal effects of learning the party cue across these three subgroups. The mismatched individuals appear to be engaged in critical followership: they learned the party cue but it did not lead them to simply taken their party's position. Such critical followership has been overlooked in past research, in part because it can be difficult to assess who is a mismatched partisan for the reasons we discussed earlier. The European issue under consideration here makes that process of identification much easier and the use of panel survey data ensures that citizens' do not resist party influence simply because we primed them to consider their European orientations immediately before measuring their opinions. The critical followership seen here suggests an organic tendency to absorb but also to resist towing the party line.

#### *Further Robustness Checks*

Our results are based on almost every possible model specification possible given the structure of the panel data. As such, we are quite confident that these results are robust. That said, we can still perform a few additional analyses.

Given the strong correlation of three potentially influential factors – debate attention, awareness of other party positions, and knowledge of the position taken by the preferred party – one could be concerned that our measure of own party knowledge might just be capturing a general effect of knowing all party positions. In essence that those with a better understanding of the partisan layout of the debate generally also happen to know their own

party's position and therefore there's no independent variation in knowing the in-party cue. This does not seem to be the case because even though people become less undecided when they learn other party positions, those who know their own party's position are much more likely to be party consistent at every level of party position knowledge, at every point in time. Figure 9 displays this pattern of results. Learning the position of one's preferred party seems to uniquely contribute to opinionation at low levels of knowledge and uniquely contribute to party consistency at all levels of general knowledge.

Another concern is that our measure of five-point measure of opinion is potentially quite coarse and subject to measurement error. As such, our measure of opinion consistency is similarly noisy. To address this, we repeated the party consistency analysis using a three-item scale of consistency that was created from the opinion measure and two other items measuring support for the UPC on seven-point scales. The scale was highly reliable ( $\alpha=0.95$ ). The measure was rescaled to range from 0 to 1 and transformed into a continuous measure of party consistency (with higher scores indicating greater consistency with one's preferred party). When we repeated all consistency analyses using this new measure, we find substantively identical results that follow a very similar pattern of statistical significance. Full results are available in the Supplementary Appendix.

### **Party Endorsement Experiment**

Our results to this point suggest very clear support for our hypotheses: learning the position taken by one's preferred party drives opinionation and party consistent opinion formation among those who are not mismatched in their values and party affiliation. Despite extensive descriptive evidence and a variety of between-subjects and within-subjects tests, one could remain concerned that the differences in outcomes are due to some form of selection on unobservables. Some unobserved, time-variant factor may drive both knowledge of the in-party position and opinion toward the UPC.

Fortunately, we have a final, pivotal test of the opinion leadership and critical followership hypotheses. At the end of each reinterview survey, we included a brief experiment that exposed individuals to the position taken by one of the major political parties. Specifically, we exposed individuals to either: a “yes” endorsement from Social Democrats, a “yes” endorsement from the Liberals, a “no” endorsement from the Danish People’s Party, or a “no” endorsement from the Red-Green Alliance. This means that some individuals were randomly exposed to an in-party endorsement, while others were exposed to an out-party endorsement. We then asked them one final time for their opinion on the issue, using the same measure reported earlier. We are therefore able to conduct within-subjects tests of the effect of randomly learning this in-party endorsement by comparing the consistency of opinions at the (pre-treatment) beginning of the reinterview survey to those at the (post-treatment) end of the reinterview survey.<sup>23</sup> Importantly for our analysis, many individuals still did not know the position taken by their preferred party, so we can analyze the effect of this treatment separately among those who already knew the party position compared to those who are learning it for the first time.

Figure 10 reports treatment group mean levels of consistency, separating those who were assigned to learn an out-party position versus their own party’s position, and further by those who already knew their party’s position and those who did not. The upper panel shows those learning an out-party cue. As we have seen before, those who already knew their party’s position were much more likely to be consistent than those who do not. Replicating our ecological results from the panel survey, learning the out-party position appears not to have affected either of these groups (know cue already: -0.01,  $t=-0.79$ ; don’t know cue already: 0.00,  $t=0.00$ ). The lower panel, however, shows a different pattern of results. The experimental exposure to an in-party endorsement increases consistency by 10.2 percentage

---

<sup>23</sup> Note: the experiment did not include a control group because we are interested in within-subject changes, especially among those who reported not knowing their party’s position and thus are learning it for the first time during the experiment.

points when that exposure constitutes the respondent's first learning the party position ( $t=4.16$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). The effect does not occur among those who already know their party's position ( $0.01$ ,  $t=0.80$ ) and who were baseline much more consistent.

These results therefore replicate the results seen throughout the panel study. As citizens learn the position taken by their preferred party, they become more party consistent. While learning the party's position does not make these individuals as consistent as those who already knew the position, it does significantly increase the degree to which they adopt the position taken by their preferred party. Opinion leadership appears to be strong.

### **Conclusion**

Do citizens blindly follow political parties when forming their political preferences? Yes and no. In the case of the UPC, citizens used the positions of parties and other information about the policy to form preferences. All of this information reduced their uncertainty about the issue, allowing them to form an opinion and eventually to vote. The position taken by their preferred party, however, seemed particularly useful information. Many citizens, once they learned their party's position, adopted that position. Other citizens also learned their own party's position but adopted another view. We therefore see patterns of both opinion leadership and critical followership and this pattern of opinion formation depended in large part on the degree of correspondence between citizens' predispositions toward European integration and their party's position on the issue.

When forming opinions about a European policy issue, citizens for whom preferences and party were well-matched responded to their party's endorsement by adopting the position. This effect held even when they were broadly knowledgeable about the positions of other parties, suggesting a unique contribution of the endorsement of one's own party. For citizens who were neutral toward European integration, party endorsements carried similar sway. Without predispositions leading them one way or another, these citizens followed their

party. What then of those for whom predispositions and party disagreed? Here we see clear signs of critical followership. Like their matched and neutral peers, these individuals become less uncertain about their views over the course of the UPC debate but learning their own party's position made them no less likely to adopt their party's position. With reasons of their own to adopt an alternative opinion, they went against their party more than any other group. These results were plainly visible in the over-time patterns of opinion formation observed over the course of our four-wave rolling reinterview panel, in the various regression specifications used to causally identify the effect of learning the cue from those data, as well as from the endorsement experiment embedded in the reinterview waves of the survey. All of this evidence triangulates in on a common set of results: learning the position of one's preferred party is uniquely influential in shaping policy opinions and that influence occurs most when citizens have matched predispositions and occurs least when citizens are cross-pressured.

What do these results mean for the literature on opinion formation? Our analysis suggest that party position-taking provides a uniquely potent way to engage citizens in politics, encourage those citizens to form opinions, and to connect their predispositions to specific policy questions. These results represent a significant advance over prior understanding of party influence. By engaging a high-risk research design involving the study of an issue before it was widely debated among the mass public, we were able to measure citizens' political predispositions prior to any debate. As such our design was uniquely capable of identifying the heterogeneous effects of learning the position of one's preferred party across those with different value orientations.

Our results also highlight the value of focusing on *consistency* as a measure of opinion formation. Unlike a "raw" measure of support, consistency provides an intuitive metric of agreement between a citizen and their preferred party and, more importantly, the

degree to which factors (such as learning the party's position) affect that agreement. We saw for instance that upwards of 90% of matched partisans who were knowledgeable of their party's position were consistent with their party but only about 50% of those who were not knowledgeable held the same view. For this latter group, our panel data reveal that the broader campaign generally did not lead citizens to form the consensus view held by their fellow partisans; many still voted against the position implied by their partisan predispositions. In short, learning a single piece of information (the party position) helped citizens understand how to vote on a new and complex issue. Mismatched partisans by and large formed opinions inconsistent with their party's position – regardless of whether they knew or learned that position – which shows a significant pattern of critical followership.

On balance, we think these results invite two broad democratic implications. First, partisan debate is critical to citizen engagement. At the beginning of our study, almost none of our respondents were attentive to the matter of Danish membership in the Unified Patent Court, despite several years of preceding legal debate in across the continent. In a short period of time, however, position taking by all of the major parties in Denmark triggered nationwide media coverage (as shown in Figure 1), significant increases in public attention (as measured in our data), and a considerable increase in the proportion of individuals aware of their party's position as well as that of other parties. Partisan conflict at the elite level (in particular, the stance of the Danish People's Party in favor of a referendum) meant that an issue resolved as a parliamentary matter in nearly every other European country became an issue for mass political debate in Denmark. Danish citizens learned about and formed opinions on this issue because parties disagreed. Without partisan conflict, most citizens would have remained uninformed and without opinions on this issue.

Second, citizens we find that party endorsements help citizens to critically engage with political debates. While matched partisans used a party endorsement to form a

reasonable position – that is, an opinion consistent with both their party and their orientation toward Europe – those who were mismatched in their party affiliation and European orientation appear to have engaged in much more critical followership. Rather than simply taking the lead of their party and form opinions inconsistent with their European orientation, they used cues in the process of opinionation to the same degree as matched partisans but used that cue toward a different end: to go against their party and in favor of their value orientation. This suggests that party position taking has the potential to provide more than just a reminder to defend one's party identity or an affective cue about what views a citizen should hold. Instead, for at least some segment of the electorate, party cues communicate information that help citizens to make sense of and critically evaluate complex policy questions.



**Table 1. Demographics by Panel Wave**

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4	Time 2/4 Non- respondents	Danish Population
<b>Female</b>	.50 (.50)	.50 (.50)	.49 (.50)	.49 (.50)	.50 (.50)	.50
<b>Age (mean)</b>	45.6 (14.2)	47.2 (14.0)	47.2 (13.9)	47.3 (14.2)	40.6 (13.3)	40.4
<b>Region</b>						
<i>Copenhagen</i>	30.1	30.4	30.5	29.3	30.0	31.1
<i>Zealand</i>	15.1	14.7	14.9	14.7	15.9	14.5
<i>S. Denmark</i>	21.6	22.1	21.4	22.4	20.4	21.4
<i>Mid-Jutland</i>	23.0	22.6	23.3	23.3	23.4	22.7
<i>North Jutland</i>	10.2	10.3	10.0	10.4	10.3	10.3
<b>Employment Sector</b>						
<i>Private</i>	38.2	34.9	39.1	37.7	41.1	46.9
<i>Public</i>	24.4	27.2	24.2	22.7	23.3	22.8
<b>Income (,000 DKK)</b>						
<i>Personal</i>	303 (168)	304 (164)	315 (170)	300 (166)	292 (169)	295
<i>Household</i>	521 (305)	518 (301)	536 (308)	517 (303)	507 (302)	474
<b>Education (mean)</b>	4.4 (1.5)	4.4 (1.5)	4.4 (1.5)	4.3 (1.6)	4.6 (1.4)	--
<b>Left-Right Ideology (mean)</b>	.18 (.46)	.16 (.46)	.19 (.47)	.17 (.46)	.17 (.46)	--
<b>EU Orientation (mean)</b>	.04 (.52)	.03 (.53)	.02 (.54)	.03 (.53)	.07 (.50)	--

Note: Cell entries are proportions, unless otherwise noted, with standard deviations in parentheses. Education is measured on a 1-6 scale. Danish population numbers were retrieved from Statistics Denmark's StatBank for the year 2014. Population income numbers are based on total pre-tax income and employment sector is based on working-age population (19-69 years of age).

**Table 2. Factors Explaining Knowledge of Own Party's Position (Cross-Sectional Analysis)**

	T1	T2-T4	T1	T2-T4	T1	T2-T4
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
knowscale	0.11* (0.01)	0.08* (0.01)	0.11* (0.01)	0.08* (0.01)	0.11* (0.01)	0.08* (0.01)
followdebate	0.69* (0.03)	0.70* (0.03)	0.69* (0.03)	0.71* (0.03)	0.71* (0.03)	0.69* (0.04)
govperf	0.03* (0.01)	0.03* (0.02)	0.05* (0.01)	0.06* (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.05* (0.01)
leftright	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.03* (0.02)
female	-0.09* (0.01)	-0.11* (0.01)	-0.09* (0.01)	-0.11* (0.01)	-0.08* (0.01)	-0.09* (0.01)
age	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
edu	0.01* (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)
region=2	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)
region=3	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
region=4	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
region=5	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)
Pro frame		-0.01 (0.02)		-0.01 (0.02)		-0.01 (0.02)
Con frame		-0.04* (0.02)		-0.03 (0.02)		-0.03 (0.02)
partyid=2	0.04 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)				
partyid=3	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.09* (0.04)				
partyid=4	-0.17* (0.02)	-0.27* (0.03)				
partyid=5	-0.20* (0.03)	-0.25* (0.04)				
partyid=7	0.03 (0.02)	-0.06* (0.03)				

partyid=8	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.09* (0.02)				
partyid=9	0.06* (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)				
t1yesparty=1			-0.10* (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)		
EU Neutral					-0.07* (0.01)	-0.07* (0.02)
Mismatched					-0.06* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.04)
<hr/>						
$R^2$						
Observations	4862	3550	4862	3550	4092	2979

Cell entries are average marginal effects from a logistic regression model predicting respondent's knowledge of their own party's position. Standard errors of the marginal effect in parentheses.

\* p<0.05

**Table 3. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position: Opinionation**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Know Own Party Position	-0.35*	-0.15*	-0.25*	-0.12*	-0.24*	-0.12*	-0.31*	-0.14*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
$R^2$								
With Controls	None	All	None	All	None	Time Variant	None	All
Waves	T1	T1	T2-T4	T2-T4	All	All	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	5242	4862	3817	3552	5242	5242	5242	4862

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

**Table 4. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position (Learners Only): Opinionation**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Know Own Party Position	-0.27*	-0.13*	-0.27*	-0.12*
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)
$R^2$				
With Controls	None	Time Variant	None	All
Waves	Learners	Learners	Learners	All Learners
Model	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	1260	1260	1260	1197

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

**Table 5. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position: Opinionation**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1.knowown									
Matched	-0.34* (0.02)	-0.14* (0.02)	-0.23* (0.02)	-0.10* (0.02)	-0.23* (0.02)			-0.30* (0.01)	-0.13* (0.01)
EU Neutral	-0.37* (0.03)	-0.21* (0.03)	-0.29* (0.02)	-0.19* (0.02)		-0.33* (0.03)		-0.36* (0.02)	-0.22* (0.02)
Mismatched	-0.25* (0.07)	-0.12* (0.06)	-0.16* (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)			-0.20* (0.06)	-0.24* (0.04)	-0.08 (0.04)
$R^2$									
Controls	None	All	None	None	None	None	None	None	All
Waves	T1	T1	T2-T4	T2-T4	All	All	All	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	FE	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	4420	4092	3204	2981	2837	1361	222	4420	4092

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

**Table 6. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position (Learners Only): Opinionation**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1.knowown								
Matched	-0.26* (0.02)			-0.13* (0.04)			-0.26* (0.02)	-0.10* (0.03)
EU Neutral		-0.36* (0.03)			-0.15* (0.06)		-0.35* (0.03)	-0.21* (0.04)
Mismatched			-0.25* (0.07)			-0.09 (0.15)	-0.25* (0.07)	-0.09 (0.07)
$R^2$								
With	None	None	None	Time	Time	Time	None	All
Controls				Variant	Variant	Variant		
Model	FE	FE	FE	FE	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observation	664	319	55	664	319	55	1038	988

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

**Table 7. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position: Party Consistency**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Know Own Party Position	0.38*	0.22*	0.34*	0.25*	0.25*	0.18*	0.34*	0.22*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
$R^2$								
With Controls	None	All	None	All	None	Time Variant	None	All
Waves	T1	T1	T2-T4	T2-T4	All	All	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	5242	4862	3818	3552	5242	5242	5242	4862

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

**Table 8. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position (Learners Only): Party Consistency**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Know Own Party Position	0.26*	0.15*	0.26*	0.17*
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)
$R^2$				
With Controls	None	Time Variant	None	All
Waves	Learners	Learners	Learners	All Learners
Model	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	1260	1260	1260	1197

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

**Table 9. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position: Party Consistency**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1.knownown									
Matched	0.37* (0.02)	0.22* (0.02)	0.33* (0.02)	0.23* (0.02)	0.25* (0.02)			0.34* (0.01)	0.22* (0.01)
EU Neutral	0.30* (0.03)	0.19* (0.03)	0.35* (0.03)	0.29* (0.03)		0.30* (0.03)		0.34* (0.02)	0.25* (0.02)
Mismatched	0.05 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.07)			0.16* (0.07)	0.11* (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)
$R^2$									
Controls	None	All	None	None	None	None	None	None	All
Waves	T1	T1	T2-T4	T2-T4	All	All	All	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	FE	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	4420	4092	3205	2981	2837	1361	222	4420	4092

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05

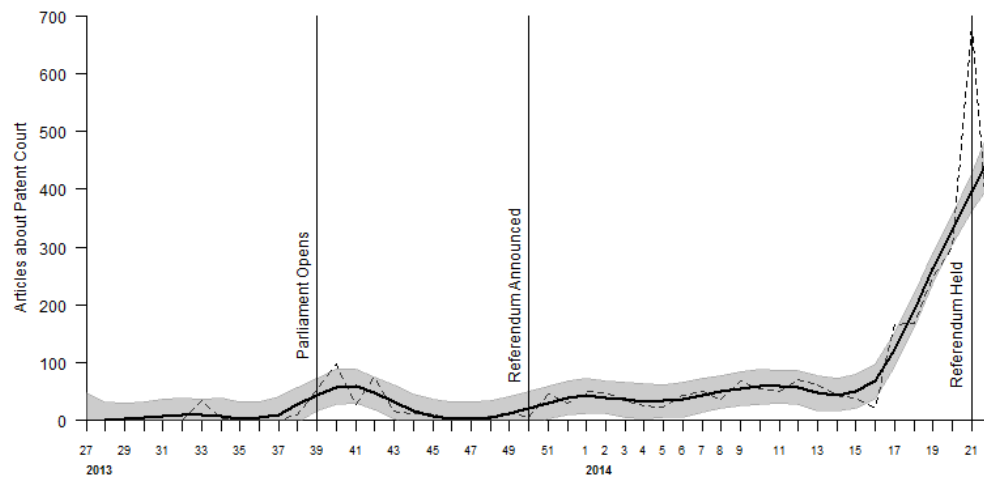
**Table 10. Average Marginal Effect of Knowing Own Party's Position (Learners Only): Party Consistency**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1.knownown								
Matched	0.27* (0.02)			0.13* (0.04)			0.27* (0.02)	0.13* (0.03)
EU Neutral		0.32* (0.03)			0.13* (0.07)		0.32* (0.03)	0.20* (0.04)
Mismatched			0.19* (0.07)			0.02 (0.16)	0.19* (0.08)	0.05 (0.08)
$R^2$								
With	None	None	None	Time Variant	Time Variant	Time Variant	None	All
Controls								
Model	FE	FE	FE	FE	FE	FE	RE	RE
Observations	664	319	55	664	319	55	1038	988

Standard errors in parentheses

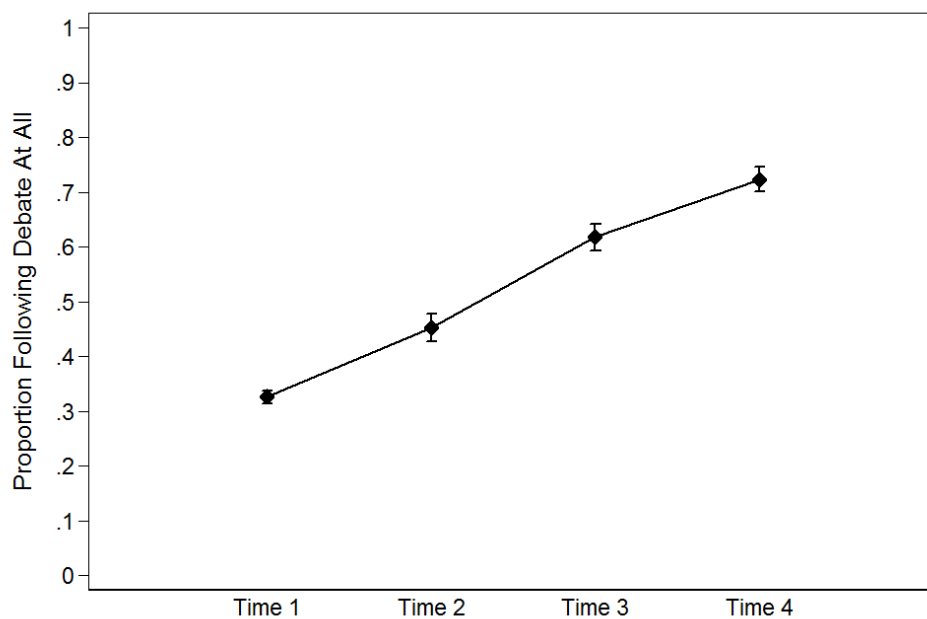
\* p&lt;0.05

**Figure 1. Weekly Media Coverage of UPC in Danish News Media**



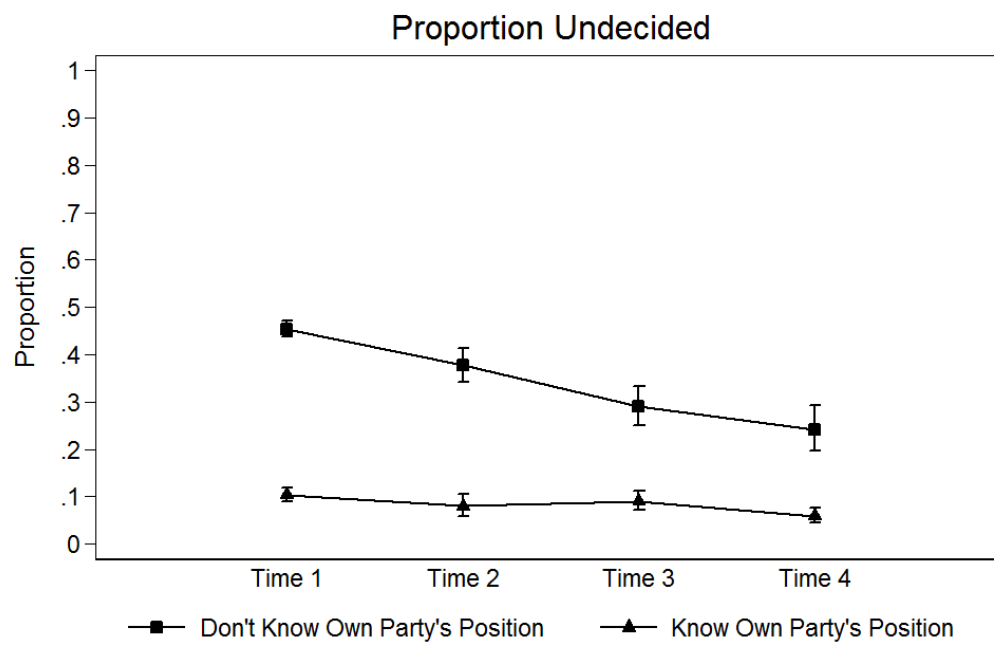
Note: Figure displays dashed line representing total news articles by week. Black line is a LOESS smoothing of that series, with a gray region indicating +/- one standard error of the predicted media coverage. Key time points in the UPC debate are highlighted.

**Figure 2. Proportion of Respondents Following UPC Debate, by Wave**

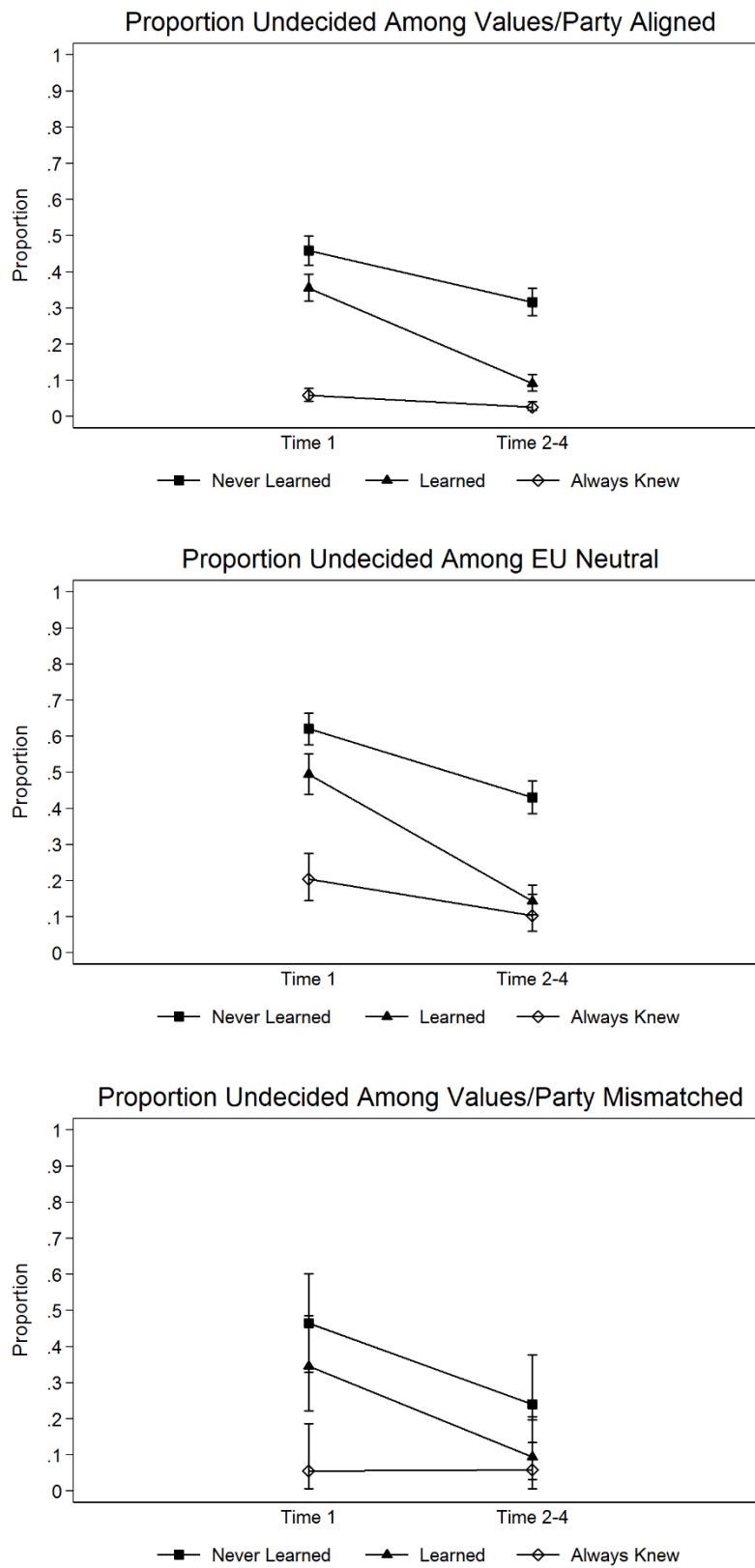




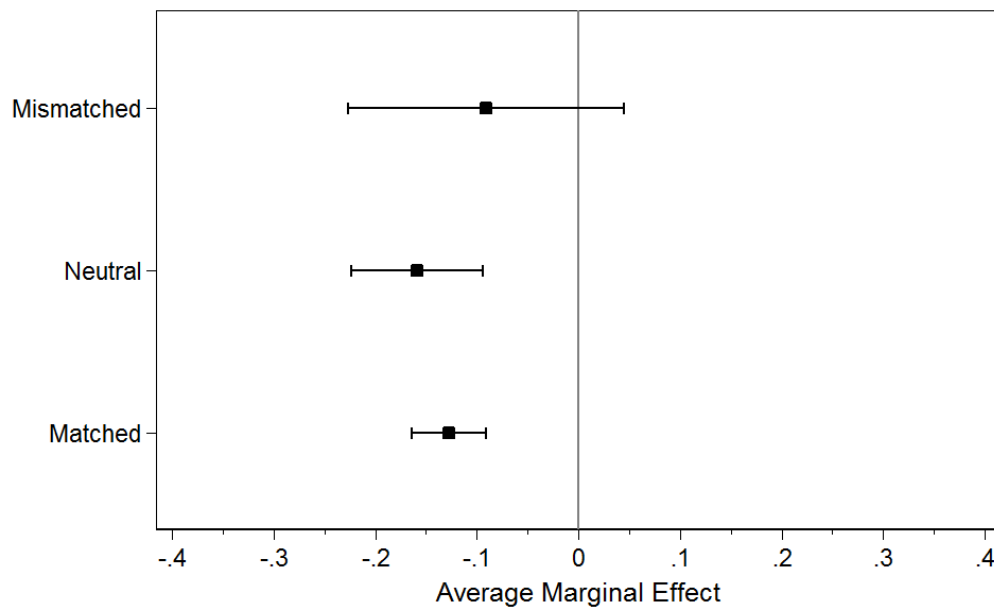
**Figure 3. Proportion Undecided over Time**



**Figure 4. Proportion Undecided over Time by Party/Orientation Match**

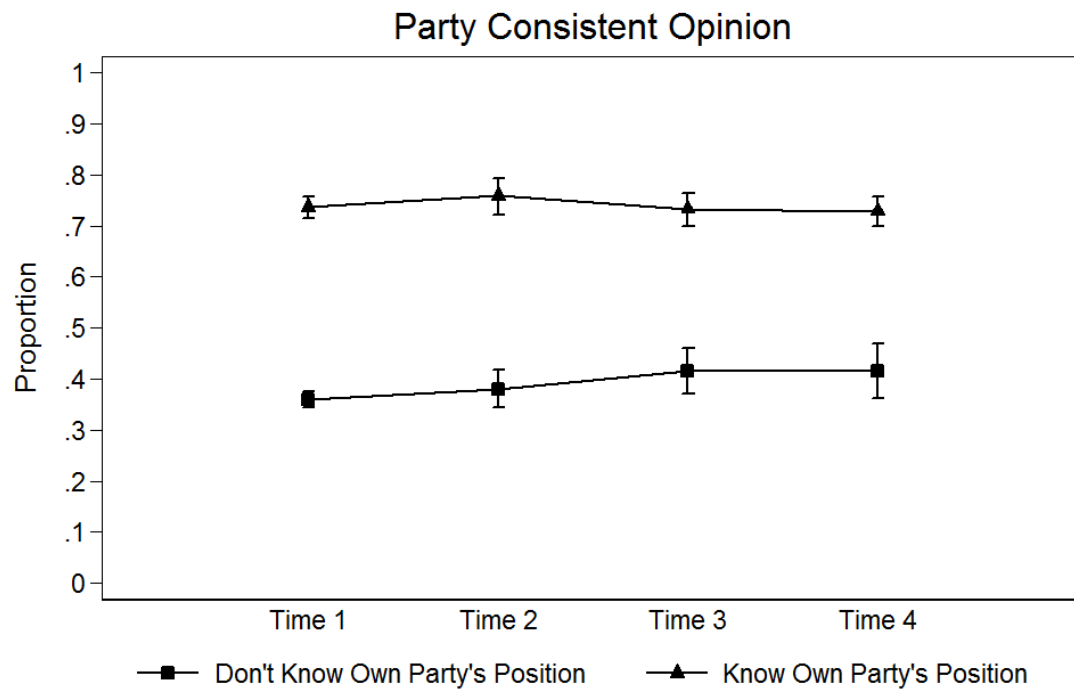


**Figure 5. Effect of Knowing Cue on Being Undecided, by Party/Orientation Match**

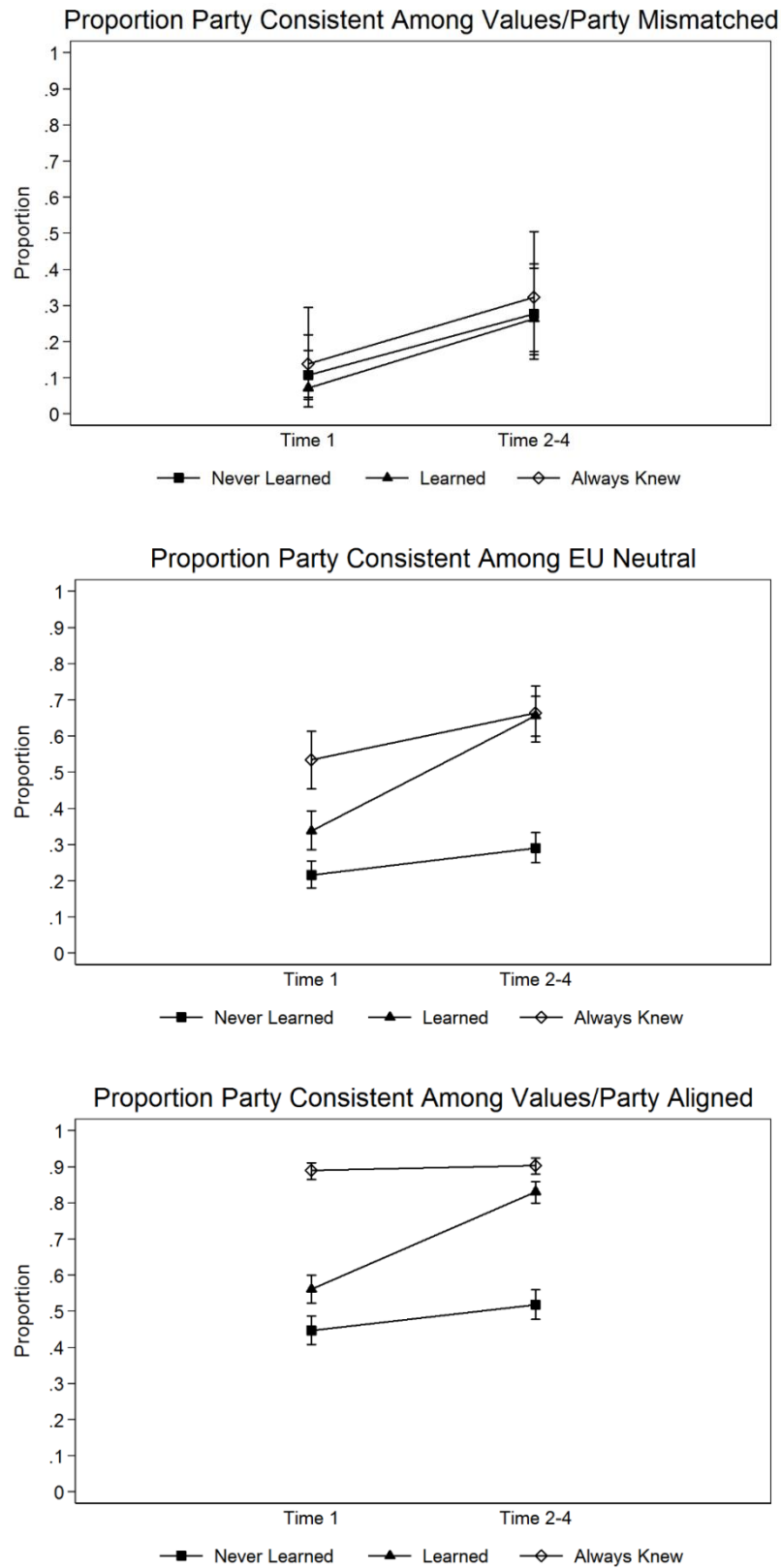


Note: Outcome is a binary variable with 1 indicating a “don’t know” response to the UPC opinion question and 0 otherwise. Results based on fixed effects panel regression analysis, with time-variant controls (issue knowledge, attention to debate, government performance, and time 2 experimental condition).

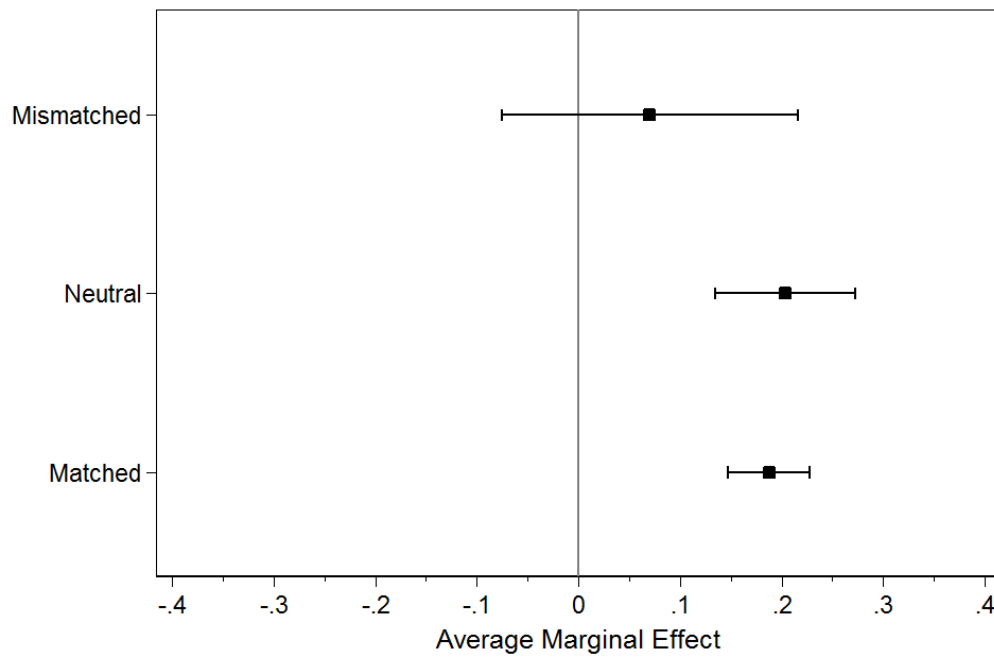
**Figure 6. Party Consistency over Time**



**Figure 7. Party Consistency over Time by Party/Orientation Match**

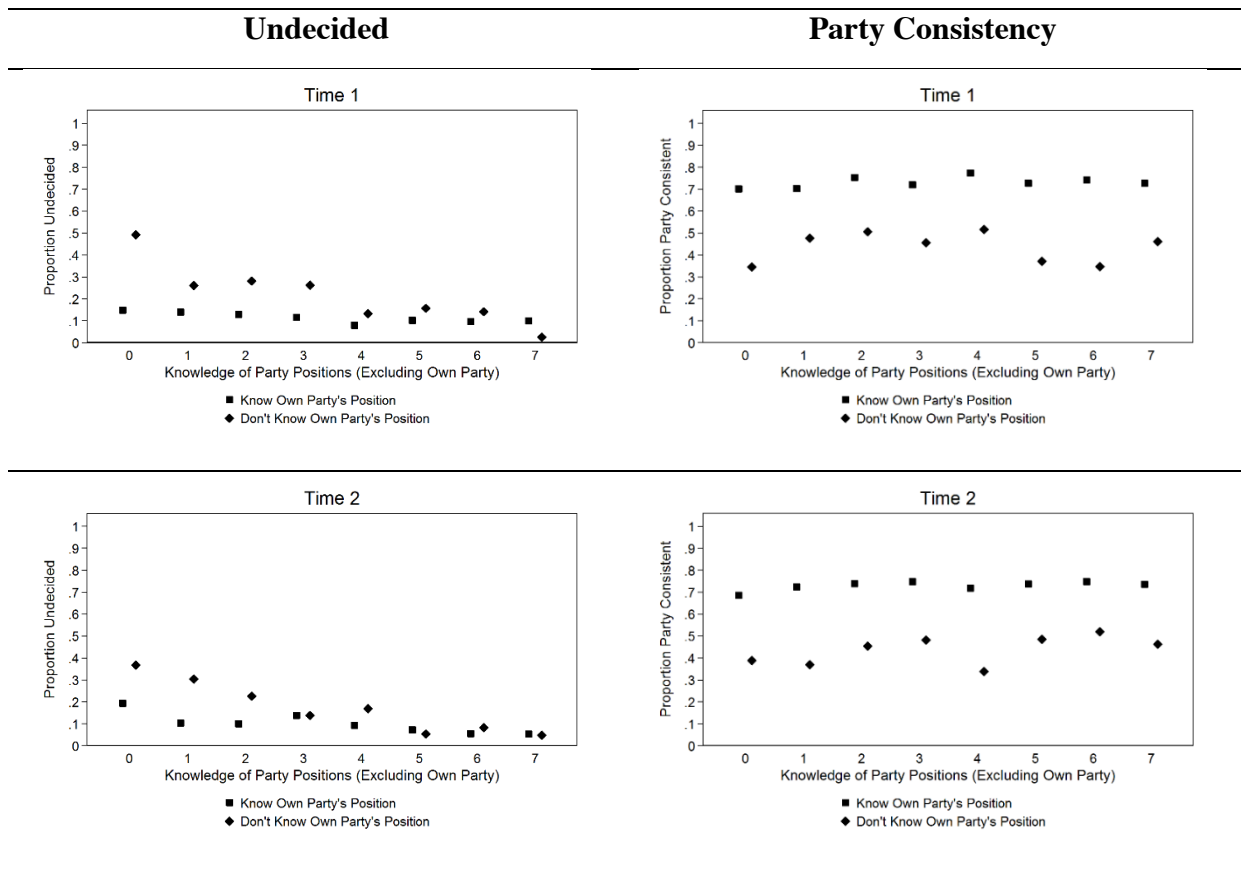


**Figure 8. Effect of Knowing Cue on Party Consistency, by Party/Orientation Match**



Note: Outcome is a binary variable with 1 indicating a party-consistent opinion and 0 otherwise. Results based on fixed effects panel regression analysis, with time-variant controls (issue knowledge, attention to debate, government performance, and time 2 experimental condition).

**Figure 9. Proportions of Respondents Undecided and Party Consistent across Levels of Partisan Awareness and Knowledge of Own Party's Position**



Note: Plots in the left column show the proportion of respondents undecided about the UPC as a function of their knowledge of party positions (excluding their preferred party) and the position of their preferred party. Plots in the right column show the proportion of respondents forming an opinion consistent with their party. Those who know their party's position are less likely to be undecided and more likely to be consistent, across all levels of general partisan awareness.

**Figure 10. Party Consistency Before and After Exposure to a Randomly Assigned Party Endorsement in the Reinterview Experiment**

