Leaders without Partisans

Dealignment, Media Change, and the Personalization of Politics

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Contents

Tables

Figures

Foreword

Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg

A generation (or more) ago, one of the prime directives of electoral research came from Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan's (1967, p. 50) statement that "the party systems of the 1960s, reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s." Despite the turbulence of mid-century European politics, they argued that the dominant feature of postwar politics was the stability and continuity of party systems. Almost as soon as their words were printed, a process of political change began to transform these same-party systems. The focus of research shifted from explaining stability to explaining these ongoing processes of electoral change.

Diego Garzia, Frederico Ferreira da Silva, and Andrea De Angelis's book *Leaders without Partisans* provocatively addresses one of the main features of this process of electoral change. The evolving social conditions of affluent democracies have gradually eroded the partisan bonds that held together the party systems of the 1960s. Each decade, fewer and fewer citizens feel attached to a specific political party, a downward current that shapes the ebbs and flows seen in specific elections.

In 2000 we assembled a team of scholars to look at the mounting forces of electoral change (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). The authors of this new book invited us to contribute a foreword that reflects on our initial findings and discusses the consequences of partisan dealignment on contemporary electoral politics.

THE FORCES OF DEALIGNMENT

The discovery of party identification is one of the most significant findings of voting behavior research. Partisanship often serves as a core value for individual political beliefs. It is the ultimate heuristic because it provides a reference structure for evaluating many new political stimuli and making political choices. Partisanship also stimulates participation in campaigns and elections. The developers of the concept emphasized the functional importance of partisanship for many aspects of political behavior:

> Few factors are of greater importance for our national elections than the lasting attachment of tens of millions of Americans to one of the parties. These loyalties establish a basic division of electoral strength within which the competition of particular campaigns takes place. And they are an important factor in ensuring the stability of the party system itself . . . The strength and direction of party identification are of central importance in accounting for attitude and behavior. (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 121).

Given the importance of partisanship in the electoral behavior literature, the first signs of weakening partisan attachments in the American public came as a surprise to many scholars. But soon this same trend became evident in several other established democracies with different electoral and party systems, and different social cleavages.

We think dealignment is a consequence of several processes of social change in affluent democracies and these are also expanded upon in *Leaders without Partisans*. One factor is the growing cognitive sophistication; more people today can deal with the complexities of politics without passive reliance on external cues or heuristics. The availability of political information through the media also reduces the costs of making informed decisions. This cognitive mobilization reduces the need to rely on partisanship or other cues to guide citizens in making political choices. Thus, some evidence shows that the drop-off in partisanship has been greatest among the better educated who are politically engaged.

A second factor is the demographic changes that have weakened the bonds between major social groups defined by class or religion and their representative parties. There are fewer working-class, union members who turn to their union for advice. There are fewer actively religious citizens who would seek advice from their religious leaders or fellow worshipers. The social cleavages that had produced frozen party alignments thawed as a consequence of social modernization.

A third factor is the changing values of contemporary publics. Social modernization has changed the value priorities of citizens, especially among

younger generations (Inglehart, 2018). Deference to authority decreased, including deference to organizations such as political parties; norms of autonomy and individualism increased. The postmaterial/self-expressive values of the cognitively mobilized weaken habitual party cues that provide less room for individual choice.

When we wrote about dealignment in 2000, this was still a contentious topic. Some analysts attributed the trends to short-term electoral forces and questioned whether the trends would continue. Others claimed that party identifications were alive and well, if you just looked in the right places. Now we have an additional two decades of evidence.

Table F.1 updates our table from *Parties without Partisans* with new survey evidence from the twenty-first century. We added new surveys from the respective national election studies for the fourteen nations in the original analyses, and added three more nations where time trends were not previously available. To the extent possible, the trends reflect comparable party identification questions across the time series. The current results are even more striking.

Table F.1. Trends in party identification over time

		Original trend		*Extended trend*			
Country	*Initial PID*	*b*	*sig.*	*b*	*sig.*	*Time span*	*N*
Australia	92%	–.179	.19	–.124	.05	1967–2016	15
Austria	67%	–1.120	.00	–.596	.00	1969–2019	13
Canada	90%	–.386	.05	–.476	.00	1965–2015	15
Denmark	52%	.001	.95	–.098	.19	1971–2015	14
Finland	57%	–.293	.49	–.199	.09	1975–2015	8
France	73%	–	–	–.401	.02	1967–2017	9
Germany	78%	–.572	.00	–.460	.00	1972–2017	13
Iceland	80%	–.750	.08	–1.658	.00	1983–2016	7
Italy	82%	–	–	–.668	.00	1968–2018	11
Japan	70%	–.386	.06	–.713	.00	1962–2012	16
Netherlands	38%	–.329	.13	–.249	.02	1971–2017	14
New Zealand	87%	–.476	.01	–.968	.01	1975–2014	14
Norway	66%	–.220	.34	–.968	.00	1965–2013	13
Sweden	64%	–.690	.00	–.861	.00	1968–2014	15
Switzerland	59%	–	–	–.669	.00	1971–2015	11
United Kingdom	93%	–.189	.01	–.270	.00	1964–2017	14
United States	77%	–.366	.00	–.314	.00	1952–2016	17

Source: Most nations are based on the respective National Election Studies.

Note: The percentage with party identification in column one is the average of the percentage expressing an identification in the first two surveys in each series. Results differ from those presented in table 2.1 due to different measurement of the party identification variable and number of elections considered in the analyses.

Every affluent democracy shows a downward trend in party attachments over the full period of available surveys. In eight of the fourteen nations, the trend strengthens with the additional surveys. And all of the three additional nations display a downward trend. Garzia, Silva, and De Angelis describe this trend across the affluent democracies in Europe. The same pattern is occurring in North America and the Pacific Rim democracies—fewer and fewer citizens are identifying with a political party. In sum, the evidence of dealignment today seems even more evident than when we published *Parties without Partisans*.

This trend has the potential to change the basic aspects of our models of electoral politics, which is the focus of this book. Fewer and fewer citizens are tied to a single party, but they still have to make choices on Election Day. So the mechanism of voting choice should change. The role of information sources also changes as voters become more responsive to the content of election campaigns. Parties and other political actors may also change their behavior in response to these trends. The impressive feature of *Leaders without Partisans* is their novel analyses and findings regarding the consequences of dealignment.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEALIGNMENT

If partisanship is less of a factor in shaping voting behavior, then other factors must inevitably be becoming more crucial. As in *Parties without Partisans*, one of the factors that Garzia, Silva, and De Angelis examine is the role of political leaders. Whereas in the early days of survey research leaders were chosen by the party elite and defined by their party's well-established identity, European political parties today are often defined by the political profile of their leader. The authors trace some of this change to the transformation of the media environment, most notably the transition from reliance on newspapers that covered politics as a struggle between competing ideas to television with its emphasis on personalities.

This book's analysis of data garnered from hundreds of thousands of interviews conducted in national election studies in Europe over the last six decades is a monumental accomplishment. We wish to note that behind each of these many interviews is a complex story with multifaceted feelings about politics. What it means for a voter to focus on the leading candidates for high office while eschewing partisanship is a complicated question, especially for sophisticated political observers who are familiar with ideological, left-right thinking. The early national election studies commonly asked open-ended questions inviting respondents to express their likes and dislikes of parties and politicians in their own words. Unfortunately, to the best of our

knowledge, only the American National Election Studies (ANES) still asks such open-ended questions. We thought it would be helpful to cull a couple of examples from the 2016 ANES study to illustrate the thinking of some "leader-centric" voters. To do so, we looked for respondents who said little about the two major U.S. political parties but much about their presidential nominees. And to ensure that we were looking at the kinds of voters identified by Garzia et al., we also made sure to choose people who did not identify with a political party, stated that no party represented their views, and were far more reliant on TV than newspapers as an information source.

Our first example is from a woman from Massachusetts who was retired from the airplane parts industry and had some college education. Her responses to what she liked and disliked about the parties and candidates were as follows:

Is there anything in particular that you like about the Republican Party?
No.

Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the Republican Party?
I don't like anything!

Is there anything in particular that you like about the Democratic Party?
I trust them more than the other.

Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the Democratic Party?
What I don't like is the lies, the email lies.

Is there anything in particular about Donald Trump that might make you want to vote for him?
No.

Is there anything in particular about Donald Trump that might make you want to vote against him?
He's against women, minorities, he's all for the rich people. I don't trust him, he's not smart, and I think he might start a war if he got in.

Is there anything in particular about Hillary Clinton that might make you want to vote for her?
I think she's a lot more for the women and the not so rich people like myself. And I just don't trust Donald Trump. There's some things I'm still not 100% with her, but there's not a lot to choose from. I just don't want to see him get in.

Is there anything in particular about Hillary Clinton that might make you want to vote against her?
The lies, but they both have lies, so I don't trust either of them. When it comes to emails, she's not very smart.

Notably, the only specific remark made about either of the parties was when she said she didn't like the Democrats because of Hillary Clinton's emails, indicating that she saw the party as little more than a vehicle for its presidential candidate. Based on this transcript, it seems that the 2016 choice came down to which presidential candidate she disliked the least. The lesser of two evils argument that this respondent expressed is a good example of the relative lack of popularity among leaders in Western democracies that Garzia et al. focus on in chapter 6 of this book.

Our second example is from a Wisconsin woman who worked as an ophthalmic medical technician after obtaining her associate vocational degree. She responded as follows to the same set of open-ended questions:

Is there anything in particular that you like about the Republican Party?
No.

Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the Republican Party?
They don't stand strong. They can't make a decision. They don't support their candidate.

Is there anything in particular that you like about the Democratic Party?
No.

Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the Democratic Party?
They're just crooked. They only answer to their lobbyists. They are not for us.

Is there anything in particular about Donald Trump that might make you want to vote for him?
His issues. He's strong. He'll be a strong leader. Pro-life, infrastructure, the military, healthcare reform, jobs, economy, religious freedom, Supreme Court justice, border control, second amendment.

Is there anything in particular about Donald Trump that might make you want to vote against him?
I'm not fond of the things he says.

Is there anything in particular about Hillary Clinton that might make you want to vote for her?
No.

Is there anything in particular about Hillary Clinton that might make you want to vote against her?
She should be convicted. She should be in prison. I don't agree with any of her policies. I'm against Obamacare. She lies. She is crooked. I am for the police. I am for the military. I've changed a lot of my views because of her. I am for religion. I want to pray where I want and not be condemned for it. She is above the law, even with the FBI, even with our president.

As with the first example, she viewed the parties largely in terms of their leaders. There is also clear evidence of political extremism in this interview transcript, with her mentioning many hot-button polarizing issues. This woman had clearly listened carefully to the rhetoric of Donald Trump and had taken sides with the groups that he espoused to support. There doesn't seem to be much middle ground to respondents like this. This pattern seems to fit the rhetoric one often sees these days throughout the world in leader-centered elections. Throughout the 2016 ANES interviews one can find an amazing collection of extreme negative statements about the candidates, with phrases such as "evil," "treasonous," "liar," "criminal," "devious," "power-hungry," and many others coming up regularly (see Wattenberg, 2019). Our review of the American time series reveals that attitudes about the candidates hit their lowest point ever in 2016, but the downward trend in leader popularity has been quite evident for decades.

We strongly suspect that much of today's negativism about leaders stems from the transition to voting in the digital age that Garzia, Silva, and De Angelis skillfully discuss in chapter 6. Television gave leaders the ability to speak directly to voters without the need for the political party as an intermediary. The Internet has taken this one step further by bypassing the need for journalists to decide what is newsworthy and thus should be transmitted from leaders to voters. Given the opportunity to communicate directly to the public through Twitter, Facebook, and so on, many leaders take to extreme rhetoric. Most importantly for the perspective of this book, the format of social media is far more conducive to presenting the views of an individual than a political party. This can be seen by comparing the number of followers for a leader as compared to his or her political party. For example, Boris Johnson currently has 3.1 million Twitter followers as opposed to just 509 thousand for the Conservative Party of the United Kingdom, which he leads. An even more extreme is the example of Emanuel Macron in France, who has 6.4 million followers compared to just 282,000 for his party, En Marche! And even a small country with

a highly proportional system like Finland is not immune from this sort of personalization. Sanna Marin of the Social Democratic Party has 193,000 Twitter followers compared to just 27,000 for her party. If social media represents the future of political communication, then we suspect that the trends identified by Garzia et al. in this book will continue unabated for quite some time to come.

In summary, *Leaders without Partisans* is a research landmark in understanding how voters and party systems are changing. The collection and coordination of national election studies from 14 nations and 129 elections is a monumental task. By analyzing how weakening partisan identities interact with the candidate images, and the role of the media in this process, this book describes the evolution of electoral choice over the past several decades. This study represents the next step in solving the puzzle of how new political forces are transforming contemporary elections.

Chapter 1

Party Change, Media Change, and Electoral Change

The study of elections and voting behavior rests on the enduring need to understand the connection between citizens and the political parties that are the foundation of the electoral process. The goal of our book is to describe how this relationship between citizens and parties has changed in fundamental ways over the past half-century.

In the early days of empirical electoral research, the classic account of political representation in Western Europe focused on the main social divisions—or *cleavages*—that have characterized these societies and their respective party systems. Based on a tight alignment between social groups and political parties, early cross-national analyses affirmed that parties "do represent the interests of different classes" (Lipset, 1981, p. 230) and have been doing so over a prolonged period of time. Indeed, the *freezing hypothesis* put forward by Lipset and Rokkan states that "the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with but few significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s" (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 50). In political systems characterized by strong cleavage parties, therefore, vote choices were largely understood as a function of citizens' embeddedness in such cleavages (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Bartolini, 2000).

However, we argue that this picture of stability changed due to social modernization and the shifting composition of social structures in postindustrial societies. According to Blondel and Thiebault, "While the process of 'modernization' continued throughout the twentieth century, its effect was no longer to reinforce the social character of the relationship between the citizens and the political system, but, on the contrary, to reduce the weight of social structure on the population as a whole" (Blondel & Thiebault, 2010, p. 1).

Thus, much as socioeconomic development shaped enduring loyalties between social groups and the parties in the first half of the twentieth century,

social modernization has produced the disaggregation of such group loyalties. In this context, electoral change is linked to "the numerical decline in traditional core party clienteles, and in particular to the declining electoral weight in recent years of farmers, the petty bourgeoisie, and the working class" (Mair, Müller, & Plasser, 2004, p. 3). In fact, a relatively steady decline in cleavage voting (i.e., class and religious) has been observed in virtually all Western democracies by the end of the 1980s (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992; Oskarson, 2005; Knutsen, 2006).

As the group-based identifications that forged attachments to political parties attenuate, voting essentially becomes more fluid. On the one hand, electoral volatility increases as voters are no longer loyal to a single political party based on group ties (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992). On the other hand, partisan attachments decline, ultimately weakening the underlying assumptions of the class–mass party model (Dalton, McAllister, & Wattenberg, 2000; Katz & Mair, 2018). In this respect, decreasing levels of turnout (Franklin, 2004; Gallego, 2015), party identification (Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995; Dalton, 2000; Berglund et al., 2005), and party membership (van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012) all illustrate the fact that traditional parties are "no longer managing to engage the ordinary citizen" (Mair, 2006, p. 32).

Importantly, the waning connection between parties and the citizens has gone hand in hand with the unfolding of the postindustrial revolution, which has brought new issues to the forefront. As economic affluence has spread and educational opportunities expanded, the public's interests have broadened to include wide-range post-materialist concerns, including social exclusion, environmental protection, gender equality, and alternative lifestyles (Inglehart, 1977, 1990). In turn, the diffusion of post-materialist aspirations has been conducive to the introduction of new issues into the political competition (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012). With the established mass parties unable to fully address the emerging claims of an increasingly complex electorate, new political parties formed to meet the demand. In the first wave, left-libertarian parties emerged, followed later by green parties, which attracted a substantial electoral support throughout Northwestern Europe in the 1980s (Kitschelt, 1988; Müller-Rommel, 1989). This first wave was followed by a counter-wave of anti-system, extreme right parties customarily labeled the "Extreme Right" (Ignazi, 2003) or "Populist Radical Right" (Mudde, 2007).

Against the background of a changing electorate—characterized by social de- encapsulation, weaker partisan ties, more complex political concerns, and the increased competition from new party actors—traditional cleavage parties adjusted their electoral strategies. These parties extended their appeal beyond the socio-ideological cleavages to which they had traditionally referred (Mair, Müller, & Plasser, 2004; Dalton, 2018). Already in 1966, Otto Kirchheimer

foresaw this transformation in his seminal analysis of party transformation in Western democracies:

> The mass integration party, product of an age with harder class lines and more sharply protruding denominational structures, is transforming itself into a *catch-all* people's party. Abandoning attempts at the intellectual and moral encadrement of the masses, it is turning more fully to the electoral scene, trying to exchange effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success. (Kirchheimer, 1966, p. 185).

The intuitions at the core of Kirchheimer's claim found widespread empirical support in subsequent studies of political parties. For instance, Gunther and Diamond (2003, p. 185) forcefully highlight catch-all parties' "superficial and vague ideology, and overwhelmingly electoral orientation." Yet, the quest for a wider audience has involved not only ideological mutation but also changes in the relations between parties and their intermediary associations (e.g., trade unions and the churches) as well as the balance of power between leaders and members within the party itself (Webb, Poguntke, & Kolodny, 2012, p. 79).

THE PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS: DEFINITIONS AND ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

One of the central themes of our study holds that the changing electoral environment has led to a personalization of politics. This is a complex phenomenon involving several different elements of the electoral process.

In response to the changing electoral environment, parties have transformed themselves into "centralized and professional campaigning organizations, in which . . . the weight and direction of party strategy have tended increasingly to be located within the party leadership" (Mair, Müller, & Plasser, 2004, p. 265). According to Panebianco (1988), the internal rebalancing of power has been vital to the strategic autonomy required by leaders in order to implement their preferred electoral strategies that responded to a fluid electoral environment. A focus on party ideology or group loyalties leaves a party with less electoral maneuverability than a focus on an individual who may market different issues as conditions change. Successful party leaders are often masters at this process (e.g., Tony Blair, Emmanuel Macron).

Bowler and Farrell (1992, p. 233) argued that the move toward the catch-all party typology implies the "pre-eminence of a personalized leadership." Peter Mair and his colleagues went so far as to contend that in such a process of transformation *the parties become their leaders* (Mair, Müller, & Plasser,

2004, p. 265). In the last two decades, the argument that leaders have grown increasingly prominent, powerful, and autonomous within the structures of the party has gained further consensus in the "presidentialization" literature (Mughan, 2000; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Webb, Poguntke, & Kolodny, 2012).

A growing strand of political science literature has linked the increasing relevance of political leaders vis-à-vis their parties to a more general process in modern democracies—the *personalization of politics*. Political personalization relates to a change in the "focus of politics from topics to people and from parties to politicians" (Adam & Maier, 2010, p. 213). In sociological terms, personalization can be seen as part of a broader trend toward the individualization of social life (Bauman, 2001). It is also a side effect of modernization, which has "empowered individual political figures at the expense of the authority of the political parties within which the figures operate" (Swanson & Mancini, 1996, p. 10). In their widely cited definition, Rahat and Sheafer argue that the personalization of politics should be seen "as a process in which the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e., political party) declines" (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007, p. 65). Similarly, Karvonen (2010, p. 4) puts at the core of his personalization hypothesis the notion that "individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities." Balmas et al. (2014) refer to this process as *centralized personalization*, which implies that "power flows upwards from the group (e.g. political party, cabinet) to a single leader (e.g. party leader, prime minister, president)." Because of its prominence, this book will concentrate on the development of centralized personalization in contemporary electoral politics.

It is evident that a fundamental aspect of the personalization thesis is its transformative longitudinal consequence (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). Personalization designates a diachronic process through which individual political actors come to matter more over time while the centrality of the political group declines over the same period. Therefore, it is not enough to show that individual politicians matter, as they may well have mattered a lot in the past as well. Rather, the claim that there has been a process of personalization is contingent on the empirical demonstration that the role of political personalities has *increased* over time.

Anecdotal evidence of a generalized trend toward personalization of democratic politics includes the spread of televised leaders' debates beyond presidential systems (Norris, 2000; de Vreese, 2010), the substitution of leader images for party symbols during election campaigns (Swanson & Mancini, 1996; Farrell & Webb, 2000; Schill, 2012), and the media's increasing propensity to mention leaders rather than the parties they belong to (Dalton,

McAllister, & Wattenberg, 2000; Mughan, 2000; Langer, 2007; Karvonen, 2010; Ohr, 2011). Governments are portrayed in an increasingly personalized fashion, as they are routinely labeled after the name of their leaders (such as the Berlusconi government or Merkel government). There is a stronger correlation over time between prime ministerial popularity and the public approval ratings of the executive in several parliamentary democracies (Lanoue & Headrick, 1994; McAllister, 2003; Campus & Pasquino, 2006).

A trend toward actual personalization of political parties has been identified as well. Paramount examples of "personal parties" that emerged around the turn of the century include, most notably, Ross Perot's *United We Stand America* (Canovan, 1999), Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (Calise, 2015), Pim Fortuyn's homonymous list (van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003), and Clive Palmer's *United List* (Kefford & McDonnell, 2016). Even outside the realm of personal parties, a general tendency toward the inclusion of leaders' names in parties' brand names has been observed throughout the Western world (Rahat & Kenig, 2018).

On these premises, one would concur with Ian McAllister's claim that the "popular focus on leaders now appears commonplace across almost all of the major parliamentary systems, where parties once occupied the center stage" (McAllister, 2007, p. 572). Hypothetically, then, the personalization of the supply side of politics should have affected "the role of individual politicians and of politicians as individuals in determining how people view politics and how they express their political preferences" (Karvonen, 2010, pp. 1–2). In this book, we will assesses the extent to which this is actually the case.

PARTY LEADER EFFECTS ON VOTE CHOICE: A REVIEW

In terms of the effect of party leaders on voters, Rahat and Kenig (2018, p. 121) suggest that personalization "implies a change in behaviors such as voting, which tends to follow the evaluations of leaders . . . and is done less and less according to party loyalty, identity and ideology." The idea that party leader evaluations are increasingly important determinants of voting behavior is at the core of Bernard Manin's model of *audience democracy*, in which voters "tend increasingly to vote for a person and no longer for a party or a platform" (Manin, 1997, p. 219). Accordingly, Anthony King's seminal contribution posed the hypothesis that nowadays "leaders' personalities and personal characteristics . . . play a large[r] part in determining how individuals vote in democratic elections" (King, 2002, p. 4).

In the last decades, electoral researchers have repeatedly attempted to estimate the strength of the relationship between voters' assessment of party leaders' personality—either through measures of overall likeability (e.g.,

thermometer scores) or through politically relevant individual personality traits (e.g., competence, honesty, empathy, and leadership)—and their actual vote choice. Several decades of cross-sectional analyses have supported the idea that candidate evaluations exert a statistically significant impact in multivariate, fully specified models of voting in both presidential and parliamentary systems.

Because presidential elections encourage a greater focus on personalities than parliamentary ones, studies of leader effects in U.S. elections have a lengthy pedigree. This research has established that there is a strong systematic impact of candidate evaluations on voting decisions (Popkin et al., 1976; Miller & Shanks, 1982; Shanks & Miller, 1990, 1991; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). Moreover, the findings of these studies have often been taken as benchmarks for—or as a sort of barometer of—the strength of leaders in presidential vis-à-vis parliamentary democracies. A particularly important contribution in this respect is Martin Wattenberg's *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics* (1991), which influenced the personalization of politics research outside the United States. The crucial importance of candidate evaluations in presidential systems is confirmed by the—comparatively fewer—available studies of non-U.S. systems such as France (Pierce, 2002; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, & Bélanger, 2012), Argentina, and Mexico (Gunther et al., 2016, p. 171).

In contrast to presidential systems, parliamentary elections formally present voters with a choice between parties rather than the personal characteristics of candidates. Accordingly, party leaders and leading candidates are assumed to matter less for vote choice in parliamentary elections. Electoral studies suggest that candidate images do not exert the same electoral impact within parliamentary systems. For the most part, this is due to the stronger historical role of social cleavages and party identifications in these systems. Available evidence points nonetheless to a substantial impact of party leader evaluations on vote choice in Britain (Crewe & King, 1994; Mughan, 2000; Clarke et al., 2004; Evans & Andersen, 2005), Canada (Johnston, 2002; Gidengil & Blais, 2007), Germany (Brettschneider, Neller, & Anderson, 2006; Schoen, 2007; Wagner & Weßels, 2012), the Netherlands (van Wijnen, 2000; Takens et al., 2015), and Norway (Midtbø, 1997)—even after controlling for previous partisan and ideological identifications. These findings are complemented by a relatively more restricted set of multicountry comparisons that support the finding that party leader evaluations are important for voter choice across different systems (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Tverdova, 2010; Bittner, 2011; Mughan, 2015; Gunther et al., 2016).

Research suggests that party leaders matter more in younger parliamentary democracies with relatively less institutionalized party systems and weaker political cleavages (Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011, p. 46; Gunther et al., 2016,

p. 173). Southern European democracies like Portugal (Lobo, 2006; Lobo & Silva, 2018) and the Second Italian Republic (Garzia & Viotti, 2012; Bellucci, Garzia, & Lewis-Beck, 2015) are good contemporary cases in this respect.

However, overall the empirical evidence gathered so far is unable to provide conclusive evidence that the personalization of electoral choice has increased over time. Indeed, the main charge to the personalization thesis so far relates to the inexistence of a clear trend toward a greater electoral importance of leaders across time (King, 2002). Regrettably, longitudinal analyses of leader effects on voting are the exception rather than the rule in the available literature. As Kriesi (2012, p. 826) puts it, "Given the importance of the 'personalization thesis', the empirical evidence in its support is surprisingly thin." An early electoral study of six established European democracies between the 1960s and the 1990s concluded that voters' evaluations of party leaders are "as important or unimportant now as they were when they were first measured" (Curtice & Holmberg, 2005, p. 250). In other words, candidates are important for electoral choice, but there is mixed evidence of whether they are more important today than in the past.

More recently, however, an acceleration of the dealignment trend coupled with the ever more pervasive nature of the personalization of politics have raised challenges to the customary conclusions. Examining more recent (i.e., post-2000) election studies, Holmberg and Oscarsson's (2011) comparative study uncovered "minor" upward trends in half of the countries included in their analysis. Similarly, Karvonen (2010, p. 106) has argued that "there are many indications that persons have become more prominent in electoral politics in many countries." A recent longitudinal analysis by Garzia (2014) supports this conclusion by means of two-stage estimation of election study data from the last three decades in Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands. More longitudinal research on longer time series and a wider number of countries has been repeatedly called for (Karvonen, 2010; Rahat & Kenig, 2018). Taking up this daunting research challenge is one of the tasks of this book, but by no means the only one.

TELEVISION AND THE PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS

From a political science perspective, it has been customarily assumed that the changing structure of mass communication has played a crucial role in the development of the personalization of politics. According to McAllister (2007, p. 584), while the causes of personalization "are numerous and complex, it does appear that international trends in political communications have become so uniform and pervasive that they dwarf all other explanations." While a precise assessment of the actual direction of causality between

personalization and mediatization lies beyond the scope of this book, it is nonetheless important to highlight the connection between the two phenomena in our overall research framework.

The combined audiovisual impact of television goes beyond mere technological transformation, to entail "the greatest anthropological revolution of all times" (Sartori, 1989, p. 43). The visual possibilities of television gave individuals the option not only to read about events but also to watch them. This transformed the notion of objectivity—it is no longer enough to read about it, one must see it—and conferred additional trustworthiness to televised news (Postman, 1986). The fact that television primes images rather than written content—and that it is more likely to be directed at entertainment rather than abstract reflection—constrains the type of political messages that can be conveyed. Unlike the written format, this setting is not ideal for communicating complex ideas, programmatic goals, ideologies, or political issues (Hayes, 2009). Rather, television-based political communication is well-suited to accentuate persons and personality factors for (at least) two concurrent reasons. According to David Swanson and Paolo Mancini, "The format of television favors personalization for formal and structural reasons. Formally, the medium favours representation of human figures over complex institutions such as political parties, while structurally the medium's commercial logic favours offering access to all candidates who can pay the cost of advertising, passing over the parties" (Swanson & Mancini, 1996, p. 13). Against this background, television has actually exerted a strong impact on both parties and citizens, as we highlight in this section.

AuQ2

The rise of television in the second half of the twentieth century was central in elevating the role of leaders at the expense of their parties. The latter became "more dependent in their communications with voters on the essentially visual and personality-based medium of television" (Mughan, 2000, p. 129). Parties' adaptation to television relied largely on ensuring that their leaders had "the visual appeal and communication skills that suited the new medium. When a new party leader is chosen . . . one of the main selection criteria is how they present themselves on television" (Dalton, Farrell, & McAllister, 2011, p. 219). The news itself becomes progressively "privatized" around individual political actors (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012) in a process reinforced by politicians' and parties' increasing highlight on personality (Sheafer, 2001; Strömbäck, 2008). Indeed, the personalization of political communication appears to have a self-reinforcing nature. Leaders react to the personalization of media coverage by means of an even stronger leader-centered communication strategy (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). This affects the media that, in turn, feels compelled to focus on individual leaders even more (Langer, 2007, p. 384).

In addition, television did not simply force parties to adapt new political communication strategies in terms of platform and style. It also transformed the patterns of voters' consumption of political information, reinforcing the demand for more personalized political competition (Prior, 2006). By calling attention to some features of political competition while ignoring others, television news influences "the standards by which governments, presidents, and candidates for public office are judged" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63).

Apart from affecting the way in which candidates are evaluated, news attention also increases perceptions of their relative importance (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Changes in the informational environment have been shown to affect citizens' political belief systems (Ohr, 2011). On these bases, a fundamental consequence of personalization is the paramount role gained by party leaders in voters' patterns of political cognition (Bittner, 2011; Holian & Prysby, 2014). In a political world characterized by increasing complexity, politicians represent an efficient cognitive shortcut, as they can be easily evaluated using inferential strategies of person perception that are constantly employed in everyday life (Kinder, 1986; Rahn et al., 1990). Television consumption supports this tendency, as unlike consumers of other media "television viewers have access to visual imagery and nonverbal cues that often play an important role in shaping personality evaluations of others" (Druckman, 2003, p. 561).

With television emerging as the chief source of political information for voters and in the light of its differential effects, empirical research at the intersection between political behavior and communication has thrown into sharp relief the link between television exposure and the determinants of vote choice. Like the literature on leader effects, the available scholarship originated in the United States, remaining (for the most part) confined to that side of the Atlantic. McLeod, Glynn, and McDonald (1983) were the first to empirically test the impact of candidate evaluations on vote choice across different patterns of media consumption. Their analysis of survey data from the 1980 U.S. presidential election suggests that candidate images are more important for vote choice among voters favoring television over newspapers. The limited generalizability of their findings—stemming from a small sample of voters in Dane county, Wisconsin—was tackled by Keeter (1987). His longitudinal analysis of nationally representative datasets collected by the American National Election Study (ANES) over the elections held between 1952 and 1980 supported McLeod and colleagues' findings, and concluded that television has facilitated and encouraged vote choices based on candidates' personality assessments. This time frame has been extended up to 2012 by Holian and Prysby (2014), again by means of ANES data and again with very similar results to those obtained by previous researchers.

Analyses of candidate-centered voting trends in European parliamentary democracies are more scattered and unable to provide unequivocal conclusions as to the impact of television on the determinants of vote choice. Anthony Mughan (2000) tackled this issue in his seminal longitudinal analysis of British elections and uncovered a strong correlation between exposure to televised political news and increased party leader effects on voting. However, this conclusion is only partly supported by Rico's (2014) analysis of three general elections from the Spanish case. Relatively more convincing, albeit cross-sectional, evidence is offered for the cases of Italy (Garzia, 2017a) and the Netherlands (Takens et al., 2015). When it comes to comparative assessments, the only piece of available literature is by Gidengil (2011). The null results stemming from Gidengil's regression analyses are importantly accompanied by an explicit acknowledgment of severe data limitations. As the author admits, exposure to television "is not really the most appropriate variable for testing whether leaders matter more to people who are regular viewers . . . A more appropriate test of the hypothesis would be to focus on voters whose main source of information was television news" (Gidengil, 2011, p. 154). This conclusion highlights the critical need for further comparative research attentive to the proper measurement of news exposure across different media.

ONLINE PERSONALIZATION

The advent of the Internet profoundly altered the way political information is produced and digested by the wider public. On these bases, the multiple links between the online world and the political process have been progressively put under tougher scrutiny by social and political scientists (for a review, see Chadwick & Howard, 2010). Early research concentrated its attention on the impact of Internet usage on broadly defined patterns of political engagement and participation (Norris, 2000). Within this framework, Internet users appeared more broadly engaged with the political process (Boulianne, 2009) as well as more prone to electoral participation (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003; Bond et al., 2012). A relatively more recent strand of research deals with the hypothetical increase in political polarization brought about by digital online communication—and social media in particular (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2011)—again, from a voter-level perspective.

The extant literature on "personalized politics online" (Rahat & Zamir, 2018) has largely focused, instead, on the presence of candidates and leaders vis-à-vis parties in online communication. Research conducted in the pre-broadband world found that candidates were not eager to be present on the web and actually actively avoiding online visibility and interactions (Stromer–Galley, 2000). At the turn of the new millennium, the use of the Internet by parties and candidates was still quite patchy, with websites often

acting as little more than static online leaflets (Ward & Gibson, 2003). Candidates' use of Web 2.0 technologies, in particular, remained scattered (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2011; Hermans & Vergeer, 2013) and largely limited to the broadcasting of official party positions (Small, 2010). Merely a decade or so later, however, the digital landscape had altered substantially, and these early findings seemed already dated. The massive spread of social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter among the population at large made candidates more inclined to use and consider them important for their campaign communication (Karlsen, 2011). In turn, the inherent logic of social media enhanced the personalized character of election campaigns, centering communication patterns on candidates' image rather than the party itself. Kruikemeier et al.'s (2015) analysis of the three prominent features of current online political communication (i.e., interactivity, personalization, and mobilization) finds that candidates' websites are widely used as platforms for personal self-promotion when compared to party websites. Against this background, empirical research switched focus to the determinants of social media use by candidates (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Dolezal, 2015) as well as its effect on voters.

Experimental evidence shows that more personalized online communication and the use of interactive features of social media by candidates boosts political involvement among citizens (Kruikemeier et al., 2013). In turn, increasing the personalization of online political communication has been shown to feed into a more general pattern toward permanent campaigning in online environments (Larsson, 2016) and an overall intensification in the personalization of politics (Livak, Lev-On, & Doron, 2011). According to Rahat and Kenig (2018, p. 128), personalization is especially prominent on the consumption side. Suffice it to say that among the twenty leading political actors on Facebook in terms of *likes*, seventeen are individual politicians and only three are political parties (ibid.). Speaking more directly to the impact of social media on voting behavior, Kruikemeier's (2014) evidence suggests that candidates who used Twitter during the 2010 Dutch parliamentary election campaign received more votes than those who did not. This study, however, is unable to clarify the extent to which electoral gains can be directly attributed to voters' appreciation of the personalization of the candidates' campaign messages.

Moving the attention to voters' patterns of consumption of political information online, the extant literature provides very little insight when it comes to their relationship with the determinants of electoral choice. While online election news seekers appear more concerned with issues (Gibson & McAllister, 2006), much less is known about the extent to which they incorporate candidate and party leader assessments in their voting calculus. The seminal analysis by Holian and Prysby (2014) focusing on the 2012 U.S. presidential election provides evidence that online news seekers are systematically less

likely to base their vote choice on personality evaluations when compared to regular consumers of television news. More nuanced conclusions are offered in a recent analysis of the 2013 Italian parliamentary election by Garzia (2017a). His findings suggest a multifaceted explanation whereby "leader effects do not depend on the main source of information per se. Their magnitude would seem to rather interact with the characteristics of the political offer and their respective interaction with old as well as new media" (Garzia, 2017a, pp. 410–11).

As of today, these two cross-sectional case studies are the only available contributions to the field. Against this background, there seems to be no need to call for further comparative research—the need for it is obvious, especially in view of the foreseeable growth of the Internet as the (likely) most important source of political information for Western electorates in the near future.

THE "WEST EUROPEAN VOTER" DATASET, 1961–2018

This book seeks to address the limitations identified in the review of the existing literature by systematically explaining the connection between partisan dealignment, individual exposure to political information across old and new media, and leader effects on vote choice. This book substantially extends the existing state of the art through an innovative methodological approach at the intersection of electoral behavior and political communication research, and its wide geographical and longitudinal scope. Indeed, the dynamics of electoral change can only be disentangled by adopting a long-term and comparative perspective (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992; Thomassen, 2005; Garzia, 2014). On the one hand, neither a synchronic approach nor one focusing on the short–medium term offers the intergenerational historic breadth that our research questions demand. On the other, the generality of change can only be accounted for by considering a large sample of heterogeneous party systems.

Regarding the research environment in which to place the study, the current survey of the literature suggests more research is needed specifically on the European democracies. These cases highlight many of the crucial variations in the structure of democratic politics and thus provide the ideal framework for such a thoroughly comparative analysis. The country selection was based on the following criteria. First, we restricted our sample to parliamentary democracies, as this is where any increase in the importance of party leaders is expected to occur (candidates have always been pivotal in presidential systems). Second, we focus on Western European countries, as they have a longer experience with democratic elections.

The baseline against which change will be measured depends necessarily on available data. To date, the National Election Study (NES) datasets are

the most widely used source of data for theoretically driven analyses of the determinants of voting behavior in cross-national perspective (Thomassen, 1994). Moreover, extensive reliance on survey data from NES is inevitable if we are to study trends in voting behavior across countries and time. NES questionnaires have been fielded in Europe since the early 1960s and NES data is currently available for virtually every parliamentary democracy in Western Europe.

Despite the abundance of cross-national NES data, comparative research has not fully exploited their potential when it comes to the study of leader effects. Existing cross-national projects involve large numbers of participants from multiple backgrounds within electoral research and therefore diverse research interests. The unfortunate result is that while all necessary variables to address our research questions might have been collected in a way or another in the original surveys, they have been systematically dropped from the harmonization process.[1]

Against this background, we targeted all publicly available NES datasets collected in Western European parliamentary democracies—including EU member states as well as those nonmember states with established tradition in the field, such as Norway and Switzerland. In the light of our guiding research questions, our pooled dataset only includes those election studies with measures tapping partisanship and voter evaluations of party leaders. As for the latter, we decided to rely on feeling thermometer scores, a context-invariant measure of voters' perception of party leaders that has the noteworthy advantage of being "the most frequently included type of question about leaders in election studies" (Bittner, 2011, p. 16).[2] Despite inevitable differences in question wording across countries, most of the studies allowed respondents to probe their feelings toward major parties' leaders on a 0 (dislike) to 10 (like) thermometer scale.[3]

The result of our labor-intensive harmonization effort is the "West European Voter" (WEV) dataset: an integrated database pooling information for a total of 129 parliamentary elections conducted between 1961 and 2018 in fourteen West European countries, summing up to 319,591 respondents. The list of studies included in our dataset is presented in table 1.1, while detailed study descriptions are presented in appendix B.

The WEV dataset overcomes the limitations of existing comparative projects, that is, unavailability of simultaneous measures of leader evaluations and patterns of media exposure, intragenerational perspective, and limited contextual variation. This allows us to tackle the main limitations identified in previous studies, which have either investigated a large number of countries without a longitudinal dimension (Bittner, 2011; Gidengil, 2011; Curtice & Lisi, 2014; Gunther et al., 2016) or adopted a longitudinal approach but focused on a smaller number of cases over a shorter time span (King, 2002;

Table 1.1. National election studies included in the "West European Voter" dataset

Country	*Year*
Austria	2008, 2013
Denmark	1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1984, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011
Finland	2003, 2007, 2011, 2015
Germany	1961, 1965, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2013
Greece	1985, 1989, 1996, 2009, 2012
Ireland	2002, 2007, 2011, 2016
Italy	1968, 1972, 1975, 1985, 1990, 1994, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2018
Netherlands	1981, 1986, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2012
Norway	1965, 1969, 1973, 1977, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013
Portugal	1985, 1993, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2015
Spain	1979, 1986, 1989, 1996, 2000, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016
Sweden	1968, 1970, 1973, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Switzerland	1979, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015
United Kingdom	1964, 1966, 1970, 1974(2), 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017

Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Karvonen, 2010; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011; Garzia, 2014). On these grounds, this book represents the most comprehensive longitudinal assessment of the role of party leader evaluation on vote choice in comparative electoral research so far.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Our journey begins in chapter 2 with a visit to the "crime scene" of weakening party attachments (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Dalton, 2013). We elaborate on the theoretical and empirical connotations of partisan dealignment, by first tracing its micro-theoretical roots and second by offering new compelling evidence regarding the long-term trajectory of partisanship decline in our fourteen parliamentary democracies. Through the lenses of cognitive mobilization theory, we seek answer to the question: *Where have all the partisans gone?* Our approach integrates a functional perspective on partisanship (positing dealignment as a function of increasing cognitive motivation and skills) with a social identity perspective (linking dealignment to the weakening intermediation function exerted by secondary associations across time). This perspective allows us to tackle another issue that the literature has only very seldom broached: Who are the parties more damaged by partisan dealignment? Who are the actual "parties without partisans"?

Chapter 3 brings party leaders into the picture. We move from the notion that the increasing influence of leaders can only be conceived as a function of the weakening electoral role of parties and party cues—in line with the very notion of personalization. If partisan dealignment is at the origin of the personalization of politics, as the theory indicates, leaders can only have become more relevant as a function of parties' loss of relevance. Hence, since these trends theoretically develop in parallel, our empirical analysis will consider both trends within a unified longitudinal explanatory model. In the footsteps of the previous chapter, we also assess the electoral implications stemming from uneven patterns of partisan dealignment across different party families. And indeed, those more strongly damaged by dealignment will also emerge as those who compensated more strongly with an emphasis on their leaders. Finally, the chapter turns to empirical democratic theory, linking leader effects to individual-level patterns of cognitive mobilization. Is the growing importance of leaders a sign of an electorate more attentive to all possible variables influencing political decisions or a symptom of a politically uninvolved society that decides based on superficial aspects related to the personality of politicians devoid of substantive political content?

In the following chapters we add another crucial variable to the equation: the media. Just as the *individualization* of political behavior does not automatically translate into the *personalization* of vote choices, in chapter 4 we put under tough scrutiny our number one suspect: television. As a matter of fact, the combination of visual and audio elements brought about by the television revolution during the second half of the last century carried profound implications in parties' communication strategies. Unlike newspapers and radio, television is an inherently image-based medium, and as such it is not the ideal platform to communicate complex programmatic contents or abstract ideological constructs. By favoring image over content, television made parties increasingly dependent on the personal appeal and favorable appearance of their leaders and leading candidates. Against this theoretical background, we highlight how the replacement of ideological cues traditionally offered to the electorate at large by political parties with the visual—and hence strongly personalized—cues provided by television has been decisive in the shift to highly personalized electoral behavior in contemporary parliamentary democracies.

Our exploration of the role of the media and its interaction with patterns of voting behavior continues in chapter 5. Here, we zero in on the profound impact of the Internet on voters' information diet, news gathering habits, and electoral choices. We do so by distinguishing between the initial, "elite" phase of the Internet and the more recent "mass" period. As the Internet proliferated in universities, among small communities of highly educated users, early communication research tended to emphasize the role of nonhierarchical networks of citizens participating in public affairs' forums to discuss and reengage with political issues. Moreover, before the introduction of broadband,

surfing the web primarily meant skimming through long chunks of text, in which images—and even more so videos—were thwarted by slow connection speeds. The spread of fast broadband connections, however, has transformed the user experience of contemporary digital media. By massively incrementing the amount of visual political information available on websites and social media, the "mass" phase of Internet use has increased its vertical, image-based, and hence person-centered nature. Nowadays, candidates and political leaders' images have become widespread online and continue to proliferate through personal blogs and YouTube channels. The personality-based dynamics that originated in television have found a fertile ground online. Our inquiry centers, by extension, on the ways in which consumption of political information on the internet is furthering the personalization trend into the present days.

In our last empirical chapter, we offer a bridge between the findings presented throughout the book and their normative implications. In chapter 6 we tackle the issue of European voters' increasingly cynical approach to politics. We present evidence indicating a long-term trend among voters of increasing distrust toward the leaders of parties they do *not* support. To make sense of this trend, we advance a composite explanation that rests on the interconnection between media and politics and focuses on the changing dynamics of (negative) campaigning since the dawn of the digital revolution. Against this background, we discuss the possibility that a distinctive form of "negative personalization" in voter behavior is emerging at the confluence of partisan dealignment and an increasingly confrontational style of political communication—triggered by the rise of social networks and partisan media—in a context of strong political personalization. The discussion is followed by an empirical analysis of the relationship between negative leader evaluations and vote choices over time.

Finally, chapter 7 discusses the broader implications of our research findings in relation to several open debates on contemporary democratic challenges. We discuss how the changing sociopolitical context of the twenty-first century may bear an effect on patterns of personalization. Inasmuch as political personalization is characteristic of a valence model of political competition, the increasing ideological and affective polarization of contemporary democracies may influence the personalization trend. We leverage the fresh analytical perspective offered by the concept of negative personalization to define the intricate characteristics of a process connecting digitalization and social media, the increasing negativity of contemporary democratic politics, and the personalization of politics. We then broaden the scope of our normative reasoning by weighing the rise of negativity in relation to the growth of populist parties and leaders. We conclude that electoral decisions are likely to become more strongly motivated by negative attitudes toward parties and their leaders than by positive attitudes—a type of electoral decision-making we designate by negative voting—suggesting a number of exploratory research paths.

Chapter 2

Patterns of Partisan Dealignment

For much of the twentieth century, West European party systems were grounded on the tight alignments between social groups and political parties (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Voters developed enduring relationships with parties, resulting from their embeddedness in political cleavages, subsequently structuring their political attitudes and voting behavior (Lipset, 1981). The stability of these party systems rested on an effective voter encapsulation by political parties, ensuring political mobilization and providing sustained electoral support.

This pattern changed significantly over the closing decades of the twentieth century. Traditional accounts of partisan dealignment point to a decline in the proportion of individuals declaring identification with a political party in Western democracies. For example, Dalton (2013) registers a decline of over 10 percentage points in the share of individuals declaring identification with a political party across nine EU countries between 1976 and 2009. Analogous trends are also identified in the United States. This erosion of stable partisan alignments paralleled a decline in cleavage voting in Western democracies (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992). Once the primary source of stable electoral support for both class–mass (e.g., Social-Democratic) and denominational (e.g., Christian-Democratic) parties, voters' affective attachments to political parties progressively declined. As a consequence, the vote shares for these parties also declined. The dealignment trend challenged the hegemony of these parties and the foundations upon which they built their linkage with West European electorates.

Partisan dealignment is thought to be the product of interconnected factors resulting from social and political modernization, exerting a role at the macro, meso, and micro levels (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). At the macro level, the social transformations resulting from modernization, such as tertiarization,

secularization, and individualization, dilute the social divisions underlying the political conflicts at the origin of cleavage alignments. At the meso level, disintermediation processes weakened the traditional organizations for social mobilization, depriving intermediary bodies such as church-related organizations and trade unions of their mass base. This process, in turn, led to a transformation in party organization and campaigning tactics. Deprived of socially mediated mass grassroots support, parties came to rely on more professionalized campaign tactics and political managers (Panebianco, 1988; Katz & Mair, 1995). Finally, at the micro level, voters became increasingly sophisticated due to a widespread process of cognitive mobilization and thus better equipped to face political decisions independently, that is, without resorting to partisan lenses to judge political events (Dalton, 1984; Inglehart, 1997).

This chapter expands upon some of the key analyses that have guided the investigation of partisan dealignment in established democracies. We start by discussing the multiple theoretical perspectives on the concept of party identification. Next, using our original data, we update partisan dealignment trends in West European democracies. The following sections explore the possible mechanisms underlying partisan dealignment and whether and how they have affected political parties differently. We conclude with a reflection on the relationship between partisan dealignment and the democratic process.

THE DECLINE OF PARTY IDENTIFICATIONS

In examining the relationship between partisan dealignment and electoral change, the departure point is, by necessity, a discussion of the concept of party identification and its importance for voting behavior. Party attachments guaranteed sustained electoral support for political parties, stabilizing Western political systems along cleavage divisions (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Bartolini & Mair, 1990). The erosion of these attachments weakened the alignments between voters and political parties, creating favorable conditions for large-scale electoral change (Dalton, Flanagan, & Beck, 1984; Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992). Thus, understanding partisan dealignment requires investigating whether the nature and function of party identification have changed and what consequences such change may have for West European electorates.

The concept emerged in the seminal work of Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960), *The American Voter*. The initiators of the sociopsychological voting behavior tradition define party identification as a long-term, affective, psychological identification with one's preferred political party. Initially designed to analyze American elections, party identification had such

a significant impact on voting behavior studies that it was rapidly picked up by European scholarship. Indeed, it is, as of today, one of the most established concepts in electoral research.

Already in *The American Voter*, party identification revealed an extraordinary ability to predict vote choice. Its fundamental impact on voting behavior has been confirmed in the following decades of electoral research, establishing it as a key explanatory variable for voting behavior models. V. O. Key (1966) aptly described this feature of party identification as a "standing decision" to support a given political party. For example, Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1976) estimated that in 1956, 83 percent of Americans with a party identification voted consistently with that identification in the presidential elections and about 90 percent voted consistently with that identification in congressional elections. These findings are extendible to European democracies: Holmberg (1994) finds similar figures for partisanship and voting congruence in both British and German elections. In fact, the effect of partisanship is claimed to be even greater in Europe than in the United States because of the party-centered nature of its political systems (Berglund et al., 2005).

Not only is party identification a key determinant of electoral support, but it also governs political attitudes, which are read through partisan lenses. Accordingly, voters' positions toward given issues or the evaluations they make of electoral candidates follow the perceptual screen of party identification, through which political reality is perceived. Thus, partisan attachments fulfill an important functional role, acting as informational shortcuts for political phenomena, providing cues to voters in scenarios of limited information. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that party identification relates to multiple aspects of political participation, whether political interest, engagement in political activities, or electoral participation (Bartle & Bellucci, 2009). As the fathers of the concept stated, "No single datum can tell us more about the [political] attitude and behavior of the individual" (Campbell et al., 1960, pp. 142–43).

According to the sociopsychological theory, voting behavior can be largely perceived as an attitudinal response to psychological forces. The intensity, direction, and consistency of such attitudes help to explain the electoral choices of individuals. In no other case are these attitudes more relevant than in relation to the development of a sense of psychological identification with a political party. As Miller and Shanks (1996, p. 120) highlight, "Party identification is a concept derived from reference and small group theory positing that one's sense of self may include a feeling of personal identity with a secondary group such as a political party." In other words, this is a sort of extension of the personal ego into the affective sense of belonging to a group. According to this perspective, the development of party identification can be traced back to early politicization, being especially rooted in inherited

parental partisan preferences and group memberships such as religion, social class, race, region of residence, and so on.

Concerning the conceptualization of *partisanship as an identity*, perhaps the most crucial feature is its stability across time. Once an individual develops an identification with a party, in most cases, it endures throughout their entire life. For example, Campbell et al. (1960, p. 148) reported that, at the time of their study, two-thirds of the respondents still identified with the party they first voted for, and a majority had always supported their party's candidate. Accounts of partisan stability were also found in the European electorate, where both LeDuc (1981) and Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002) find rates analogous to the United States. In fact, it has been claimed that even if individuals eventually defect in voting for an opposing party as a result of short-term forces, they are more unlikely to switch their partisan identification, reflecting the established fixity of political values and personal identities in adulthood (Markus & Converse, 1979). Although Campbell and his colleagues allowed for some plasticity, fluctuations in party identification are supposedly restricted to the occurrence of large-scale societal changes disrupting the balance in partisan alignments (Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, p. 132).

The idea that voters feel a stable sense of party identification was brought into question during the 1970s, feeding a wider discussion encompassing the nature and the theoretical status of the concept (Johnston, 2006; Bartle & Bellucci, 2009). Numerous empirical accounts have demonstrated that voters no longer seem to stably identify with political parties, casting doubts about its enduring influence over political attitudes and electoral behavior (Holmberg, 1994; Dalton, 2000; Berglund et al., 2005). The original Michigan idea of partisanship held it to be an *unmoved mover*—virtually unchangeable (i.e., unmoved) but nonetheless affecting (i.e., moving) the attitudinal variables to the narrow end of the funnel. In the 1970s, there emerged a contrasting attitudinal perspective on the concept, understanding partisanship as a *running tally*, permanently updated by citizens' retrospective political experiences (Popkin et al., 1976; Fiorina, 1981; Popkin, 1991).

While an assessment of the changing meaning of party identification in Western democracies lies beyond the scope of this book, we argue that the process of modernization challenged two fundamental features of party identification—whatever its conceptualization. First, as voters gained more cognitive resources and motivation as a function of the modernization process, their capacity to understand politics and reach voting decisions without relying on party cues decreased the functional aspect of partisanship (Shively, 1979). Such voters no longer need to rely on partisanship as a cognitive shortcut to political action. Therefore, the decrease in partisanship's functional importance might serve as an individual-level mechanism of dealignment. Such a mechanism is hypothesized to lie in the process of *cognitive*

mobilization, through which voters acquire more skills and motivation to deal with politics independent of party cues.

A second factor points to the weakening of secondary social groups, such as trade unions and religious organizations, as the source of attenuation in the transmission of political identities and a broader process of destructuration (Franklin, 2010; Elff & Roßteutscher, 2017). Once operating as social anchors of partisanship, these institutions provided political parties with a loyal base of supporters. The importance of these institutions for party membership, for example, has been well documented in the literature (Gunther & Montero, 2001; van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012; van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014). Just as these intermediary bodies were influential in the formation of partisan bonds, their decline may be a source of attenuation in socially embedded partisanship. These changes in electoral markets have arguably motivated a corresponding reconfiguration on the supply side. Specifically, mainstream parties have enacted a process of party change, adapting their profile in an attempt to respond to the changing composition of Western electorates (Mair, Mueller, & Plasser, 2004). This process of social disintermediation challenged the understanding of partisanship as an identity.

In the following sections, we investigate the relationships between partisan dealignment and cognitive mobilization, as well as social disintermediation. Exploring these relationships is important because it provides novel cues about the origins of partisan dealignment. By combining cognitive mobilization and social disintermediation, we offer a composite theoretical account of partisan dealignment, tested with data spanning for six decades and fourteen Western parliamentary democracies. Moreover, our analysis also provides insights into the potential consequences of partisan dealignment for representative democracies. Suppose partisan dealignment is mostly a function of attenuation in partisanship's functional role due to voters' increased cognitive skills and resources. In that case, dealignment may reflect the decisions of rational voters who—while remaining unaligned to a political party—continue to actively engage with politics through an independent assessment of political phenomena on the fly.

In contrast, the decline of intermediary social bodies as sources of political identity formation, consolidated into partisan attachments, may be a source of political alienation among those significant segments of the electorate that are not cognitively mobilized. Following the dwindling of traditional intermediary bodies, the mediation between citizens and politics has been increasingly replaced by the mass media. Especially for noncognitively mobilized individuals, the media may play an important function of cue provision in their relationship with politics. Unable to resort to decaying social intermediary bodies and often lacking meaningful partisan ties, these individuals will likely act based on the heuristics most prominently conveyed by the media.

PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT IN WEST EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES

Following Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck (1984), we define partisan dealignment as

> a decay in the pre-existing mass bases of support for the political parties—that is, an erosion of the mass party coalitions. Where partisanship reflects a long-term standing decision to support a political party, dealignment is identified most easily, for it will be manifested in a decrease in the party-affiliated portion of the electorate. (Daton, Flanagan & Beck, 1984, p. 233)

Understood mainly as a result of social and political modernization, dealignment is arguably most noticeable in advanced industrial democracies (Dalton, 2000). Some studies have documented this process describing how it unfolded in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Berglund et al. (2005) assessed the empirical evidence of a secular decline in partisanship levels. Focusing on those advanced industrial economies in which cognitive mobilization had already unfolded and produced sizable effects, the empirical scope of their study was limited to just six countries (United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). Nevertheless, the authors found "compelling evidence that partisanship is decreasing over time" (Berglund et al., 2005, p. 109). Schmitt and Holmberg (1995) measured changes in the postwar strength of aggregate party identification using Eurobarometer and EES data from fourteen European countries and the United States to find varying patterns of decline across countries. Dalton (2000) expanded this approach by considering a longer time series. Additionally, he only focused on advanced industrial democracies and drew mostly on election studies. Because of these refinements in operationalization, his findings point to an overall long-term dealignment process. In seventeen out of nineteen countries, the trends reveal a decline in the share of partisans in the electorate over time.

The aim of this chapter is to update and extend the seminal work by Dalton (2000), Schmitt and Holmberg (1995), and Berglund et al. (2005) by focusing on the long-term trend of partisanship in established Western democracies. Notably, none of these studies covers how the phenomenon has unfolded in the twenty-first century. To do so becomes even more important since, in recent decades, Western democracies have seen large-scale citizen withdrawal from politics, reflected in the decline in voter turnout rates (Blais & Rubenson, 2013), distrust in political parties (Dalton & Weldon, 2005), and overall detachment from politics. Most noticeably, the result has been a decline in electoral support for mainstream parties (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016).

All these recent developments anticipate further accentuation of ongoing partisan dealignment trends. More comprehensive data on partisan dealignment—together with a more fine-grained analytical approach—is, therefore, necessary to achieve an encompassing picture of its social and cognitive roots and to capture the development of partisan dealignment against the backdrop of increasing pressure on representative democracies.

Existing studies that address the origins of partisan dealignment contrast explanations associated with cognitive mobilization and value change (Dalton, 1984, 2000, 2013) with others claiming that macro-level factors play the most important part (Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995; Berglund et al., 2005). The latter set of studies privileges factors linked to the political supply, such as a decline in polarization, a decrease of ideological and issue conflict, or a surge in the number of parties running for elections. Our integrated analytical approach combines micro- and macro-level accounts by exploring the role of cognitive mobilization *and* social disintermediation in fostering partisan dealignment. The disintermediation framework has been applied in analyses of the decline in party membership in Western democracies, with empirical confirmation (van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012; van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, it has not yet been applied in the study of partisan dealignment.

Given the large comparative scope of our analysis, we are confronted with issues of item consistency. Inevitably, the partisanship measure included in our "West European Voter" (WEV) dataset relies on the different questions that each national election study project deemed appropriate to capture the respondents' political identities in each nation. Fortunately, we operate in conditions of conceptual homogeneity since all the national election studies included in the WEV dataset tackle respondents' *feelings of closeness* to a political party—a widely available indicator signaling a long-term affective relationship—which can be meaningfully distinguished from vote choice (Dalton, 2008). In the large majority of countries under analysis, respondents were offered the possibility to signal the strength of their attachment to a specific party on a three-point scale, ranging from (1) only a sympathizer, (2) close to the party, and (3) very close to the party.[1] Throughout the rest of the book, we will refer to "partisans" or "party identifiers" to indicate those voters declaring themselves to be either "close" or "very close" to a party.

Based on this operational definition, figure 2.1 plots the proportion of partisans in each of the election studies considered in our analysis. The figure provides evidence of a steady partisan dealignment over the last decades in West European parliamentary democracies. The share of people reporting to feel close/very close to a political party is now half of what it was six decades ago. This statistic reveals a rather clear trend of partisan dealignment: while

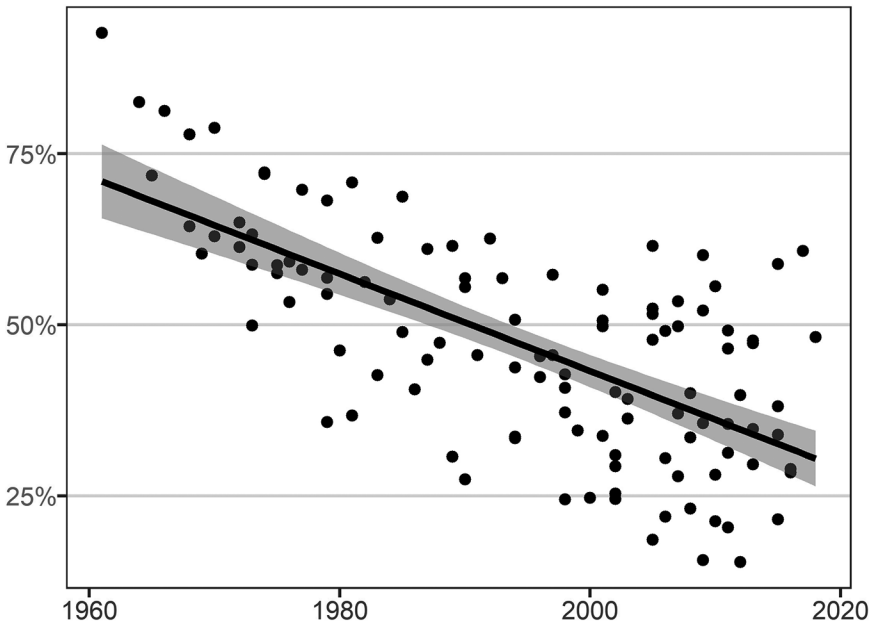

Figure 2.1. Partisan dealignment in West European democracies, 1961–2018

Note: Scatter dots represent the proportion of respondents declaring themselves either "very close" or "fairly close" to a political party in each of the election studies included in our dataset.

until the mid-1980s, partisans comprised a clear majority in West European electorates, party identifiers have since shrunk to a minority of the population.

Since the time series for each country vary substantially in our data, table 2.1 breaks down this trend by country to address the possibility of divergent time trends across countries. We adapt the methodology employed by Schmitt and Holmberg (1995) and Dalton (2000) by regressing the year of the survey on the proportion of individuals reporting to closely or very closely identify with a political party.

The evidence points to an overarching process of partisan dealignment across most of the countries considered. In six of these countries (i.e., Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom), the partisan dealignment trend is negative and statistically significant. Perhaps predictably, these are countries with the longer time series, in which a partisan dealignment trend is more clearly detectable. The Swiss case could be considered an exception in this regard, but it is worth noticing that the baseline levels of partisanship for this country were already very low in the late 1970s. In countries with shorter time series, starting around the early

Table 2.1. Party identification by country, 1961–2018

Country	*% PID*	*b*	*sig.*	*Period*	*N*
Austria	37	–1.038	–	2008–2013	2
Denmark	54	–.201	.077	1971–2011	12
Finland	45	1.250	.366	2003–2015	3
Germany	77	–.671	.019	1961–2013	13
Greece	51	.294	.856	1996–2012	3
Ireland	27	.251	.352	2002–2016	3
Italy	72	–.712	.020	1968–2018	10
Netherlands	72	–.674	.001	1981–2012	9
Norway	66	–.505	.001	1965–2013	13
Portugal	22	–.202	.643	2002–2015	5
Spain	30	.365	.267	2000–2016	5
Sweden	64	–.848	.000	1968–2010	14
Switzerland	36	.045	.345	1979–2015	6
United Kingdom	82	–.485	.000	1964–2017	15
All countries	–	–.529	.000	1961–2018	113

Note: The percentage of identifiers in the first column corresponds to the average share of individuals declaring themselves either "very close" or "fairly close" to a political party in the first two election studies available for each country.

2000s (i.e., Austria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain), the results are more mixed and generally not statistically significant because of the more synchronic perspective, starting from a point in which these democracies were already experiencing a high degree of dealignment in their electorates. Hence, in these cases, there is little cross-time variation to be captured by the regressions.

In figure 2.2, we follow Berglund et al. (2005, p. 110) and offer a visual representation of the trends by concentrating on the countries with the longest time series in our dataset. We do so because partisan dealignment is, first and foremost, a *diachronic process*. The results show a marked decrease in the share of partisans in all six countries, varying, on average, from 10 percentage points in Denmark to about 35 percentage points in Germany, Italy, and Sweden.

PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT ACROSS PARTY FAMILIES

Next, we explore differences in patterns of partisan dealignment across different party families. To do so, we initially focus on the mainstream left and right parties in each country. Their historical trajectory originates within the two cleavages that structured political conflict within West European party systems for the bulk of the twentieth century—namely, the labor–capital and church–state cleavages.

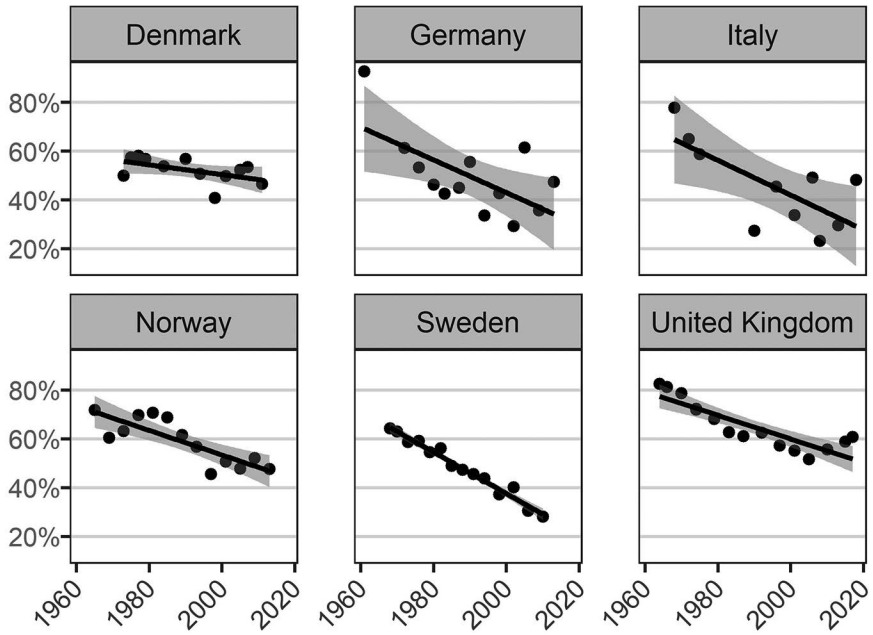

Figure 2.2. Patterns of partisan dealignment in six countries

Note: Scatter dots represent the proportion of respondents declaring themselves either "very close" or "fairly close" to a political party in each country and election under analysis.

Concerning the mainstream left, we concentrate on the Social-Democratic party family, traditionally competing on the class cleavage and historically mobilizing relatively unsophisticated voters in the lower class groupings (Bartolini, 2000). The social intermediation of Social-Democratic parties has been fundamentally structured around unions and workers' organizations. Concerning the mainstream right, we refer primarily to the Christian-Democratic family, which traditionally opposed the left by competing on the religious cleavage, although frequently sharing similar popular support (De La O & Rodden, 2008). The function of social intermediation for Christian parties was traditionally fulfilled by religious organizations, although the different religious denominations generate greater diversity than the unifying class cleavage characterizing the left (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). We note that West European party systems are relatively more heterogeneous on the right side of the spectrum due to their more complex cleavage structure (Bartolini, 2000). Therefore, in the cases where Christian-Democratic parties are either nonexistent or do not have expressive electoral representation, the

most electorally relevant parties on the center-right were used instead (i.e., the parties more directly competing with Social-Democratic parties on the labor–capital divide).[2]

In addition, we compare partisan dealignment in these two mainstream party families to the remaining political parties, which may have evaded the same process because they have been differently affected by the modernization process. In fact, the dealignment trend may just involve voters of traditional long-standing political parties, reflecting the parties' inability to react to modernization challenges and adapt to the opening of the electoral market. For this reason, we disaggregate partisan dealignment trends into the share of individuals identifying with mainstream left parties, mainstream right parties, and other parties, tracing their development across time.

Figure 2.3 illustrates a strong pattern of partisan dealignment among mainstream party families. While mainstream left parties' partisans were close to 35 percent of all voters in the 1960s, they have progressively declined to around 10 percent of the overall electorate in the 2010s. Over the same

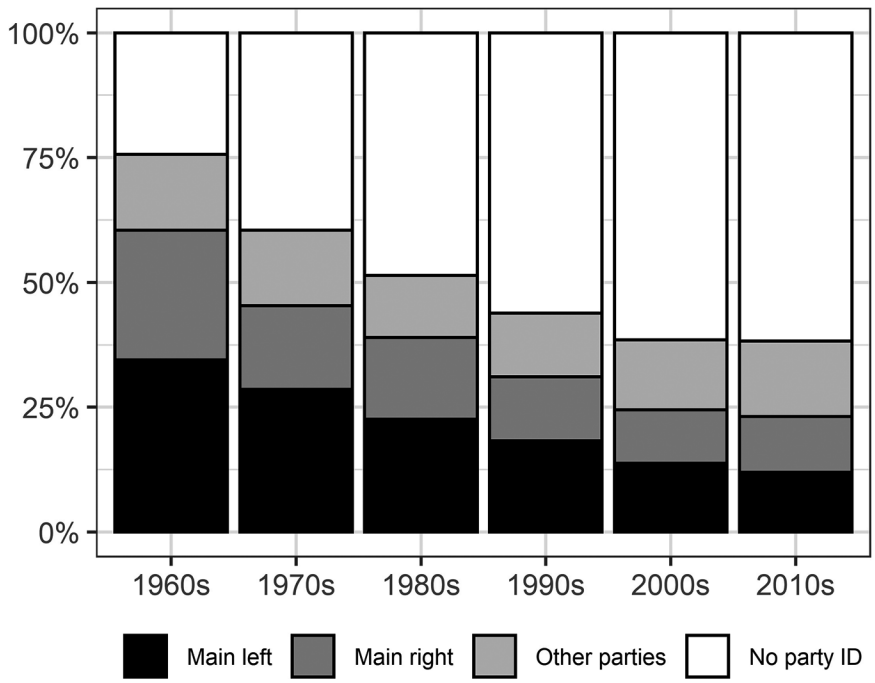

Figure 2.3. Partisan dealignment across party families

Note: Respondents are grouped by decade (***N*** = 266′927).

period, partisans of mainstream right parties have fallen to about half of their number in the 1960s. Overall, the share of individuals declaring an identification with mainstream parties represented 60 percent of the electorate; these individuals amount to less than 30 percent in the current decade. Importantly, dealignment on the mainstream parties' side has hardly been compensated by the creation of new partisan ties with parties from other families. The share of individuals declaring an identification with other political parties remains about the same throughout the period of analysis. In sum, this evidence confirms an actual process of partisan dealignment, rather than a recomposition of West European electorates characterized by cross-party shifts in the percentages of partisans. Today, the majority of voters does not identify with any of the political parties. More importantly, the figure conveys that the process of dealignment has been particularly incisive among mainstream parties, which have been, by far, the hardest hit by the dealignment process. According to our calculations, they lost more than half of their partisans across the last five decades.

This novel evidence feeds into the existing debate stemming from previous studies on partisan dealignment. As earlier discussed, social disintermediation and cognitive mobilization within the modernization process have been repeatedly put forward as potential drivers of partisan dealignment. Traditional parties have relied more heavily and for longer on intermediary social organizations to structure their electoral support. In particular, Christian-Democratic parties have benefited from the mobilization of religious voters by church-related organizations. Similarly, partisan support for Social-Democratic parties was traditionally mobilized by trade unions, acting as intermediaries between the workers' demands and left parties' pledges. Therefore, the differentiated weight of dealignment among mainstream parties could result from their historically heavier reliance on intermediary social bodies as agents of voter encapsulation. However, in producing more educated and emancipated citizens, cognitive mobilization has also led to more critical electorates (Dalton & Welzel, 2014). Citizens now feel more competent to evaluate politicians and also tend to expect more from them. Raising the bar may lead to more unmet expectations, particularly when a party holds office. Mainstream parties are in power more frequently. Therefore, while enjoying more opportunities to put their political agenda into practice, they also face more political exposure and arguably more critical scrutiny from voters. These factors may hinder party attachments as a result of the process of cognitive mobilization.

Having advanced the possible mechanisms at work in the development of partisan dealignment, in the next sections, we explore its sources by examining the relative importance of cognitive mobilization and social disintermediation in driving this process, as well as interpreting its potential consequences for West European electorates.

COGNITIVE MOBILIZATION AND PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT

According to Inglehart (1977), cognitive mobilization results from increases in voters' cognitive abilities—stemming from the postwar expansion of educational opportunities—and the wider availability of political information with the proliferation of the mass media. Therefore, it is a combination of increased skills to cope with political phenomena and more resources to process political information through the media. As a result, individuals progressively became more self-sufficient in their relationship with politics and independent from partisan heuristics in processing and interpreting complex political information (Shively, 1979). Voters' increased cognitive resources and general interest in politics, together with lower information costs, "have impinged on the interest articulation and informational functions of the political parties" (Dalton, 2000, p. 22). The functional utility of political parties, and partisan attachments in particular, as shortcuts for political action, has decreased for a growing share of the electorate, who have become more capable of making autonomous political decisions. For these reasons, it is contended that cognitive mobilization replaced partisan mobilization and hence contributed to partisan dealignment.

Dalton (1984) introduced an operational measure of cognitive mobilization employing two indicators—namely, the level of formal educational attainment and the level of interest in politics. The former indicator represents a dimension of cognitive engagement, which is highly correlated with the cognitive resources that individual voters possess to process political information. The latter indicator, instead, corresponds to a form of political engagement and taps the motivation of individual voters to undertake a costly activity of information processing in the first place (Zaller, 1992). We resort to our comparative and long-term dataset to offer an updated reading of the relationship between partisan dealignment and cognitive mobilization. To this end, we follow Dalton (1984) and rely on a measure of cognitive mobilization tapping both individual motivation and ability to process political information, as measured by indicators of subjective interest in politics (three-point scale ranging from low to high) and formal education achievement (primary, secondary, tertiary).

In our operationalization, we consider both *sufficient cognitive resources* and *sufficient individual motivation* to engage in political information processing as necessary conditions for cognitive mobilization.[3] Partisanship's functional utility should be high in cases where a voter lacks either cognitive skills or motivation to process political information (or both). Following this logic, even in the case voters express a high interest in politics, this should not *per se* be considered enough to classify them as cognitively mobilized. In fact, these voters may still lack the cognitive resources to properly articulate

Table 2.2. Construction of the cognitive mobilization typology

		Interest in politics		
		Low (1)	*Medium (2)*	*High (3)*
Educational level	Primary (1)	**2** (9.9%)	**3** (30.9%)	**4** (4.4%)
	Secondary (2)	**3** (3.2%)	**4** (26.5%)	**5** (4.4%)
	Tertiary (3)	**4** (0.9%)	**5** (15.0%)	**6** (4.8%)

Note: Table entries represent the sum of the two constituent variables. Respondents falling within grey cells (i.e., sum greater than four) are considered cognitively mobilized (N = 275,528).

this potential motivation. Conversely, voters achieving tertiary education should not automatically be considered mobilized since the potential ability may not translate into an actual information processing activity due, for instance, to the lack of internal motivation. The operationalization resulting from these insights requires classifying only those voters scoring *at least 5* on the additive index. By this parameter, the total of cognitively mobilized citizens in our sample amounts to about 25 percent of individuals (see table 2.2).

Cognitive mobilization refers to a process by which voters' cognitive skills and resources develop due to modernization. Along the lines suggested by modernization theory, in figure 2.4, we build upon previous studies' empirical efforts in documenting an increase in the share of cognitively mobilized respondents (Dalton, 1984, 2013, 2014) and inspect the development of our cognitive mobilization index across the last six decades.

The figure depicts a relatively consistent pattern consistent with cognitive mobilization theory. The percentage of cognitively mobilized voters has registered an almost threefold increase in the six decades of analysis. This statistic hardly comes as a surprise, as the expansion of individuals' cognitive resources is a core component of the previously described social modernization processes. On average today, one-third of voters is likely to possess sufficient cognitive skills and motivation to undertake complex political reasoning. Admittedly, even if the cognitive mobilization process is sizable, noncognitively mobilized voters comprise the majority of voters. Therefore, the substantial increase in the share of relatively more sophisticated voters requires additional analyses to understand better the political nature of this expanding group.

We follow the two-by-two typology introduced by Dalton (1984) to classify voters in terms of the presence of a political identity (partisan vs. independent voters) and their cognitive profile. Voters are thus divided into four ideal types: *apartisans* are cognitively mobilized voters that report no attachment to a political party; *apolitical* voters are neither cognitively mobilized nor partisan supporters; *ritual partisans* score low on cognitive mobilization

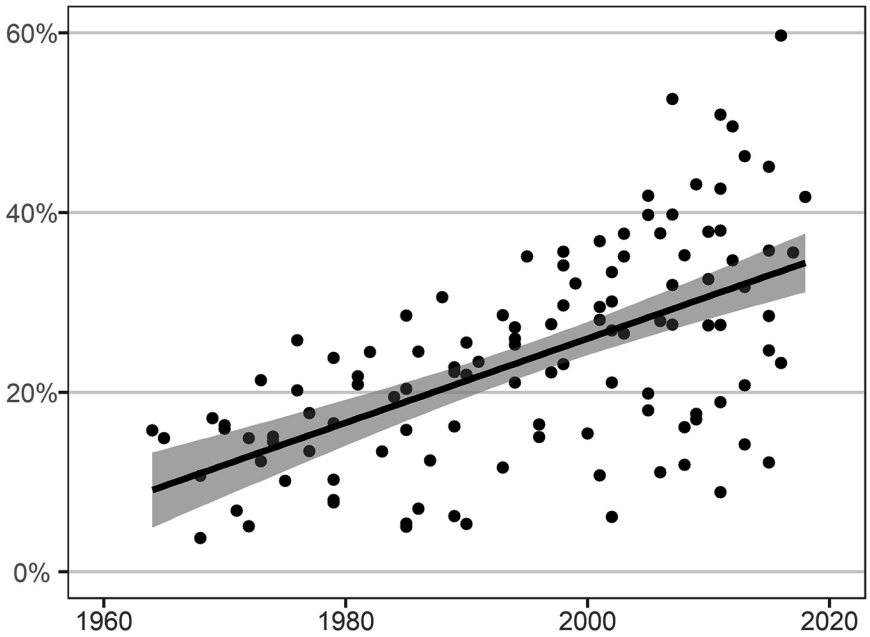

Figure 2.4. Percentage of cognitively mobilized respondents in each election study

Note: Scatter dots represent the proportion of respondents scoring either "5" or "6" on our cognitive mobilization index in each of the election studies included in our dataset.

Table 2.3. The mobilization typology

		Strength of partisanship	
		Nonpartisan	*Partisan*
Cognitive mobilization	Low	**Apolitical** (42.2%)	**Ritual partisan** (32.2%)
	High	**Apartisan** (13.2%)	**Cognitive partisan** (12.4%)

Note: $N = 228{,}178$.

but still report a partisan attachment; finally, *cognitive partisans* are those voters that are both cognitively and politically mobilized. Table 2.3 provides a visual heuristic of the described voter typology, while figure 2.5 presents the trend for the relative proportions of the four types of voters over time.

This typology is key to understanding the relationship between cognitive mobilization and partisan dealignment. By quantifying the share of independents who are cognitively mobilized, we can better understand the extent to

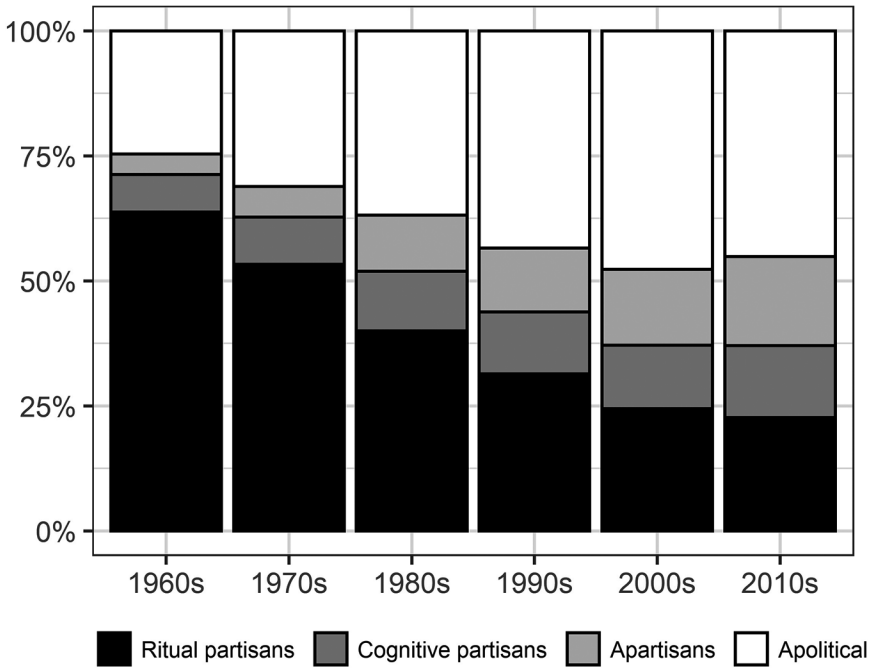

Figure 2.5. Partisan dealignment and the mobilization typology

Note: Respondents are grouped by decade (N = 247,526).

which dealignment results from cognitive mobilization or whether there may be other factors at play. In fact, reading the table, we conclude that roughly only one out of three dealigned voters in our sample is cognitively mobilized. The relative share of cognitively mobilized citizens is greater among partisans, lending some support to studies arguing that cognitively mobilized individuals tend to be more partisan (Arzheimer, 2006; Albright, 2009). However, this figure is not fully informative about the development of the cognitive mobilization across time and its influence on the process of dealignment. A snapshot of the entire sample provides no evidence regarding the evolution of these categories over the period of analysis. Therefore, in figure 2.5, we trace the categories of the mobilization typology in the period 1961–2018, with values grouped by decade. The figure provides a better understanding of the interplay between the processes of cognitive mobilization and partisan dealignment in West European democracies.

How does cognitive mobilization relate to partisan dealignment? Does it hinder dealignment? Or, on the contrary, does it foster it? And what kind of electorate is it producing? As previously noted, throughout time, the share of individuals declaring to identify with a political party has substantially decreased much in every West European parliamentary democracy. However,

by examining this figure, we note that such decline has only occurred with regard to the category of *ritual partisans*, that is, individuals who do not possess high cognitive resources to deal with politics but still evince partisan attachment. The share of ritual partisans has been sliced to almost a half over these six decades. This finding could very well be the outcome of the process of cognitive mobilization. As more people acquire cognitive skills resulting from modernization, these individuals no longer qualify as ritual partisans. If they maintain some sort of attachment to a political party, they would fit into the category of cognitive partisans, that is, voters who are cognitively mobilized and closely identify with a party.

Notwithstanding the salient increase in the share of cognitive partisans, who have nearly doubled in size throughout the period under analysis, such an increase hardly accounts for the overall decline registered among ritual partisans. This was somehow to be expected. In fact, the cognitive mobilization thesis postulates that such a process is likely to increase the number of politically engaged independents (i.e., apartisans) rather than cognitive partisans. This is precisely the rationale underlying the theoretical connection between cognitive mobilization and partisan dealignment—were the former mostly conducive to a more informed sense of partisanship, it would have no role in explaining dealignment. Instead, "the cognitive mobilization thesis suggests that sophisticated apartisans may comprise an increased share of the independents, who would change the nature of nonpartisans" (Dalton, 2013, p. 41). That is, as more people develop the skills and resources to cope autonomously with politics, they no longer depend on partisan cues, and partisanship loses much of its functional utility, leading to higher levels of apartisanship. As we analyze figure 2.5, that seems to be indeed the case. Apartisans are now about five times more numerous than in the 1960s. Today, they constitute nearly one-fifth of the electorate. Not only are they more numerous than cognitive partisans, but their increase also greatly surpasses that of cognitive partisans over the same period, indicating that indeed cognitive mobilization tends to result mostly in a politically independent electorate possessing a repertoire of cognitive skills and resources to cope with politics.

However, while this evidence supports the cognitive mobilization thesis, the latter still seems insufficient in accounting for the totality of the dealignment registered over the study period. If partisans (whether cognitively mobilized or not) registered a decline of over 30 percent in five decades, only half of that decline can be accounted for by the growth of apartisans. At the same time, we observe a growth of equal magnitude in the share of apolitical individuals, that is, those neither cognitively mobilized nor partisan supporters. They were about 25 percent of the electorate in the 1960s and represent today close to 40 percent of respondents. They are a fundamental part of the process of dealignment, and their increase cannot be explained by cognitive mobilization. Therefore, other factors may also be intervening as a source of dealignment.

SOCIAL DISINTERMEDIATION AND PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT

Since partisan dealignment appears to have occurred mainly among the ranks of cognitively nonmobilized voters, the pattern appears to run against the functional logic of partisanship. Those allegedly most in need of a political anchor and party cues appear to have progressively lost their partisan ties. To address this inconsistency, we move our attention to the possibility that partisan dealignment is also generated by a more fundamental process of social dealignment.

Electoral enfranchisement has suddenly given millions of individuals, for the first time, the right to vote in democratic elections. Arguably, most of them had minimal knowledge of politics, little or no formal education, and a constrained understanding of the political offer at their disposal at the early stages of universal suffrage. Thus, for a significant part of the twentieth century, voters relied on heuristic information provided to them by institutions that had long served as historical, social guideposts and moved to also act as mediators between an eminently alienated electorate and political parties. Although such institutions were not directly involved in the dispute for democratic power, they had underlying political interests that they sought to see represented by specific parties. Such bodies also became instrumental in mobilizing the population into voting for parties who would secure such interests.

On the left side, the social demands were organized and mobilized by trade unions' associations, promoting the improvement of the economic conditions of the working class (Bartolini, 2000). On the right side of the class cleavage, the structuring of preferences mainly operated on the cultural dimension, with the promotion of the moral instances of religious communities aggregated by church organizations (Evans & de Graaf, 2013). Trade unions for Social-Democratic parties and religious institutions for Christian-Democratic parties operated as intermediary social bodies, decisively contributing to the formation and stabilization of West European party systems by articulating voters' interests with the political supply. The effective encapsulation of relatively homogeneous masses of citizens into long-standing bases of electoral support for these two party families—who dominated political conflict in Western Europe throughout most of the last century—has been largely achieved thanks to the political socialization role played by these bodies who operated as social anchors of partisanship (Gunther & Montero, 2001).

As we have been discussing, socially embedded partisan alignments have been noticeably threatened by modernization and its sociopolitical implications. The cleavage encapsulation function exerted by secondary groups of social intermediation has been lessened since the end of World War II.

Following this perspective, for many aspects related to the "end of cleavages" argument (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992; Franklin, 2010), the process of partisan dealignment could be linked to the decline of the intermediary bodies that have aggregated, mobilized, and aligned the main social groups politically since the end of the war. Individualization—understood primarily as a process of destructuration of social and political communities, of thinning of joint ideologies and values, and retreat into the private sphere of group beliefs and incentives—has contributed to these institutions' waning influence (Putnam, 2000). If social structure vanishes under the weight of modernization, previous political alignments might evaporate following a similar trend.

On the one hand, changes in labor market composition caused by tertiarization and globalization, as well as the expansion of middle classes, have drained trade unions of their core membership (Ebbinghaus & Visser, 2000). On the other hand, secularization markedly dropped the attendance rates of religious services in Western Europe (Girvin, 2000). As intermediary social bodies themselves came to lose social relevance, their role in channeling citizens into political party support has declined. In this way, mainstream left and mainstream right parties, which we have concluded to be the party families most affected by the dealignment process, could no longer rely to the same degree on these institutions' contribution in accumulating long-lasting political supporters. We thus argue that partisan dealignment is, besides a consequence of cognitive mobilization, also the result of the concurrent process of social disintermediation, which deprived political parties of an important pool of supporters.

To illustrate the relevance of this process for partisan dealignment, figure 2.6 depicts the percentage of socially embedded partisans concerning the total percentage of partisans over the six decades covered by our data. Socially embedded partisans are operationalized as individuals who (1) have a close/very close identification with a political party and (2) are either members of a trade union or attend religious services at least once a month. They represented more than half of all partisans in the 1960s, attesting to the paramount importance of trade unions and religious institutions among partisans. As citizens' engagement with such institutions progressively declined throughout the second half of the century, the share of socially embedded partisans decreased accordingly. Today, these voters amount to no more than 15 percent of the whole electorate.

The fact that the two downward trends tend to develop almost in parallel suggests an interrelationship. However, it is crucial to highlight that despite there being very few socially embedded partisans, they continue to represent around half of all partisans. To be sure, these institutions do seem to remain instrumental in mediating voters and political parties—half of all partisans are still engaged with them. However, the pool of individuals attending religious services or belonging to a trade union has decreased substantially over

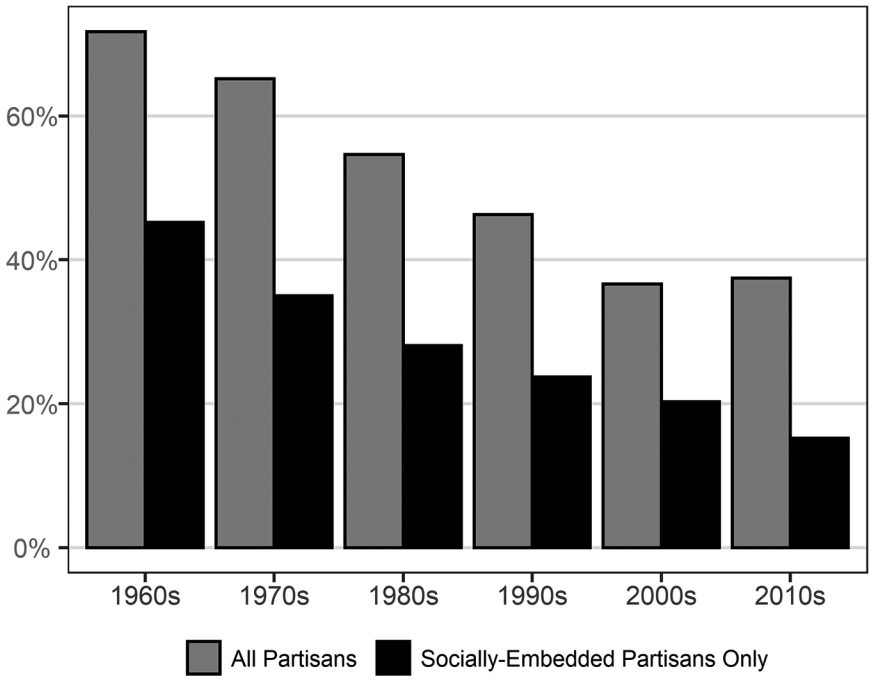

Figure 2.6. Proportion of socially embedded partisans over time

Note: Respondents are grouped by decade (N = 186,794).

the last century. Thus, we can conclude that the observed partisan dealignment trend occurring in Western societies is only partly related to the cognitive and educational dimension of the process of social modernization. This view is supported by the consideration that partisan dealignment has a sizable longitudinal impact, especially for unsophisticated and uninterested voters. Moreover, the pattern of dealignment appears to be, at least in part, matched by a decline in the social structuring capacity of intermediary bodies. In sum, the declining intermediary ability of secondary social groups may complement the explanation to cognitive mobilization for the decline of partisan attachments among mainstream parties.

PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS: AN ENDURING DEBATE

Voters' attachments to political parties have traditionally been understood as a token of party-based democracy. For this reason, partisan dealignment has

traditionally been interpreted as a concerning threat to the vitality of democratic politics. If, as we have calculated, most of the electorate does not identify with any of the political parties competing for office, it is questionable whether citizens still consider political parties apt to represent their political preferences. Moreover, considering the decrease in voter turnout rates, party membership, and trust in political parties in Western Europe, all factors seem to point to a crisis of representative democracy. But does an increasingly independent electorate necessarily correspond to such a gloomy scenario?

Classic studies of public opinion trace a predominantly negative account of independent voters, portraying them as more apathetic, less knowledgeable, and, consequently, less prone to political participation than partisans (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Campbell et al., 1960). This view is also shared by more recent studies arguing that independents are relatively less sophisticated (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Under this perspective, dealignment is conceived as a negative symptom for contemporary democracies, conducive to political disengagement and political apathy.

However, under the framework of cognitive mobilization, dealignment is not necessarily regarded as a negative manifestation of political apathy but rather as a sign of a more rational, resourceful, and engaged electorate that does not pledge allegiance to a single political party but is equipped to make a consciously informed assessment of the political offer (Dalton, 1984, 2012). From a functional perspective, higher levels of cognitive resources, and greater motivation to assess political information on the part of voters, should translate into a narrower role for partisanship. Thus, partisan dealignment could simply be the reflection of the sociopolitical consequences of modernization.

The academic debate on this topic has contrasted these two different views about the consequences of dealignment for the democratic process (Inglehart, 1977; Dalton, 1984, 2013, 2014; Dassonneville, Hooghe, & Vanhoutte, 2012, 2014; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2016). Leaving aside the more specific aspect of the underlying mechanism, disagreement remains over the nature of independent voters: are these individuals assertive and sophisticated citizens or, quite to the contrary, citizens who have become entirely alienated from political matters? An additional point to note is that the idea of a positive correlation between cognitive and political engagement—regarding independent voters as detached and uninterested in politics—runs against the logic of functional partisanship. Specifically, if the less cognitively mobilized are more likely to be independent voters, this would mean that those who need party cues are also those resorting to them the least. This chapters' conclusions directly engage with this debate, synthesizing contributions from both sides of the barricade. Our longitudinal analysis of partisan dealignment across fourteen countries over the period 1961–2018 demonstrates that dealignment

is both a consequence of cognitive mobilization and social disintermediation, with foremost impact on the mainstream party families.

In relative terms, cognitively mobilized apartisans have increased much more than apolitical individuals over the time period considered by our dataset, thus providing empirical support to the cognitive mobilization thesis. However, cognitive mobilization can only partially account for the observed decline in partisan attachments. Parallel to the increase in apartisans, the share of apolitical individuals has grown to an even greater extent in absolute terms. Despite the significant advances in education and political information brought about by modernization, most individuals at the latest time point in our sample remain not cognitively mobilized. Whereas before, such individuals could rely on party heuristics to guide their political action, intermediary social bodies' downfall has hindered the development of the bonds inherent in such a relationship. Without such references, instead of seeking political guidance in party heuristics, these individuals may be forced to look for alternative informational shortcuts.

Chapter 3

The Personalization of Party Choice

We have portrayed a new electoral context in Western parliamentary democracies characterized by waning partisan attachments. The share of individuals identifying with a political party has been declining steadily over the last decades because of the joint processes of cleavage dealignment, cognitive mobilization, and value change. A half a century ago, about three eligible voters out of four professed a party identification. Today, partisans are by and large a minority among West European electorates.

How have these shifts affected patterns of voting behavior? Electoral research has historically attributed a central role to partisan attachments in explaining vote choice (Campbell et al., 1960; Thomassen, 2005). According to this research, the electorate is mainly driven to the ballot box by long-standing affective bonds with political parties, expressing electoral preferences in line with these attachments. But if most voters no longer hold partisan attachments, what brings them out to the polls? Notwithstanding a generalized decline in voter turnout rates in Western democracies—widely attributed to the decline of partisan attachments (Clarke et al., 2004)—a substantial part of the electorate (in most cases, even a majority) still turns out to vote. This implies that many individuals without party identification, whether they be the apolitical or the apartisans described in the previous chapter, still feel motivated to cast a ballot in elections. If not driven by partisan attachments, what other factors guide individual voting decisions?

Following the decline in partisan attachments, researchers have argued that the core of vote choice decisions has moved to short-term factors associated with the electoral context. Dealigned voters are arguably less dependent on socially structured intermediary bodies for cues about political action. As a result, they are potentially sensitive to other types of cues in making sense of political reality. Bartolini and Mair (1990, p. 44), for example, argue that

voters are increasingly likely to respond electorally to "the emergence of specific salient issues, [and] to the appeal of individual candidates, whether seen retrospectively or prospectively . . . in other words, voters will respond to *short-term factors*." Unconstrained by long-standing sociopolitical allegiances, many voters can now individually assess various short-term factors. This involves a shift away from a style of electoral decision-making based on social group and/or party cues toward a more individualized and inwardly oriented style of political choice. Consequently, citizens consider factors such as issues, performance evaluations, or candidate assessments, otherwise subsumed into partisan appraisals (Dalton, 1996a; Walczak et al., 2012; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2016).

In their analysis of the consequences of partisan dealignment, Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg (2000) highlight how a new type of *candidate-centered politics* may fill the void created by partisan dealignment. Wattenberg (1991) originally defined this mode of political competition to designate a context in which candidates acquire increasing relevance as stand-alone political actors distinct from political parties. The waning of partisan attachments has arguably left a larger share of the electorate adrift regarding their vote choice so that the increasing prominence of individual candidates in elections is seen as a direct result of dealignment.

While this theory originally referred to U.S. presidential elections, it has been translated into dealigned European parliamentary democracies under the umbrella of the *personalization of politics* thesis (McAllister, 2007; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Garzia, 2011). Many of the candidate-centered features characteristic of American politics are finding equivalents in European parliamentary democracies. For example, in contrast to the tradition of the twentieth-century mass parties, today party leaders are increasingly selected through party primaries, as they are in America (Cross & Blais, 2012; Cross & Pilet, 2015).

Individual candidates are increasingly independent of parties when running for office—including separate staffing and managing of campaigns, independent fundraising, and developing a marketing strategy to directly appeal to voters by cultivating the candidate's personal brand as distinct—and perhaps even detached—from that of the party (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). This happens not only at the grassroots level but also, and most notoriously, at the leadership level. The campaigns of Emmanuel Macron, Beppe Grillo, and Geert Wilders are recent examples of personalized politics in Europe. And similar candidate-centered politics is seen in Tony Blair's government, Helmut Kohl's, and other leaders of established parties.

The last chapter showed how the parallel trends of social disintermediation and cognitive mobilization have produced growth in the number of dealigned voters. This chapter examines whether leader evaluations have replaced

partisanship as the primary driver of vote choice in West European parliamentary democracies. In so doing, we seek to directly assess the hypothesis stemming from the personalization of politics literature that leader effects have been growing over time. We examine the extent to which the personalization of politics has emerged as a function of partisan dealignment when it comes to voter behavior. We also show that these dynamics affect political parties differently and we investigate whether and how the personalization of voting behavior relates to cognitive mobilization.

PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT AND THE CHANGING DETERMINANTS OF VOTE CHOICE

Party change and the mediatization of politics may have created favorable conditions for the elevation of party leaders to electoral pre-eminence. But how and to what extent are leader assessments relevant in voting decisions? Do leaders matter independently or are their evaluations a mere reflection of previous partisan preferences?

The social–psychological model of voting behavior postulates that party identification is the central force shaping voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). Arguably the most controversial aspect regarding party identification—with direct implications for our object of study—is its placement at the center of the so-called *funnel of causality*. The Michigan School model of voting posits that the voting process can be organized in terms of a funnel, where at the wider end lie the economic structure, historical patterns, and social alignment that cement the political divides of a given society. Such socioeconomic structures condition the development and configuration of the party system but have only indirect influence on individual voting decisions by operating on the formation of political values and group loyalties. These are intrinsically related to political attitudes such as party identification, candidate evaluations, and issue positions. As political attitudes are closer to the narrow end of the funnel, they exert a stronger and more direct impact over voting decisions. However, by placing party identification as causally antecedent to the remaining political attitudes, the founders of the Michigan School do not assign a primary role for issue opinions and candidate images on vote choice. In the sociopsychological framework, party identification strongly influences political attitudes (toward, e.g., issues and candidate images), to the extent that these are interpreted through partisan lenses. In the case of leader effects on vote choice, the model assumes that voters evaluate leaders primarily according to their partisan cues and not their individual characteristics. Party identification acts as a *perceptual screen* through which political reality is perceived—issues and candidates included.

This view has dominated studies dealing with the effects of voters' assessments of leaders on their voting decisions, where a unidirectional flow of causation from party identification to leader evaluations is assumed. For example, Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, p. 121) argue that "party identification is one of several antecedent factors that affect people's attitudes toward such objects as the candidates and issues of the campaign." The same idea is stressed by Miller and Shanks (1996, p. 122), who claim that "although some leaders ultimately put their own stamp on the party and contribute to reshaping the party image, they are initially perceived as having the attributes of their predecessors." In other words, identifiers tend to ascribe to leaders the same characteristics they associate with their parties. Hence, besides exerting a direct influence on the vote, party identification is claimed to also have an indirect effect on voting behavior through framing short-term political attitudes toward issues and candidates.

The Michigan School designed the funnel of causality as a model of voting behavior in the highly candidate-centered American majoritarian electoral system. Such a conceptualization of the process of voting decision does not necessarily reflect the European reality (Thomassen, 2005). For one thing, the findings about party identification's relationship with the vote are different in European democracies. Analyzing British and German elections, Holmberg (1994) finds similar patterns to the United States for partisanship and voting congruence. However, the effect of partisanship on the vote appears even greater than in the United States because of the centrality of parties in Europe's multiparty and proportional representation systems (Berglund et al., 2005). Likewise, LeDuc (1981) finds that party identification is more likely to travel with the vote in parliamentary democracies than in the United States.

Despite strong patterns of covariance, the meaningfulness and applicability of the concept for explaining vote choice in multiparty systems is subject to debate. Thomassen (1976) noted that in European multiparty parliamentary democracies party identification may not be conceptually different from vote preferences. It is worth recalling that the funnel of causality clearly places party identification as causally antecedent to vote choice. Besides the independence condition, the concept of party identification also presupposes a stability over time. However, these assumptions seem to be violated in repeated analyses of the Netherlands' extreme multiparty system, in which party identification proves less stable than vote choice (Thomassen, 1976; Thomassen & Rosema, 2009).

Such discrepancies in the concept's validity between the United States and Europe can be explained, at least partially, by diverse measurements and conceptualizations. Rosema (2006) found that an attitudinal conceptualization

of partisanship in the Netherlands can be meaningfully distinguished from vote choice, suggesting that such discrepancies may lie at the very origin of the conceptualization of party identification as an identity in European cases. The different question wording typically employed in European national election studies—which taps *closeness* to a party rather than *identification* with it—may help understanding why partisanship and party identification refer to different constructs. Notwithstanding these differences, partisanship still captures long-term partisan dispositions translating respondents' sense of closeness to political parties, feelings that are distinguishable from vote choice (Dalton, 2008).[1]

With the dealignment of European electorates, partisanship came to guide the decisions of only a minority of voters. For the dealigned majority, party identification is no longer front and center in vote choice explanations, nor does it endogenously affect political attitudes. Even among partisans, party identification can no longer be assumed to unidirectionally determine political attitudes, as attachments are themselves more volatile and sensitive to the influence of short-term factors (Fiorina, 1981; Garzia, 2014). Scholars have found that among voters lacking this political compass to make political decisions, the political issues of the moment, prevailing economic conditions, and—most notably—evaluations of candidates and party leaders are increasingly salient factors in how voters decide among contenders (for a review, see Garzia, 2017b).

A commonly advanced consequence of partisan dealignment in a context of heavily mediatized politics and individualized vote choice is, in fact, that political leaders are simply far more prominent vis-à-vis their parties in the minds of voters. When it comes to ballot box behavior, this implies that the electorate is increasingly deciding based on assessments of party leaders. However, evidence that leader effects are *on the rise* is not conclusive (King, 2002; Curtice & Holmberg, 2005; Karvonen, 2010; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2011). Furthermore, the role of partisan dealignment and cognitive mobilization in driving this process remains yet underresearched in the literature. If, as the theory suggests, leader effects increase as a function of dealignment, the former must be analyzed in relationship to an eventual decline in partisan voting. The few studies investigating this association in less than a handful of countries show some evidence of a stronger impact of leaders for dealigned voters but fail to do so in a longitudinal perspective (Mughan, 2009; Gidengil, 2011; Holian & Prysby, 2014; Lobo, 2014b).

The remainder of this chapter provides an empirical assessment of the theoretical relationship between the processes of partisan dealignment and the hypothesized personalization of voting decisions in European parliamentary democracies.

A BIVARIATE ASSESSMENT OF PARTY AND LEADER EFFECTS ON VOTE CHOICE

This chapter's fundamental concern is the weight of party leader images vis-à-vis party attachments in Europeans' voting choices. If the personalization of politics reflects a consequence of partisan dealignment, the increasing electoral relevance of leaders ought to be matched by a decrease in partisanship effects on the vote. Accordingly, a diachronic assessment of political leaders' salience in voting must be accompanied by a parallel assessment of the importance of partisan attachments.

Figure 3.1 highlights this issue by comparing the percentage of individuals who voted for the party of their highest-rated leader[2] and the percentage of individuals who voted for the party they identify with, across time and countries. Note that respondents can be included in both categories under this bivariate configuration (i.e., voting for the leader they like the most *and* the party they feel closest to).

The patterns depicted in the figure seem to support our initial claim of a decrease in the relative salience of partisan attachments in structuring voting behavior in our fourteen West European democracies. There is a notable

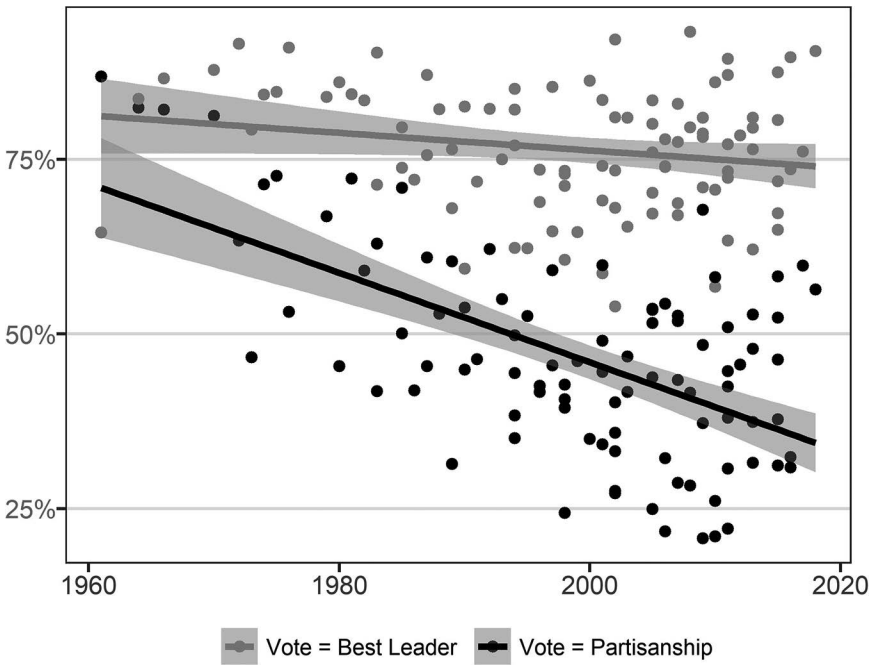

Figure 3.1. Percentage of respondents voting for the best-rated leader's party and for the party they identify with, by election study

decline in the share of individuals voting along partisan lines, quantifiable in around 40 percentage points over the last six decades.

Importantly, this decline is not the result of increased volatility among partisans but rather the result of a simple decrease in the number of partisans. We calculated the percentage of loyal partisans for every decade, and the results reflect a very stable pattern across time in the share of loyal partisan voters. In each of the six decades under analysis, in fact, we find over 90 percent of partisans casting a vote for the party they identify with.

On average, voter evaluations of leaders appear as important today as they were in the 1960s in orienting individual choices at the ballot. For example, in the 1964 British election, 82 percent of individuals cast a vote consistent with their partisanship, and 84 percent cast a vote consistent with their preferred party leader. By 2017, these figures had changed to 60 percent and 76 percent, respectively. This implies that the decrease in partisan voting corresponds to a *relative increase* in the importance of leader assessments for vote choice. As partisan attachments declined, leaders have retained their relevance and became increasingly important vis-à-vis partisanship. Thus, we argue that figure 3.1 provides evidence that the declining impact of partisanship on voting corresponds to a growing *independent* effect of leaders on voting. In other words, where in the 1960s, people may have—according to the premises of the funnel of causality—voted for their party *and* its leader, today citizens tend to cast a vote for their preferred leader, irrespective of whether he/she is the leader of their party.

A TYPOLOGY OF *PARTY-CENTRIC* AND *LEADER-CENTRIC* VOTING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

To dig deeper into the changing patterns of partisan and leader-centric voting behavior at the individual level, we consider a bivariate measurement based on the two-by-two typology described in table 3.1. In this typology, individuals are considered party-centric if they vote for the party they identify with *despite* this not being the party of the leader they rate the highest. On the contrary, individuals are leader-centric if they vote for the party of the leader they rate the highest *regardless* of whether this is the party they identify with. Importantly, this typology allows for the possibility that leader-centric voters are also apartisans, which is true in the majority of cases. Therefore, all party-centric and leader-centric individuals necessarily hold different partisan and leader preferences.

The fundamental difference between this typology and the measurements of figure 3.1 involves the exclusivity of these categories. In the previous measure, one could vote for the highest-rated leader, which could simultaneously be the party one identifies with (i.e., the category of consistent voters

Table 3.1. Partisanship and leader evaluations as drivers of vote choice: a typology

		Vote = Best leader	
		No	*Yes*
Vote = Partisanship	No	**Idiosyncratic** (16.0%)	**Leader-centric** (36.9%)
	Yes	**Party-centric** (7.6%)	**Consistent** (39.5%)

Note: N = 164,042.

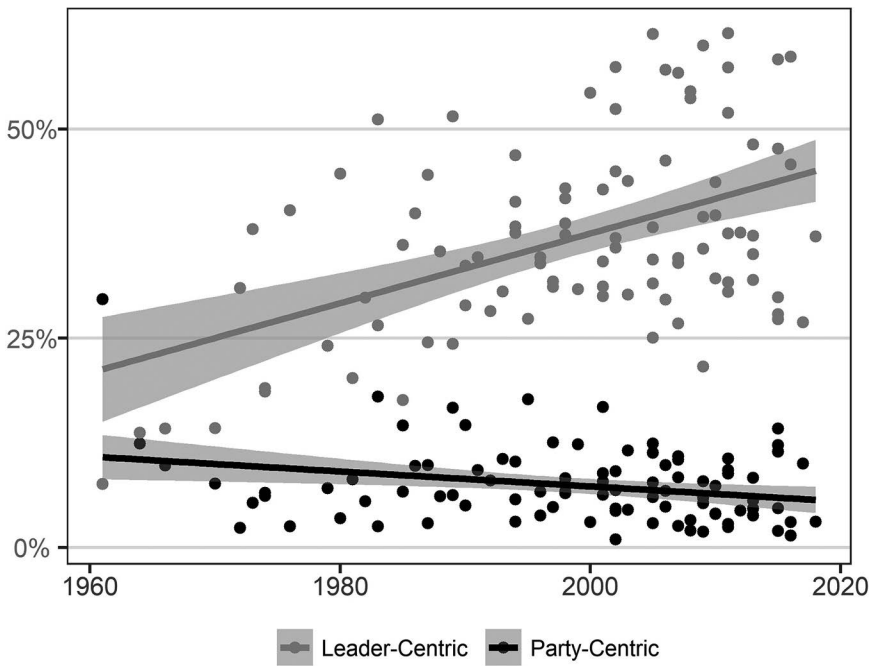

Figure 3.2. Percentage of party-centric and leader-centric voters, by election study

in table 3.1). In fact, that is the normally assumed scenario of agreement between partisanship, candidate preference, and vote choice. In this way, our typology allows for an initial disentanglement of the endogenous party leader relationship by isolating respondents whose vote choices are driven by partisanship regardless of leader evaluations (party-centric voters) and those whose voting behavior is guided by their leader preferences regardless of partisan feelings (leader-centric voters).

Figure 3.2 displays the distribution of party-centric and leader-centric voters by election study. The share of party-centric voters is relatively

stable across time, amounting to less than 10 percent of the electorate overall. The cases in which an individual identifies with a party but not its leader are quite rare. This is in line with the Michigan School's theoretical claim that candidate evaluations are generally aligned with partisan attachments. If individuals identify with a given party, they are also very likely to rate its leader higher than other party leaders. Any discrepancies would reflect unusual circumstances such as the existence of a particularly appealing candidate from another party who is yet unable to break partisan bonds.

The panorama changes once we consider partisan dealignment. Until the 1970s, both party-centric and leader-centric voters were quite rare, as most individuals had coherent partisan and leader preferences. These individuals voted in line with both and thus did not qualify as either party- or leader-centric. However, once partisan dealignment struck Western democracies and the share of nonidentifiers increased, so did the percentage of leader-centric voters. In short, in the absence of partisan ties, individuals weight assessments of leaders much more heavily in their vote choices. Wattenberg (1991, p. 2) argued that "like nature, politics abhors a vacuum, and candidates are the most logical force to take the place of parties in this respect." Notably, leader-centric individuals increase by about 30 percentage points over our time frame, amounting to nearly half of the whole electorate in the last decade. Although we do not claim that these voters cast their ballots exclusively based on leader evaluations, these evaluations certainly play a crucial role in guiding their electoral reasoning. Admittedly, other short-term factors such as parties' issue positions, relevant events during the campaign, and performance assessments certainly influence voters' behavior. However, the impact of leader evaluations in voters' electoral decisions is, we contend, more systematic than these factors.

PARTY AND LEADER EFFECTS ON VOTE CHOICE: A LONGITUDINAL ASSESSMENT

The standard model estimation procedure for cross-sectional analyses of voting behavior in multiparty systems consists of conditional logit models (Alvarez & Nagler, 1998; van der Eijk et al., 2006). However, the use of such models could be problematic for our analysis, as they cannot take into account the varying set of competing parties across countries and within countries across time.[3] Thus, we favored a modeling strategy relaxing the assumption of homogeneous choice sets by estimating logistic regression models on a stacked data matrix. Under this framework, vote choice is not measured through a standard nominal configuration of the several parties running for election. Instead, the dependent variable vote choice is measured

vis-à-vis a generic party (0: did not vote for this party; 1: voted for this party), repeated as many times per respondent as the number of parties competing on that given election (for a more detailed discussion, see van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).[4] Because it allows for the consideration of vote choices for any of the political parties and leaders running in an election, stacked data matrix estimation has been widely adopted in cross-national analyses of leader effects on vote choice (see, e.g., Aarts, Blais, & Schmitt, 2011; Curtice & Lisi, 2014; Garzia, 2014).[5]

The key covariates in our model are voters' evaluation of party leaders measured by feeling thermometers ranging from 0 (dislike) to 10 (like)[6] and the strength of their closeness to a political party (0: not close to that party; 1: only a sympathizer; 2: fairly close; 3: very close).

Notwithstanding the importance of partisanship and leader evaluations as determinants of the vote, they do not cover the breadth of short-terms issues and long-term ideological considerations potentially impacting voting decisions. Therefore, we also decided to consider the proximity of voters and parties on the left–right continuum, which we consider "a super-issue that summarizes the programmes of opposing groups" (Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976, p. 244).[7] Issue ownership—namely, candidates' ability to prime certain policy stances among the electorate—might spuriously affect leader evaluations (Wattenberg, 1986; Hart, 2015). For this reason, it becomes relevant to control for left–right proximity, as there may be a correlation between voters' assessment of party leaders and the trademark issues associated with the respective parties, especially given that issue voting has also grown more salient over time as a by-product of dealignment (Franklin, 1985; Lewis-Beck, 1990; Dalton, 1996b). Our measure of left–right proximity is calculated as the distance in absolute value between the voter's self-placement on the left–right continuum and parties' position on the same scale, as ascribed by the voter. From an econometric point of view, this measurement strategy implies that left–right proximity is expected to exert a *negative* effect in a model of vote choice (i.e., lower party–voter distance on the left–right scale increases the chances of voting for that party).[8]

The estimates from our logistic regression models, which include standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level to account for the multiple observations per respondent within the stacked data matrix framework, are presented in table 3.2. The models also feature country and year fixed effects to control for unobserved heterogeneity across countries and across time within countries.[9] The coefficients are standardized to facilitate comparison across variables with different measurements.

Model 1 (our baseline model) estimates the impact of left–right proximity, partisanship, and leader evaluations on individual voting decisions.[10] Voters' evaluations of party leaders stand out with a strong and statistically significant

Table 3.2. The effect of partisanship and leader evaluations on vote choice across time

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*
L-R proximity	–.900***	–.904***	–.898***	–.902***
	(.007)	(.007)	(.007)	(.007)
Partisanship	.687***	.837***	.687***	.839***
	(.004)	(.015)	(.004)	(.015)
Leader evaluation	1.031***	1.032***	.814***	.801***
	(.006)	(.006)	(.026)	(.027)
Partisanship	–	–.004***	–	–.004***
*Year		(.000)		(.000)
Leader evaluation	–	–	.005***	.006***
*Year			(.000)	(.000)
Year	–.004***	–.001**	–.008***	–.005***
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Constant	–2.164***	–2.292***	–1.996***	–2.116***
	(.040)	(.041)	(.045)	(.046)
Pseudo R-squared	.51	.51	.51	.51
Log-likelihood	–158498	–158389	–158463	–158351
N (combinations)	667328	667328	667328	667328
N (respondents)	126582	126582	126582	126582

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

effect on vote choice. Both partisanship and ideological distance hold significant and in the expected direction, yet with smaller parameter estimates: the greater the distance on the left–right scale between respondents and parties, the less likely they are to vote for that party; the closer respondents feel to a given party, the more likely they are to cast a vote for it.

However, this is only a snapshot of the explanatory power of these variables in all elections combined. To understand how relationships evolve over time, we have added cross-time interactions for partisanship and leader evaluations. Across the different model specifications, the results seem to support our initial theoretical expectations. In Model 2, the negative interaction between partisanship and year confirms the partisan dealignment hypothesis by demonstrating that the effect of partisanship on the vote has significantly decreased across time. Model 3 finds the opposite trend concerning the interaction between leader evaluations and year, providing evidence that leader effects on the vote have increased across time. The combined inclusion of these two interaction terms in a final step, in Model 4, confirms the results drawn from the previous models. The relationship between partisanship and vote choice has decreased across time, while the impact of leader evaluations has simultaneously increased.

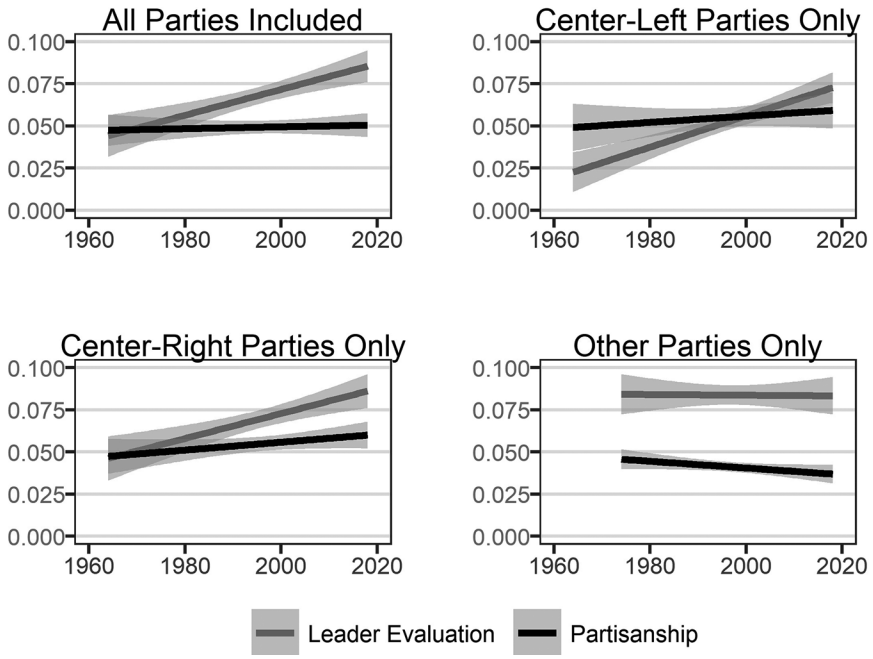

Figure 3.3. Partisanship and leader effects on the vote across different party families

Based on the estimates from Model 4 in table 3.2, we have plotted the average marginal effects of partisanship and leader evaluations on the vote over time (figure 3.3). In addition to the full model estimates deriving from the entire sample (upper-left quadrant), the marginal effects were also broken down by party family, looking at mainstream center–left parties, mainstream center–right parties, and other parties in turn.

The full-sample estimates depict contrasting temporal trends for partisanship and leader evaluations. Following the partisan dealignment trends, there is a longitudinal decrease in the impact of partisanship on the vote. The waning impact of long-term party allegiances on voting decisions unfolds in contrast with the growing effect size of leader assessments over the same time frame. These relationships of near symmetric magnitude hold even when controlling for ideological proximity on the left–right scale. Crucially, the divergent longitudinal trends exhibited by the two predictors appear to stand against the endogeneity assumptions of the Michigan School's funnel of causality. Instead, these findings suggest that the personalization of voting behavior—in the form of a cross-time increase in the correlation between leader evaluations and voting behavior—developed against the decreasing correlation between partisanship and vote choice.

Following the conclusions of previous research examining variations in the magnitude of leader effects across different types of political parties (Lobo, 2008; Aardal & Binder, 2011; Bittner, 2011), we re-estimated the models for voters of center–left mainstream parties (upper-right quadrant in figure 3.3), center–right mainstream parties (lower-left quadrant), and other parties (lower-right quadrant).

For center–left parties, partisanship and leader evaluations clearly exhibit divergent longitudinal trends. As mass parties have historically built their support base upon a strong ideological profile, partisanship has been particularly important in accounting for the center–left vote. The marginal effects suggest that partisanship had already lost some importance in the 1960s when mainstream parties' struggle to maintain a loyal electoral base began because of the social modernization process. In parallel, the importance of leaders for center–left parties increases over time. Around the late 1990s, the magnitude of the marginal effects of partisanship and leader evaluations more or less matches. By this point, many center–left mass parties in Europe had already transformed into catch-all formations.[11]

Among center–right parties, leaders have always been relevant factors alongside partisanship as drivers of vote choice. The resemblance in partisanship and leader effects until the mid-1970s is stark. Such a pattern is congruent with the potential endogeneity between the two variables, in line with the Michigan funnel of causality. However, around the 1980s, partisanship and leader evaluations start exhibiting divergent patterns, suggesting increasing independence between the two predictors. This time frame corresponds to the reconfiguration of conservative parties' ideological foundations, intending to reach out to a broader electorate—much like the move center–left parties made later in the 1990s.[12] The differences in the relative importance of the predictors, compared to the center–left, may be explained by the more complex cleavage structure of center–right parties (Bartolini, 2000). Because of leaders' earlier importance for center–right parties, we observe growth in leaders' relative importance vis-à-vis partisanship in structuring the vote for center–right parties.

Nonmainstream parties manifest more complex patterns, as the diverse set of parties that compose this group often compete on idiosyncratic issues that our data cannot pick up. Due to the possibility of model underspecification regarding the analyses for these parties, some discretion is advisable upon the interpretation of these findings. Any conclusions drawn from the apparently strong leadership versus partisanship effects should further take into account the fact partisanship has traditionally played a lesser role for many of these parties, as they are relatively more recent and less anchored on enduring sociopolitical cleavages. Accordingly, for these parties, the impact of partisanship remains relatively unchanged across time, much in opposition to the patterns observed for mainstream parties.

COGNITIVE MOBILIZATION AND LEADER EFFECTS

The longitudinal evidence for the personalization of the vote presents us with another unexplained puzzle—namely, the relationship between personalization and cognitive mobilization. This carries possible ramifications regarding the normative implications of this process. Is the growing importance of leaders a sign of an electorate more attentive to all possible variables influencing political decision? Or is it a symptom of electoral choices based on superficial aspects related to the personality of politicians devoid of substantive political content?

Traditionally, candidate-based electoral decisions have been perceived as irrational and normatively undesirable (Converse, 1964; Page, 1978). The dominant perspective on candidates is that they are "affectively packaged commodities devised by image makers who manipulate the public's perceptions by emphasizing traits with special appeal to the voters" (Dalton & Wattenberg, 1993, p. 208). On these bases, candidate-centered voting may constitute a peril to the ideals of democratic representation.

A contrary interpretation of candidate-based voting is offered by cognitive psychology. In such a framework, the evaluation of leaders is indeed understood as part of a rational voting strategy (Mondak & Huckfeldt, 2006). Given the increasingly complex and unpredictable political reality, leader evaluations may provide important cues to voters, since "candidate assessments actually concentrate on instrumental concerns about the manner in which a candidate would conduct governmental affairs" (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986, p. 536). This contention is supported by empirical studies demonstrating that voters do evaluate candidates largely on competence grounds (Mondak, 1995a; Funk, 1999).

To better understand both the ongoing process of personalization and—as importantly—the consequences of it for democratic politics, we argue that it is relevant to investigate the roots of leader-centric vote choices. Even more so in times of dealignment and uneven cognitive mobilization. In the previous chapter, we highlighted that the increase of cognitively mobilized independents has been accompanied by a similar increase in the percentage of apolitical noncognitive voters. Thus, we are fundamentally interested in the relationship between cognitive mobilization and leader effects on vote choice. Specifically, do leaders matter more for cognitively mobilized voters? These citizens are highly interested in politics and possess substantial educational resources to reflect on political reality. A positive answer to this question would imply that cognitive voters evaluate political leaders on politically relevant terms, as potentially one of several factors weighing on their political choices. On the contrary, if leader effects happen primarily among apolitical individuals who lack both partisan attachments and the cognitive resources

to meaningfully interpret political reality, it implies that evaluations of party leaders are possibly providing simplified political cues in the absence of party identification.

Previous studies touching upon these questions have focused mainly on the distinct concepts of political sophistication or political knowledge (Bittner, 2011).[13] Although the concepts are related, those who are cognitively mobilized possess both the *skills* and the *motivation* to grapple with the complexities of politics (Dalton, 2007). According to what is, perhaps, one of the most consensual accounts on political sophistication, Luskin (1990, p. 331) identifies three fundamental components of this concept: "the political information to which people are exposed, their ability to assimilate and organize such information, and their motivation to do so." That is, political sophistication presupposes not only the skills and motivations comprised in cognitive mobilization. It additionally incorporates voters' exposure to political information as a necessary condition. Such an assertion is supported by the imperfect statistical relationship between both education and political interest, and political sophistication. Education and political interest are equally helpful in explaining political sophistication, but they are far from fully explaining the concept.[14] Other works investigate leader effects across one of the components of the cognitive mobilization index, or the two components alternatively in isolation, instead of simultaneously combined in a typology. For example, Gidengil (2011) tests the effect of education and political interest in isolation, finding null results. Rico (2014) finds mixed results using education and interest.

Consequently, we propose to assess the relationship between leader effects and the cognitive mobilization index to understand the nature of such effects under conditions of dealignment. Looking at the ratio of cognitively mobilized versus noncognitively mobilized among leader-centric voters across time, we find a (slight) prevalence of leader-centrism among cognitively mobilized citizens in just five elections. In contrast, in a great majority of election studies, noncognitive leader-centric voters are about 20 percentage points more, compared to cognitively mobilized voters who are leader-centric. Therefore, leader-centrism seems to be predominantly a phenomenon that characterizes noncognitive voters. Importantly, this finding holds even when controlling for the increasing number of cognitively mobilized voters across time.

Table 3.3 further tests this result with logistic regression on a stacked data matrix. This extends the analysis from the subsample of leader-centric voters to the entire sample of respondents in the pooled dataset. By means of an interaction between leader evaluations and our cognitive mobilization index, we test whether the latter can act as a moderator of leader effects on the vote. The results from our interaction effects model (right column) suggest that cognitive mobilization plays a moderating effect on leader evaluations.

Table 3.3. Cognitive mobilization and leader effects

	(1)	*(2)*
L-R proximity	–.900***	–.932***
	(.007)	(.007)
Partisanship	.687***	.688***
	(.004)	(.004)
Leader evaluation	1.031***	1.218***
	(.006)	(.028)
Cognitive mobilization	–	–.060***
		(.005)
Leader evaluation	–	–.036***
*Cognitive mobilization		(.006)
Constant	–2.164***	–2.055***
	(.040)	(.046)
Pseudo R-squared	.51	.50
Log-likelihood	–158498	–146927
N (combinations)	667328	627705
N (respondents)	126582	115691

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$.

Leader evaluations matter *less* for cognitively mobilized individuals. This relationship occurs in the expected direction, considering the indications from the descriptive analysis discussed above.

Overall, the process of modernization and the expansion of educational opportunities in Western democracies have increased the average skills and resources to deal with political information among citizens. As mean educational levels (i.e., the ability to cope with the complexities of politics) grow, the main differentiating factor may lie in citizens' motivations to engage with politics. As highly interested individuals are likely to actively seek more political information and be exposed to additional political stimuli, citizens with low levels of interest in politics are more prone to rely passively on political cues. If they lack partisan attachments—as most voters do nowadays—they are more likely to find such cues in political leaders.

It is worth noting that the methodology we have employed and the analysis we have undertaken cannot establish relations of causality. Nevertheless, the long longitudinal evidence depicts a steady decline in the correlations between partisanship and vote choice, as well as the opposite relationship regarding leader effects and the vote. Furthermore, the six decades comprised in the longitudinal scope of this analysis go beyond any time span possibly covered by a panel survey. Although our analysis is correlational, the identification of such consistent trends over a long period of electoral research provides assurance for the strength of these results.

FROM GROUP MEMBERSHIP TO PARTY LEADERSHIP: THE PERSONALIZATION OF PARTY CHOICE

This chapter reports on the consequences of partisan dealignment for the patterns of voting behavior in Western democracies. The waning of party mobilization grounded on collective identities entailed a shift into more individualized styles of decision-making. This chapter's findings suggest that party-centered voting patterns have been substituted, for the most part, by a more substantial factor—namely, party leader assessments on voting decisions.

The dealignment process furthermore appears to have rendered party leader evaluations independent from partisan attachments. If many fewer individuals report an identification with a political party even as leader evaluations retain much of their impact in accounting for vote choice, this suggests an increasingly exogenous relationship between the two variables. Such conclusions challenge the assumptions of the Michigan-based funnel of causality.

We speculate that the addition of nearly two decades of election studies in the "West European Voter" dataset, corresponding to the peak of personalized voting behavior, may partially explain why previous studies featuring data until the 2000s have not captured a cross-time increase in leader effects. Another factor possibly accounting for such divergencies may relate to the joint consideration of leadership and partisanship effects across time. While previous studies frequently overlooked this, this chapter's findings have elucidated the interrelationship between dealignment and personalization. This chapter's contributions to the study of personalization of voting behavior are thus twofold. The first is a methodological contribution—namely, extending the geographical breadth and the time span of previous studies. The second is a theoretical contribution grounded on the simultaneous consideration of partisanship and leadership effects.

The role of dealignment as a driver of the personalization of voting behavior appears all the more evident once attention concentrates specifically on mainstream parties. These are the parties most affected by the process of dealignment, having lost a substantial number of members and supporters as their vote shares declined over the last sixty years. The previous chapter showed that the decline of partisans is disproportionally concentrated among mainstream parties. So too, unsurprisingly, is the decline of partisanship's effect on vote choice. In turn, partisanship's role has mostly been replaced by the growing salience of leader assessments, especially among mainstream parties. In an earlier study of six democracies relying on expert advice for party type categorization, Lobo (2008) identified more substantial leader effects among catch-all vis-à-vis mass parties. Our research comparing mainstream parties to other party types corroborates these prior indications, suggesting that the leaders' effect differs across various party categories. Such

conclusions are congruent with the extant literature on party change that describes, among other aspects, the heightening of leadership as a response to the changing social and electoral environment (Kirchheimer, 1966; Katz & Mair, 1995; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Mair, 2006).

It is worth highlighting that the share of dealigned voters comprises quite distinct types. A fundamental distinction concerns voters' degree of cognitive mobilization. Cognitive apartisans differ from noncognitive apoliticals. As their resources and motivations differ fundamentally, their electoral profile is likely to follow. This aspect is all the more relevant if we consider the disproportionate weight of these two categories in the overall electorate, where cognitive apartisans are a clear minority vis-à-vis noncognitive apoliticals (see figure 2.5). Thus, our analysis documents how an increasingly dealigned electorate—characterized mainly by low levels of cognitive mobilization—is progressively turning to leaders as the primary lens through which they perceive and relate to politics.

With the weakening role of parties as cue providers, leaders find themselves in the best position to exploit strategies beyond traditional party channels. Against the backdrop of profound social disintermediation—where encapsulation through collective bodies is no longer the norm—atomized, dealigned (and not particularly interested) citizens still need cues for political action. Partisan channels do not exist for dealigned individuals, and therefore leaders emerge as the cue givers for these voters.

Chapter 4

Voting in the Television Age

The previous chapters have provided evidence of a generalized process of partisan dealignment in Western European parliamentary democracies over the last half-century and a resulting individualization of voting behavior patterns. This chapter shifts attention to a contextual dynamic that is crucial in accounting for the distinctive electoral importance that party leaders now assume.

The *mediatization* of politics has established a new context in which political institutions increasingly are dependent on and shaped by mass media (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). According to Strömbäck and Esser (2014, p. 6) mediatization can be defined as a "long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors has increased." A fundamental aspect of this development is linked to the changes in the structure of mass communication throughout the last century, prompting changes in political communication and, simultaneously, on voters' political information consumption habits (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni, 1987).

For the first half of the twentieth century, newspapers represented the hegemonic source of mediated political information flowing from parties to the voters. The second half of the century, however, saw television introduced as a technological development challenging the dominant role of the press within mass media. The rapid penetration of television into Western European households further disseminated political messages across social classes. Combining visual and audio elements, television was able to communicate verbal and nonverbal information to both low and highly educated citizens in real time. This new reality carried, in turn, profound implications in political parties' communication strategies. Parties found themselves forced to adapt their political messages to suit the new paradigm of mass communication. As an image-based medium, television is not the ideal platform to communicate

elaborate programmatic contents or abstract ideological constructs. Rather, television favors a personalized type of communication based on party leaders and leading candidates as the most easily recognizable faces of political parties. As a result, individual politicians saw their role greatly enhanced by the diffusion of television as main channel of political communication. Telegenic candidates—with a strong personal appeal and favorable appearance—became key to every election campaign ran in the television era. As Grabe and Bucy put it,

> Since the rise of television as a political force, candidate images have largely been constructed visually through deliberate campaign strategies designed to promote desired qualities and favored themes. Visual portrayals facilitate different levels of intimacy between candidates and viewers, highlight appealing or unappealing personal attributes of candidates, and have the potential to craft enduring images that affect electoral support. (2009, p. 85)

This has altered, for example, the standards by which politicians are deemed suitable for televised and deeply personalized political campaigns. Like television-born candidates such as Ronald Reagan or Silvio Berlusconi, those aspiring to electoral victory must now be able to perform naturally before the cameras.

This chapter contends that this technological revolution was a very decisive element in making leaders the most prominent political actors in the eyes of voters in Western democracies (Mughan, 2000). In a time where parties were no longer able to anchor voters, television played a fundamental role in priming leaders for an increasingly dealigned and individualized electorate. To test this proposition, we will scrutinize the connection between voters' exposure to political information in newspapers and television and leader effects on vote choice. We hypothesize that a media diet dominated by television is instrumental in promoting a personalized type of voting behavior. The possible interrelationship between a paradigm of communication dominated by television and the voters' consideration of leaders in the decision-making process has been a recurrent topic in political communication research (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). However, the evidence accumulated to date is far from unequivocal on this point. Empirical studies investigating these relationships provide only mixed evidence. If some case studies find evidence linking exposure to televised political information and leader effects (McLeod, Glynn, & McDonald, 1983; Keeter, 1987; Mughan, 2000; Holian & Prysby, 2014; Takens et al., 2015; Garzia, 2017a), others find partial or no evidence of an association between exposure to televised news and leader-centered patterns of voting (Hayes, 2009; Gidengil, 2011; Elmelund–Præstekær & Hopmann, 2012; Rico, 2014).

Besides remaining ambiguous about the interconnection between exposure to televised political news and personalized voting, we argue that these studies carry methodological deficiencies of three kinds. First, virtually all existing studies are cross-sectional and/or focus on a single country case. Second, even among the few comparative analyses, measurement issues arise due to their focus on exposure to the medium as such, rather than exposure to *political news*. Third, none of these studies has considered the composition of individuals' media diet—that is, the extent to which their political information consumption habits are diversified across different types of old media (i.e., newspapers, television). This chapter addresses these limitations by means of a large-N comparative analysis, using exposure to political news both in newspapers and on television. We consider not only the frequency of exposure to political information via each medium but also the composition of individuals' media diet.

MEDIA CHANGE AND THE GREATEST ANTHROPOLOGICAL REVOLUTION OF ALL TIMES

At the individual level, partisan dealignment means that partisan cues lose importance in guiding individual voting decisions. As voters' ties with political parties wane, citizens become increasingly distant from the informational shortcuts provided by political parties. In the previous chapter we argued that citizens nonetheless need cues for political action, and that leaders may be increasingly providing these cues. This is particularly the case for individuals with low levels of cognitive mobilization. The question remains unanswered as to *why* and *how* leaders came to replace parties as cue providers under conditions of dealignment.

Across the last century, the media progressively took on many of the mobilization and informational functions traditionally operated by party organizations, campaign rallies, and party staff on electoral campaigns. The expansion of mass communication increased the availability of information about politics and provided a platform for voters to judge and act upon the political realm independently. As social intermediary bodies such as trade unions and religious institutions progressively struggled to encapsulate citizens, the development of mass communication in the twentieth century came to replace these intermediaries in bridging political parties with voters. Today, fewer people attend political rallies or campaign events than fifty years ago. The media has thus become the main channel through which parties and candidates inform and persuade the electorate (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). In providing political cues to voters, the mass media have assumed the once party-controlled role of primary source

of political information, preempting a significant part of political parties' role as information providers (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000, pp. 11–12).

Notwithstanding the historically important part played by the press in mass communication for many decades, the spread of television as a primary source of political information went beyond a reconfiguration in the patterns of media consumption, to entail a broader cultural change in Western societies with profound consequences in the nature and form of democratic politics. Indeed, the emergence of television has been described as "the greatest anthropological revolution of all times" (Sartori, 1989, p. 43). From an epistemological point of view, it represents a change from a print culture to a new paradigm where objectivity emanates from what is *seen*. The television age "demands a reconsideration of our print-age value structure, which routinely prizes abstractions conveyed through words more than the realities and feelings conveyed through pictures" (Graber, 1988, p. 174).

For citizens, the ability to *watch* what is happening may appear as more factually representative of reality than what is reported secondhand in writing by a journalist. Images can be quite illusive. For example, it matters very much whether in the visual reporting of a civil disturbance the camera "is looking over the heads of the police being stoned or over the heads of the demonstrators being tear-gassed" (Williams, 1974, p. 48). The apparent absence of an intermediary in audiovisual communication confers it a misleading and potentially perverse notion of added neutrality. According to Neil Postman (1986, p. 78), "Television arranges our communications environment for us in ways that no other medium has the power to do." Television's communication framework, he argues, has profoundly transformed contemporary politics, now condemned to mimicking the show business logic under which television operates. For example, "political recruiters have become extremely conscious of a candidate's ability to look impressive and to perform well before the camera" (Graber, 1980, p. 161). In modern elections, in which campaigns are fought primarily on television, telegenic candidates have become an almost essential asset for political parties (Grabe & Bucy, 2009).

The characteristics of television also impose conditions on how messages reach citizens, and what types of messages are conveyed. Compared to newspapers, televised news are more synthetic because they are further restricted in space/airtime (Mondak, 1995b, p. 78). Viewers have less control over the quantity and speed at which information is provided to them, whereas newspaper readers can allocate as much time as they need to process information. The type of content is also affected, as "some claim that the visual aspects of television and practices of television news organizations lead to a different product: compared to newspapers, television news content supposedly emphasizes individuals' attributes such as political candidates' personalities at the expense of issue coverage" (Druckman, 2005, p. 464). For all these

reasons, the changes in the structure and composition of mass communication to a media environment dominated by television—and aggravated by an increasing interdependence between mass media and politics—have created a set of conditions favorable to individual political actors, placing them at core of contemporary politics. However, to what extent does this translate to individual-level patterns of political information and electoral behavior?

THEORIES OF MEDIA EFFECTS: TELEVISION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR

The preponderant role of the media in contemporary politics has been matched by an increased scholarly interest in its growing impact over modern campaigning and elections, generally designated as *media effects* (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Perse & Lambe, 2001; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Bryant et al., 2012; Potter, 2012). This heterogeneous body of research seems to concur with the idea that the media does not straightforwardly replicate political reality but actively selects what aspects to cover and—perhaps more importantly—how to portray information to citizens. Accordingly, media effects can be defined as the result of individual exposition to "a particular aspect, form or content, of a media message system, medium, type of content, or individual message" (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991, p. 236). Mediated political content often embodies simplified constructions destined to turn complex political processes into intelligible storylines for recipients. Since the media connects citizens with political actors, the way in which it communicates can be expected to—either directly or indirectly—influence how citizens perceive and form opinions about politics, by filtering and shaping political information, with reflections on the public's attitudes and political behavior.

Although not entirely specific to television, certain types of media effects are particularly enhanced by its audiovisual characteristics—namely, priming and framing. Our understanding of priming relates to the process of selecting the issues that are presented to voters in the media, thereby affecting the standards by which people make political judgments. In contrast, we conceive framing as the type of focus employed by the media on a specific news story, potentially influencing how individuals interpret and evaluate the information.

By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, "priming helps explain why some issues and not others are used to form subsequent evaluations, for example, of political leaders" (Kiousis et al., 2015, p. 3347). Citizens' political evaluations of complex objects are indeed largely conditioned by the type of information primed most readily by the media—that is, by what

is called to their attention by media reports through selective emphasis on certain topics. Consequently, priming effects can have an impact on partisan and candidate assessments, ultimately with implications on vote choice (Takens et al., 2015). For example, existing research shows that the audience's view of presidential character and performance "depends on which aspects of national life television news chooses to cover and which to ignore" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 80). Others have argued that a more positive/negative media focus on issues can affect citizens' evaluations accordingly, through a process coined as *affective priming* (Sheafer, 2007; Balmas & Sheafer, 2010). According to these studies, the affective evaluative tone in the media may carry relevant consequences for the approval ratings of political leaders and, ultimately, the outcome of elections.

A related effect is framing, through which subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems affect individual decision outcomes related to a given issue (Iyengar, 1994). In other words, framing refers to citizens' sensitivity to contextual cues in formulating judgments and making opinions, as well as to the media's active role in defining and shaping how such cues are presented to voters. In sum, this type of effect refers to the way in which politics is portrayed to citizens. When it comes to television, framing mostly takes the form of a highly personalized coverage of events or issues, such that "citizens should be more likely to attribute responsibility to individuals rather than broad societal forces" (Mendelsohn, 1996, p. 113). If, for example, issues are framed in highly personal terms, voters are more likely to form their performance judgments also in personal terms (Hart, 2015).

These effects largely stem from the fact that individuals have limited resources and selective attention to political news, so they seek heuristics or cognitive shortcuts to help them assimilate political content, frequently relying on the information that is most accessible to them in memory (Conover & Feldman, 1989; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Zaller (1992) makes a strong case for citizens' tendency to resort to top-of-the-head considerations—to a large extent, determined by whatever they have most recently been exposed to in the media—when elaborating political judgments. Miller and Krosnick (2000) show that attention toward an object increases its accessibility but, more importantly, also its perceived importance in the eyes of voters. Numerous studies document how televised news disproportionately prime individual politicians at the expense of abstract ideological constructs (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Mendelsohn, 1996; Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Other studies have highlighted the way television frames political topics in a highly personalized fashion, leading citizens to evaluate these issues with reference to individual political actors (Schram, 1987; Iyengar, 1994; Grabe and Bucy, 2009). Because television news recurrently frame politics

as a horserace between candidates, focusing on their personal characteristics and suitability for office, citizens are also more likely to foreground candidate assessments as the basis for their political decisions. Both effects thus mean political leaders often appear to television watchers as among the most relevant and accessible factors to consider when making sense of political reality. Furthermore, individuals have a heightened ability to recall televised information, especially when personalized through human figures, carrying natural implications in terms of the salience of televised content in the political cognition process (Graber, 1990). Grabe and Bucy explain this mechanism as follows:

> Because reading and the apprehension of spoken language require more deliberate cognitive effort than recognizing and deriving meaning from images, news verbals are poorly remembered compared to news images—particularly when they are compelling and dramatic. In contrast to images, verbal description is more experientially remote and less directly involving, especially for those with low levels of literacy. This is particularly true for political information, which requires an elaborated schema or existing base of knowledge for audiences to effectively integrate novel occurrences and new knowledge for later use. (2009, pp. 21–21) AuQ3

For instance, television is extremely well suited to convey emotional messages and to communicate nonverbal information as well. The visual imagery conveyed by television can act as cue providers for personality evaluations (Druckman, 2003). Studies on political psychology have long established that voters resort to these types of cognitive shortcuts as strategies of personality evaluation that mimic those undertaken in individual daily interactions (Kinder et al., 1980; Kinder, 1986; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986).

The use of such heuristics is stimulated by the shape and content of televised news, subsequently supporting patterns of opinion formation and performance judgments based on assessments of individual political actors.

Through the concurrent effect of priming and framing mechanisms, the era of television-based political communication has thus moved political leaders to the foreground in voters' overall judgments of political reality. Perhaps the most notorious example of how televised political information affects political attitudes is Druckman's (2003) experiment in which two distinct groups of subjects were exposed to the 1960 Kennedy–Nixon debate—forty years after—via television versus via radio. The author's original hypothesis that television viewers would consider additional nonverbal information provided by visual imagery or cues drawn from movements found empirical support. Significant differences were found between the two groups: television viewers considered Kennedy as victor of the debate, whereas radio listeners considered Nixon more convincing. It is argued that this discrepancy can be explained

by Kennedy's superior image, favored by television, even if his performance was not definitely better on issues (Druckman, 2003, p. 563). This is just one out of many examples of how television images provide personality perceptions that are used by individuals as cues to evaluate candidates. Additional evidence in this direction is provided by Mendelsohn (1996), who finds that the media's role in priming candidates affects voters' top-of-the-head considerations, favoring candidate assessments at the expense of partisanship. Lenz and Lawson (2011) support further the existence of an appearance image effect, through which appealing-looking candidates are particularly benefited from television exposure, especially among less sophisticated voters exposed to heavy television watching. Todorov et al. (2005) also conclude that voters' draw nonverbal information about candidates from facial appearance, forming competence judgments about them based solely on images.

The visual mechanisms influencing voters' assessments of candidates' have noteworthy implications concerning voting behavior decisions. Empirical research linking political communication studies with voting behavior has dedicated to investigating to what extent exposure to televised political information contributes to a higher consideration of leader evaluations in individual voting decisions. However, most of this research is restricted to case studies of a single nation (Mughan, 2000; Elmelund–Præstekær & Hopmann, 2012; Rico, 2014; Takens et al., 2015; Garzia, 2017a) and largely rotating around the peculiar American context (McLeod, Glynn, & McDonald, 1983; Keeter, 1987; Hayes, 2009; Holian & Prysby, 2014). The only available exception so far is a comparative study by Gidengil (2011) in which it is argued that leader effects are actually weaker for voters with higher degrees of television exposure. As the author admits, however, such study relies on suboptimal measures since it considers exposure to television as such, rather than to television *news*, as the main source of political information for voters. Furthermore, Gidengil's study does not consider the possible implications of commensurate levels of political information consumption on the newspapers. In this way, it does not envisage potentially neutralizing or counterbalancing effects of newspaper readership on the candidate priming and framing effects resulting from the exposure to televised news.

PATTERNS OF POLITICAL INFORMATION CONSUMPTION: NEWSPAPERS AND TELEVISION

The composition and relative importance of the mass media throughout the last century has dramatically changed, to the extent that "television joined and, in some instances, replaced radio and newspapers as the major means of mass communication" (Druckman, 2005, p. 464). Whereas until the 1950s

the print media dominated communication, the emergence and diffusion of television to virtually every household in advanced industrial democracies has changed the modes through which political parties communicate with citizens. Television provided access to news and political information to a wider audience than any other media channel before. Unsurprisingly, survey research recurrently finds that television is the main source of political information, followed by the press, in virtually every Western democracy (Ohr, 2011). However, such survey data is limited both temporally and geographically. Measures of exposures to political information in the media first appear in national election studies at a late stage, if we consider the development of mass communication in Western societies. It was not until the 1980s that questions tapping respondents' frequency of consumption of political information in the media were systematically included in national election studies in Europe. At this point television was already a pervasive medium in Western societies. This carries important implications regarding our sample of election studies and its ability to address our research questions.

The fact that most studies in the beginning of our time series did not feature media exposure questions forces a truncation in the empirical base so far employed in the book. Since our survey data does not include the period before television saturation, we cannot address the longitudinal personalization hypothesis. Despite this limitation, our "West European Voter" dataset contains, to the best of our knowledge, the most comprehensive set of election studies ever considered in studying the relationship between exposure to political information and the determinants of vote choice. Our large-N comparative analysis of thirteen parliamentary democracies in Western Europe covers forty-eight elections held across nearly four decades, thus offering a large-scope improvement compared to the preexisting research on this topic.[1] Furthermore, this sample includes a balanced selection of countries from each of the three types of media systems described by Hallin and Mancini (2004).

Another asset compared to previous studies concerns our enhanced measurement strategy, corresponding to a conceptual definition in which national election studies' original variables must allow the respondent to: (1) indicate the frequency of media usage; (2) explicitly mention media use for the purposes of political information; and (3) include both television and newspapers. In this setting, we allowed for different measurement scales varying between more fine-grained measures enabling individuals to report news exposure on the different media in number of days per week, to a minimally satisfactory scale (e.g., four values ranging from "never" to "everyday"). Our minimum-common-denominator approach rests on the idea that—whatever the response categories—respondents can be classified in terms of what media (if any) is their most important source of political information.[2]

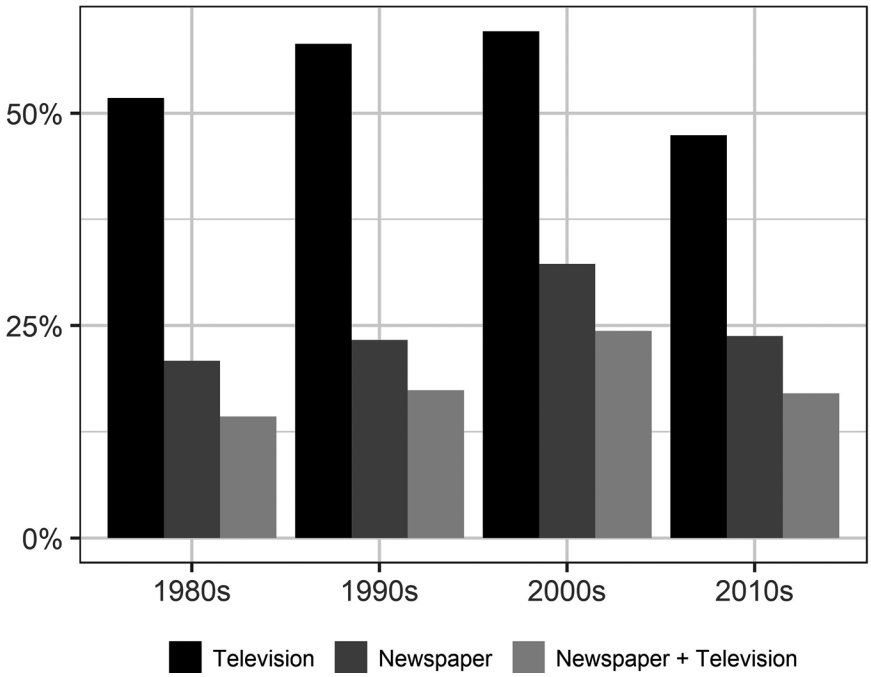

Figure 4.1. Newspapers and television as a source of political information

Note: Bars represent the proportion of respondents consuming political information on each media every day. Respondents are grouped by decade (N = 127,116).

A description of these measurements and their respective trends across time is provided in figure 4.1, which depicts the share of individuals reporting use of either newspapers or television (and both combined) as frequent sources of political information.

Newspapers' role as information providers appears quite stable over the three decades in figure 4.1. However, because of the emergence of television, newspaper consumption is likely to have suffered a decline in the 1960s, which we are unable to capture given that the time frame for the media exposure data at our disposal begins in the 1980s. We can nonetheless be sure of the sustained significance of newspapers as a source of political information for about a quarter of the electorate across the last four decades.

The same data constraints hold for television. Television already played a major role in Western societies and their politics in the 1980s: the first televised U.S. presidential debate was in 1960. Our data would likely need to go further back in time in order to capture any substantial time variation in exposure patterns. If any variation is captured in this period, it is actually

a minor decrease in citizens' levels of exposure to political information on television toward the end of the period, possibly resulting from the growing importance of the Internet as a source of political information over recent decades (see next chapter). Nonetheless, television remains, by far, citizens' preferred means to obtain political information.

Yet, these categories are not exclusive—voters can be frequently exposed to political information through television and newspapers *jointly*. In fact, given as television has become pervasive in modern societies, much anyone who is a regular consumer of political information is likely to gather it—even if not necessarily exclusively—on television. Hence, examining patterns of consumption of either media separately may not be the most adequate strategy to capture the relative weight of each as a news provider. For this reason, we have also explored the share of individuals equally highly exposed to political information in both media. These heavy political news consumers are relatively stable at about 20 percent of the electorate throughout the whole time span. Including these heavy users is crucial if we are to fully understand the different importance of each media in the composition of individuals' media diet. In other words, if we have noted that about a quarter of individuals are highly exposed to political information on the newspapers, 20 percent are highly exposed to political information on *both* newspapers and television. To be sure, among regular newspapers consumers, about 80 percent also consume television news regularly. These 80 percent thus have a media diet that is balanced, in the sense that it draws equally on the two mediums. Contrarily, only one-third of the regular watchers of television news are also frequent readers of politics in newspapers. That is, there are substantially more individuals exposed to political information exclusively through television. This carries implications regarding the effects of image and text discussed before. While in a balanced media diet, image and text may cancel each other out, where one prevails—which we have argued is mostly image—it will have a disproportionate effect over individuals' political reasoning. Alongside frequency of news exposure, these arguments support the contention that the composition of individual media diets is central to understanding media effects on voter behavior.

THE COMPOSITION OF INDIVIDUAL MEDIA DIETS: INTRODUCING NEWSPAPER/TELEVISION-CENTRISM

The lack of appropriate measures of voters' exposure to political information is perhaps the most severe limitation in existing studies on the interconnection between consumption of political information in different media and vote choice. For this reason, we have devoted particular attention to the design of

a new measurement that goes beyond the consideration of the mere quantity of news media consumption, to also include a reflection about the composition of individuals' media diet. Such an approach has two main advantages.

Firstly, it enables the consideration of overlaps between exposure to political information in different mediums. For example, cognitively mobilized citizens are arguably more interested in politics and, as such, are more prone to self-selection into multiple media sources, potentially with high levels of consumption. It is a well-established finding in political communication research that more educated and more interested citizens are major news consumers (Bennett, Rhine, & Flickinger, 2000; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010; Boulianne, 2011; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, & Shehata, 2013). Therefore, for these individuals the visual effects of heavy television news exposure may be compensated by equally frequent newspaper readership. Conversely, among citizens with low levels of education or interest in politics, even only occasional exposure to television may have strong effects if not counterbalanced by newspaper consumption. This makes the case for a more refined measure of political information consumption that accounts for potentially different degrees of media prevalence as a source of political information.

Secondly, but not least importantly, a compositional approach relaxes concerns related with overreporting of news exposure, either originating from social desirability bias or inability to correctly recall previous media consumption (Prior, 2009). Amplified self-reports of news exposure would have no effect on our measure, assuming it is proportionally balanced for television and newspapers.

Shehata and Strömbäck (2011) propose a measure of newspaper and television-centrism in their comparative study of news consumption gaps (see also Norris, 2000). They operationalize it as the difference between the average amount of total newspaper reading minus the average amount of total television viewing at the aggregate (i.e., country) level. According to their operationalization, a country is considered newspaper-centric if the average newspaper readership outweighs the average television viewing and is television-centric if television watching trumps newspaper readership. We apply the same logic to develop a measure of *newspaper/television-centrism* at the individual level, by subtracting newspaper consumption of political news from television consumption of political news, yielding a scale ranging from –3 (corresponding to individuals exposed to political information in newspapers every day and never on television) to +3 (corresponding to individuals exposed to political information on television every day and never in newspapers). On this scale, the negative values represent newspaper-centric individuals, the neutral value of 0 registers a balanced consumption by individuals reporting the same frequency of news consumption for newspapers and television, and the positive values represent television-centric individuals. In this framework, television-centric individuals' voting decisions are hypothesized to be more closely related to their assessments of the leaders running for election.

Table 4.1. Construction of the newspaper/television-centrism typology

		Newspaper consumption				
		Never	*Rarely*	*Often*	*Always*	*Total*
Television consumption	Never	6.0%	1.9%	1.2%	1.2%	10.3%
	Rarely	4.0%	4.4%	2.2%	1.4%	12.0%
	Often	5.2%	6.3%	7.2%	4.3%	23.0%
	Every day	13.8%	10.5%	10.0%	20.4%	54.7%
	Total	29.0%	23.1%	20.6%	27.3%	100%

Source: Newspaper-centric Balanced Television-centric

Note: $N = 127{,}116$.

Table 4.1 illustrates the construction of our newspaper/television-centrism typology, displaying the distribution of respondents across different levels of exposure to political information on television and in newspapers. The preponderance of television-centric over newspaper-centric individuals across the sample reflects the commanding role of television as a source of voters' political information in our parliamentary democracies. Importantly, reflecting the patterns highlighted in figure 4.1, a longitudinal assessment of newspaper/television-centrism reveals the large dominance of television over newspapers, with only very small differences in the degree to which people consume televised news over press after the 1980s.

In this typology, 12 percent of individuals are newspaper-centric whereas nearly 50 percent of the sample is television-centric. Moreover, only one respondent in five balances his or her heavy (i.e., every day) television news consumption with an equally heavy exposure to political news in the newspapers. These figures reflect the disproportionate weight of audiovisual over textual political information in citizens' media diet. If, as discussed before, an audiovisual type of political information primes candidates and political decisions based on image considerations, as well as assessments of individual political actors, the differences in media diets observed may have consequences for voting behavior. In the next section, we adopt a multivariate approach to investigate this possible connection between media diet and the determinants of vote choice.

LEADER EFFECTS ACROSS LEVELS OF NEWSPAPER/ TELEVISION-CENTRISM

The theoretical argument laid out so far poses that a television-dominated media diet primes leader effects on voter behavior. Such a proposition can be preliminarily assessed by analyzing the relationship between newspaper/

Table 4.2. Distribution of party-centric and leader-centric voters across varying levels of NP/TV-centrism

. . . among:	*NP-centric*	*Balanced*	*TV-centric*	*All*
Party-centric voters	8.1%	7.1%	5.9%	6.6%
Consistent + idiosyncratic	55.8%	54.1%	49.3%	51.9%
Leader-centric voters	36.1%	38.8%	44.8%	41.4%

Note: $N = 86{,}661$.

television-centrism and different patterns of party-centric and leader-centric voting. As in the previous chapter, we have disaggregated the sample into the share of respondents who voted for the party they affirm an identification with despite not being the party of their best-rated leader (i.e., party-centric voters) and the share of individuals who voted for the party of their highest-rated leader without identifying with that party (i.e., leader-centric voters). Table 4.2 displays the distribution of these categories of voters across levels of our newspaper/television-centrism index.

The patterns expressed in the table confirm our initial expectations. Regardless of the disproportionate weight of television-centric voters vis-à-vis newspaper-centric voters in our sample, a television-centric media diet appears more common among leader-centric voters. Among party-centric individuals, there is a difference of about 2 percentage points between the proportion of newspaper-centric and television-centric voters in favor of the former. Conversely, among leader-centric voters we observe a shift toward a higher prevalence of television-centrism, with a difference close to 8 percentage points between the two types of media diets. Such preliminary evidence is informative about the relationship between voters' media diet and their voting behavior patterns but requires further empirical analysis.

Again, we rely on hierarchical logistic regression models with fixed country and year effects, measuring the moderating role of exposure to political information on different media on leader effects, through a stacked data matrix framework, in which the key covariates (strength of partisanship, left–right proximity, and leader evaluations) are measured at the respondent × party level. The stepwise introduction of different media exposure variables on top of a baseline model accounts for media effects across quantities of media exposure and, subsequently, media diet composition. The results are presented in table 4.3.

Models 2 and 3 inquire into the quantitative dimension of media consumption, by looking at newspapers and television in turn. Model 2 addresses this point through an interaction term between leader evaluations and the frequency of political information consumption from newspapers. The interaction term is negative and significant, indicating that printed news

Table 4.3. Leader effects across changing patterns of media exposure

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*
L-R proximity	–1.008***	–1.014***	–1.008***	–1.014***	–1.016***
	(.009)	(.009)	(.009)	(.009)	(.009)
Partisanship	.654***	.653***	.654***	.654***	.652***
	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)
Leader evaluation	1.031***	1.186***	.894***	1.036***	.984***
	(.008)	(.020)	(.027)	(.027)	(.009)
Newspapers	–	–.094***	–	–.067***	–
		(.005)		(.005)	
Leader evaluation	–	–.057***	–	–.070***	–
*Newspapers		(.007)		(.007)	
Television	–	–	–.163***	–.149***	–
			(.006)	(.006)	
Leader evaluation	–	–	.044***	.057***	–
*Television			(.008)	(.008)	
NP/TV-centrism	–	–	–	–	–.016**
					(.005)
Leader evaluation	–	–	–	–	.067***
* NP/TV-centrism					(.006)
Constant	–1.907***	–1.649***	–1.388***	–1.266***	–1.913***
	(.063)	(.066)	(.067)	(.068)	(.064)
Pseudo R-squared	.50	.50	.50	.51	.51
Log-likelihood	–101574	–98528	–100490	–98079	–98468
N (combinations)	436531	424159	432727	423127	423127
N (respondents)	78503	76581	77832	76372	76372

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

consumption is inversely correlated with leader effects on vote choice. Model 3 applies the same logic to consumption of political information from television. Contrary to the previous model, exposure to televised news correlates positively with leader effects. These findings are in line with our initial expectations regarding the contrasting impacts of the two media sources on leader effects. In Model 4, we bring consideration of composite effects to the table by including the joint frequency of consumption of both media in the same model. The results show a reinforcement of the interaction effects of both newspapers and television, hinting that additional variance might be explained by composite effects. In other words, voters' consumption of information from one media source seems to matter in relation to the frequency of consumption from the other source. We further explore this possibility in Model 5, through the assessment of the relationship between individuals' score on the newspaper/television-centrism index and leader effects on vote choice. The interaction term is statistically significant and positively signed,

suggesting that individuals with a television-centric media diet are more likely to consider leader evaluations in their voting decisions. In sum, the composite measures nuance the findings from the quantity measures—television fosters leader effects on individual vote choice, whereas newspapers downplay them. However, the effects of media exposure derive less from the frequency of consumption of each media in isolation than from the consideration of individuals' media diet as a whole, considering the degree of conjoint exposure to newspapers and television.

The differentiated effects of leaders across levels of newspaper/television-centrism are better perceived by plotting the marginal effects of the key predictors included in our model across different media diets, as presented in figure 4.2.

The analysis of the marginal effects confirms the variation in the effect of voters' assessments of party leaders on the vote according to individuals' media diet. Among television-centric voters—those with positive values, who comprise the majority of individuals in the sample—leader evaluations are the strongest predictor of vote choice, overcoming the impact of both left–right proximity and partisanship. In contrast, among newspaper-centric voters—the ones with negative values on the scale—leader evaluations are even *less* important than left–right proximity. While partisanship and left–right proximity appear unaffected by respondents' degree of newspaper/

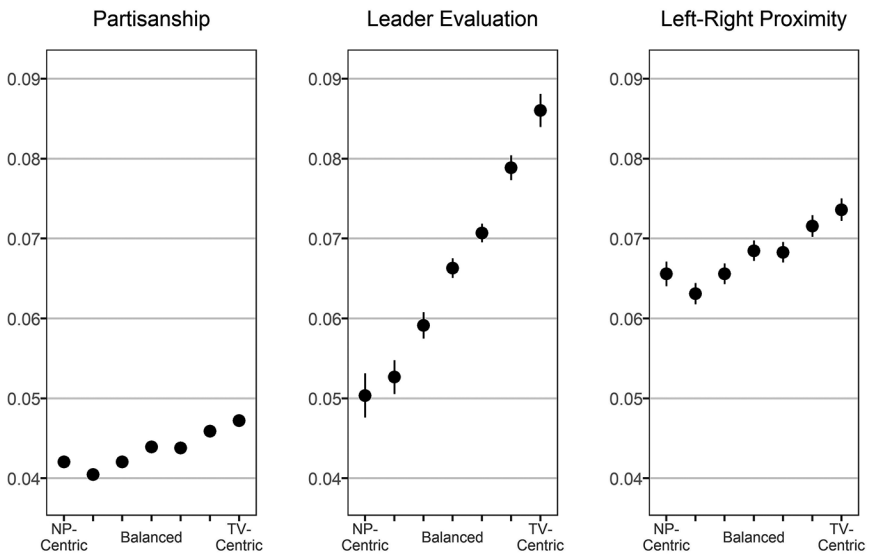

Figure 4.2. Marginal effect of key covariates across values of newspaper/television-centrism

television-centrism, the effect of voters' assessments of leaders on vote choice varies substantially across the scale.

The purpose of this composite measure is perhaps best illustrated by considering those individuals with a balanced media diet. This modal category encompasses around 40 percent of voters, of which nearly half watches television every day (as shown in table 4.1). However, despite their daily consumption of televised news, leader effects are not significantly higher for these voters, compared to left–right proximity. This happens because their media diet is balanced with newspaper readership, contraposing text-based information to the image effects of television. Conversely, for individuals who may even watch televised news less frequently but do not complement this with any newspaper readership (falling into scores 1 and 2 of the index), leader effects are significantly stronger. Thus, frequency of consumption of television, in isolation, is not fully informative about the relationship between media exposure and leader effects on vote choice, justifying an examination of individuals' broader media diet.

Overall, these results sustain our guiding research hypothesis, pointing to the differentiated impact of television, particularly on leader effects, and thus suggesting a systematic interrelationship between individual exposure to televised political information and personalized patterns of voting behavior.

NEWSPAPER/TELEVISION-CENTRISM AND COGNITIVE MOBILIZATION

In the previous section, we provided empirical evidence of the connection between a television-dominated media diet and stronger leader effects on voter behavior. However, inasmuch as consumption of political information from television is pervasive among all kinds of voters, we can expect different media diets to vary according to individuals' degree of cognitive mobilization. Not only do cognitively mobilized individuals possess the necessary skills and resources to interpret political information autonomously from partisan cues, they are also more interested in politics than the average citizen (Dalton, 1984, 2007). It follows that cognitively mobilized individuals are therefore more likely to be exposed to political information both from television and newspapers (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010). Because of their higher interest in politics, they may well seek political information from multiple sources, thus resulting in a less television-centric media diet than not cognitively mobilized individuals. Furthermore, the last chapter provided evidence of a relationship between cognitive mobilization and leader effects on vote choice, in which leaders were shown to have a stronger impact among voters who are not cognitively mobilized. However, we do not yet know the

Table 4.4. Percentage of cognitively mobilized voters across varying degrees of newspaper and television consumption

	Never	*Rarely*	*Often*	*Always*
Newspapers	10.9%	23.0%	36.3%	41.8%
Television	22.9%	27.4%	31.2%	26.7%

Note: N = 124,668.

extent to which cognitive mobilization and individuals' media diet relate to each other, and how such pattern of covariance impacts on voting decisions. Previous studies on leader effects across different media consumption have generally failed to consider individual differences in levels of cognitive mobilization. Therefore, to accurately investigate the importance of the process of cognitive mobilization and media change on the changing patterns of voting behavior, it is important to consider the interaction between these dynamics. How do media effects interact with cognitive mobilization regarding the influence of leader assessments on vote choice?

In table 4.4, we describe the proportion of cognitively mobilized voters across varying degrees of newspaper and television consumption.[3] Their proportion appears overall stable across levels of television exposure, as virtually no compositional difference emerges. There are as many cognitively mobilized voters among heavy television consumers as there are among those who never watch television for political information. The key variation seems to reside, instead, in the differentiated patterns of consumption of political information from newspapers among the cognitively mobilized. There is a notable difference of about 30 percentage points in the proportion of cognitive voters among those who are never exposed to political information from newspapers and those reading political news every day. Among the latter group, the cognitively mobilized are slightly less than a half.

This claim is backed up by the correlations between the frequency of consumption of each media and cognitive mobilization: while the correlation coefficient between television consumption and cognitive mobilization is only of .01 ($p < .001$), the correlation between newspaper consumption and cognitive mobilization amounts to .28 ($p < .001$). This finding sheds light on the very distinct political information consumption profiles of these two groups. Although equally prone to frequently consume televised political information, cognitively mobilized citizens are also heavier readers of political matters in newspapers. In incorporating both sources into their media diet, they introduce more diversity in the type of political information they collect. These contrasts become even clearer by looking at the distribution of the composite newspaper/television-centrism measure across levels of cognitive mobilization in table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Newspaper/television-centrism across levels of cognitive mobilization

. . . among:	*Newspaper-centric*	*Balanced*	*Television-centric*
Noncognitive	54.8%	67.3%	81.0%
Cognitive	45.2%	32.7%	19.0%

Note: $N = 124{,}668$.

The two subgroups exhibit contrasting media diets. While cognitively mobilized individuals are predominantly newspaper-centric, noncognitively mobilized citizens are mostly television-centric. Among cognitively mobilized citizens, there is a difference of about 26 percentage points between the proportion of individuals with a newspaper-centric and a television-centric media diet. For noncognitively mobilized citizens, the difference is obviously of the same magnitude but in the opposite direction. Such variation is quite revealing of the distinct media diets across levels of cognitive mobilization. While television-dominant patterns of political information consumption are mostly characteristic of noncognitively mobilized individuals, citizens possessing higher educational resources and motivations are more prone to balance their media diet with newspapers sources or even be newspaper-centric. Importantly, as we have seen from table 4.4, rather than being explained by different exposure to televised political information, these differences are mostly due to the higher likelihood of cognitively mobilized citizens reading newspapers.

The more diverse media diet of cognitively mobilized individuals may result in differentiated leader effects across levels of cognitive mobilization. If these individuals are attentive to a medium that does not prime political leaders as much as television does, the priming effect of television may be counteracted by the influence of newspaper reading. The joint effect of newspaper/television-centrism and cognitive mobilization on leader effects is tested in an interaction effects model, as presented in table 4.6.

Our results suggest a congruence between individual media diet and the relationship between cognitive mobilization and vote choice. Leader effects on the vote are weaker for cognitively mobilized citizens and for individuals with a newspaper-centric media diet. As we have seen before, most of the television-centric subpopulation is not cognitively mobilized. Therefore, the results from Model 2 suggest that these two dynamics go hand in hand. The higher educational resources and stronger interest in politics of cognitively mobilized citizens equip them with the skills and motivations to seek political information in a more diverse set of media sources, resulting in a more balanced media diet. As cognitively mobilized voters complement their media diet with a balanced consumption of newspapers and television, the audiovisual effects priming candidate-based voting decisions are counterbalanced. In the current audiovisual age of politics as show business (Postman, 1986), where voters

Table 4.6. Old media consumption, cognitive mobilization, and leader effects

	(1)	*(2)*
L-R proximity	–1.016***	–1.015***
	(.009)	(.009)
Partisanship	.652***	.653***
	(.005)	(.005)
Leader evaluation	.984***	1.118***
	(.009)	(.035)
NP/TV-centrism	–.016**	–.027***
	(.005)	(.005)
Leader evaluation	.067***	.059***
* NP/TV-centrism	(.006)	(.007)
Cognitive mobilization	–	–.071***
		(.007)
Leader evaluation	–	–.032***
* Cognitive mobilization		(.008)
Constant	–1.913***	–1.668***
	(.064)	(.070)
Pseudo R-squared	.50	.50
Log-likelihood	–98468	–97006
N (combinations)	423127	417082
N (respondents)	76372	75280

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

decisions seem increasingly grounded on candidate images and personalities, and electoral outcomes dependent on leaders' telegenic features, a share of cognitively mobilized citizens seems relatively immune to this personalization—their antidotes being the written word and their higher interest in it.

NEWSPAPERS, TELEVISION, AND PERSONALIZED VOTING BEHAVIOR

In this chapter, we have offered an empirical assessment of the role of television in fostering personalized voting behavior. If partisan dealignment and the individualization of vote choice have created a favorable context for short-term factors to play a stronger independent role in the voting calculus, television has become a channel used by leaders to fill the void left vacant by eroding cleavage alignments. A media diet in which exposure to televised news is predominant primes political leaders among voters, influencing their electoral behavior.

Our conclusions rely on an improved measurement and conceptualization of voters' exposure to political information from television and newspapers.

Specifically, we have offered three improvements vis-à-vis previous studies: a large-N comparative analysis spanning over four decades, measures of frequency of exposure to *political* information in both newspapers and television, and a novel compositional measurement of voters' media diet. Our refined measures proves crucial, for example, when analyzing the relationships between media consumption and cognitive mobilization. Cognitive voters are about as likely to be highly exposed to televised news as any other individual. However, unlike their less cognitive counterparts, they are also heavy consumers of political information in the press. Consequently, they have a more balanced media diet, in which television's priming effect for leaders is somehow compensated by newspaper readership, arguably more prone to develop issue discussions and ideological debates.

These results therefore counsel consideration of the structure and composition of voters' media diet—the share of television vis-à-vis press exposure—to establish a fuller picture of the impact of media consumption on vote choice. While measures of self-reported individual exposure to printed and televised political information are admittedly imperfect, our findings nevertheless point to the role played by the interconnections between the process of media change and mediatization of politics, on the one hand, and the development of the personalization of politics through stronger leader effects on voting behavior, on the other.

Admittedly, the constraints imposed by the cross-time unavailability of media exposure variables in national election studies hinder any definite conclusions regarding an actual personalization as an outcome of media change. Data anterior to the 1960s would be required to capture the emergence of television and assess its eventual impact on the personalization of politics. We were also unable to address this limitation through media content analysis, which could potentially help in accounting for the variance at the country/election level (Takens et al., 2015). Longitudinal analyses of media coverage do not stretch for the entirety of our period of analysis, nor are they conclusive regarding an actual increase in personalization of media coverage. Concerning newspapers, the positive answers provided by a few case studies (Mughan, 2000; Langer, 2007; McAllister, 2007; Rahat and Sheafer, 2007; Balmas et al., 2010) are counterbalanced by the mixed (Dalton et al., 2000; Karvonen, 2010), or even negative (Kriesi, 2012), conclusions from comparative analyses.

Media content analyses of television are more scarce, due to obvious obstacles in data collection and analysis. To date, the single longitudinal study conducted, albeit a single case study, found evidence supporting personalization in televised media content (Schulz, Zeh, & Quiring, 2005). Given the inexistence of longitudinal accounts of media content in televised news (aside from the mixed findings of studies analyzing newspapers), we

could not incorporate media content in our analysis. Instead, we have relied on other works, suggesting, as an alternative, a comparison between different media (van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stayner, 2011), under the assumption that television coverage offers a type of communication more centered on leaders than in newspapers, because of the different nature of these platforms (van Aelst, 2007; Salgado, 2007). We substantiate the findings of these studies when it comes to voting behavior, demonstrating that the distinct characteristics of these two media yield different patterns of voting, with television in particular favoring personalized voting behavior.

Understanding the implications of media exposure for electoral mechanisms is likely to become even more imperative. The Internet has already emerged as a leading source of political information for a growing number of voters, arguably with profound implications on electoral outcomes, which most recent elections have confirmed. Despite television's overwhelming impact on modern societies, the importance of the written word is clear from our findings on cognitively mobilized voters. The Internet combines features of the print and televised media, offering voters the possibility of accessing audiovisual as well as text-based information online. Although their preferences in this regard are yet largely unknown, the pervasiveness of television and the importance of audiovisual communication in modern societies would suggest a possible inclination for online information consumption that is heavily image-based. In the next chapter, we attempt to shed some light on the consequences of the emergence of the Internet as a new phase in the media change process and the implications of this for voting behavior in Western democracies.

Chapter 5

Voting in the Digital Age

The previous chapters have documented the interplay of social and technological changes in the relationship between citizens, parties, and their leaders. So far, we have explored how different patterns of consumption of old media have fostered the personalization of voting decisions. The visual nature of televised political information primes voters to evaluate parties through the lens of the leader's persona. When the individual-level composition of political information leans toward televised news, the relevance and centrality of political leaders in the voting calculus is strengthened. However, television has been but one step in a longer and more wide-ranging media transformation that has occurred over the past decades. In this chapter, we move toward an exploration of the electoral implications of the digital revolution when it comes to the effect of online political communication on the determinants of vote choice.

The rapid spread of the Internet worldwide has had profound consequences both for the overall communication system and individuals' information-seeking habits. An unprecedented expansion in the amount of available news goes hand in hand with the narrowing of audiences and the fragmentation of online news sources. While most empirical studies addressing the consequences of news exposure through the Internet involve case studies tracking a particular election campaign, or the campaign of a single party, we rely on our "West European Voter" dataset to investigate its broader implications for voting behavior. This comparative-longitudinal approach results in an original exploration of the key characteristics of *political internauts*—namely, those voters who declare they gather political information using the Internet—of the individual-level correlates of online news consumption, as well as the effect of the latter on patterns of vote choice. As we will argue, the current online environment—increasingly characterized by unmediated and visual forms of political communication—allows for the discretionary adaptation of

the forms of media usage to individual preferences, which results, in turn, in a progressive personalization of vote choices.

THE SPREAD OF BROADBAND INTERNET IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Since its introduction in the early 1990s, the Internet has been hailed as a revolutionary transformation in citizens' daily lives, with the promise of virtually unlimited access to political information that fosters transparency and accountability. The new medium was, at first, an elite technology adopted by governments, universities, and big business. Only in the late 1990s did the new technology begin to steadily diffuse through society as it was adopted by ordinary citizens, letting them establish direct connections with one another, as well as with their political referents.

Today, digital technologies have profoundly transformed the media environment, de-massifying political communication and leading to a complex hybrid of old and new sources (Chadwick, 2013). The hybrid character of the media environment rests, on the one hand, on the *complementarity* of media technologies and, on the other, on their *versatility*. Far from being substitutes, old and new media often complement each other, allowing users to either switch between media technologies in a matter of seconds or even allowing synchronous usage (Gil de Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo, & McGregor, 2015). In fact, digital technologies can provide access to traditional media, for instance, when newspapers are accessed in digital format, or when broadband connections are used to stream television news. Thus, users increasingly mix media sources and technologies in various ways and different amounts, often accessing old media sources digitally. The composition of media usage, rather than its sheer quantity, may, therefore, carry salient political implications.

For our argument, it is important to note that the type of Internet connection influences the volume of digital information that users can access. Old connections, such as through dial-up modems that connected users to Internet providers over telephone lines, provided a theoretical maximum transfer speed of 56 Kb/second, which limited users to accessing mostly textual information. With the introduction of broadband Internet access—either via cable, digital lines, or satellite—the transfer speed progressively increased to reach the order of multiple Mb/second, which allows accessing information in audiovisual format. The technological progress has, therefore, also produced a qualitative change in how users gather information through the Internet.

We can track this change relying on official aggregate-level statistics compiled by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations' specialized agency for information and communication technologies. The ITU offers the most comprehensive data source on telecommunication

technologies in terms of the time span and the number of countries featured in the survey—which includes, importantly, all the countries considered in our study. The timing and pace of improvements in digital infrastructure has varied significantly from country to country. By focusing on aggregate-level indicators, we can better reconstruct the trajectories of Internet usage and offer a fuller picture of changes in the range of access and the speed of connectivity over time.

While the Internet was introduced at roughly the same time (around 1995) everywhere, it unfolded faster in some countries, and slower in others. In Northern European countries, Internet take-up occurred at a faster pace, and the rate of Internet users had passed half of the population in some cases already in 2003. Differently, in Southern European countries, such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy, the penetration increased more slowly and appears to have reached a ceiling that is significantly lower than that in northern countries. More than 25 percent of the population in Italy and Portugal still did not use the Internet in 2016.

As for the qualitative dimension of Internet penetration, we noted the critical distinction between access to information through slow telephone lines, that do not allow for fast download of audiovisual streams, and fast broadband technologies. A subset of the ITU data, available for the years since 2007, tracks the prevalence of slow and fast Internet connections. We consider as "slow" all those Internet connections that can transfer less than 2 Mb/second, and "fast" all those connections transferring more than 10 Mb/second. In figure 5.1, we report the respective shares of country populations having that type of access. These thresholds are particularly relevant for our purpose, as the transfer speed needed to stream low-quality videos is about 3 Mb/second, while about 8 Mbit/second is needed to stream videos in high definition. Thus, it is reasonable to say that Internet users with a connection slower than 2 Mb/second cannot watch videos, while users with connections beyond 10 Mbit/second can stream HD videos at will.

Figure 5.1 clarifies that, in all countries, the share of Internet users having slow connections peaked at around 10 percent of the population at the beginning of our time series, and it has by now virtually disappeared. Differently, the share of fast connections has grown steadily over the last ten years. In 2016, over a third of the population in the countries under consideration had a fast home Internet connection. Combining these data with the aggregate-level penetration statistics discussed above, we can also infer that the remaining Internet users (the majority in most of the countries) still have connections between 2 and 10 Mb/second, which allows the Internet to be used to watch videos.

These trends underscore the deep transformation in the media environment in recent decades. The significant growth in Internet penetration writ large and the increasing speed of broadband connections have been accompanied by advances in connected device technology, as well as in the content that is

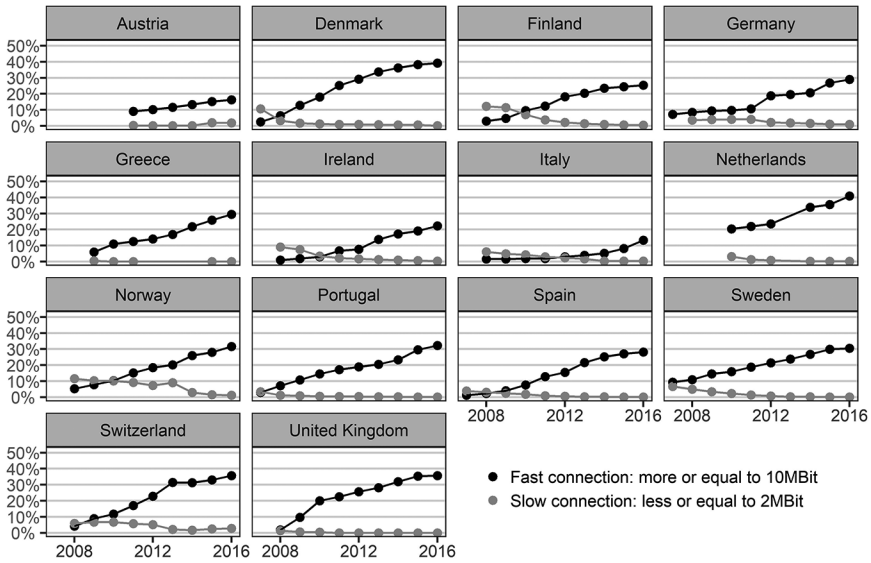

Figure 5.1. Internet penetration by connection type

Source: World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database, International Telecommunication Union.

transmitted. First, smartphones and tablets allow almost continuous Internet connectivity. This means that the potential exposure to political information is no longer limited to the hours a citizen spends at home watching TV, or sitting at the computer, but may include virtually any spare moment. Second, fast connections have triggered a transformation in the contents transmitted across the Internet. On the one hand, television channels have become increasingly inclined to grant access to their content via the Internet. At the European level, 17 percent of citizens report watching television via the Internet "everyday or almost" and an additional 15 percent "at least once a week" (Eurobarometer, 2019). On the other hand, as a result of spreading broadband connections and mobile connecting devices, social media usage has boomed. So much so that nowadays 48 percent of European citizens report using online social media "everyday or almost" and an additional 16 percent "at least once a week" (ibid.).

ONLINE POLITICAL INFORMATION ACROSS THE BROADBAND REVOLUTION

The idea of the digital "village"—where everyone can freely communicate with everyone else, and where important information is abundant and easily obtainable—marked the introduction of the Internet, creating the aura of a

bright future to come and hopes for better and fuller democracy. This optimistic view foregrounded the way digital technologies favor new and variegated patterns of political participation. In 2006, *Time* magazine declared "You" to be the person of the year, stressing the empowering effects of personalized communication technologies to foster engagement with social causes, provide better knowledge about political issues, and provide powerful mobilization and organization tools for protest events and campaigns. Scholars supporting this view defined the new patterns of digital technologies as leading to a "personalization of politics" (Bennett, 2012), in the sense that the Internet could favor exposure to inwardly personal action frames that would prompt greater participation. In a meta-analysis of studies on social media and political participation, Boulianne (2015) has found a positive relationship between social media usage and participation, showing the existence of a stable association between the two concepts.

In line with this expectation, early scholarship proposed that digital networks might plausibly replace secondary social groups (e.g., party, union, church, class). Indeed, the large part of communication research since the 1990s has tended to emphasize the community-building, deliberative, and transparency-enhancing character of "net activism" (White, 1997; Hague & Loader, 1999). New technologies were expected to favor the centrality of horizontal networks of citizens participating in public forums (Klein, 1999) to discuss and reengage with political issues (Delli Carpini, 2000). The issue-centrism of the early Internet also led political candidates to initially avoid digital technologies as a campaigning tool (Stromer–Galley, 2000). In some cases, this perspective was taken to an even more radical point—namely, toward forms of techno-utopia that foresaw a future of party-less, policy-centered, and assertive citizens self-organizing in online decision-making platforms. Examples include the Italian Five Star Movement, which coordinated and advertised its political activities through the blog of its leader after the late 2000s, Beppe Grillo, and the so-called Pirate Parties that diffused simultaneously in various countries, from Sweden to the United Kingdom.

Over time, as the advance of Internet technologies has transformed digital activities, the digital promise of better democracy and representation has become subject to growing skepticism. In the first place, slow connections facilitated mostly textual engagement, resulting in the mushrooming of online forums in which practitioners and interested users would exchange opinions and views about issues of interest. This type of digital practice saw a culture of participatory discussion and collaboration emerge, one that was seen as beneficial for public opinion and democratic decision-making. However, as faster and cheaper connections saw an expanding user base, growing suspicion and perplexity surrounded the expected impact of digital tools for the functioning of democracy. We have therefore witnessed a simultaneous process of democratization of online tools—which rapidly became available for

the majority of citizens—and of transformation of online news outlets, which increasingly became aligned along partisan positions.

Against this backdrop, the rise of social media has foregrounded the dangers of one-sided or siloed political communication. Here, a central concern has been the proliferation of niche outlets advocating strong partisan views on political issues. Amid growing fragmentation, it has become increasingly clear that misinformation spreads as readily across digital platforms as verified data does, with the attendant risk of cascades of fake news contaminating public deliberation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Furthermore, they came to be associated with greater political apathy and declining political efficacy and trust in politics (for a review on the "media malaise" perspective, see Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010). Finally, many pointed to social media as potentially homogeneous and closed communication spheres, similar to echo chambers, with the fragmentation of political knowledge and ever-increasing political polarization (Lelkes, Sood, & Iyengar, 2017). The latter problem, in particular, has been linked to the expansion of choice availability (Iyengar et al., 2019).

The general abundance of information fostered by the digital revolution has had profound effects on citizens' political learning. Well before television became ubiquitous, Antony Downs identified the dilemma of "a priori attention" (Downs, 1957, p. 219). From an instrumental and rational perspective, individuals will first guess the value of information before they invest their cognitive resources to process the information content. For this reason, so the Downsian argument goes, individuals will tend to identify a narrow set of information sources as trustworthy. Open media environments are salient exemplars of this mechanism of self-selection into information sources, as they offer users a wide choice over news content. In line with this theoretical framework, later contributions (Prior, 2005, 2007) have documented extensively the contextual effects of political learning on millions of Americans triggered by the introduction of post-broadcast technologies (cable and satellite TV) in the 1980s. By granting greater filtering and discretionary capacity, the many channels received via cable or satellite TV have allowed the electorate to self-select into preferred content. Those individuals motivated to learn more about politics were now able to search out political updates all day long, while those uninterested in politics could focus exclusively on entertainment programs.

The process of self-selection leads to a profound contrast between the old, concentrated media landscape of traditional media, in which a limited number of media sources made attitude-news incongruence likely, and the current fragmented media environment characterized by high attitude-news consistency. Contemporary information technology has features that lie at the opposite of traditional low-choice media. The spreading of the broadband Internet contributed to a media environment that resembles the post-broadcast TV, in

that it potentially allows users a wide choice over content. Indeed, the volume of information that circulates over the Internet makes the set of potential choices for users virtually limitless in terms of not only entertainment content but also political content and ideological flavors. Post-broadcast TV and broadband Internet additionally share the visual element of their content. This introduces a remarkable distinction between the pre-broadband (i.e., dial-up connection) Internet and today's much faster version. As the Internet has sped up it has become a sort of hyper-TV, given the virtually unlimited number of sources users have access to and the diffuse visual content available.

Before the spread of the Internet, people generally chose the type or channel of media for consuming news (newspapers versus TV) based on the individual preference for visual or textual communication. However, with the diffusion of fast Internet connections, this distinction has blurred and become much harder to disentangle, since those favoring text and those with a preference for visual information may well use the same (digital) medium. As emphasized in the previous chapter, the balance between visual and textual information is linked to the relative importance of party- and leader-based factors in shaping voting decisions. Pew (2016) data on U.S. citizens shows that a significant majority of individuals gathering news online prefers to watch videos (46 percent) rather than read news articles (35 percent).

For another thing, the Internet is more than a TV with unlimited content, given the multidirectional nature of the communication via this medium. In fact, the introduction of broadband Internet has occurred in parallel with the diffusion of social media, which has introduced a radical change in the directionality of information flows. If post-broadcast television allowed for the expansion of sources, it would still constrain users to the role of passive receivers in top-down information flows. The Internet has revolutionized communication flows, such that mediated communication is now much more like interpersonal communication, only virtually so. Social media means Internet users can become producers of their own information flows, potentially interacting with each other as well as with their political referents. For this reason, social media create an ideal setting for personalized political communication by allowing for direct and unmediated connections with political leaders.

Empirical evidence appears to support these points about the impact of the Internet and social media. Enli and Skogerbø (2013) demonstrate that social media tend to personalize electoral campaigns, by centering the political communication around the candidates' image rather than on the party itself, even in party-centered systems such as Norway. Similar patterns of personalization in online campaigning are also observed in Austria (Dolezal, 2015) and the United States (Enli, 2017). In a comparative study of candidates' political communication in seventeen countries during the 2009 European Parliament elections, Hermans and Vergeer (2013) also highlight the trend of

personalization in online campaigning. Recent research has found strong levels of personalization in patterns of political communication on social media, where leaders—rather than the respective parties—are the uncontested protagonists. A recent analysis by Rahat and Kenig (2018) shows that among the twenty leading political actors on Facebook in terms of *likes*, seventeen are individual politicians, and only three are political parties. This finding leads them to the conclusion that "the top political online realm is that of individual politicians" (ibid., p. 189).

The key points outlined above undergird our main expectation regarding the connection between exposure to political information via new media and voting mechanisms. The widespread availability of fast connections, allowing the mass diffusion of video streaming technologies and social media platforms, may result in an increasing relevance of personality evaluations in patterns of electoral decision-making. To validate this claim at the individual level, however, we need to consider the cognitive profile of new media users, who are likely to be heterogeneous in how they gather political information. The Internet user may thus be linked to their offline counterpart, as the specific form in which political information is gathered online likely depends on individual-level preferences (e.g., textual versus audiovisual).

MEASURING POLITICAL INFORMATION ONLINE WITH ELECTION STUDIES

We count three decades since the introduction of dial-up Internet connections and just over a decade since the introduction of broadband technologies. The comprehensive database compiled for this book is thus apt for tracking the digitalization of political communication and identifying its consequences in terms of electoral decisions for the growing amount of voters resorting to the Internet for political information. If a full assessment of the political consequences of digitalization would clearly exceed the scope of this contribution, our descriptive analysis can shed new light on significant political dimensions of Internet usage by answering the following questions: How many voters rely on digital sources of political information? What is their cognitive profile? Are there significant differences between Internet users in terms of old media consumption and patterns of party/leader-centrism?

Our pooled "West European Voter" dataset faces some inevitable challenges that arise in using election studies to gauge the exposure to digital political information. For one, the various indicators tapping Internet usage for political information have been introduced at different times across countries. In some cases (e.g., Italy and the Netherlands), an indicator was already available at the end of the 1990s/early 2000s, but in other cases, the

measurement starts only after 2005. Besides the time imbalance, we had to tackle the inevitable differences in the indicators and question wordings across countries. To identify adequate measures for the usage of traditional media, we have scanned the election surveys in search of viable items, guided by the two conceptual criteria set out earlier in the book: (1) an indication of the frequency of Internet usage and (2) an explicit mention of use of the Internet to gather political or electoral information.

However, if the indicators of usage of traditional media have undergone a process of calibration and harmonization, the more recent introduction of the Internet and its versatility implies a somewhat lower consistency in the indicators. In particular, the frequency of Internet usage has seldom been included in the question wording. Thus, to avoid excluding a substantial number of cases, we resort to indicators that distinguish users from nonusers, but that do not differentiate between users in terms of the time spent searching for, or frequency of access to, political information via digital technologies. Empirically, this limitation means that we will not be able to distinguish between heavy Internet users and occasional ones, but only between those who report not using the Internet and those who do report such use.

We also acknowledge that this simple indicator does not allow us to assess *how* political information is accessed online. Thus, we cannot perform an ideal test that would compare the users gathering political news in video format and those reading articles on the Internet. Nevertheless, we can still compare Internet users with a preference for television news (television-centered) and those with a preference for reading the papers (newspaper-centered). This test follows the logic that, online or offline, patterns of individual news access reflect a deeper preference for the information format.

At the completion of the data harmonization work, we identified forty-five election surveys, including satisfactory Internet consumption items from ten countries.[1] The resulting pool of countries represents a variegated set of media systems, including the Mediterranean, continental European, and Northern European countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The aggregate-level indicators of Internet penetration previously presented are available for all the countries included in our analysis. This means that it is possible to compare the average share of voters using the Internet to collect political information (based on our individual-level dataset) with the overall share of Internet users (based on the ITU's country-level statistics). If our indices are valid and reliable, we should never observe that the share of voters gathering digital information exceeds the share of the population with Internet access. Moreover, as Internet penetration expands, we should also observe a parallel increase in the share of individuals reporting that they gather political information on the Internet. The respective trends, disaggregated by country and year, are reported in figure 5.2.

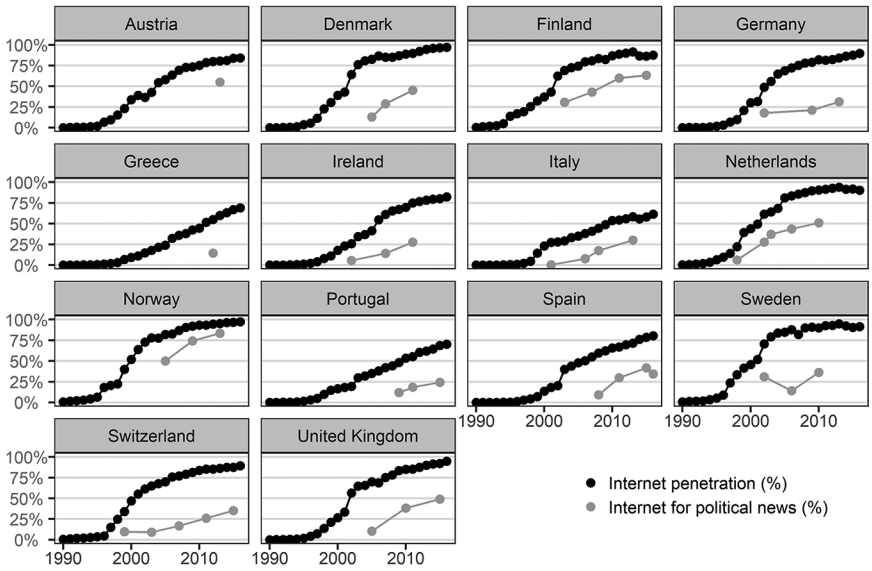

Figure 5.2. Internet penetration (aggregate) and Internet use for political information (individual)

As expected, the figure shows that the individual-level measure systematically lies below the trend of the overall share of Internet users, since not all users actually use the Internet to collect political information. We also observe that the growing trend of voters reporting that they collect political information online tracks more or less proportionally with the larger overall share of users. In fact, the two variables correlate strongly (Pearson's $r = .73$). We read these numbers as an indication of the satisfactory outcome of the data harmonization work. We acknowledge that the set of Internet items does not provide as solid an empirical base as the television and newspaper items. However, to the best of our knowledge, the data at hand represents the most comprehensive individual-level database for measuring the impact of Internet usage on the determinants of vote choice in a comparative and longitudinal perspective.

A COMPARATIVE PROFILE OF POLITICAL INTERNAUTS

We can thus move to analyze the profile of political internauts—namely, those voters who report gathering political information on the Internet. In particular, we focus our attention on those factors that were shown to affect voting-decision mechanisms in the previous chapters—that is, the shares of

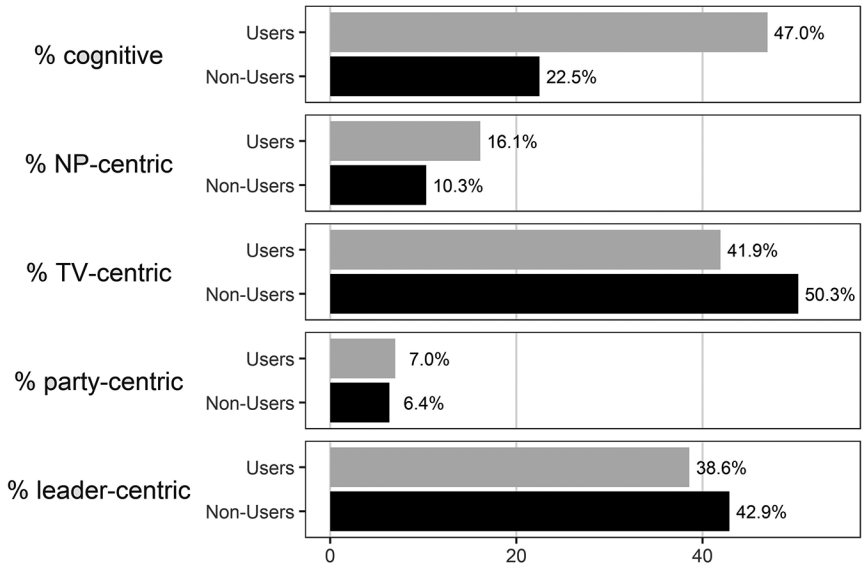

Figure 5.3. The cognitive and behavioral profile of political internauts

cognitively mobilized individuals, the balance in terms of traditional media usage (newspaper- and television-centrism), and the alignment between party and leader evaluations and the vote (party- and leader-centrism). Figure 5.3 presents the distributions of these variables and compares voters using the Internet to collect news with those voters not using digital media.

Our analysis reveals the presence of salient differences between the two groups of voters. First, the share of cognitively mobilized individuals is substantially larger among political internauts as compared to nonusers. In particular, our data reveal that, overall, the share of cognitively mobilized users is 47 percent, more than double the share of cognitively mobilized nonusers (23 percent). Second, the different cognitive profile is also reflected in the fact that Internet users are more likely to rely on newspapers vis-à-vis television for gathering political information. In fact, the share of newspaper-centric Internet users amounts to about 16 percent of all political internauts, as compared to about 10 percent among nonusers. Thus, even though newspaper users are a minority among both groups, still their share is larger in the former category. Third, the reverse appears true for television, as television-centric respondents prevail among nonusers (50 percent) as compared to users (42 percent). Political internauts thus appear more cognitively mobilized and more reliant on newspapers to gather political information—seemingly the identikit of nonleader-centric voters (and contrary to our initial hypothesis).

Figure 5.3 also reports the respective shares of party-centric voters (i.e., respondents who voted for the party they identify with, regardless of whether they prefer its leader over the others) and leader-centric voters (i.e., respondents who voted for the party of their highest-rated leader, regardless of their party identification) among users and nonusers of political information online. In terms of party-centrism, there are no sizeable differences between the two groups. However, and more importantly to our purposes, we also observe that political internauts are, on average, slightly less leader-centric than nonusers—the proportion of leader-centric voters among political internauts being about 39 percent as opposed to 43 percent among nonusers.

This initial exploration would seem to suggest that online political information consumption has no personalizing effect on vote choice. However, as previously argued, these bivariate figures may hide spurious relationships, as preexisting patterns of cognitive mobilization and offline media consumption may also affect the relevance of party-leader evaluations in the voting calculus. The direct assessment of the relationship between online political information and the influence of political leaders on voting choice is likely to depend on the cognitive profile and the traditional media diet of the voters, in that more cognitively mobilized, newspaper-centric voters are also more likely to use the Internet and to downplay the role of leader ratings.

To further support this idea, figure 5.4 disaggregates the proportion of leader-centric voters by simultaneously accounting for their degree of

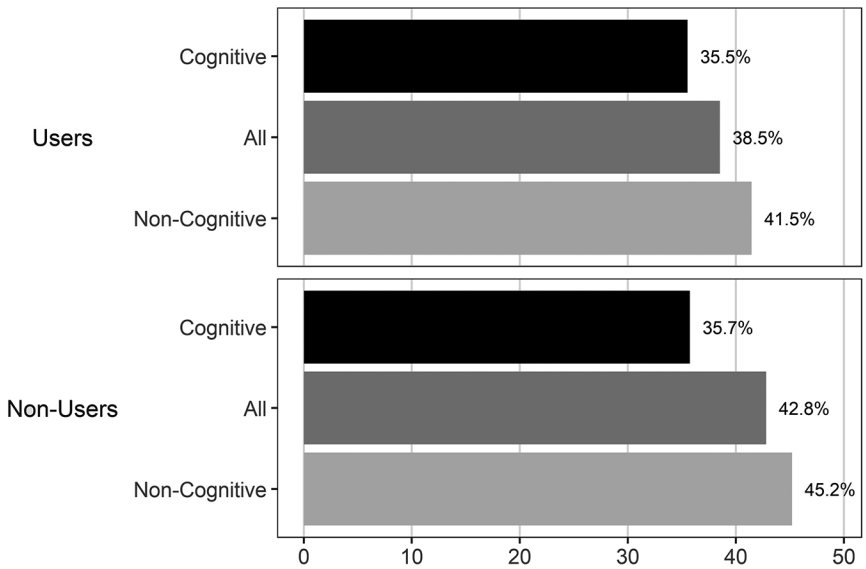

Figure 5.4. Percentage of leader-centric respondents by cognitive mobilization and Internet usage

cognitive mobilization and whether they use the Internet to gather political information online. The figure reveals that leader-centrism is indeed predicted by the cognitive profile of the voters. The share of cognitive mobilized leader-centric individuals is precisely the same regardless of whether or not they use the Internet for political information (36 percent). This share then increases among cognitively unsophisticated voters in both subgroups (42 percent among Internet users, 45 percent among nonusers). In other words, much of the average difference in leader-centrism between users and nonusers is attributable to within-group differences among cognitively unsophisticated voters.

We observe a specular trend when disaggregating the patterns of leader-centrism across Internet usage by the dominance of traditional media sources, as reported in figure 5.5. The share of leader-centric voters that predominantly collect information reading newspapers is about the same for political internauts (36 percent) and for traditional media users (37 percent). This value then increases among television-centric regardless of whether they use the internet for political information (43 percent) or not (47 percent). Thus, once again, the difference in the extent of leader-centrism appears to be motivated by underlying differences occurring at the level of offline—rather than online—media preferences.

Overall, our bivariate evidence highlights that the connection between Internet usage and the extent of party and leader effects on vote choice is likely to

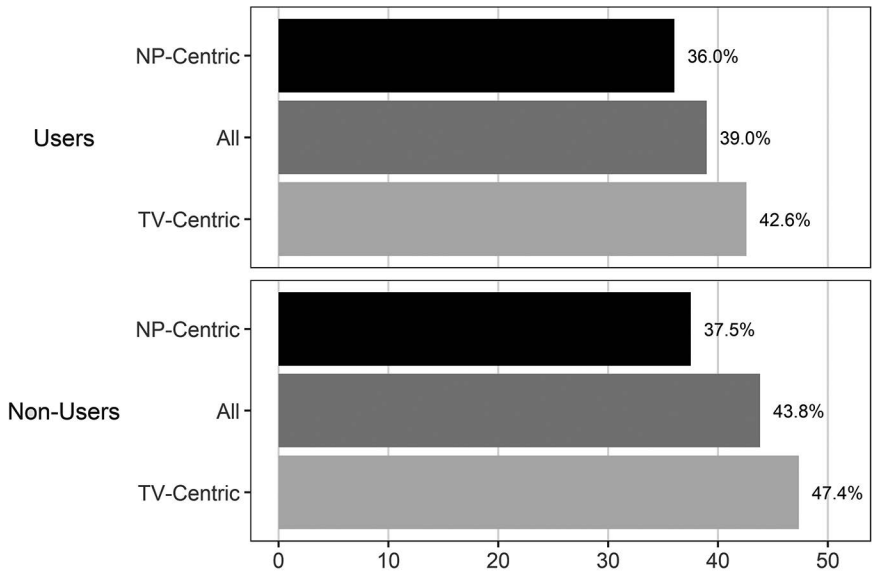

Figure 5.5. Percentage of leader-centric respondents by NP/TV-centrism and Internet usage

be simultaneously affected by the cognitive profile and the media preferences of the voters. On the one hand, we find that Internet users are twice as likely than nonusers to be cognitively mobilized. The cognitive profile may provide a deeper motivation to collect political information regarding policy issues or the persona of political leaders. This tendency was already documented in the previous chapters, and it is mostly visible when it comes to voters' old media diet. On the other hand, we also find that political internauts are, on average, only 4 percent less likely to be leader-centric than nonusers. However, the differences *within* the categories of Internet users and nonusers observed when comparing television- and newspaper-centric respondents were larger than 4 percent, summing to 6.5 and 10 percent, respectively. To estimate the relationship between Internet usage and the determinants of vote choice, we should then separate the effect of the exposure to online political information from the role of preexisting patterns of cognitive mobilization and offline media consumption. To this purpose, the next session presents a multivariate regression model with interaction terms to account for these conditional patterns.

INTERNET USAGE AND THE DETERMINANTS OF VOTE CHOICE

In this section, we assess the extent to which using the Internet for political information moderates the impact of party-leader evaluations on vote choice, once we control for the simultaneous relationships stemming from lower cognitive mobilization and a television-centric media diet. Out modeling strategy utilizes multivariate hierarchical modeling with interaction terms. In particular, following the insights from the previous bivariate findings regarding the relationship between the individual cognitive profile and media habits, we control for conditional relationships by adding interaction terms between party-leader evaluations and all potential confounders. This way, we can isolate the resulting relationship between Internet usage and the leadership influence on the vote, after controlling for these factors.

Table 5.1 reports the estimated coefficients of our regression models. Model 1 introduces Internet usage, including both a direct term and an interaction term with leader evaluations alongside our standard statistical controls (left–right proximity and partisanship). We find that the interaction term is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that political internauts are, on average, more likely to connect voting decisions to their judgment of political leaders. However, this model does not consider that the electoral influence of political leaders is predicted by the level of cognitive mobilization and by the media diet, which also covary with the usage of the Internet. Thus, Model 2 further considers individuals' level of cognitive mobilization

Table 5.1. Political information in old media, new media, and leader effects

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*
L-R proximity	1.036***	1.036***	1.066***
	(.011)	(.011)	(.012)
Partisanship	.650***	.650***	.675***
	(.006)	(.006)	(.007)
Leader evaluation	1.040***	1.345***	1.229***
	(.011)	(.038)	(.044)
Political information online	–.116***	–.089***	–.029
	(.015)	(.016)	(.017)
Leader evaluation	.133***	.183***	.087***
* Political information online	(.019)	(.020)	(.022)
Cognitive mobilization	–	–.057***	–.074***
		(.007)	(.008)
Leader evaluation	–	–.079***	–.061***
* Cognitive mobilization		(.009)	(.010)
NP/TV-centrism	–	–	–.032***
			(.006)
Leader evaluation	–	–	.071***
* NP/TV-centrism			(.008)
Constant	–1.649***	–1.405***	–1.356***
	(.060)	(.067)	(.073)
Pseudo R-squared	.48	.48	.48
Log-likelihood	–85276	–83805	67850
N (combinations)	345559	339693	276306
N (respondents)	63300	62250	51176

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$.

in relation to leader evaluations. As already documented, cognitive mobilization depresses leadership effects, as signaled by the respective interaction terms. Yet, when its effect is accounted for, the coefficient for the size of the interaction term between Internet usage and leader evaluations increases. This moderation bias depends on the fact that cognitively mobilized voters attach less importance to political leaders in their voting decisions, and they also tend to access political information on the Internet. Thus, in Model 1, this omitted negative effect would be averaged with the positive effect of Internet usage.

Similarly, we should also observe a similar pattern as television/newspaper-centrism is brought into the picture. In fact, the interaction term could still depend on respondents' preferences for visual or textual information, which are reflected in the old media usage but do not arise from standard indicators of Internet use. We, therefore, include in Model 3 the direct term for our newspaper/television-centrism index, as well as its interaction term

with the leader-evaluation measure. In line with the analyses from the previous chapter, we find that a television-centric media diet fosters leader effects on voting. The interaction term between Internet usage and leader evaluations nonetheless remains positive and statistically significant. This time, the effect is reduced, since the effect of television-centrism on leader effects is positive, and not negative, as in the case of cognitive mobilization. Nevertheless, net of the effect of cognitive mobilization and the patterns of offline media consumption, the Internet would seem, on average, to contribute to the personalization of voting behavior observed across recent decades.

Finally, we compute the predicted changes in the influence of leader ratings on vote choice for different values of cognitive mobilization, newspaper/television-centrism, and Internet usage. These quantities are presented in figure 5.6. By inspecting the marginal predictive changes, we find that the overall effect of Internet usage, on average, is about a fifth of the overall effect of cognitive mobilization. The overall effect of newspaper/television-centrism is also substantially larger than the effect of Internet usage. These results nonetheless support the view that new technologies may have further contributed, even if just residually, to personalizing voting decisions throughout the last two decades.

Due to acknowledged data constraints, we can only speculate about the reasons for this pattern. The impression is that the individual cognitive profile

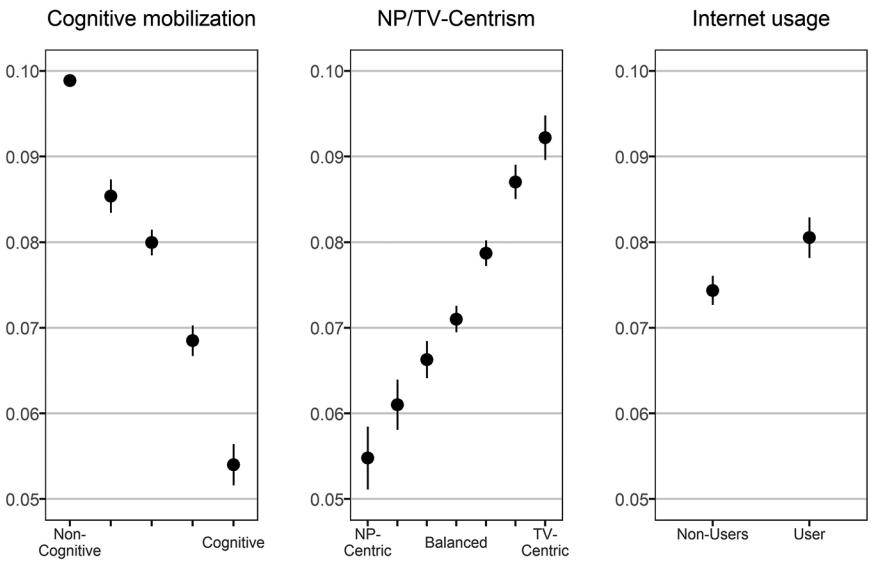

Figure 5.6. Average marginal leader effects by levels of cognitive mobilization, NP/TV-centrism, and Internet usage

and, to some extent, the degree of newspaper/television-centrism represent deeper individual predispositions affecting the style of news reception and elaboration. Along these lines, we are led to believe that individuals with greater cognitive resources will tend to experience politics in more abstract and impersonal forms, favoring nonvisual information sources, and be more likely to convey political considerations in the form of arguments, such as discussions or commentaries focusing on policies and institutions. Differently, individuals characterized by lower cognitive resources will tend to deal with political news in more personalistic forms, favoring visual information and considerations centered on political leaders. This kind of individual cognitive disposition is likely to affect every type of political experience, whether direct or mediated. Thus, as a new type of media that allows both a visual and a nonvisual usage becomes available, it is unlikely that everyone will use the new tool the same way, but rather the public will sort into different types of usages. Thus, the salience of the Internet concerning leadership effects is probably not so important *per se*, but rather as a multiplicator of the impact of visual political information on patterns of voting behavior.

THE PERSONALIZATION OF VOTING DECISIONS BETWEEN TELEVISION AND THE INTERNET

In this chapter, we tackled the introduction of the Internet and digital technologies from a comparative, longitudinal perspective, offering an empirical assessment of the role of new media as potential drivers of the personalization of politics. On the one hand, the steady growth in fast Internet connectivity implies the Internet has increasingly come to resemble television as a source of news and information—at least in so far as information is presented more readily in a visual format. This technological potential is coupled with the increasing propensity of political leaders to use social media to build direct and unmediated connections with their supporters. These considerations imply that the Internet—much like television—likely boosts the role of political leaders in the voting calculus. On the other hand, however, we have noted the versatility of the usage of the Internet, which makes it harder to characterize univocally the profile of Internet users. Thus, we pointed out the inherent difficulty in identifying a definite voting behavior pattern for Internet users.

Political internauts are, on average, more cognitively mobilized than nonusers, tend to read more newspapers, and to rely less on television. However, when it comes to the determinants of voting behavior, political internauts, as a whole, are slightly less likely to reward the best-rated leader with their vote than nonusers. We resorted to multivariate statistical modeling to identify the connection between exposure to political information online and patterns

of leader-centric vote choice. We disentangle the role played by the Internet usage, the underlying individual level of cognitive mobilization, and the offline media exposure and, after these factors are accounted for, find a stable and positive relationship between Internet usage and leader effects.

We connect this finding to the unique features of today's Internet—the mix of visuality and specificity. On the one hand, Internet users can stream videos due to the improved connection speed, and, on the other hand, users increasingly gather news through social networks that allow them to form a more direct and personalized relationship with the political leaders. Overall, our findings show that news exposure through the Internet can personalize electoral decisions. However, once the traditional media diet and the cognitive profile of individuals are accounted for, the magnitude of this effect is nearly a fifth of the overall effect of these deeper individual features.

Our findings cannot be taken as conclusive because we operate with conditions that are not ideal in terms of data availability. In particular, as previously mentioned, we note that comparative electoral analysis cannot rely, for the time being, on a harmonized set of items measuring news exposure on the Internet. In the first place, the formulation of these items differs widely across countries and over time, which led us to rely on a sufficiently homogenous subset of elections. Second, we lack measures tapping the frequency of Internet usage for the purpose of collecting political information. Therefore, we can only rely on a dichotomous indicator that precludes identifying diverging patterns for moderate and heavy Internet users. Third, the available indicator does not contain any information regarding the specific kind of Internet activity preferred by the users. Due to this limitation, we cannot explore whether the personalization effect is triggered by the usage of social media or by the exposure to political videos, or if it is related to television access via the Internet. Being unable to unravel the reciprocal weight of these mechanisms, we cannot exclude the possibility that what we observe is actually resulting from traditional media being accessed on the Internet. In fact, we lack any definitive indication at all about the very nature of digital political exposure resulting from digital texts or videos. Nevertheless, we attempt to derive these patterns inductively from the reported newspaper/television-centrism scale, although we must rely on the assumption that the text-to-visual ratio is unchanged for traditional and digital media sources. All in all, we believe that these findings suggest that digital media might still be playing a role in the process of personalization of voting decisions.

The Internet has undoubtedly opened a new era of democracy, and it is likely to introduce deep transformations in the relationship between the voters and their representatives. Indeed, our findings show that the number of individuals gathering political information on digital media is growing, which

urgently calls for new and better measures of online activity and the exposure to online political information. Greater homogeneity in the items tapping new media is the key to advancing electoral scholarship in the current fragmented and mixed media environment. At the same time, our analyses demonstrate that, given the hybrid character of the contemporary media environment, it is still quintessential to account for traditional media for a fuller understanding of the patterns of voting behavior.

Chapter 6

The Rise of Negative Personalization

A large part of this book has been dedicated to demonstrating that voters' evaluations of party leaders matter for party choice, and increasingly more so across time. While we have provided longitudinal evidence of personalization in voting behavior and delved into the potential drivers of this process, we have so far left unexplored a more fundamental question concerning the nature of leader effects. Until now, we have shown that the correlation between leader evaluations—measured through the feeling thermometer—and vote choice has become stronger across the six decades under analysis. Furthermore, we have identified partisan dealignment as the main factor driving this longitudinal personalization trend. Indeed, previous studies have demonstrated that leader effects are particularly strong among dealigned voters (Mughan, 2009; Gidengil, 2011; Lobo, 2014b; Silva, 2018). Whether deprived of (i.e., apolitical) or emancipated from (i.e., apartisans) the informational function exerted by partisan attachment, dealigned voters are most reliant on the media to form political impressions. With the advent of personalization of news—especially on television, the traditional source of news for most voters—these voters are now mostly primed with images of political leaders, which helps to explain the importance of leader evaluations for their voting decisions. However, this media personalization has happened in parallel to a surge in negative campaigning in traditional media outlets, accompanied by growth in negativity on social media platforms (Soroka & McAdams, 2015). Just as exposure to more personalized content among a television-reliant electorate leads to more personalized patterns of voting behavior, a news media environment charged with negativity may prompt decision-making driven mostly by negative considerations.

The cumulation of these two trends in the media environment may create a context favorable to a type of personalization that is eminently anchored

around negative impressions of opposing party leaders. As such, leader effects may also happen as a function of *dislikes*, rather than *likes*. In this respect, the results from the previous chapters leave us still in the dark regarding what mechanism lies beneath this leader effect. Does it mean that voters came to like leaders more across time? Is it mostly a popularity effect driven by the qualities of the candidates? Or can it also be the product of a form of negative personalization primed by an increasingly confrontational style of political communication diffused in a heavily personalized media environment?

According to a survey conducted shortly after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, 53 percent of Trump supporters saw their vote as having been *against* Clinton more than *for* Trump (Geiger, 2016). The same holds on the other side of aisle—46 percent of Clinton supporters report the same pattern of voter decision-making. Negative voting in the 2016 U.S. election actually reflects a continuing trend in national elections across advanced democracies (Caruana, McGregor, & Stephenson, 2015; Mayer, 2017). The second round of the 2002 French presidential election opposed the conservative Jacques Chirac and the far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. Left-wing voters were called to choose between "the lesser of two evils" voting for Chirac to prevent the election of Le Pen (Medeiros & Noël, 2014). The Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi personally invested his political capital in the 2016 constitutional referendum. The public announcement of the referendum date was accompanied by an ultimatum from the prime minister, who threatened to resign if the proposed reforms were rejected. This pledge turned the referendum into a plebiscite on Renzi's premiership (De Angelis, Colombo, & Morisi, 2020), which had become increasingly unpopular because of the migration crisis, economic underperformance, and high unemployment. The rejection of the referendum was thus widely interpreted as a negative vote against Renzi's leadership of the country (Garzia, 2019).

Negative voting is driven by voters' tendency to increasingly dislike parties and candidates they do not support while becoming more ambivalent toward parties they support (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). It fits into the process of affective polarization in Western electorates, characterized by a growing social distance between supporters across the aisle, increasing partisan bias, emotional reactivity, and partisan activism (Mason, 2015). Among voters, this typically results in the development of negative partisanship, defined by a stable, robust, and persistent affective repulsion toward a given political party (Caruana, McGregor, & Stephenson, 2015, p. 772).

Various studies have confirmed the electoral implications of negative partisanship in Western parliamentary democracies (Medeiros & Noël, 2014; Mayer, 2017). These developments have been fueled by transformations in political communication and the media environment, marked by the proliferation of partisan media, resort to strategies of negative campaigning, and the generation of social media bubbles (Lelkes, Sood, & Iyengar, 2017; Iyengar

et al., 2019). We argue that the same mechanisms may favor the diffusion of a negative form of personalization. Increasingly polarized views of political leaders conveyed in the media arguably foster and accentuate negative attitudes toward opposing candidates. Ultimately, much like with negative partisanship, negative feelings regarding political foes may impact the process of voter decision-making, motivating a vote *against* disliked leaders.

The cognitive importance of negativity has been acknowledged within the subfield of political psychology, but its implications for the study of leader effects, and personalization more generally, still have not been explored. Psychological research has repeatedly confirmed the existence of a *positive–negative asymmetry effect* in the process of impression formation. Even when subjects are exposed to an equal amount of positive and negative stimuli, the latter tend to bear a disproportionate weight in the mechanisms of impression formation (for an extensive review, see Baumeister et al., 2001). As Caruana, McGregor, and Stephenson explain (2015, p. 774), "A negativity bias exists, such that individuals react more strongly to negative than positive information; they are more likely to pay attention to it, more likely to remember it and likely to weight it more heavily when making decisions." When it comes to its electoral consequences, however, "the incorporation of a negativity bias into political scientists' views of political behavior . . . has yet to happen" (Soroka, 2014, p. 15).

Drawing insights from the political psychology and political communication literature, with the latest developments in election campaigning in Western democracies as a background, in this chapter, we put forward the notion of negative personalization applied to voting behavior.[1] More concretely, we explore the possibility that negative attitudes toward leaders of opposing parties can predict voting for a given party *independently* of the effect of (positive) evaluations of its leader. Furthermore, we investigate cross-time variations in positive and negative leader effects. Distinguishing between positive and negative leader evaluations, we unpack their relative effects on the vote. Having a clearer picture of what these effects entail, we are better equipped to reflect upon the consequences of the personalization process for contemporary democracies and grasp better the broader implications of personalization for the democratic process—a prevalent question in the personalization literature.

AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION, NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING, AND PERSONALIZATION

The process of partisan dealignment has hindered parties' ability to provide attitudinal cues to their supporters (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 1992; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). As citizen attachments to political parties have eroded, social disintermediation has turned the media into the main channel

through which citizens relate to politics (Albright, 2009). The news is now the main source of knowledge about the political process (Ohr, 2011). As argued before, the most frequently used type of media (i.e., television) is rich in visual cues, with a personalized focus on party leaders. Television is now the main prism through which voters see and reflect on politics. The findings from chapter 4 illustrated how leader evaluations are a particularly strong voting behavior determinant among individuals with a television-dominated media diet. Strongly primed with images of candidates in the media, voters have come to express more personalized patterns of voting behavior.

Apart from increasing media personalization, the style and content of political communication transformed in other salient ways, especially in the last couple of decades. On the supply side, campaign strategies have become increasingly negative, employing media tactics targeted at exposing the perceived weaknesses or flaws of political rivals (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2007; Lau & Rovner, 2009; Geer, 2012).[2] Characterized by personal attacks and a contemptuous style of politics, negative campaigning has become increasingly common and salient much throughout all Western media systems (Nai & Walter, 2015). The media landscape has also changed to cope with a "post-broadcast" media market (Prior, 2007). Not only has the emergence of partisan media provided voters with information matching their political predispositions (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), but also "criticism of the opposition on these outlets" has become "part and parcel of this one-sided presentation of the facts" (Levendusky, 2013, p. 566). Recent studies have demonstrated that the majority of air time on partisan media—which is characterized by "bias, emotionality, ridicule, and ad hominem attacks" (Gervais, 2014, p. 565)—is spent attacking the positions of political opponents, more than advocating for their own (Smith & Searles, 2014). Importantly, its effects appear to reach beyond the immediate audience to the wider population, by means of a two-step communication flow. Political communication research has further demonstrated that negativity in political messages is more frequent on televised news than in newspapers (Pruysers & Cross, 2016). Research on privatization—which refers to the rising importance of the politician as "ordinary" person—also shows that negativity is most customary on television (van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012). This research also highlights the contribution negativity has made to the growing cynicism among voters and the intensification of mistrust (Langer, 2007).

These dynamics are perhaps even more present in the digital realm. Political communication online is not only highly personalizing, as detailed in the previous chapter, but has also been found to be more negative than traditional information outlets—this being especially the case on social networking platforms (Baek et al., 2011; Ceron, 2015). Moreover, as Internet users can readily tailor news content to their preferences, the opportunity to self-select

into negative stories over positive ones emerges (Meffert et al., 2006; Himelboim et al., 2014; Kätsyri et al., 2016). Besides offering another arena for negative campaigning—opening the door to microtargeting of specific groups (Auter & Fine, 2016)—social media platforms have been consistently linked with the more recent polarization of Western electorates (Tucker et al., 2018). Partisan selective exposure to news content may confine voters in social media bubbles operating as echo chambers, or expose them to disinformation aimed at reinforcing their antagonism toward political adversaries (Garrett, 2009; Shin & Thorson, 2017). Rather than breaking with the older media pattern, the claim is that online political information boosts levels of partisan media consumption (Lelkes, Sood, & Iyengar, 2017).

The described changes in the media landscape and political environment are likely to resonate with the electorate. As political elites resort to internecine media skirmishes, driving opponents further apart, voters themselves are likely to become contaminated by the negativity of political messages. For this reason, negative campaigning and partisan media have commonly been held as key causes of the affective polarization of Western electorates (Levendusky, 2013; Iyengar et al., 2019). Media priming of partisan disdain, incivility in political debate stemming from belligerent styles of campaigning, and exacerbated political conflict arguably motivates patterns of voting *against*.

Electoral behavior research has identified negative partisanship as a primary consequence of these developments. This negative form of partisanship is more than merely the reverse side of the original concept, as it has distinct causal antecedents and potential consequences (Medeiros & Noël, 2014). Abramowitz and Webster (2016) have shown a longitudinal growth in negative partisanship in the United States since the 1970s. Caruana, McGregor, and Stephenson (2015) identified an independent effect of negative partisanship on both vote choice and turnout. Numerous other studies have attested to the theoretical relevance and electoral implications of negative partisanship for voting behavior in contemporary Western democracies (McGregor, Caruana, & Stephenson, 2015; Mayer, 2017). In contrast to the flourishing literature on negative partisanship, little research has been devoted to analyzing the role of negative attitudes toward opposing party leaders in voting behavior. In their recent article titled "What do we measure when we measure affective polarization?" Druckman and Levendusky (2019, p. 115) conclude that "when people think about the other party, they think primarily about political elites." The authors' findings support the notion that negative personalization could also be a consequence of affective polarization, especially in the present context of pervasive personalization in parliamentary democracies.

In the footsteps of negative partisanship research, we explore whether evaluations of out-party leaders have an impact on vote choice, independent of evaluations of in-party leaders. The claim that voters cast a ballot "against"

rather than "for" candidates has seldom been tested empirically. The existing literature is thus underdeveloped, at best. Evidence that negative evaluations are increasingly influencing voter choice is rather thin and virtually unavailable for democracies outside the United States. The first study on this "hostility hypothesis" using data from the American National Election Study (ANES) between 1964 and 1974 concluded that "evaluations of the opposition are independent, long-term factors which improve both our ability to explain and predict electoral behavior" (Maggiotto & Piereson, 1978, p. 745). Kernell's investigation into the impact of presidential (dis)approval on U.S. mid-term elections between 1946 and 1966 reached similar conclusions: "Persons who disapprove of the President's performance were generally more likely to vote and to cast their ballot against the President's party than were his admirers to support it" (Kernell, 1977, p. 44; see also, Lau, 1982, 1985).

The absence of more recent analyses on the American context, as well as the rarity of comparative analyses, constitutes a significant obstacle to our understanding of the relevance and pervasiveness of this phenomenon in contemporary Western democracies. Two exceptions are worth noting. A recent comparative study of Australia and the United States by Soroka (2014) has demonstrated that negative trait evaluations are better predictors of vote choice than positive trait evaluations. Aarts and Blais (2011) contrasted the importance of positive and negative leader thermometer evaluations in explaining vote choice in a larger set of Western democracies. The results confirmed that negative leader evaluations are significantly related to voting choice, even when controlling for positive evaluations.

Nonetheless, the effect of positive evaluations on vote choice is stronger in multiparty systems. Notwithstanding the acknowledged data limitations and reduced time span (i.e., only elections held before the turn of the century), this study represents, as of today, the only comparative test of the hypothesis that vote choices are (also) shaped by voters' negative assessments of party leaders. In this chapter, we propose to advance our understanding further by demonstrating the independent effect of negative attitudes toward party leaders and the increasing effect of this in shaping vote choice over time, and by exploring potential drivers of this form of negative personalization by focusing on different patterns of news media consumption.

LEADER EVALUATIONS IN LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

While multiple studies have relied on feeling thermometers of political leaders to measure leader effects across time, none has—to the best of our knowledge—enquired comparatively about a cross-time variation in thermometer scores.

The extended time frame of the "West European Voter" dataset thus allows mapping of how voters' evaluations of party leaders develop across time. For every election, we calculate voters' mean evaluation of all leaders included in the feeling thermometer battery of each election study, as selected by their national coordinators. The mean scores were aggregated at the election level to control for different sample sizes and to plot unbiased fit lines (we adopt this procedure throughout all descriptive analyses). Taking the sample as a whole, there is a yearly statistically significant decrease of about 0.024 units in the average leader evaluation. Across the overall six-decade period, on average, mean leader evaluations decreased by about 1.5 points on a 0–10 feeling thermometer scale. At the turn of the century, mean leader evaluations progressively moved from positive (i.e., above the mid-point of the scale) to negative values. In sum, across time, voters appear to have turned more cynical overall toward party leaders, who have become, on average, generally disliked (see figure 6.1).

In table 6.1, we detail the development of this trend of decreasing likeability of party leaders, breaking it down by decade and country to inspect the possibility of divergent contextual patterns. We present the mean leader thermometer score for each decade in every country, as well as the regression coefficient for the change in mean leader evaluations for a one-unit increase in a year. Again, as shown by *N*, these are aggregated scores at the election

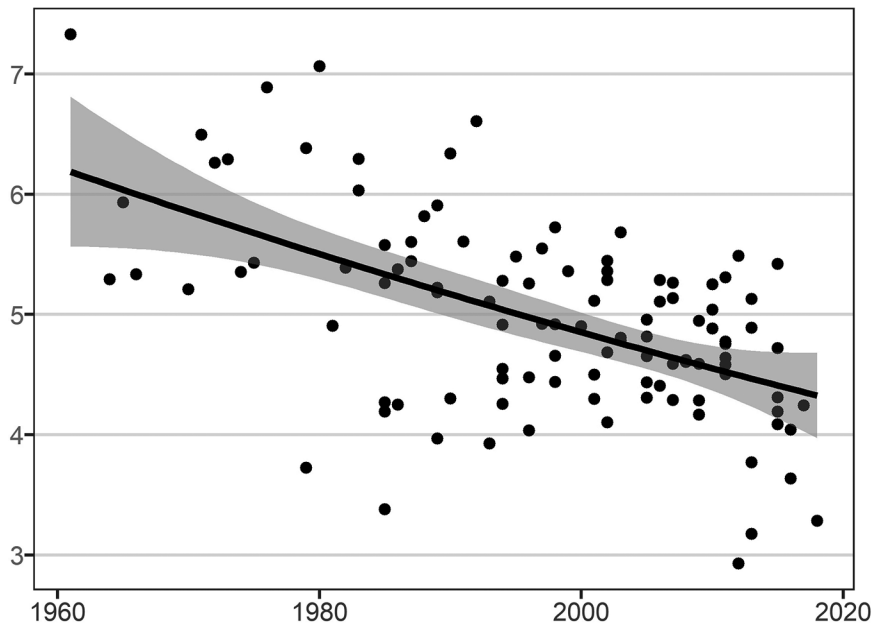

Figure 6.1. Mean party leader evaluation by election study

Table 6.1. Mean leader evaluation, by country and decade

	1960	*1970*	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*2010*	*b*	*sig.*	*(N)*
Austria	–	–	–	–	–	3.77	–	–	1
Denmark	–	6.44	–	4.68	4.63	4.75	–.050	.001	8
Finland	–	–	–	–	4.98	4.74	–.015	.573	4
Germany	6.70	6.57	6.17	4.92	4.89	4.89	–.050	.000	14
Greece	–	–	4.08	4.04	4.28	2.93	–.025	.351	5
Ireland	–	–	–	–	4.55	4.34	–.038	.177	4
Italy	–	–	3.38	4.35	4.44	3.24	–.014	.487	9
Netherlands	–	–	5.65	4.71	5.47	5.34	.000	.924	9
Norway	–	–	5.15	5.02	4.68	5.13	–.007	.402	9
Portugal	–	–	4.27	3.93	4.23	4.42	.009	.293	7
Spain	–	3.73	4.50	5.26	4.72	4.15	–.005	.777	9
Sweden	–	–	5.59	5.53	5.19	5.04	–.019	.055	9
Switzerland	–	–	–	5.44	4.99	5.37	.000	.992	6
United Kingdom	5.31	5.57	5.87	6.07	5.02	4.42	–.020	.049	15
All countries	5.95	5.24	5.10	5.13	4.82	4.53	–.025	.000	109

level. Note that, due to the few time points in each country, statistical significance should be interpreted with caution. Focusing on the coefficient's sign only, we observe that the cross-time decrease in the mean leader-evaluation scale holds true in ten out of thirteen cases.[3] In two cases (i.e., Switzerland and the Netherlands), the slope of the regression line appears flat. In only one case (i.e., Portugal) is the coefficient positive (though very small in magnitude and not statistically significant).

We subjected our preliminary findings to several controls that consider election and party-specific features. First, the concentration of election studies in recent years might be producing an artificial decline in the pooled trend. Thus, we split the sample around the median number of election studies per country ($\tilde{x} = 9$) to distinguish between countries with long and short time series. The varying length of country time series does not seem to bias the overall pooled trend, as the respective subgroups' regression coefficients are very similar.

AuQ4

Next, we consider the possibility that more fragmented party systems may result in lower mean leader evaluations and thus control for the number of parties competing on each election. Taking the median number of parties competing in each election ($\tilde{x} = 5$), we distinguish between congested and noncongested party systems. The increasing complexity of European party systems—understood here as an expansion in the number of party competitors—across time is a putative driver of the higher number of dislikes, affecting the overall mean leader evaluations. Again, a comparison of the slopes of the regression lines allows us to eliminate this possibility.

AuQ5

We also enquired about voters' tendency to attribute greater importance to more electorally relevant parties. To control for this possibility, we have

weighted leader evaluations by their respective party's vote share in each election. The results are unchanged. Finally, we investigate whether the downward trend could be the product of dislikes directed at a particular category of parties, distinguishing between mainstream and other parties. The results show that the decline in the mean leader evaluation trend is common to both categories.

POSITIVITY AND NEGATIVITY AS INDEPENDENT DRIVERS OF VOTE CHOICE: MEASUREMENT AND OPERATIONALIZATION

In the previous section, we demonstrated that voters' feelings toward party leaders have become increasingly negative throughout the last six decades. Moreover, we have excluded several putative explanations for this trend, such as the increasing complexity of European party systems leading to more congested elections, or the greater data available for more recent elections in our pooled dataset. In a pattern consistent across the several countries analyzed, leaders are liked less by citizens today.

At first sight, this assertion may appear somewhat contradictory to the personalization of politics argument. In chapter 3, we argued that, across time, voters have come to vote more based on their evaluations of party leaders than any other factor. How is this development consistent with the process of increasing distrust toward party leaders that we have been outlining in the present chapter? Even if this is usually not made explicit, the literature on leader effects underlies the notion that individuals are brought to vote for a certain party by the popularity and positive appeal of its lead candidate. As aptly summarized by Barisione (2009, p. 487), "Where there is low popularity, there cannot be a positive leader effect."

Yet, this does not exclude the possibility—which is wholly consistent with the descriptive evidence presented above—that growing aversion toward leaders may also affect voting behavior, although in a different way. Thus, we propose the seemingly counterintuitive hypothesis that leader effects on vote choice became stronger over time not only because of how much citizens came to *like* them but also as a function of how much they *dislike* them. Such negative personalization does not run against the personalization of politics thesis, but it merely advances a different mechanism through which leaders may have gained importance for electoral outcomes.

Our argument is both methodological and theoretical. On the one hand, as positive leader evaluations become rarer, they may increase the predictability of voting for a given party. On the other hand, lower scores may be increasingly predictive of *not* voting for a given party. In other words, leaders may matter more over time not as a function of how much their popularity brings

votes to their parties but rather because their unpopularity is increasingly shaping citizens' intention *not* to support their parties.

In this line of argumentation, we follow Aarts and Blais' (2011, p. 166) operational approach to testing the negativity hypothesis, according to which "negative feelings about parties and candidates have a greater impact on vote choice than positive feelings." In this sense, leaders' (dis)likeability can operate both as a pull or a push force, driving voters closer or further away from their political parties. Accordingly, we need to consider the possibility that leader effects can exert both a positive and a negative impact on the vote.

We operationalize positivity and negativity by drawing on the research strategy employed by Aarts and Blais. They use feeling thermometers of political leaders with an eleven-point scale (0–10) to build a measure of positivity and negativity in voters' evaluations of each party leader running for election. First, we recoded the original 0–10 scale to a –5 (most negative) to +5 (most positive) interval, in which 0, the central point, equals a neutral evaluation. Next, we built two new variables with reference to the cut-off point determined at the central point of the scale. *Negativity* varies from 0 (absence of negativity) to 5 (total negativity) and captures those instances in which respondents ascribe a negative score to a party leader, that is, below 5. Conversely, *Positivity* varies from 0 (absence of positivity) to 5 (total positivity) and captures those instances in which respondents ascribe a positive score to the party leader, that is, above 5.

This procedure is illustrated in figure 6.2. For example, a party leader scoring a 7 in the original like–dislike scale will score 0 on the negativity variable and 2 on the positivity variable. Individuals scoring a 5 on the original scale will have a 0 value on both variables. This way, the negativity variable can be used to measure "by how much the inclination to vote for a party decreases when one moves from a neutral rating to a more negative rating, and the positivity variable indicates how much that inclination increases when one moves to a more positive rating" (Aarts & Blais, 2011, p. 172).

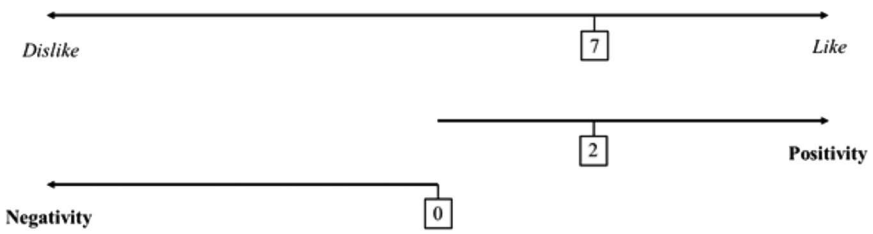

Figure 6.2. Recoding procedure of feeling thermometer into measures of positivity and negativity

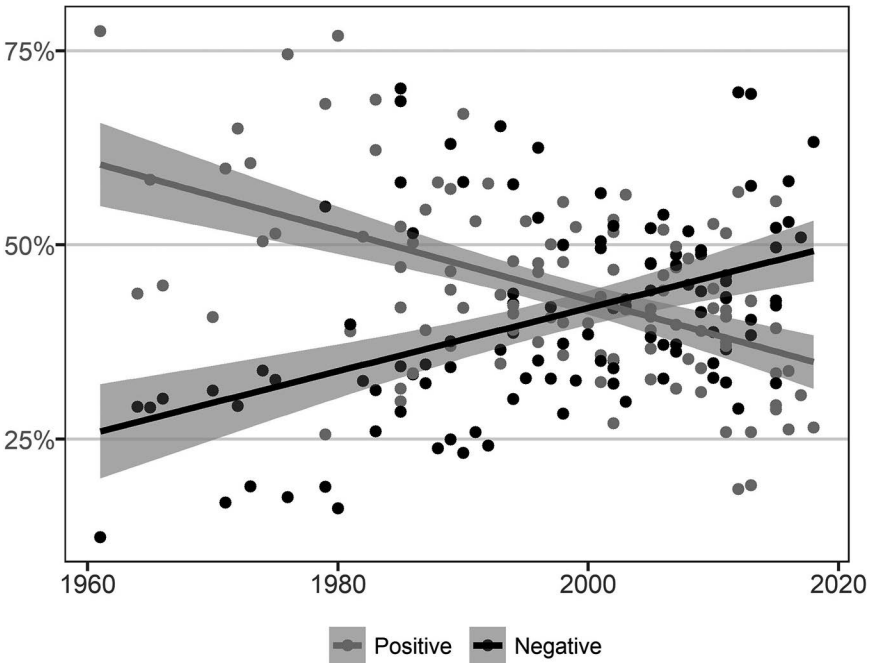

Figure 6.3. Mean percentage of positive and negative leader evaluations by election study

Using our positivity and negativity variables, in figure 6.3 we measure the mean percentage of positive and negative party-leader evaluations by election study. For each respondent, out of each election's choice set of competing parties/leaders, we measure the percentage of positively evaluated leaders (>5) and negatively evaluated leaders (<5), and subsequently calculate the mean percentage of positives and negatives by election. Note that, since individuals may report neutral evaluations, the percentages of positive and negative feelings do not necessarily add up to 100 percent. From the cross-time analysis, we can conclude that, while until the turn of the century the overall percentage of positive party-leader evaluations was still greater than the percentage of negative evaluations (i.e., on average, voters tended to like more leaders than they disliked) this setting has since then reversed. Over the six decades of analysis, the percentage of negative party-leader evaluations has increased substantially while, at the same time, the percentage of positive evaluations has decreased. Today, the share of negative evaluations even outweighs the proportion of positive ones (i.e., on average, voters now tend to dislike more leaders than they like).[4]

Figure 6.4 breaks down the aggregated trend country by country. The general pattern is congruent with a setting of increased negativity. In most

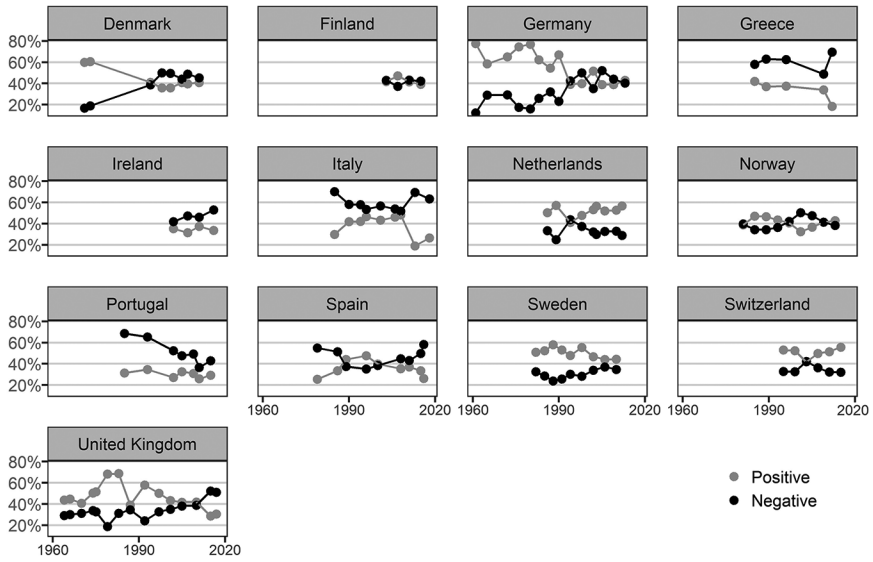

Figure 6.4. Mean percentage of positive and negative leader evaluations, by country

countries, the percentage of negative party-leader evaluations is greater today than the percentage of positive evaluations. Even in the countries where the respective proportions compare, negative evaluations have become remarkably more important over the period of analysis.

THE CHANGING IMPACT OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE LEADER EVALUATIONS ON PARTY CHOICE

After our extensive bivariate analyses, we now turn to investigate the relationship between feelings of positivity/negativity toward party leaders and vote choice in a multivariate setting. Resorting to our restructured data matrix, we model the effect of positivity and negativity on vote choice across time by means of a logistic regression model with fixed effects at the election-level and clustered-robust standard errors at the respondent level. First, in Models 1, 2, and 3 of table 6.2, we measure the impact of positivity and negativity, either alternatively or jointly included. After controlling for partisanship and ideology, both variables report a comparable and significant relationship with vote choice. This attests to the importance of voters' negative evaluations of party leaders in structuring vote choice independently from positive evaluations. We replicate the former procedure in Models 4, 5, and 6, interacting each variable with year, to assess their relative effect across time. The full model results clearly demonstrate that the effect of negativity has grown extensively across time.

Table 6.2. Explaining the effect of positivity and negativity on vote choice across time

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*	*(6)*
L-R proximity	–.968***	–.961***	–.905***	–.966***	–.961***	–.903***
	(.007)	(.007)	(.007)	(.007)	(.007)	(.007)
Partisanship	.715***	.761***	.710***	.716***	.761***	.710***
	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)	(.005)	(.004)
Positivity	.719***		.586***	.530***	–	.519***
	(.004)		(.005)	(.017)		(.019)
Negativity	–	1.016***	.537***	–	.795***	.225***
		(.011)	(.010)		(.047)	(.040)
Positivity×year	–	–	–	.005***	–	.002***
				(.000)		(.000)
Negativity×year	–	–	–	–	.005***	.007***
					(.001)	(.001)
Year	–.004***	–.008***	–.004***	–.007***	–.011***	–.009***
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.001)	(.001)
Constant	–2.030***	–2.135***	–2.133***	–1.887***	–2.005***	–1.899***
	(.038)	(.040)	(.040)	(.041)	(.048)	(.046)
Pseudo R-squared	.50	.48	.51	.50	.48	.51
Log-likelihood	–160116	–165437	–158444	–160058	–165424	–158391
N (combinations)	667328	667328	667328	667328	667328	667328
N (respondents)	126582	126582	126582	126582	126582	126582

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$.

In fact, plotting the marginal effects of the time interactions in figure 6.5, we realize that, while there is a cross-time increase also in the effect of positivity, the longitudinal increase in negative personalization is substantially larger. The gap between the effects of positivity and negativity observed at the origin of the time series has reduced progressively over time, to the point that the effect size of both types of personalization has become virtually the same. These findings suggest that the longitudinal variation inherent to the concept of personalization of politics is primarily due to the increasing impact of negativity. The impact of positive personalization on vote choice—understood as the effects of leader likeability—has undoubtedly grown across time. However, the traditional notion of personalization as exclusively a function of leaders' positive features is challenged by the even stronger growth of negative personalization over the same period.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION, POSITIVITY, AND NEGATIVITY EFFECTS ON THE VOTE

Finally, we test the competing effect of positive and negative leader evaluations on vote choice by varying degrees of exposure to political information

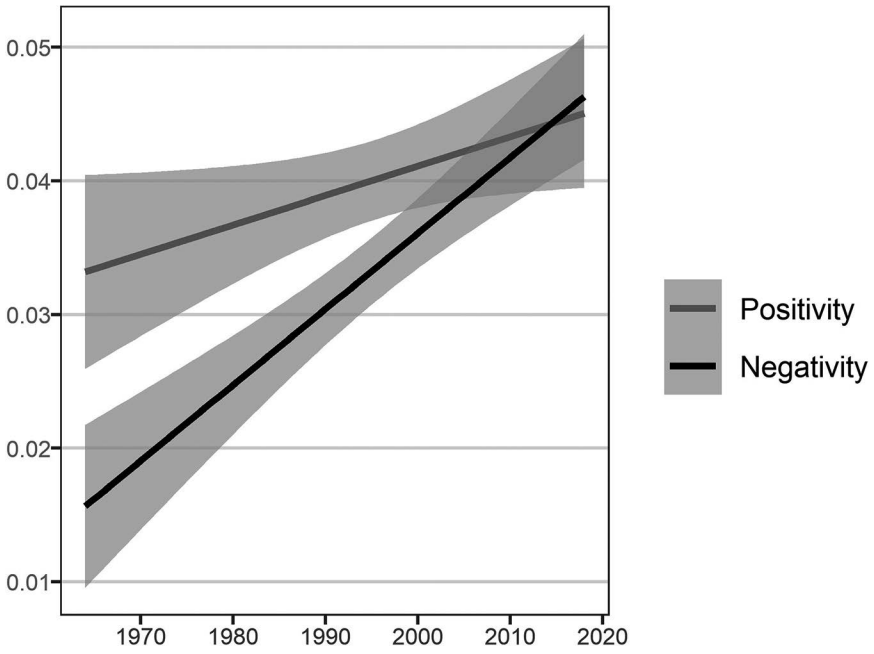

Figure 6.5. Average marginal effect of positivity and negativity across time

across different media. We operate under the premise that negative political messages are more heavily primed on television and online, leading to stronger negativity effects among the voters most exposed to political information through these media. As previously discussed, this theoretical expectation is grounded on the higher prevalence of personalization and negative campaigning channeled by partisan media and social media bubbles on television and the Internet.

To this purpose, we rely on our newspaper/television-centrism index and the online consumption of political information dummy employed in the two previous chapters. We model the role of media consumption on the effects of positivity and negativity on the vote through a stepwise procedure. Building on our baseline cross-sectional model (Model 3 in table 6.2), Model 2 in table 6.3 investigates whether varying patterns of old media consumption could be linked to differential effects of positivity and negativity on the vote. It does so by interacting the newspaper/television-centrism index with positivity and negativity, respectively. In line with the conclusions from chapter 4, the results confirm that leader effects—be they positive or negative—are stronger among individuals with a television-centric media diet (and weaker among newspaper-centric individuals). However, this moderation effect affects each

Table 6.3. The role of media consumption: Interaction effect models

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*
L-R proximity	–.905***	–.966***	–1.07***
	(.007)	(.009)	(.012)
Partisanship	.710***	.744***	.674***
	(.004)	(.006)	(.007)
Positivity	.586***	.553***	.562***
	(.005)	(.007)	(.010)
Negativity	.537***	.507***	.491***
	(.010)	(.014)	(.019)
NP/TV-centrism	–	–.019**	–.035***
		(.006)	(.007)
Positivity*NP/TV-centrism	–	.031***	.031***
		(.004)	(.006)
Negativity*NP/TV-centrism	–	.051***	.082***
		(.009)	(.011)
Internet	–	–	–.108***
			(.019)
Positivity*Internet	–	–	.004
			(.016)
Negativity*Internet	–	–	.098**
			(.034)
Year	–.004***	–.015***	–.026***
	(.000)	(.001)	(.001)
Constant	–2.133***	–1.60***	–1.01***
	(.040)	(.046)	(.080)
Pseudo R-squared	.51	.50	.48
Log-likelihood	–158444	–103812	–69454
N (combinations)	667328	439329	281784
N (respondents)	126582	82339	52159

Note: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered robust at the respondent level in parentheses. All models include fixed effects at the country level, coefficients not shown. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

variable differently. The results from the model show that exposure to televised political information fosters negative personalization more than it fosters positive personalization (see the magnitude of the respective interaction coefficients). In other words, the moderation effect of individuals' media diet on leader effects appears to be more pronounced for negativity than positivity.

To better illustrate these differential dynamics, in figure 6.6 we plot the marginal effects of the interactions between newspaper/television-centrism and positivity/negativity. Having a television-centric media diet fosters leader effects of both types. This corroborates the more general findings from chapter 4, where we argued that exposure to a television-dominated media environment correlates with stronger leader effects on the vote.

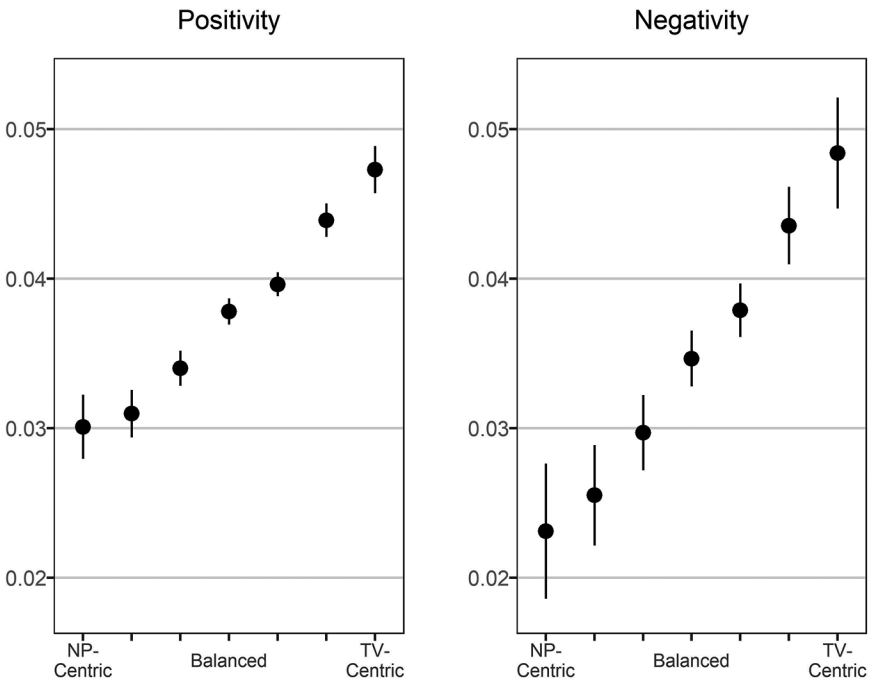

Figure 6.6. Average marginal effect of positivity and negativity by levels of NP/TV-centrism

Yet, consistent with our theoretical expectation, respondents' media diet seems to moderate positive and negative leader effects unevenly. The higher variation in negative effects across the newspaper/television-centrism scale, which stands out from the analysis of figure 6.6, suggests that individual patterns of exposure to different media affect negative personalization more decisively. Explicitly, for those on the newspaper-centric side of the scale—who are exclusively exposed to political information through newspapers—the effect of positivity is stronger. In contrast, for television-centric individuals, the effect of negativity is most substantial. Hence, while having a newspaper-centric media diet hinders both sorts of leader effects on the vote, negative effects are significantly more depressed by heavy exposure to political information on newspapers versus television. Correspondingly, even if television can enhance positive and negative leader effects, the latter are substantially reinforced by television consumption and the consequently higher exposure to negative campaigning, partisan media, and negativity in political communication.

Finally, we revisit table 6.3 to assess the potential moderating impact of exposure to political information online on positive and negative leader

effects. Model 3 introduces the dummy measure of consumption of political information online, which we interact with positivity and negativity in turn.[5] Despite the reduction in sample size brought about by restricting the analysis to election studies that include items on the consumption of political information online, the findings from the previous models still hold. This constitutes a reassurance as to the robustness of the results.

Regarding the relationship between consumption of online political information and the different types of leader effects, we only find a significant interaction effect with negativity. Although the interaction coefficient of positivity also has a positive sign, it does not reach statistical significance. In accordance with our theoretical argument, the results imply that exposure to political information online fosters the impact of negativity on the vote. This finding goes in line with the frequent assumption that the Internet and social media, in particular, are fertile grounds for political contempt.

Although we lack the media content data on the websites accessed by respondents required to draw any more definitive conclusions, these findings suggest that certain characteristics of online media may motivate negative personalization. For example, those more exposed to political information online are potentially more prone to self-select into social media bubbles and to be the subjects of microtargeted political messages, both of which are likely to reinforce partisan bias and out-group antagonism. This largely disintermediated media environment is also more susceptible to the pervasiveness of disinformation, which often assumes the form of personal and character attacks on candidates, which only further polarizes the electorate. On this note, both personalization and negative campaigning, while not exclusive to Internet media platforms, remain common features of online political information. All of these aspects may help explain why we find stronger negative effects among individuals exposed to political information on the Internet.

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERSONALIZATION

This inquiry into the role of negative attitudes toward political leaders contributes to the delimitation of the concept of negative personalization applied to voting behavior research. In this chapter, we propose an updated theoretical outlook on the personalization of politics thesis, by conceptualizing the impact of voters' evaluations of party leaders on the vote not only from a positive perspective. We advance a novel theoretical framework to account for the rising relevance of negativity in voters' feelings toward party leaders and its importance for voting decisions. Our findings thus shed much-needed light on the bimodality of leader effects—that they

can be both negative and positive—as well as the factors that drive each type. By linking electoral studies with political communication research, we also explore the interrelationship between changing patterns of exposure to political information in traditional and new media and negative personalization.

From a methodological perspective, our study offers some innovations compared to previous empirical analyses on the topic. Our data largely extends the breadth of countries and the time frame considered by the scant available empirical works. In particular, we expand on Aarts and Blais' (2011) analysis by investigating (1) whether voter choices are independently driven by negative attitudes toward candidates and party leaders; (2) if such an impact has grown across time; and (3) what factors are driving this process. Our findings confirm the existence of a significant, substantial, and robust effect of negative attitudes on vote choice of a magnitude comparable to positive attitudes toward political leaders. Furthermore, the results demonstrate a sizeable growth in the impact of negativity across time. In fact, contrary to the typical framing of the personalization of politics thesis, the longitudinal variation in leader effects seems to be, for the most part, an artifact of growing negative attitudes toward party leaders.

This systematic analysis of the drivers and the electoral dynamics of negative voting at the micro level also provides insights into which segments of the electorate are more prone to base their vote choices on negative considerations. Patterns of consumption of political information in different media seem to play an instrumental role. Frequent consumers of televised (as well as online) political information appear substantially more likely to base their voting decisions on negative evaluations of party leaders. As such, these findings shed much-needed light on the relationship between media change and the rise of negative personalization, which no study has explored thus far. In today's hybrid media system, traditional media sources have been somewhat overtaken by relatively more negative sources of information, such as partisan channels and social media. The claim that diverse media could affect public perceptions variously by prompting different degrees of negativity toward political actors such as party leaders seems to find translation in our findings, suggesting that these transformations may already be detrimentally influencing citizens' attitude formation and voting-decision mechanisms.

Chapter 7

The Changing Nature of the Personalization of Politics

The main goal of this manuscript has been to examine the changing patterns of voting behavior that have taken place in established parliamentary democracies in Europe over the last six decades. To that purpose, we have drawn on our original "West European Voter" dataset, which pools a total of 129 parliamentary election studies conducted between 1961 and 2018 in fourteen West European countries. This novel resource, developed for this book, has allowed us to carry out more extensive tests of research hypotheses that have long motivated several debates within the subfield. The more extended temporal scope of the dataset—over half a century—has allowed a more diachronic account of the changing patterns of voting behavior leading to electoral personalization, overcoming thus the limitations of previous studies. Such an extended time span has made it possible to fully capture a process already in motion but not yet fully documented by earlier studies. Moreover, the inclusion of more accurate measures of exposure to political information in different media has enhanced the precision of our analyses compared to previous comparative efforts in assessing the role of media consumption on leader effects.

PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT AND THE PERSONALIZATION OF PARTY CHOICE

In chapter 2, we began by updating preexisting research on the decline of partisan attachments in Western democracies, adding two additional decades of election studies to prior comparative analyses, and considering a larger pool of countries. Our results confirmed the existence of a pronounced partisan dealignment trend in West European democracies. The strength of

the dealignment process now appears even more evident than in previous studies. This can be primarily explained by the inclusion of election studies from the twenty-first century, in which the share of voters declaring to have an attachment to a political party fares the lowest. Our data showed that, on average, partisans now amount to about half of the numbers registered in the 1960s. However, this trend affected political parties differently. Looking into different party families, we found that mainstream parties have suffered the most from partisan dealignment, losing nearly half of their partisans over the last half-century. Moreover, shrinking partisanship figures for mainstream Christian-Democratic and Social-Democratic party families have barely been compensated by parties belonging to other political families, as their share of partisans remained stable throughout the period of analysis. Pointing away from a scenario of recomposition or realignment, these results corroborate the idea of an ongoing, widespread partisan dealignment among West European electorates.

While previous studies mostly considered supply-side dynamics when explaining partisan dealignment, we have aimed at combining micro- and macro-level factors through the joint consideration of the processes of cognitive mobilization and social disintermediation as drivers of partisan dealignment. In line with previous studies, our findings show a relationship between cognitive mobilization and the development of partisan dealignment. By creating motivation to engage with politics and equipping individuals with the skills to do so, cognitive mobilization decreased the functional utility of party attachments as cues for political action.

Yet, cognitive mobilization only tells half the story. The consideration of social disintermediation dynamics in our analyses offers a more comprehensive outlook into the forces driving dealignment. Focusing on the key intermediary agents for political mobilization among mainstream left and mainstream right party families, we have linked declining trade union membership and lower attendance of religious services to the shrinkage of partisans among these party families. Modernization—as well as the resulting changes in labor market composition due to tertiarization, the expansion of the middle classes, and, most recently, globalization—has decisively hindered intermediary bodies' social structuring capacity, broadly explaining the asymmetric effect of dealignment among mainstream party families.

In chapter 3, we examined the personalization of party choice in light of the larger dealignment process. We contended that social disintermediation left segments of the electorate that are not cognitively mobilized deprived of partisan cues to guide their interpretation of political phenomena. We argued that this void, caused by the erosion of partisan attachments, has been mostly filled by short-term cues, particularly in the form of assessments of political leaders. Our results provide evidence of a relationship between the process of

partisan dealignment and the personalization of party choice. Distinguishing between party-centric and leader-centric patterns of voting behavior, we have shown that in recent decades, the number of individuals voting in line with their top-rated leader (rather than in line with their partisanship) has increased by 30 percentage points.

The results from chapter 3 speak to two enduring fundamental debates in the personalization of politics literature. First, they provide evidence of a longitudinal increase in leader effects on the vote. While leader effects had been found to matter for voting behavior, previous studies had been inconclusive about whether leader effects are now more important in the voting calculus than in the mid-twentieth century. Our analytical time frame allows for the capture of such longitudinal development and provides more definitive evidence about the process of personalization of voting behavior in West European democracies. Second, our longitudinal approach allows us to demonstrate that the decrease in partisanship effects on vote choice corresponds to a concomitant increase in leader effects. While a cornerstone of the personalization of politics thesis, the connection between the dealignment process and an increase in leader effects has long shown a dearth of empirical evidence. By jointly considering the relative importance of partisanship and leader effects on the vote across time, we have also concluded that the process of dealignment has played a significant part in rendering leader effects increasingly independent from partisanship effects. This finding speaks directly to the debate on the endogeneity between partisanship and leader evaluations as determinants of vote choice, as postulated by the Michigan Model.

We have also uncovered differences in the degree of personalization across party families. Like partisan dealignment, personalization appears stronger among mainstream parties due to the greater social disintermediation effects among their formerly more ideologically grounded party ranks. This finding has drawn our attention back to cognitive mobilization, distinguishing between types of dealigned voters, with distinct resources and motivations, for whom leader evaluations may matter differently. This analysis revealed that leader evaluations are most important to voters with lower levels of cognitive mobilization, who are supposedly more dependent on political cues. In a context of dealignment, party leaders' image can offer such cues.

MEDIA CHANGE AND THE PERSONALIZATION OF PARTY CHOICE

The reason leaders have emerged as the primary cue providers under conditions of dealignment is put forward in chapter 4. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of the personalization of politics thesis, the transformation in

the structure of mass communications in Western societies into a television-based paradigm of political communication created a favorable setting for the development of personalized voting behavior patterns. The audiovisual character of televised political information is rich in imagery, and visual cues focused on individual politicians, to which parties effectively adapted their political communication strategies. We have aimed at contributing to the existing literature by including more accurate measures of exposure to *political information* in the different media—most previous studies simply resort to mere exposure to the different media—and a broader geographical scope and time span than any other study testing these hypotheses to date.

We have also moved beyond the existing literature by taking into consideration the composition of individuals' overall media diet. That is, we weighted voters' consumption of text versus image-based political information (exposure to political news in the newspapers vs. on television) to better disentangle their respective effects as moderators of personalization. Thus, our reliance on the newspaper/television-centrism index constitutes a critical methodological innovation vis-à-vis previous studies of leader effects. We have confirmed that most of the electorate has had a television-centric media diet but, more importantly, that this imbalance is even more pronounced among leader-centric voters. Such descriptive evidence was subsequently confirmed in the multivariate analysis. Using the more sophisticated composite newspaper/television-centrism index, we concluded that the effects of media exposure are less contingent on the frequency of consumption of each media type in isolation than individuals' general media diet.

In sum, raw measures of exposure to political information in the newspapers and on television cannot capture the net amount of textual versus image-based communication. This finding is most important once we analyze these effects on cognitively mobilized voters, who are heavy consumers of political information from both media sources and thus relatively more immune to leader effects. In contrast, individuals who are not cognitively mobilized are significantly more exposed to televised political information. The predominance of image-based information yields more substantial leader effects among this group of voters. Again, these results vouch for the relevance of considering the overall media diet instead of the frequency of consumption of each media in isolation.

In chapter 5, we then looked into the Internet as an ever more present source of political information for voters and sought to descriptively explore how it may affect the developments in voting behavior patterns previously set in motion by the advent of television. The increased availability of Internet connections in West European countries and the change from slow to fast Internet speeds constituted important transformations in the volume and type of political information available to voters. With broadband Internet, both

textual and audiovisual content coexist, voters being the ones choosing the type of content they (self-) select into. Our comparative profile of political internauts hinted that the connection between Internet usage and party and leader effects on the vote is possibly spuriously affected by voters' cognitive profile and media diet. The multivariate analysis revealed a positive relationship between exposure to political information online and stronger leader effects on the vote. While such an effect is robust to the simultaneous consideration of cognitive mobilization and newspaper/television-centrism, the moderator effect of exposure to political information online is significantly reduced. We speculate that citizens' cognitive profile—and possibly also their previous patterns of media consumption offline—may influence the type of online information they self-select into, thus explaining the small effect sizes after including these control variables. In a hybrid media environment, individual media consumption patterns in the online and offline world are likely interrelated. The mixed nature of online political information in the broadband age offers a panoply of sources, both visual and nonvisual, allowing for versatile and differentiated usages and consumption patterns, according to users' profiles. Nevertheless, the characteristics of broadband Internet, enabling fast loading of images and video streaming, permanent social media presence, and direct interaction with politicians, may play a decisive role in explaining the positive relationship between exposure to political information online and increased leader effects.

THE NEGATIVE PERSONALIZATION OF PARTY CHOICE

In the final empirical chapter, we zoomed in on the nature of leader effects. So far, the electoral literature on personalization has operated under the unspoken assumption that leaders matter for vote choice as far as voters like them better than other leaders. As a result, the process of personalization has been implied to operate under a generally positive cognitive framework.

Nevertheless, we noted that recent trends in Western societies might anticipate a different scenario. On the one hand, political elites have become more negative, frequently engaging in negative campaigning, using social media as grounds to promote divisiveness among the electorate, and making more use of personal attacks and incivility in speeches and debates. On the other hand, public opinion has grown ideologically and socially polarized, possibly due to this trend in negativity. Among other factors, the growing distance between partisans is fueled by self-selection into political information congruent with each side's respective political views, materializing into the development of negative attitudes toward political opponents, for example, in the form of negative partisanship. The argument we put forward in chapter 6 led to the

hypothesis that these mechanisms may also be contributing to the development of a form of negative personalization, characterized by a motivation to cast a vote *against* disliked party leaders. Specifically, we contended that negative attitudes toward leaders of opposing parties can predict voting for a given party, independently of the effect of (positive) evaluations of its leader—and that they do so increasingly over time.

A preliminary investigation into the dark side of personalization revealed that party leaders have become, to begin with, more disliked throughout time. Over the six-decade period under analysis, the share of negative party leader evaluations has grown significantly, while that of positive evaluations has concomitantly declined. In the most recent decade, the proportion of negative evaluations outnumbers the share of positive evaluations. This initial evidence in favor of the weight of negativity in voters' evaluations of political leaders was later corroborated in the multivariate analysis. The results have demonstrated that both positivity and negativity in leaders' evaluations have a significant effect on vote choice of a comparable magnitude.

Moreover, the longitudinal analysis revealed that, while both exhibit a cross-time increase in their effects on the vote, the longitudinal increase in negative personalization is substantially larger. That is, while in the 1960s, leaders mattered almost exclusively in terms of their positive appeal, today, negative evaluations of party leaders are almost equally important in explaining voting decisions. These findings constitute an entirely new perspective upon the personalization of politics thesis, which is likely to motivate further inquiries in future research. As contemporary societies continue privileging negativity, votes are ever more likely to be cast based on negative considerations, with notable consequences regarding the quality of democratic participation.

Our results also uncovered other interesting relationships concerning moderators of positivity and negativity in leaders' evaluations. For example, while a television-centric media diet fosters leader effects of both types, the moderation effect of image-based political information on negativity is nearly three times the size of the effect on positivity (see table 6.3). Moreover, the moderation effect of online political information consumption is only present with regard to negativity. In other words, frequent consumers of televised as well as online, political information appear substantially more prone to base their voting decisions on negative evaluations of party leaders. These findings may seem unsurprising, given that these are probably the two most fertile grounds for negative campaigning and partisan-biased political information, but given the somewhat raw nature of our measurements, the fact that we found such clear patterns is quite telling.

In sum, this chapter provided an exploratory analysis into what we believe may be the way forward for personalization in the years to come. By advancing a new concept of negative personalization applied to electoral behavior

research and connecting it with the transformations recently occurred in political communication and public opinion in Western societies, we have drawn attention to the most negative development of personalization and aimed at setting a research agenda to understand the implications of these interrelated processes on contemporary democracies, which we sketch in the remainder of this chapter.

POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION AND THE END OF VALENCE POLITICS

As argued in chapter 3, the shifting point in terms of the relative importance of partisanship versus leader evaluations in accounting for voting behavior was in the mid-1980 through to the 1990s, precisely when mainstream parties from both sides of the aisle were reforming their programmatic agendas away from class-based ideological configurations. On the supply side, among other factors, a greater economic interdependence resulting from globalization among polities, often also integrated into transnational governance structures, imposed severe constraints to the latitude of policies governing parties may adopt, especially on the economic dimension. These constraints promoted growing policy convergence between catch-all/cartel parties around a synthesis of left and right economic positions (Giddens, 1998). Such ideological depoliticization saw the importance of *valence* issues rise versus *positional* issues (Stokes, 1992). A growing party consensus about the policy goals centered the competition on the competence, means, and instruments to achieve these agreed ideal points. It was the beginning of the "valence politics" era (Clarke et al., 2004, 2009).

On the demand side, this implied a novel focus on electoral decision-making around "the importance of voters' judgements about rival parties' abilities to deliver salient and widely agreed upon policy goals" (Sanders et al., 2011, p. 287). The erosion of political cleavages, partisan dealignment, and the gains in levels of well-being resulting from modernization reduced ideological polarization on the economic dimension (Heath et al., 1991, 2001; Clarke et al., 2004). As far as the left–right dimension tends to "exhibit growing consensus between party voters and between party positions" (Green, 2007, pp. 650–51), fading party loyalties give place to a centripetal move in party competition for the median voter. In this regard, Katz and Mair (2018) maintain that

> as substantive policy positions have converged, the emphasis in electoral competition has shifted away from policy differences (*what* the different parties would do) and towards differences in personalities (sometimes identified as the

> "personalization," or at the top as the "presidentialization," of politics), experience or "managerial competence" (how *effective* the different parties may be). (Katz & Mair, 2018, p. 82, emphasis in the original)

Along these lines, Clarke et al. (2004, pp. 28–29) identify three sets of reasons that leaders have become a most prominent factor in explaining vote choice under a context of valence politics, respectively at the macro, meso, and micro level, namely: (1) a presidentialization in executives and of party leadership, supported by an increasing media focus on party leaders; (2) a mediatization and personalization of electoral campaigns, which are now longer and perceived as more decisive for electoral outcomes and thus also pooling more party resources to conduct leader-centered campaigns; and (3) a move on behalf of voters toward short-term cues to navigate a complex, high-information political context, operating as low-information rationality heuristics to assess competence prospectively.

The valence theory's claim that leaders have become fundamental determinants of voting behavior in their own right found strong support in our results. The evidence resulting from our empirical analyses consistently pointed toward a growing personalization of individual-level patterns of vote choice, particularly in the period coincidental with ideological depoliticization. Yet, the conditions under which (positive) leader effects could reach their maximum potential have become to a large extent dated nowadays. The most recent developments in Western democracies contrast with the sociopolitical context of two or three decades ago and may undermine or transform previous personalization dynamics. The inequalities stemming from the globalization process, in its broader sense, while reigniting old divides, also created additional orthogonal dichotomies among Western electorates (Kitschelt, 1994; Hooghe Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008; Bornschier, 2010). As noted by Grande and Kriesi (2012, pp. 3–4), the "processes of increasing economic, cultural, and political competition linked to globalization have created latent structural potentials of globalization winners and losers." This has led to deepened feelings of social and economic inequality, relative deprivation, and to cultural backlashes against the advancement of socially liberal values since the "silent revolution" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Hence, while some convergence may subsist on the economic dimension, ideological polarization can still exist and even accentuate on other dimensions. Globalization created constraints on economic policies, but "if economic alternatives are no longer feasible for those who habitually govern or if voters no longer count on parties to propose economic alternatives, opposition to globalization can still be persuasively framed in cultural terms" (Grande & Kriesi, 2012, pp. 18–19).

Consequently, numerous studies observe another, more recent polarization in public opinion, not in ideological (Dalton, 1987), but rather in affective terms (Iyengar et al., 2019; Reiljan, 2019; Wagner, 2020). These developments suggest a resurgence of social identity as a basis for political action. The restructuring of party competition mirrors these dynamics, shifting away from the median voter and abandoning the valence approach in favor of appealing to well-defined social groups. Elite polarization, negative campaigning, and microtargeting are examples of the campaign strategies now commonly employed by political parties in Western democracies that are incompatible with the previous party competition model. While many of these trends were anticipated in the United States, we have attested to their appearance, to a varying extent, also in West European party systems. What does this mean for personalization? Does the downfall of valence politics correspond to the end of personalization and a coming back of ideology?

In chapter 6, we explored the possibility that these developments do not lead to the end of personalization but rather to a change in the nature of leader effects. The polarization and broader trends toward political negativity previously described have already been shown to resonate with citizens. Multiple studies have shown evidence of the relevance of feelings of negative partisanship in Western democracies, according to which hostility toward the out-group can independently drive support for the in-group, and linked this recent phenomenon to the rise in the importance of group belongings crystalized into antagonistic social identities (Medeiros & Noel, 2014; Caruana, McGregor, & Stephenson, 2015; Abramowitz & Webster 2016; Mayer, 2017; Bankert, 2020). Moving from the recognition that affective polarization manifests primarily with reference to political elites (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019, p. 115; see also Kingzette, 2021), we hypothesized that evaluations of (out-party) political leaders might also act as a significant determinant of the vote, acting alongside positive (in-party) leader evaluations. The independent effect of negative personalization and its increased importance in recent decades vis-à-vis positive personalization that our longitudinal analysis showed are indications of the impact of the transformations in political communication and public opinion on the changing nature of leader effects in contemporary politics. Leaders no longer seem to matter mainly in terms of positive attributes; instead, it appears that disgust toward out-party leaders is now at least as important. Hence, it seems that the end of valence politics, instrumental to the development of personalization throughout much of the twentieth century, does not necessarily imply the end of the personalization trend, but rather a reconfiguration of the mechanism underlying leader effects on the vote.

POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

However, the trends of social disintermediation and partisan dealignment and the reconfiguration of the voting mechanisms to incorporate negative evaluations are not the only lasting changes we observe in Western democracies. Another interrelated element of transformation involves the media environment and affects how voters are exposed to political news. Digital media, in particular, are likely to accentuate further the personality-based type of communication previously conveyed by television while also carrying an increased potential for negativity.

Our extensive analyses demonstrate the critical role played by the media as moderators of voting-decision mechanisms. As detailed, our findings reveal that changes in media consumption patterns can profoundly affect the relative weight voters assign to the assessment of political leaders vis-à-vis the feelings of closeness toward parties, even after the cognitive profile and the media diet of the voters are factored in. In conceding that patterns of new media consumption are influenced by preferences for traditional media, we did not mean to understate the transformations deriving from the diffusion of digital media. On the contrary, digital media arguably provide political leaders with unprecedented tools to connect to supporters, opening the scene to a whole new set of personalization opportunities that were not available with traditional media.

First, by allowing every user to freely choose the most preferred information sources, including personal public pages and accounts, we argue that digital media have reinforced the direct connection between political leaders and their supporters. The idea of direct connection and sharing of information has been advanced to propose a new logic of *connective action* enabled by social media (Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Such connective logic also applies to explain the personalization of politics in the current context of declining partisan identities and social fragmentation (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). In fact, a direct news feed from leader to follower was not possible in the television age when leaders could only compete to gain coverage and attention. Today, while the competition for media coverage continues, we also attest to the spread of "live streams" where political leaders directly update their followers regarding the latest initiatives, in some cases on a daily basis (Sørensen, 2016). Part of these live streams directly involve the leader speaking to the followers in a video, but the streams can also contain text, as in the case of Twitter (Zamora-Medina & Zurutuza-Muñoz, 2014). While this is not the place for a full account of digital media usage patterns by political leaders, we simply note that some leaders personalize their communication without using videos. The most notable example is U.S. president Trump's communication strategy, which has mostly relied on text communication—namely,

releasing tweets that offer comments on the news of the day or ongoing developments (Ott, 2017).

Second, in the age of digital media, television news and newspapers tend to displace traditional news agencies in identifying candidate stories, providing wider coverage of messages posted by political leaders on their personal pages (McGregor, 2018). President Trump represents, once again, a notable example of this trend: effective political leaders can use their social media feeds to personalize the coverage of traditional media, with a personalization effect running from digital through to traditional media, fostering the presence of political leaders on television and newspapers in a "hybrid media campaign" (Wells et al., 2016). A similar trend characterizes European elections, with evidence showing that candidates and their televised debates figure as the most prominent factors influencing the volume and the content of online communication (Nulty et al., 2016). In this respect, we note that the traditional televised coverage of political leaders represented a *mediated* form of personalization of political communication, in that the statements of political leaders were generally limited by questions and framed narrowly by reporters. Differently, when televised broadcasts and newspapers report a sensationalized tweet or a live announcement made by a political leader on their personal account, they share an *unmediated* form of personalized communication where the political leader is not answering reporters' questions and is hardly subject to any frame of reference.

Third, while in the age of television, personalization occurred primarily through a narrow group of national political leaders, including executive and party leaders, digital media, in principle, make it possible for every politically involved person to establish a direct connection with their followers. On the one hand, this means that the set of potentially visible politicians is no longer restrained to national leaders but also includes local leaders, such as mayors, regional leaders, and related opposition figures, MPs, referents in intermediary social and bureaucratic bodies, and even simple citizens acting as political influencers. On the other hand, this implies further challenges for traditional political parties, given their largely residual role in digital political communication. This process can be connected to the identified transformation of a collective news "audience" into individual news "users" (Picone, 2016), in that users are no longer possible recipients but can actively increase or reduce the visibility of any political actor. To a large extent, traditional media connect citizens to institutions, while digital media connect them to other people.

Fourth, the pattern of personalization of political communication in the television age relegated TV watchers to the role of passive listeners, limited to receiving messages but not interacting in any meaningful way other than personal networks. Digital media, as mentioned, invite the user to *join the conversation*, undertaking an active role in commenting and spreading the

leaders' message. This process means that every user can now contribute to personalizing political communication by deciding to follow personal social media accounts instead of the more institutional accounts. The ability to engage in social media discussions will be a critical factor not only for the success of political candidates but also for evaluating the relative engagement of leaders, parties, and institutions. Future research on personalization could track the dynamic trends in the size, volume, and intensity of social media discussions of political leaders vis-à-vis institutions and parties, so as to estimate longitudinal trends in digital personalization.

Finally, the unmediated and unprofessional character of discussions and communication on digital media has lessened the role of reliable evidence and credible sources in public conversations: far from the optimism of the early days of Internet forums, social media have been increasingly associated with a post-truth scenario (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017; McIntyre, 2018) in which negative comments and resentment go hand in hand with false stories mainly targeting political opponents who are afforded no space to answer the attack (Gross & Johnson, 2016; Bekafigo et al., 2019). Evidence shows that posts loaded with negative emotions are more likely to become viral in online communities (Bene, 2017). In the television age, the professional nature of communication provided a barrier against unsubstantiated facts and unreliable sources while generally also guaranteeing some exposure to both sides of the argument. This barrier of professionalism largely contained negative-campaigning tactics into electoral ads. In the digital age, where news is directly sourced from the people in charge, we increasingly experience unfiltered and one-sided attacks, often trespassing into open accusation and uncivil affronts, thrown at opponents with no attention to facts and truth (Higgins, 2016; Ribeiro et al., 2017). In this sense, personalization in traditional media was by and large constructive, because reporting tended to be comparatively more balanced and more often checked against the facts. The personalization of digital media instead has the potential to be very destructive, with one-sided and ungrounded forms of negativity. These contrasting trends in political communication represent a promising avenue for future analyses of the differential patterns of digital and traditional communication.

In sum, several concerns arise vis-à-vis the ability of political negativity to self-reinforce in the closed and homogenous environment of online echo chambers. Growing resentments across party lines, leading to high affective and social polarization, find a dangerous catalyst in online connective actions, allowing every user to send or share their bit of negativity. While providing a comprehensive account of the drivers of the apparent asymmetry between positive and negative messages exceeds the scope of our contribution, we argue that this perspective can offer critical insights for future studies on political personalization.

POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION AND THE RISE OF "NEGATIVE VOTING"

The discussed transformations in public opinion and political communication, coupled with a growing distrust toward political parties and politicians (Dalton, 2004; Dalton and Weldon, 2005; van der Meer, 2017), suggest that the dark side of personalization may linger. Considering that negative personalization is not an isolated phenomenon but rather part of a broader trend toward increasing negativity in Western democracies, the electoral consequences of all these developments could be leading to the emergence of an increasingly widespread negativity-driven form of voting behavior, that is, *negative voting* (for a review, see Garzia and Silva, 2021).

As a matter of fact, the polarization of public opinion in recent years results in an increase in partisan prejudice and more divisiveness among the electorate, developing stronger negative attitudes toward out-partisans (Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015). Even if evaluations of the in-party have not become more favorable over time, existing research shows that individuals tend to dislike more political opponents now than before (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016, 2018). At times, these negative feelings crystalize into enduring negative attitudes toward political parties, in the form of negative partisanship. Importantly, negative partisanship is not exclusive to partisans, as research has shown that it develops more or less independently from positive partisan attitudes (Bankert, 2020). Studies zooming in on the drivers of negative partisanship in parliamentary democracies link its development to social identity and ideological antagonism (Medeiros & Noel, 2014; McGregor, Caruana, & Stephenson, 2015). As we argued in chapter 6, similar forces could be contributing to the development of negative personalization in Western democracies. Combined, such negative attitudes could be important factors driving vote choices *against* rather than *for*, which can become increasingly common under the current context. Thus, negative voting could be defined as a type of electoral choice more strongly motivated by negative attitudes toward political actors, that is, parties and their leaders, than by positive attitudes. While we still lack an integrated theoretical framework combining the contributions of the literatures on polarization, negative campaigning, negative partisanship, and negative personalization into a composite model of negative voting, we can anticipate its relevance in accounting for electoral choice in contemporary democracies.

More fundamentally, the possible consequences of negative voting for democracy and responsible government ought to be considered. While some negativity in voting decisions may not be entirely undesirable (Soroka, 2014, pp. 119–21), electoral choices motivated primarily by contempt may also relegate competence in favor of mudslinging, resulting in suboptimal models of

representation and undermining the quality of government. The worldwide growth of populism can be considered an especially recognizable case of negative voting. If positive personalization can be associated with the previously described valence politics period of the late twentieth century, negative personalization—and negative voting, more generally—stands very much in contrast to it. Indeed, numerous scholars on the topic have argued that populism emerged in reaction to the political consensus and depoliticization that characterized the policy convergence of the valence politics age (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2005). Exploiting increasing degrees of affective polarization and negative partisanship through negative campaigning, especially among a dealigned electorate, populist parties and leaders have often fostered and thrived on the growth of negativity in contemporary politics. A recent study on the communication strategies of populist leaders found that they "communicate through campaigns that are 15% more negative, and contain 11% more character attacks and 8% more fear messages than campaigns of non-populist 'mainstream' candidates" (Nai, 2018, p. 22). Another study found that this type of campaign is more likely to attract media attention and that negativity and personal attacks potentiate the chances of victory (Gerstlé & Nai, 2019).

The extent to which this is achieved through leader effects can be understood by comparing leader effects between populist and mainstream parties. A comparative analysis of ten Western European democracies has recently demonstrated stronger leader effects among voters of populist radical-right parties and that leader evaluations hold an impact stronger than partisanship and left–right ideological proximity among such voters (Michel et al., 2020). Thus, the exploration of negativity by leaders of populist parties appears to go hand in hand with their parties' electoral success. These parties could possibly benefit the most from negative personalization, a research avenue worth exploring in future studies.

Based on indications from the populism literature, one could thus expect broadly defined populist parties benefiting from negative voting by tapping into the growing share of dealigned anti-establishment identifiers in the electorate (Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Yet, even if populist parties may have been pioneers in the use of negativity in their political messages and campaign strategies, negativity should not be conceived as their sole preserve. In fact, in recent years, mainstream parties have often employed a "fight fire with fire" strategy to grasp the challenges posed by populist parties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018), not only co-opting their political agendas (Han, 2015; Rooduijn et al., 2014) but also mimicking their rhetoric and use of negativity (Mudde, 2004). Hence, negativity is now a pervasive feature of Western party systems, common to nearly all political forces to a greater or lesser degree.

Just like the negativity feedback loops among political parties, this dynamic interplay is also likely to travel between supply and demand. While we remain relatively agnostic about the causal direction of what we instead perceive to be a circular relationship, the use of negativity by political parties, the media, and voters is mutually reinforcing. Parties resort to negative campaigning because they perceive that voters respond more readily to it. Voters develop negative attitudes toward given political actors because they are flooded with negative messages and perceive heightened elite polarization. The media primes negativity because the sources of material are more negative and because the audience consumes more avidly negative information. This simplification serves merely as an illustration of the growing incentives to go negative in contemporary democracies. Although the extent to which it translates into electoral support (in the form of negative voting) and eventual differences in its magnitude between mainstream and populist challengers remain an open research question, negativity appears ever more inevitable under today's conditions.

NORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

All these factors seem to portray a somewhat gloomy outlook for the personalization of politics in contemporary Western democracies. Existing scholarship has typically contrasted two different views on the consequences of personalization for voting behavior and its broader implications for the quality of democracy.

Traditionally, personality-based electoral decision-making has been held as affectively charged, irrational, and, consequently, normatively undesirable (Converse, 1964; Page, 1978). By these accounts, candidate images are products of political marketers and campaigns, aimed at appealing to the most unsophisticated, who could be more easily manipulated by candidates' superficial characteristics. Thus, personalization would entail depoliticization and the triumph of short-term emotionality in contemporary politics over substantive ideological programs, political issues, and policy proposals, devaluing democratic participation. This would be even clearer under a television-dominated political communication paradigm, imposing a lowering effect that minimizes the distance between voters and candidates (Meyrowitz, 1985) and encourages applying the same evaluation standards routinely used in daily interpersonal interactions with ordinary people (Rahn et al., 1990).

Against this view, a perspective closer to cognitive psychology tends to conceive personality-based voting as part of a rational voting strategy. Given the increasingly complex and unpredictable political reality, leader evaluations

may provide important cues to voters since "candidate assessments actually concentrate on instrumental concerns about the manner in which a candidate would conduct governmental affairs" (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986, p. 536). Thus, voters could infer important performance-related information from leadership traits as effective information-reduction mechanisms, conferring a rational character to candidate assessments in the voting decision-making process (Popkin, 1991; Mondak, 1995a).

If the consequences of positive personalization for the quality of democracy were questionable, motivating a long-lasting debate among scholars and fears of electoral choices that are "heavily influenced by appeals to emotions and tastes, rather than reflective judgement" (Simons, 2000, p. 83), the implications of negative personalization are, intuitively, even more concerning. The heyday of personalization coincided with a period of economic expansion and consensus about a model of growth and development that depolarized party competition. This valance model was time-bound to economic prosperity and low-conflict societies. Though challengeable from a normative point of view, the late twentieth century's personalization was arguably less pernicious than today's type of personalization.

At the end of his book on negativity in democratic politics, Soroka (2014) reflects on whether negativity is intrinsically bad for democracy and argues that negativity can be an effective mechanism of information reduction. That is, negative information may be especially valuable in an increasingly complex information environment. By focusing on a circumscribed amount of negative information, voters limit their information processing tasks to the most relevant data. However, as noted by the author, this interpretation only remains valid under the premise of the scarcity of negative information depicted against an overall positive background, as it suffers from a "self-limiting negativity" condition. In short, this instrumental role of negative information does not hold "when the political environment is desperately negative" (Soroka, 2014, p. 119). Indeed, the current political environment seems eminently negative.

Along these lines, future research should dig deeper into the electoral consequences of negative personalization beyond patterns of party choice. An emerging body of research has indicated that (positive) personalization could more generally affect electoral participation as a whole (Silva, 2018; Silva & Costa, 2019; Silva, Garzia, & De Angelis, 2019). While research on the impact of negative personalization on turnout is scarce, existent studies analyzing the effects of negative campaigning, political distrust, and related phenomenon find both evidence of a demobilizing effect (Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006; Grönlund & Maija, 2007) and of a curvilinear, or positive, relationship (Kernell, 1977; Wattenberg & Brians, 1999). An assessment of the (de)mobilization impact of negative attitudes

toward political leaders could be a relevant addition to this literature and contribute to the long-standing debate on turnout decline in advanced postindustrial democracies. Levendusky (2013, p. 576) contends that "polarized politics draws more citizens into the political arena . . . Such increased participation, however, need not be a normative good." However, if negativity is a significant force in electoral participation, should we instead be concerned with the potential reversal of the turnout decline trend due to the "dark side of civic engagement" (Fiorina, 1999)?

While we cannot be sure about whether personalization will continue growing in the future, the nature of personalization seems to have already changed, heightening the role of its negative dimension. A diagnosis of the current political environment suggests that the conditions are favorable for negative personalization to further develop in the years to come. In this sense, recent experiences with "negative leaders," who resorted mainly to negativity in their campaigns and when in office, and capitalized on negative attitudes to get sustained popular support, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, could be a significant milestone for the negative personalization of political leadership.

Appendix A

An Introduction to the "West European Voter" Dataset

As explained in chapter 1, our *West European Voter* (WEV) dataset was born out of the demands imposed by the broad research questions guiding this book. What are the connections between partisan dealignment, individual exposure to political information across old and new media, and the personalization of voting behavior? Furthermore, how did these concurrent processes unfold/interact over time? As of today, National Election Study (NES) datasets represent the most prominent data source for theoretically driven analyses of the determinants of voting behavior from a cross-national perspective (Bittner, 2011). Moreover, extensive reliance on NES survey data is inevitable if we are to study trends in voting behavior across countries and time (Thomassen, 1994, 2005). However, existing cross-national data collection and harmonization projects either did not offer the necessary longitudinal scope or lacked crucial variables to test our research hypotheses, such as media exposure batteries (i.e., *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems*) or leader thermometers (i.e., *European Election Study*). Nevertheless, over six decades of electoral research in advanced industrial democracies are out there, offering a raw wellspring of data for our project. We thus ventured into every national election study conducted in Western European parliamentary democracies to develop a longitudinal, comparative pooled dataset, encompassing 129 election studies conducted across fourteen countries over the period 1961–2018 (see table A.1).

The following criteria applied to country selection. First, we restricted our sample to parliamentary democracies, as this is where a trend toward an increase in the importance of party leaders is expected to occur—in presidential systems, candidates have always been pivotal. Second, we focus on Western European countries, as their experience of democratic elections (and

Table A.1. List of election studies included in the West European Voter

Country	*Year (N)*
Austria	**2008** (N = 1165), **2013** (N = 1504)
Denmark	**1971** (N = 1302), **1973** (N = 533), **1975** (N = 1600), **1977** (N = 1602), **1979** (N = 1989), **1984** (N = 1990), **1990** (N = 1008), **1994** (N = 2021), **1998** (N = 2001), **2001** (N = 2026), **2005** (N = 2264), **2007** (N = 4018), **2011** (N = 2078)
Finland	**2003** (N = 1270), **2007** (N = 1422), **2011** (N = 1298), **2015** (N = 1587)
Germany	**1961** (N = 1715), **1965** (N = 1305), **1972** (N = 1222), **1976** (N = 1196), **1980** (N = 1001), **1983** (N = 1014), **1987** (N = 1311), **1990** (N = 907), **1994** (N = 2046), **1998** (N = 2019), **2002** (N = 3263), **2005** (N = 2018), **2009** (N = 2115), **2013** (N = 1908)
Greece	**1985** (N = 1998), **1989** (N = 1996), **1996** (N = 996), **2009** (N = 1022), **2012** (N = 1029)
Ireland	**2002** (N = 2680), **2007** (N = 1430), **2011** (N = 1853), **2016** (N = 1000)
Italy	**1968** (N = 2500), **1972** (N = 1841), **1975** (N = 1657), **1985** (N = 2074), **1990** (N = 1500), **1994** (N = 2600), **1996** (N = 2502), **2001** (N = 3209), **2006** (N = 1377), **2008** (N = 3000), **2013** (N = 1508), **2018** (N = 2573)
Netherlands	**1981** (N = 2305), **1986** (N = 1630), **1989** (N = 1754), **1994** (N = 1812), **1998** (N = 2101), **2002** (N = 1907), **2003** (N = 2558), **2006** (N = 2806), **2010** (N = 2621), **2012** (N = 1677)
Norway	**1965** (N = 1623), **1969** (N = 1595), **1973** (N = 1225), **1977** (N = 1730), **1981** (N = 1596), **1985** (N = 2180), **1989** (N = 2195), **1993** (N = 2194), **1997** (N = 2055), **2001** (N = 2341), **2005** (N = 2012), **2009** (N = 1782), **2013** (N = 1727)
Portugal	**1985** (N = 2000), **1993** (N = 2000), **2002** (N = 1303), **2005** (N = 3001), **2009** (N = 1317), **2011** (N = 1000), **2015** (N = 1499)
Spain	**1979** (N = 5439), **1986** (N = 8286), **1989** (N = 3084), **1996** (N = 5338), **2000** (N = 4165), **2008** (N = 6083), **2011** (N = 6082), **2015** (N = 6242), **2016** (N = 6110)
Sweden	**1968** (N = 2943), **1970** (N = 1403), **1973** (N = 2596), **1976** (N = 2686), **1979** (N = 2905), **1982** (N = 2980), **1985** (N = 2944), **1988** (N = 2845), **1991** (N = 2730), **1994** (N = 2657), **1998** (N = 2361), **2002** (N = 3788), **2006** (N = 3999), **2010** (N = 3963)
Switzerland	**1979** (N = 1002), **1995** (N = 7561), **1999** (N = 3258), **2003** (N = 5891), **2007** (N = 4392), **2011** (N = 4391), **2015** (N = 5337)
United Kingdom	**1964** (N = 1769), **1966** (N = 1874), **1970** (N = 1843), **1974(2)** (N = 2462), **1979** (N = 2365), **1983** (N = 3955), **1987** (N = 3826), **1992** (N = 3534), **1997** (N = 3615), **2001** (N = 2996), **2005** (N = 4157), **2010** (N = 3075), **2015** (N = 2987), **2017** (N = 2194)

national election study projects) is longer. Finally, we only included studies featuring party leader evaluations and party identification, as these are our key independent variables.

This endeavor took place throughout 2017 and part of 2018. It was made possible thanks to an "Ambizione" grant funded by the Swiss National

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It is worth noting that the WEV dataset includes but is not limited to the variables necessary to answer this book's research questions. A nonexaustive list includes: political interest, party identification, left-right placement (self and parties), party leader thermometers, economic evaluation, trust in political parties, exposure to political information in old and new media, usage of Voting Advice Applications and Facebook, as well as basic sociodemographic controls (age, gender, educational level, frequency of church attendance, union membership).

Therefore, despite having been developed for this book, the West European Voter dataset can represent a valuable resource for the wider academic community, particularly for scholars studying comparative political behavior in Western Europe. Importantly, we also intend to pursue our investment in this dataset by continuously adding the most recent national election studies from our fourteen countries and possibly expanding the pool of countries and the list of variables included. On this note, we very much welcome proposals to collaborate with researchers who wish to contribute to the expansion of the *West European Voter* project.

Appendix B

Detailed List of National Election Studies Included in the Pooled Dataset

AUSTRIA

2008

Fritz Plasser, Wolfgang C. Müller, Sylvia Kritzinger, and Günther Lengauer
Austrian National Election Study, Post Post Election Survey 2009

2013

Sylvia Kritzinger, Eva Zeglovits, Julian Aichholzer, Christian Glantschnigg, Konstantin Glinitzer, David Johann, Kathrin Thomas, and Markus Wagner
Austrian National Election Study, Pre- and Post Panel Study 2013

DENMARK

1971–1973–1975–1977–1979–1984–1990–1994–1998

Johannes Andersen, Jörgen Goul Andersen, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Hermann Schmitt, Bernhard Wessels, Tanja Binder, John Curtice, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts, and Cees van der Eijk
The European Voter Database. Continuity File of National Election studies in Denmark

2001

Jørgen Goul Andersen, Ole Borre, Hans Jørgen Nielsen, Johannes Andersen, Søren Risbjerg Thomsen, and Jørgen Elklit
Danish National Election Study 2001

2005

Jørgen Goul Andersen
Danish National Election Study 2005

2007

Jørgen Goul Andersen and Kasper Møller Hansen
Danish National Election Study 2007

2011

Rune Stubager, Kasper Møller Hansen, and Jørgen Goul Andersen
Danish National Election Study 2011

FINLAND

2003

Lauri Karvonen and Heikki Paloheimo
Finnish National Election Study 2003

2007

Heikki Paloheimo
Finnish National Election Study 2007

2011

Sami Borg and Kimmo Grönlund
Finnish National Election Study 2011

2015

Kimmo Grönlund and Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen
Finnish National Election Study 2015

GERMANY

1961–1965–1972–1976–1980–1983–1987–1990–1994–1998

Johannes Andersen, Jörgen Goul Andersen, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Hermann Schmitt, Bernhard Wessels, Tanja Binder, John Curtice, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts, and Cees van der Eijk
The European Voter Database. Continuity File of National Election studies in Germany

2002

Jurgen Falter, Oscard Gabriel, and Hans Rattinger
Political Attitudes, Political Participation and Voter Conduct in United Germany 2002

2005

Bernhard Weßels
The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems: Module 3

2009

Hans Rattinger, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Bernhard Weßels, and Aiko Wagner
German Longitudinal Election Study 2009, Post-Election Cross Section

2013

Hans Rattinger, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, Bernhard Weßels, Christof Wolf, Aiko Wagner, and Heiko Giebler
German Longitudinal Election Study 2013, Post-Election Cross-Section

GREECE

1985

George Th. Mavrogordatos and Elias Nikolakopoulos
Study of Political Patterns and Political Behaviour (May 1985)

1989

Elias Nikolakopoulos
Study of Political Patterns and Political Behaviour (May 1989)

1996

Nikiforos Diamandouros
Comparative National Elections Project: Module 2

2009

Ioannis Andreadis, Theodore Chadjipadelis, and Eftichia Teperoglou
The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems: Module 3

2012

Ioannis Andreadis, Theodore Chadjipadelis, and Eftichia Teperoglou
The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems: Module 4

IRELAND

2002–2007

Michael Marsh and Richard Sinnot
Irish National Election Study 2002–2007

2011

Michael Marsh, David Farrell, and Theresa Reidy
Irish National Election Study 2011

2016

Michael Marsh, David Farrell, and Theresa Reidy
Irish National Election Study 2016

ITALY

1968

Samuel Barnes
ITANES 1968: Italian National Election Study 1968

1972

Samuel Barnes and Giacomo Sani
ITANES 1972: Italian National Election Study 1972

1975

Giacomo Sani and Giovanni Sartori
ITANES 1975: Italian National Election Study 1975

1985

Giacomo Sani, José Santamaria, and Renato Mannheimer
ITANES 1985: Italian National Election Study 1985

1990

Arturo Parisi and Hans Schadee
ITANES 1990: Italian National Election Study 1990

1994

Piergiorgio Corbetta and Arturo Parisi
ITANES 1994: Italian National Election Study 1994

1996

Piergiorgio Corbetta and Arturo Parisi
ITANES 1996: Italian National Election Study 1996

2001

Mario Caciagli and Piergiorgio Corbetta
ITANES 2001: Italian National Election Study 2001

2006

Paolo Bellucci and Paolo Segatti
ITANES 2006: Italian National Election Study 2006

2008

Paolo Bellucci and Paolo Segatti
ITANES 2008: Italian National Election Study 2008

2013

Paolo Bellucci and Paolo Segatti
ITANES 2013: Italian National Election Study 2013

2018

Mauro Barisione, Paolo Bellucci, and Cristiano Vezzoni
ITANES 2018: Italian National Election Study 2018

NETHERLANDS

1981

Cees van der Eijk, Kees Niemoeller, and A. Th. J. Eggen
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1981

1986

Cees van der Eijk, Kees Niemoeller, and Galen Irwin
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1986

1989

Hans Anker and Erik Oppenhuis
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1989

1994

Hans Anker and Erik Oppenhuis
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1994

1998

Kees Aarts, Henk van der Kolk, and M. Kamp
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1998

2002–2003

Galen Irwin, Joop van Holsteyn, and Jan den Ridder
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2002/3

2006

Kees Aarts, Henk van der Kolk, Martin Rosema, and Hans Schmeets
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2006

2010

Henk van der Kolk, Kees Aarts, and Jean N. Tillie
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2010

2012

Henk van der Kolk, Jean Tillie, Patrick van Erkel, Mariken van der Velden, and Alyt Damstra
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2012

NORWAY

1965–1969–1973–1977–1981–1985–1989–1993–1997

Johannes Andersen, Jörgen Goul Andersen, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Hermann Schmitt, Bernhard Wessels, Tanja Binder, John Curtice, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts, and Cees van der Eijk
The European Voter Database. Continuity File of National Election studies in Norway

2001

Bernt Aardal
Norwegian Election Study 2001

2005

Bernt Aardal
Norwegian Election Study 2005

2009

Bernt Aardal
Norwegian Election Study 2009

2013

Bernt Aardal
Norwegian Election Study 2013

PORTUGAL

1985

George T. Mavrogordatos
The Political Culture of Southern Europe: Four Nations Study

1993

Mario Bacalhau and Thomas Bruneau
Continuidade e Mudança no Sistema de Partidos em Portugal

2002

António Barreto, Marina Costa Lobo, and Pedro Magalhães
Portuguese Election Study 2002

2005

António Barreto, Marina Costa Lobo, and Pedro Magalhães
Portuguese Election Study 2005

2009

Marina Costa Lobo and Pedro Magalhães
Portuguese Election Study 2009

2011

Marina Costa Lobo and Pedro Magalhães
Portuguese Election Study 2011

2015

Marina Costa Lobo, Pedro Magalhães, and João Tiago Gaspar
Portuguese Election Study 2015

SPAIN

1979

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Postelectoral Elecciones Generales, 1979

1986–1989–1996

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Estudios Postelectorales. Elecciones Generales 1982–1996

2000

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Preelectoral y Postelectoral Elecciones Generales y Autonomicas de Andalucia, 2000

2008

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Preelectoral y Postelectoral Elecciones Generales y Autonomicas de Andalucia, 2008

2011

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Preelectoral y Postelectoral Elecciones Generales, 2011

2015

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Preelectoral y Postelectoral Elecciones Generales, 2015

2016

Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas
Postelectoral Elecciones Generales, 2016

SWEDEN

1968–1970–1973–1976–1979–1982–1985–1988–1991–1994–1998

Johannes Andersen, Jörgen Goul Andersen, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Hermann Schmitt, Bernhard Wessels, Tanja Binder, John Curtice, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts, and Cees van der Eijk
The European Voter Database. Continuity File of National Election Studies in Sweden

2002

Sören Holmberg and Henrik Oscarsson
Swedish Election Study 2002

2006

Sören Holmberg, Henrik Oscarsson, and Per Hedberg
Swedish Election Study 2006

2010

Sören Holmberg, Henrik Oscarsson, and Per Hedberg
Swedish Election Study 2010

SWITZERLAND

1979–1995–1999–2003

Georg Lutz
Swiss National Election Studies, Cumulated File 1971–2011

2007

Peter Selb, Georg Lutz, Marc Buehlmann, Marco Steenbergen, Philipp Leimgruber, Sarah Nicolet, Alexander Widmer, Dominique Joye, Florence Passy, Daniele Caramani, and Oscar Mazzoleni
Swiss National Electoral Studies (Selects) 2007: Post-Election Survey

2011

Georg Lutz
Swiss National Electoral Studies (Selects) 2011: Post-Election Survey

2015

Georg Lutz
Swiss National Electoral Studies (Selects) 2015: Post-Election Survey

UNITED KINGDOM

1964–1966–1970–1974f–1974o–1979–1983–1987–1992–1997–2001

Johannes Andersen, Jörgen Goul Andersen, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Hermann Schmitt, Bernhard Wessels, Tanja Binder, John Curtice, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts, and Cees van der Eijk
The European Voter Database. Continuity File of National Election Studies in the United Kingdom

2005

Harold Clarke, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, and Paul Whiteley
British Election Study 2005

2010

Harold Clarke, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, & Paul Whiteley
British Election Study 2009–10

2015

Ed Fieldhouse, Jane Green, Hermann Schmitt, Geoff Evans, Cees van der Eijk, Jon Mellon, and Chris Prosser
British Election Study, 2015 (Face-to-Face Survey)

2017

Ed Fieldhouse, Jane Green, Hermann Schmitt, Geoff Evans, Cees van der Eijk, Jon Mellon, and Chris Prosser
British Election Study, 2017 (Face-to-Face Survey)

Appendix C

List of Parties Included in the Stacked Data Matrix Analysis (by Country and Election Year)

Table C.1. List of parties included in the stacked data matrix analysis, by country and election year

Austria											**2008**		**2013**
1. FPÖ: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs											X		X
2. GRÜNE: Die Grünen—Die Grüne Alternative											X		X
3. NEOS: Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum													X
4. ÖVP: Österreichische Volkspartei											*MC-R*		*MC-R*
5. SPÖ: Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs											*MC-L*		*MC-L*
6. FRANK: Das Team Stronach für Österreich													X
Denmark	**1971**	**1973**	**1975**	**1977**	**1979**	**1984**	**1990**	**1994**	**1998**	**2001**	**2005**	**2007**	**2011**
1. A: Socialdemokraterne	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
2. B: Det Radikale Venstre	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. C: Det Konservative Folkeparti	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. D: Centrum-Demokraterne		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
KD: Kristendemokraterne	X									X		X	
5. F: Socialistisk Folkeparti	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6. V: Venstre	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*

(Continued)

Table C.1. (Continued)

Denmark	**1971**	**1973**	**1975**	**1977**	**1979**	**1984**	**1990**	**1994**	**1998**	**2001**	**2005**	**2007**	**2011**
7. Y: Venstresocialisterne	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
8. Z: Fremskridtspartiet		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
9. O: Dansk Folkeparti									X	X	X	X	X
10. Z: Ny Alliance												X	X

Finland	**2003**	**2007**	**2011**	**2015**
1. KD: Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit	X	X	X	X
2. KESK: Suomen Keskusta	X	X	X	X
3. KOK: Kansallinen Kokoomus	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
4. PS: Perussuomalaiset		X	X	X
5. SFP: Svenska folkpartiet	X	X	X	X
6. SDP: Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
7. VAS: Vasemmistoliitto	X	X	X	X
8. VIHR: Vihreä Liitto	X	X	X	X

Germany	**1961**	**1965**	**1972**	**1976**	**1980**	**1983**	**1987**	**1990**	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2005**	**2009**	**2013**
1. CDU/CSU: Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
2. FDP: Freie Demokratische Partei	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
3. GRÜNE: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen									X	X		X	X	X
5. PDS: Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus								X	X	X		X		
LINKE: Die Linke													X	X
6. SPD: Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*

Greece	1985	1989	1996	2009	2012
1. ANEL: Anexartitoi Ellines					X
2. DIKKI: Dimokratiko Koinoniko Kinima			X		
3. DIMAR: Dimokratiki Aristera					X
4. EPEN: Ethniki Politiki Enosis	X	X			
5. KKE: Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas	X		X	X	X
6. KKEes: ΚΚΕ Εσωτερικού	X	X			
7. LAOS: Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós				X	
8. ND: Nea Dimokratia	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
9. OP: Oikologoi Prasinoi				X	
10. PASOK: Panellínio Sosialistikó Kínima	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
11. Politiki Anixi			X		
12. SYN: Synaspismos		X	X		
SYRIZA: Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás				X	X
13. Chryssi Avgi					X

Ireland	2002	2007	2011	2016
1. FF: Fianna Fail	X	X	X	X
2. FG: Fine Gael	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
3. GP: Green Party	X	X	X	X
4. LAB: Labour Party	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
5. PD: Progressive Democrats	X	X		
6. SF: Sinn Fein	X	X	X	X

Italy	1968	1972	1975	1985	1990	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008	2013	2018
1. CCD: Centro Cristiano-Democratico							X	X				
UDC: Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro									X	X		
2. DC: Democrazia Cristiana	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*							
PPI: Partito Popolare Italiano						X	X					
La Margherita								X	X			

(Continued)

Table C.1. (Continued)

Italy	1968	1972	1975	1985	1990	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008	2013	2018
3. Democrazia Europea								X				
4. FT: Fiamma Tricolore							X	X		X		
5. FI: Forza Italia						*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*			*MC-R*
6. IdV: Italia dei Valori								X		X		
7. La Rete						X						
8. LN: Lega Nord						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9. Lista Dini							X					
10. M5S: Movomento 5 Stelle											X	X
11. MSI: Movimento Sociale Italiano—Destra Nazionale	X	X	X	X	X							
AN: Alleanza Nazionale						X	X	X	X			
12. PCI: Partito Comunista Italiano	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*							
PDS: Partito Democratico della Sinistra						*MC-L*	*MC-L*					
DS: Democratici di Sinistra								*MC-L*	*MC-L*			
13. PD: Partito Democratico										*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
14. PLI: Partito Liberale Italiano	X	X	X	X	X							
15. PRI: Partito Radicale				X	X							
Lista Pannella						X	X	X				
16. PRI: Partito Repubblicano Italiano	X	X	X	X	X							
17. PSDI: Partito Socialdemocratico Italiano		X	X	X	X							
18. PSI: Partito Socialista Italiano	X	X	X	X	X							
19. Patto Segni						X						
20. PdL: Popolo delle Libertà										*MC-R*	*MC-R*	
21. RC: Rifondazione Comunista (Fausto Bertinotti)						X	X	X	X			
SA: Sinistra Arcobaleno										X		
SEL: Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà											X	
22. SC: Scelta Civica											X	
23. Verdi							X	X	X			

The Netherlands	**1981**	**1986**	**1989**	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2003**	**2006**	**2010**	**2012**
1. CD: Centrum Democraten				X	X					
2. CDA: Christen-Democratisch Appèl	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
3. CU: Christen Unie						X	X	X	X	X
4. D66: Democraten 66	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Eènnl								X		
6. GL: GroenLinks				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. GPV: Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond	X			X	X					
8. LN: Leefbaar Nederland						X				
9. LPF: Lijst Pim Fortuyn						X	X	X		
10. PVN: Partij Voor Nederland								X		
11. PvdA: Partij van de Arbeid	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
12. PvdD: Partij voor de Dieren									X	X
13. PVV: Partij voor de Vrijheid								X	X	X
14. RPF: Reformatorische Politieke Federatie	X			X						
15. SGP: Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
16. SP: Socialistische Partij	X				X					X
17. Trots Op Nederland									X	
18. VVD: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Norway	**1965**	**1969**	**1973**	**1977**	**1981**	**1985**	**1989**	**1993**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2009**	**2013**
1. Sp: Senterpartiet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Krf: Kristelig Folkeparti	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Kystpartiet											X		
4. H: Høgre	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
5. A/Ap: Arbeidarpartiet	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
6. V: Venstre	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

(Continued)

Table C.1. (Continued)

Norway	**1965**	**1969**	**1973**	**1977**	**1981**	**1985**	**1989**	**1993**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2009**	**2013**
7. FrP: Fremskrittspartiet			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8. RV: Rød Valgallianse										X	X	X	
9. SV: Sosialistisk Venstreparti	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Portugal					**1985**	**1993**	**2002**	**2005**	**2009**	**2011**	**2015**		
1. BE: Bloco de Esquerda							X	X	X	X	X		
2. CDS-PP: Partido Popular					X	X	X	X	X	X			
3. CDU: Coligação Democrática Unitária					X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
5. LIVRE											X		
6. PS: Partido Socialista					*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*		
7. PSD: Partido Social-Democrata					*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*		
9. PDR: Partido Democrático Republicano											X		
Spain			**1979**	**1986**	**1989**	**1996**	**2000**	**2008**	**2011**	**2015**	**2016**		
6. PRD: Partido de la Revolución Democrática				X									
7. Ciudadanos										X	X		
8. CD: Coalición Democrática			*MC-R*										
CP: Coalición Popular				*MC-R*									
PP: Partido Popular					*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*		
12. IU: Izquierda Unida				X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
16. Podemos										X	X		
17. PCE: Partido Comunista de España			X	X									
18. PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español			*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*		
19. CDS: Centro Democrático y Social			X	X	X								
20. UN: Unión Nacional			X										
21. UPyD: Unión Progreso y Democracia									X				

Switzerland	**1979**	**1995**	**1999**	**2003**	**2007**	**2011**	**2015**
1. CVP: Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei der Schweiz/PDC: Parti Démocrate-Chrétien	X		X	X	X	X	X
2. FDP: Freisinnig-Demokratische Partei/PRD: Parti radical-démocratique	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
3. SP: Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz/PS: Parti socialiste suisse	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
4. SVP: Schweizerische Volkspartei/UDC: Union démocratique du centre	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Sweden	**1968**	**1970**	**1973**	**1976**	**1979**	**1982**	**1985**	**1988**	**1991**	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**	**2010**
1. C: Centerpartiet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. KD: Kristdemokraterna	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
3. F!: Feministiskt initiativ														X
4. MP: Miljöpartiet de gröna									X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Piratpartiet														X
6. V: Vänsterpartiet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8. M: Moderata samlingspartiet	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
9. NyD: Ny Demokrati									X	X				
10. L: Liberalerna	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11. S: Socialdemokraterna	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
12. SD: Sverigedemokraterna														X

United Kingdom	**1964**	**1966**	**1970**	**1974f**	**1974o**	**1979**	**1983**	**1987**	**1992**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2010**	**2015**	**2017**
1. Conservatives	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*	*MC-R*
2. Greens														X	X
3. Labour	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*	*MC-L*
4. Liberal Democrats				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. United Kingdom Independence Party														X	X

Appendix D

Question Wording for Party Identification (by Country and Election Year)

AUSTRIA

2008

Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?
0. Not close to any party
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 0
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2013

Generally speaking, do you feel close to a particular party?
0. Not close to any party
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 0
Only a sympathizer: 3

Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

DENMARK

1971–1973–1975–1977–1979–1984–1990–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2001–2005–2007–2011

n/a
0. Not close to any party
1. Not strong supporter
2. Strong supporter

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 0
Fairly close: 1
Very close: 2

FINLAND

2003–2007–2011

Do you usually consider yourself as close to any particular party?
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close
4. Can't say

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 4
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2015

Do you usually consider yourself as close to any particular party?
1. Can't say

2. Not very close
3. Somewhat close
4. Very close

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 1
Only a sympathizer: 2
Fairly close: 3
Very close: 4

GERMANY

1961–1965–1972–1976–1980–1983–1987–1990–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2002

Many people in Germany feel close to a particular political party for a longer period of time even if they occasionally vote for another party. What about you? In general terms, do you feel attached to a particular political party? And if so, which one?
1. Very strongly
2. Strongly
3. Moderately
4. Weakly
5. Very weakly

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3, 4, 5
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2005

See: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Module 2

2009

Which party do you feel closest to?
1. Very strongly
2. Strongly

3. Moderately
4. Weakly
5. Very weakly

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3, 4, 5
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2013

Which party do you feel closest to?
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

GREECE

1996–2009

Normally, do you identify yourself with a particular political party?
1. Closely identified
2. Somewhat identified
3. Slightly identified

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2012

Which party do you feel closest to?
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

IRELAND

2002–2007–2011–2016

Do you usually think of yourself as close to any political party?
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

ITALY

1968–1972–1975

Which is the party you feel habitually closest to?
1. Very close
2. More or less close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

1990

Is there a party, among those mentioned, to which you feel closer with respect to the others? If yes, which one?
1. Just a sympathizer
2. Somewhat close
3. Very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 1
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 3

1996–2001–2006–2008

Is there a party to which you feel closer with respect to the others?
1. Very close
2. Fairly/rather close
3. (Only) A sympathizer

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2013

Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party?
1. Merely a sympathizer
2. Fairly close
3. Very close

Recoding procedure:
None

2018

Is there a party or a political movement to which you feel closest to?
1. Merely a sympathizer
2. Fairly close
3. Very close

Recoding procedure:
None

NETHERLANDS

1981

Many people think of themselves as being adherents of a particular political party, but there are many other people who do not regard themselves as such. How about you? Do you regard yourself as an adherent of a political party, or don't you?
1. Adherent
2. Not adherent

Recoding procedure:
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

1986–1989–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2002

Is there a party to which you feel more attracted than to other parties?
0. Neither adherent nor attracted
1. DK whether attracted
2. Attracted, not adherent
4. Adherent, not convinced
5. Adherent, DK whether convinced
6. Adherent, convinced
7. Adherent, very convinced

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 0, 1, 2
Only a sympathizer: 4, 5
Fairly close: 6
Very close: 7

2006–2010

Do you think of yourself as an adherent to a certain political party?
1. Very convinced adherent

2. Convinced adherent
3. Not convinced adherent

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2012

Do you consider yourself to be an adherent of a political party?
1. Very convinced adherent
2. Convinced adherent
3. Not convinced adherent

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

NORWAY

1965

Would you say that you, in general, think of yourself as a Conservative, a Liberal, Labourite, and so on, or do you not consider yourself tied to any party? Do you consider yourself to be a strongly convinced supporter of your party, or are you not particularly strongly convinced?
1. Strong
2. Weak
3. Independent

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

1969–1973

Would you say that you ordinarily consider yourself to be a høyremann (-kvinne) (follower of the Conservative Party), venstremann(-kvinne)

(follower of the Liberal Party), arbeiderpartimann(-kvinne) (follower of the Labour Party), and so on, or do you not feel affiliated with any party?
1. Strong
2. Weak
3. Independent

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

1977

Would you say that you in general consider yourself to support the party "høyre," "arbeiderpartiet," "sv," and so on, or do you not feel attached to any party?
1. Strong
2. Weak
3. Independent

Recoding procedure:
Not close to any party: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

1981–1985–1989–1993–1997

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2001–2005–2009–2013

Generally, would you say that you think of yourself as a supporter of the Conservative Party, a Labour Party supporter, and so on, or do you not feel any specific attachment to any?
1. Strongly convinced
2. Not very convinced

Recoding procedure:
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

PORTUGAL

2002–2005–2009–2011–2015

Do you consider yourself close to a particular political party?
1. Very close
2. Reasonably close
3. Merely a sympathizer

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

SPAIN

2000–2008–2011–2015–2016

Could you indicate if you feel close or proximate to any party or political coalition?
1. Very close
2. Quite close
3. Somewhat close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

SWEDEN

1968–1970–1973–1976–1979–1982–1985–1988–1991–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2002

Many people consider themselves adherents of a specific party. But there are also many others who do not have any such attachments to any of the parties. Do you usually think of yourself as, for example, a folkpartist,

socialdemokrat, moderat, centerpartist, vänsterpartist, miljöpartist, or kristdemokrat? Or do you have no such attachment to any of the parties?
1. Strong identification
2. Weak identification
3. Only a preference

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2006

Do you think of yourself as close to any particular party?
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2010

Some people are strongly convinced adherents of their party. Others are not so strongly convinced. Do you yourself belong to the strongly convinced adherents of your party?
1. Strong identification
2. Weak identification
3. Only a preference

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

SWITZERLAND

1979–1995–1999–2003

n/a
0. [min]
1. [max]

Recoding procedure:
The minimum value is recoded to "Not very close" and the maximum value to "Very close."
Note that the variable for the strength of party identification is not available for 1995.

2007–2011–2015

Does R feel close to a party?
1. Very close
2. Rather close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

UNITED KINGDOM

AuQ6 **1964–1966–1970–1974–1974–1979–1983–1987–1992–1997–2001**

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2005–2010–2017

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, (Scottish National/Plaid Cymru), or what?
1. Very strong
2. Fairly strong
3. Not very strong

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

2015

Do you think of yourself as close to any particular party?
1. Very close
2. Somewhat close
3. Not very close

Recoding procedure:
Only a sympathizer: 3
Fairly close: 2
Very close: 1

Appendix E

Question Wording for Party Leader Thermometer Evaluations (by Country and Election Year)

AUSTRIA

2013

How much do you like the following politicians? Please rate each politician on a scale from 0 to 10. 0 means you strongly dislike that politician and 10 means that you strongly like that politician.
0. Strongly dislike
10. Strongly like

DENMARK

1971–1973–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2001–2005–2007–2011

I would like to ask you how well or bad you think of some of our political leaders when 0 means you think very bad about the person and 10 means you think really well about the person.
0. Very bad
10. Very good

FINLAND

2003–2007–2011–2015

Rate the following leaders on a scale from 0 (strongly dislike) to 10 (strongly like).
0. Strongly dislike
10. Strongly like

GERMANY

1961–1965–1972–1976–1980–1983–1987–1990–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2002

Generally speaking, what do you think of [LEADER]? Please use the following scale. "+5" means that you have a very positive view of this politician, whereas "–5" means that you have a very negative view of this politician.
–5. Very negative view
5. Very positive view

Recoding strategy:
5-points were added to the original scale so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10.

2005

See: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Module 2

2009–2013

Please tell me what you think about some leading politicians. Please use the scale from –5 to + 5 for this purpose.
–5. Strongly dislike
5. Strongly like

Recoding strategy:
5-points were added to the original scale so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10.

GREECE

1985–1989–1996

We would like to know your feelings toward some persons and social organization on a scale from 0 to 10. If you feel very favorable toward this person, you can give him the highest score of 10; if you feel hostile toward this person you can give him a 0 (zero); if you feel absolutely neutral toward this person, you can give him a 5.
1. Hostile
10. Favorable

Recoding strategy:
Values from 1 to 5 in the original scale were recoded by subtracting 1-point so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 with no observations in the middle point of the scale.

2009–2012

See: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Module 3

IRELAND

2002–2007–2011–2016

And what do you think of the party leaders? After I read the name of a party leader, please rate them on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that candidate and 10 means that you strongly like that candidate.
0. Strongly dislike
10. Strongly like

ITALY

1985

How much sympathy do you have for the political leaders that I am about to read? Please use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "no sympathy" and 10 means "much sympathy."
1. No sympathy
10. Much sympathy

Recoding strategy:
Values from 1 to 5 in the original scale were recoded by subtracting 1-point so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 with no observations in the middle point of the scale.

1990–1994–1996–2001–2006

I shall now read you a list of national politicians. For each of them tell me whether you have ever heard of them and, if so, give them a score from 1 to 10 according to your opinion of them: 1 means a totally negative judgment and 10 means a totally positive judgment.
1. Totally negative
10. Totally positive

Recoding strategy:
Values from 1 to 5 in the original scale were recoded by subtracting 1-point so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 with no observations in the middle point of the scale.

2008–2013–2018

I shall now read you a list of national politicians. For each of them tell me whether you have ever heard of them and, if so, give them a score from 0 to 10 according to your opinion of them: 0 means a totally negative judgment and 10 means a totally positive judgment.
0. Totally negative
10. Totally positive

NETHERLANDS

1986–1989–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2002–2003

I would also like to know how sympathetic you find the following politicians. You can give each [politician] a score between 0 and 100. The more sympathetic you find a [politician], the higher the score you give. A score of 50 means that you find a [politician] neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic.

0. Very unsympathetic
100. Very sympathetic

Recoding strategy:
The original values were divided by 10 and then rounded to the nearest integer value so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10.

2006–2010–2012

I would like to know from you how sympathetic you find party leaders. To this end you can give points between 0 and 10 to the respective party leaders. 0 means that you find this party leader very unsympathetic and 10 means that you find this party leader very sympathetic.
0. Very unsympathetic
10. Very sympathetic

NORWAY

1981–1985–1989–1993–1997

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2001–2005–2009–2013

After I have read you the name of a political leader, would you please rate him or her on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, where 0 means that you strongly dislike that politician and 10 means that you like the politician very much.
0. Strongly dislike
10. Like very much

PORTUGAL

1985

I will now give you the names of some Portuguese politicians. Using the same scale from 0 to 10 tell me which number corresponds to the degree of sympathy you have for the following political leaders.
0. No sympathy
10. A lot of sympathy

1993

I would like you to tell me how much sympathy do you have for the following personalities. I have numbers from 1 to 10, in which 10 means you have very much sympathy and 1 none. Which number would you use to classify your sympathy for [politician]?
1. No sympathy
10. A lot of sympathy

Recoding strategy:
Values from 1 to 5 in the original scale were recoded by subtracting 1-point so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10 with no observations in the middle point of the scale.

2002

Degree of sympathy for political leaders
0. Great antipathy
10. Great sympathy

2005

Now, using the same scale, I would like to ask you about your sympathies and antipathies for certain political leaders. Once again, if I name a leader you do not know or you do not think you know enough about, just say so. The first political leader is . . .
0. Great antipathy
10. Great sympathy

2009–2011–2015

I would like to know what you think about each one of our political leaders, using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means Great dislike for the political leader, 10 means that you fell Great sympathy for the leader, and 5 means you feel indifference for the leader.
0. Great dislike
10. Great sympathy

SPAIN

1979

0. Hostile
10. Favorable

1986–1989–1996–2000–2008–2011–2015–2016

I'm going to read out a series of political leaders' names. Please tell me, for each one, whether you know of them and how you value their political performance. Grade them from 0 to 10, where 0 means that you value them "very bad" and 10 means that you value them "very good."
0. Very bad
10. Very good

SWEDEN

1982–1985–1988–1991–1994–1998

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press

2002

On this card there is a kind of scale. I would like you to use it to illustrate how much you like or dislike the different [party leaders]. Use "plus" figures for [party leaders] you like and "minus" figures for [party leaders] parties you dislike.
–5. Strongly dislike
5. Strongly like
Recoding strategy:
5-points were added to the original scale so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10.

2006

I'd like to know what you think about each of our [political leaders]. Please rate the [political leaders] on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you

strongly dislike that [political leader] and 10 means that you strongly like that [political leader].
0. Strongly dislike
10. Strongly like

2010

On this card there is a kind of scale. I would like you to use it to illustrate how much you like or dislike the different [party leaders]. Use "plus" figures for [party leaders] you like and "minus" figures for [party leaders] parties you dislike.
–5. Strongly dislike
5. Strongly like

Recoding strategy:
5-points were added to the original scale so that the recoded scale ranges from 0 to 10.

SWITZERLAND

1995

Here is another list of other known politicians. Can you tell me every time, what level of sympathy do you have for him or her on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, where 0 means "no sympathy" and 10 "very strong sympathy"?
0. No sympathy
10. Very strong sympathy

1999–2003–2007–2011–2015

And can you tell me what sympathy you have for the following political figures on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "no sympathy" and 10 "very strong sympathy"?
0. No sympathy
10. Very strong sympathy

UNITED KINGDOM

AuQ7 **1964–1966–1970–1974–1974–1979–1983–1987–1992–1997–2001**

See: Thomassen, J. (2005). The European Voter. Oxford: Oxford University Press
0. Minimum
10. Maximum

2005–2010–2015–2017

Now, let's think more generally about the party leaders. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about . . .
0. Strongly dislike
10. Strongly like

Appendix F

Question Wording for Newspaper Consumption Items (by Country and Election Year)

AUSTRIA

2013

How often do you read newspapers to learn about political events in Austria?
1. Almost every day
2. Several times a week
3. Several times a month
4. Less frequently
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

DENMARK

2005

How often: reading newspaper
1. Every day
2. Five to six times a week
3. Three to four times a week

4. One to two times a week
5. Less than once a week
6. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1, 2
Often: 3
Rarely: 4
Never: 5, 6

2007–2011

How often: reading newspaper
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0

FINLAND

2003–2007–2011

How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in newspaper articles?
1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4

GERMANY

2002–2009–2013

Here on this list you can see different newspapers. On how many days of the week on average do you read reports on political events in Germany in [NEWSPAPER] during the election campaign?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0
Note:

Respondents were asked how often they read news on different newspapers. We have taken the value of the respondent's most often read newspaper.

GREECE

1996

During the electoral campaign, how frequently did you follow political news through newspapers?
1. Every day or almost every day
2. Three to four days a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Less frequently
5. Never or almost never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

IRELAND

2007

On a scale 0–7, where 0 means never and 7 means every day, how often do you do the following? Read the newspaper
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0

ITALY

1990–1996–2001–2006–2008

Do you usually read a newspaper? If so, how frequently?
1. Don't read
2. Less than once a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Three to five days a week
5. (Almost) Every day

Recoding procedure:
Always: 5
Often: 4
Rarely: 3
Never: 2, 1

2013

Do you usually read a newspaper—physically or online, excluding sports' news? If so, how frequently?
1. No, never
2. Less than once a week
3. One day a week
4. Two days a week
5. Three days a week

6. Four days a week
7. Five days a week
8. Six days a week
9. Every day

Recoding procedure:
Always: 9, 8
Often: 7, 6, 5
Rarely: 4, 3
Never: 2, 1

NETHERLANDS

1986–1989–1994–1998–2002

When there is domestic news in the newspapers, for example news about governmental problems, how often do you read such news?
1. (Nearly) Always
2. Often
3. Now and then
4. Seldom or never
5. Does not read newspaper

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

2006–2010

How often do you read a newspaper?
1. (Almost) daily
2. A few times a week
3. A few times a month
4. Seldom or never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4

PORTUGAL

2002

Frequency of readership of political news in the newspaper
1. Every day
2. Several times a week
3. Once a week
4. Less than once a week
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

2005

During the electoral campaign, how often did you follow political news in newspapers?
1. Daily/almost every day
2. Three to four days a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Less frequently
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

2009–2015

During the electoral campaign, how often did you follow political news in newspapers or magazines, in paper or online?
1. Daily/almost every day
2. Three to four days a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Less frequently
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

SPAIN

2000–2008–2011–2015–2016

During this electoral campaign, could you tell me how frequently have you followed electoral and political information in the general newspapers?
1. Every day or almost every day
2. Four to five days a week
3. Two to three days a week
4. Only on the weekends
5. Rarely
6. Never or almost never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 4, 5
Never: 6

SWEDEN

1982–1985–1988–1991–1994–1998–2002–2006–2010

How often do you read news and articles about politics in the daily press?
1. Never
2. Occasionally
3. Often
4. Every day

Recoding procedure:
Always: 4
Often: 3
Rarely: 2
Never: 1

SWITZERLAND

2003–2007–2011

How many days/week does R read news in the newspaper?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0

2015

I would like to know how attentively have you followed, over the last days, political affairs on [newspapers].
1. Not at all attentive
2. Not very attentive
3. Rather attentive
4. Very attentive

Recoding procedure:
Always: 4
Often: 3
Rarely: 2
Never: 1

UNITED KINGDOM

2015

Do you regularly read about politics or current affairs in one or more newspapers (either online or in print)?
1. Yes
2. No

Recoding procedure:
Always: n/a
Often: 1
Rarely: n/a
Never: 2

Appendix G

Question Wording for Television Consumption Items (by Country and Election Year)

AUSTRIA

2013

How often do you use the television to learn about political events in Austria?
1. Almost every day
2. Several times a week
3. Several times a month
4. Less frequently
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

DENMARK

2005

How often: news on [CHANNEL]
1. Every day
2. Five to six times a week
3. Three to four times a week
4. One to two times a week
5. Less than once a week

6. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1, 2
Often: 3
Rarely: 4
Never: 5, 6
Note:

Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on three different channels (TV2 News; DR1; DR2). We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel.

2007–2011

How often: TV news
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0

FINLAND

2003–2011

How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in television news and current affairs programs?
1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4

2007

How much important information did you get for your voting choice from news and current affairs programs on television?
1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4

GERMANY

2002

How often do you watch news casts on the first or second channel? What is meant here are the news casts of ARD or ZDF, namely Tagesschau, Tagesthemen, Heute, and Heute-Journal.
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0
Note:

Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel.

2009–2013

On average, on how many days of the week did you watch Tagesschau or Tagesthemen on ARD during the election campaign?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0
Note:

Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel.

GREECE

1996

During the electoral campaign, how frequently did you follow political news through television?
1. Every day or almost every day
2. Three to four days a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Less frequently
5. Never or almost never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

IRELAND

2007

On a scale 0–7, where 0 means never and 7 means every day, how often do you do the following? Watch TV news?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6

Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0

ITALY

1990–2001–2006–2008–2013

Do you usually watch news programs? If so, how frequently?
1. Never
2. Less than once a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Three to five days a week
5. (Almost) Every day

Recoding procedure:
Always: 5
Often: 4
Rarely: 3
Never: 2, 1

1996

During the election campaign did you happen to see any TV news programs? If so, how often?
1. Never
2. Less than once a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Three to five days a week
5. (Almost) Every day

Recoding procedure:
Always: 5
Often: 4
Rarely: 3
Never: 2, 1

NETHERLANDS

1986–1989–1994–1998–2002

Could you indicate on this showcard how often you generally watch the [CHANNEL] television newscast?
1. (Almost) daily
2. Three to four times per week
3. One to two times per week
4. Less than once a week
5. Does not own a TV set

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5
Note: Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel.

2006–2010

How often do you watch a newscast?
1. (Almost) daily
2. Three to four times per week
3. One to two times per week
4. Less than once a week

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5
Note: Respondents were asked how often they watched TV news on different channels. We have taken the value of the respondent's most watched news channel.

PORTUGAL

2002

Frequency watching news or programs about politics on television
1. Every day
2. Several times a week
3. Once a week
4. Less than once a week
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

2005–2009–2015

During the electoral campaign, how often did you follow political news on television?
1. Daily/almost every day
2. Three to four days a week
3. One to two days a week
4. Less frequently
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

SPAIN

2000–2008–2011–2015–2016

During this electoral campaign, could you tell me how frequently have you followed electoral and political information on the television?
1. Every day or almost every day
2. Four to five days a week

3. Two to three days a week
4. Only on the weekends
5. Rarely
6. Never or almost never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 4, 5
Never: 6

SWEDEN

1982–1985–1988–1991–1994–1998–2002–2006–2010

How often do you watch Rapport (TV, national channel 2)?
1. Six to seven days a week
2. Three to five days a week
3. One to two days a week
4. More seldom
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
Always: 1
Often: 2
Rarely: 3
Never: 4, 5

SWITZERLAND

2003–2007–2011

How many days/week does R watch news on TV?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
Always: 7, 6
Often: 5, 4, 3
Rarely: 2, 1
Never: 0

2015

I would like to know how attentively have you followed, over the last days, political affairs on [television].
1. Not at all attentive
2. Not very attentive
3. Rather attentive
4. Very attentive

Recoding procedure:
Always: 4
Often: 3
Rarely: 2
Never: 1

UNITED KINGDOM

2015

On a typical day, how much time do you spend watching television news or programs about politics and current affairs?
1. None, no time at all
2. Less than half hour
3. Half hour to one hour
4. One to two hours
5. More than two hours

Recoding procedure:
Always: 5, 4
Often: 3
Rarely: 2
Never: 1

Appendix H

Question Wording for Online News Consumption Items (by Country and Election Year)

AUSTRIA

2013

How often do you use the Internet to learn about political events in Austria? Almost every day, several times a week, several times a month, less frequently, or never?
1. Almost every day
2. Several times a week
3. Several times a month
4. Less frequently
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
No: 5
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4

DENMARK

2005–2007

Parties' homepages
1. No
2. Yes, one
3. Yes, several

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2

2011

Participation in election quiz
1. Yes
5. No

Visited parties' website
1. Yes
5. No

Recoding procedure:
Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

FINLAND

2003

How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in:
__ *Web news covering elections*
__ *Websites of candidates and political parties*
__ *Candidate selectors on the Internet*
1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3 on at least one item

2007

How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in:
__ *Web news covering elections*

__ *Websites of candidates and political parties*
__ *Online diaries or blogs*
__ *Candidate selectors on the Internet*
1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3 on at least one item

2011

How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in:
__ *Web news covering elections*
__ *Websites of candidates and political parties*
__ *Online diaries or blogs*
__ *Candidate selectors on the Internet*
__ *Social media, for example, Facebook, Twitter*
__ *Web videos of the candidates or political parties, for example, YouTube*
1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3 on at least one item

2015

How much attention did you pay to media coverage of the parliamentary elections in:
__ *Web news covering elections*
__ *Websites of candidates and political parties*
__ *Blogs*
__ *Candidate selectors on the Internet*
__ *Social media, for example, Facebook, Twitter*
__ *Web videos of the candidates or political parties, for example, YouTube*
__ *News broadcasts on the Internet and social media*

1. A great deal of attention
2. A fair amount of attention
3. Only a little
4. Paid no attention at all

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3 on at least one item

GERMANY

2002

I use the Internet to search for political information on the net
1. Very often
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4

2009

On how many days of the week did you use the Internet to inform yourself about political parties and the federal election during the election campaign?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

2013

[Only Rs who state to use the Internet] On how many days in the week on average do you use political news available on the Internet, for example, belonging to newspapers, television stations, or other provider?

[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

[Only Rs who state to use the Internet] What about special sources of information about the federal election, such as "Wahl-o-mat" ("Electoral Compass") or "Kandidatenwatch" ("Candidate watch")? Have you used sites of this kind during the election campaign?
1. Yes
2. No

Recoding procedure:
Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

IRELAND

2002–2007

Did you see information about political parties and candidates on the Internet?
1. Yes
2. No

2011

On a scale of 0–7 where 0 means "Never," 1 means one day a week, 2 means two days a week, and so on, until 7 means "every day" of the week, how often do you do the following: Browse online for news?
[Number of days per week]

Recoding procedure:
No: 8
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

ITALY

2001

How did you keep yourself informed about the recent elections? Please tell me your main source of information and then the next main source.
1. Television
2. Personal contacts with friends or family
3. Newspapers
4. Weekly/periodic magazines
5. Radio
6. Personal contacts with candidates
7. Internet
8. None of them

Recoding procedure:
No: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
Yes: 7 (if Internet is named as main or secondary source)

2006

Now I'm going to read a list of things some people happened to do during the last electoral campaign. For each of them, please tell me if you happened to do it or not: Reading Internet websites about the elections.
1. Yes
2. No

2008

Did you happen to do some of the following things during the last election campaign: Reading Internet websites about the elections?
1. Yes
2. No

2013

Now let's talk about some activities that take place online. Considering the election campaign of the last months, please tell me how frequently you did the following things:
__ *Visited parties'/candidates' websites?*
__ *Visited parties'/candidates' social network profiles (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)?*

__ *Watched campaign-related TV content (e.g., on YouTube or on newspapers' sites)?*
__ *Shared campaign-related content (texts, photos, videos, pictures)?*
__ *Participated in online discussions about politics or the campaign?*
__ *Participated in a political event or political demonstration after being invited via Internet?*

1. Every day
2. A few times a week
3. From time to time
4. Never

Recoding procedure:
No: 4
Yes: 1, 2, 3 on at least one item

NETHERLANDS

1998–2002–2003

Did you make use of the Internet during the election campaign to gather information on politics?
1. Yes
2. No

2006

Frequency visiting:
__ *portal.omroep.nl*
__ *geenstijl.nl*
__ *nu.nl*
__ *teletekst.nl*
__ *anp.nl*
__ *spitsnet.nl*
__ *bn.nl*
__ *planet.nl*

1. Never
2. Less than once a week
3. One to two times a week
4. Three to four times a week
5. (Almost) daily

Recoding procedure:
No: 1
Yes: 2, 3, 4, 5 on at least one item

Did you fill in vote matcher?
0. No
1. Yes
Note: Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

2010

Frequency visiting:
__ *nos.nl*
__ *geenstijl.nl*
__ *nu.nl*
__ *telegraaf.nl*
__ *elsevier.nl*
__ *nrc.nl*
__ *volkskrant.nl*
__ *Google news*
__ *Fok.nl*
__ *AD.nl*
1. Never
2. Less than once a week
3. One to two times a week
4. Three to four times a week
5. (Almost) daily

Recoding procedure:
No: 1
Yes: 2, 3, 4, 5 on at least one item

Did you fill in vote matcher?
0. No
1. Yes
Note: Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

NORWAY

2005

How often did you read about the election on the Internet in relation to the electoral campaign?
1. Every day
2. At least once a week
3. More seldom
4. Never

Recoding procedure:
No: 4
Yes: 1, 2, 3

2009

How often did you read about the election on the Internet in connection with the election campaign?
1. Every day
2. At least once a week
3. More seldom
4. Never

Recoding procedure:
No: 4
Yes: 1, 2, 3

We now turn to a number of questions concerning various political activities in which it is possible to participate. During the course of the past four years, have you taken one or more of the so-called batch tests on the net before the election this year?
1. Yes
2. No

Note: Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

2013

How often did you read about the election on the Internet in connection with the election campaign?
1. Every day
2. Two or three times a week
3. At least once a week
4. More rarely
5. Never

Recoding procedure:
No: 4
Yes: 1, 2, 3

We have a few questions about political activities that one can participate in. Have you during the past four years [. . .] I. Did you take any of the online party tests prior to the election this year?
1. Yes
2. No
Note: Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

PORTUGAL

2009

Finally, during the electoral campaign how often did you read blogs or websites about political themes (not counting TV or newspapers sites)?
0. Never
1. Less often
2. One to two days a week
3. Three to four days a week
4. Daily/almost daily

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4

During the last election campaign, did you answer the "Electoral Compass" (Bussola Eleitoral) inquiry?
0. No
1. Yes
Note: Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

2011

Finally, during the electoral campaign how often did you read blogs or websites about political themes (not counting TV or newspapers sites)?
0. Never
1. Less often
2. One to two days a week
3. Three to four days a week
4. Daily/almost daily

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4

2015

During the election campaign, how often did you follow the news about politics through the Internet?
0. Never
1. Less often
2. One to two days a week
3. Three to four days a week
4. Daily/almost daily

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1, 2, 3, 4

SPAIN

2008

From the following list of websites, which ones did you use to get information or follow the electoral campaign?

__ *News outlets' websites (newspapers, radios, etc.)*
__ *Websites of political parties or candidates*
__ *Websites of civic organizations or civic movements*
__ *Blogs or web forums*
__ *Other types of websites*

1. Yes
2. No

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1 on at least one item

2011–2015–2016

From the following list of websites, which ones did you use to get information or follow the electoral campaign?

__ *News outlets' websites (newspapers, radios, etc.)*
__ *Websites of political parties or candidates*
__ *Websites of civic organizations or civic movements*
__ *Blogs or webforums*
__ *Social media (Facebook, Tuenti, Twitter, etc.)*
__ *Other types of websites*

1. Yes
2. No

Recoding procedure:
No: 0
Yes: 1 on at least one item

SWEDEN

2002

Have you in 2002 visited any of the following homepages on the Internet to get information about politics or find out about the positions of the political parties?

__ *Have visited homepage of a morning newspaper*
__ *Have visited homepage of an evening newspaper*
__ *Have visited homepage of a TV channel*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Swedish Parliament*
__ *Have visited homepage of election authority*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Left Party*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Social Democrats*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Centre Party*
__ *Have visited homepage of the People's Party Liberals*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Moderate Party*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Christian Democrats*
__ *Have visited homepage of the Green Party*
__ *Have visited homepage of one or more members of parliament*

1. Yes, many times
3. Yes, on occasion
5. No, never

Recoding procedure:
No: 5
Yes: 1, 3 on at least one item

2006

Before this year's election, did you visit any of the parties' home pages on the Internet?
1. Yes
5. No

2010

Before this year's election, did you visit any of the parties' home pages on the Internet?
1. Yes
5. No

Before this year's election, did you take any of the party tests that different media organizations put on their Internet pages, where you could test which party your views were closest to?
1. No, I did not take part test
2. Yes, one or two
3. Yes, several

Recoding procedure:
No: 1
Yes: 2, 3
Note: Whenever respondents answer *Yes* to either one of the questions, they are coded as having used Internet for political information.

SWITZERLAND

1999–2003

Campaign information: parties' home pages
0. No
1. Yes

2007–2011

During the weeks prior to election, did you use the following source to obtain information about the parties and candidates: webpages about the elections?
1. Yes
2. No

2015

During the weeks prior to election, did you use the following source to obtain information about the parties and candidates: social media, video, blogs, websites, or forums on the Internet?
1. Yes
2. No

UNITED KINGDOM

2005

How much did you use the Internet to get information about the recent general election?
1. A great deal
2. A fair amount

3. Not very much
4. Not at all

Recoding procedure:
No: 4
Yes: 1, 2, 3

2010–2015

On a typical day, how much time do you spend using the Internet for news or programs about politics and current affairs?
1. None, no time at all
2. Less than half hour
3. Half to one hour
4. More than two hours

Recoding procedure:
No: 1
Yes: 2, 3, 4

Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. This is the case, for instance, with the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), which provides leader evaluation batteries for all countries but no measure whatsoever about respondents' patterns of media exposure. Conversely, the European Election Study (EES) series does rely on extensive media exposure batteries but lacks any measure of leaders' personality evaluations.

2. We note that the use of thermometers in voting behavior models has been repeatedly criticized, with Fiorina's (1981) being the classic example. His argument rests on the idea that thermometers may be contaminated by retrospective judgments about parties and issues, prompting him to the oft-quoted assertion that "no one knows what thermometer scores measure" (Fiorina, 1981, p. 154). Subsequent empirical analyses tempered this critique by explicit investigation of the determinants of thermometer evaluations, which Fiorina eschewed (Funk, 1999). Conversely, it must be highlighted that trait-based measures come with problems as well. While "purportedly much closer to what is in fact intended to be calculated" (Lobo, 2014a, p. 366), traits do not seem to perform better than thermometers from an empirical point of view. Trait perceptions are not immune from partisan stereotypes, ideological predispositions, and voting habits (Bittner, 2011; Holian & Prysby, 2014). Garzia's (2017b) comparative analysis underlines, on the one hand, the limitations of thermometer scores insofar as half of their variance is not explained by trait assessments. On the other hand, his results also speak to the limitations of traits themselves, as the inclusion of ideology in the regression model bears a strong effect on traits' parameter estimates without adding substantially to the overall explained variance.

3. In a few instances, respondents were not allowed to select the mid-point of the scale (Greece 1985–1996, Italy 1985–2006, and Portugal 1993). Detailed question wording, answer categories, and recoding strategy for each election study are presented in appendix E.

CHAPTER 2

1. Three-point closeness scales are available in 84 out of the 113 election studies for which a measurement of partisanship is available. Exceptions are the studies from Denmark (except 1998) and Norway (except 1997), the early Dutch studies (1981–1998), and the first German study (1961). In all these instances, only the degree of closeness was investigated. Respondents in those studies were unable to declare themselves "only a sympathizer."

2. Given the historical inexistence of an ideal type of either Social-Democratic or Christian-Democratic parties in Ireland, to avoid the exclusion of this country, we selected the two main parties competing on the left–right dimension in Irish politics (i.e., Fianna Fail and Fine Gael). Details on party selection in each country under analysis are provided in appendix C.

3. The case of individuals expressing both an average level of education and interest in politics deserves special consideration. This group accounts for about 27 percent of the respondents in our dataset. We make explicit that we do *not* consider these voters to be cognitively mobilized. As a matter of fact, we raise the bar for cognitive mobilization in order to achieve a more conservative measure, eventually leaning toward the underestimation of cognitively mobilized voters.

CHAPTER 3

1. Building on this conceptualization, throughout this chapter we rely on a minimal definition of partisanship, defined quite simply as "a long term tendency to support a party rather than another" (Bartle & Bellucci, 2009, p. 1). Detailed question wording, answer categories, and recoding strategy for our partisanship variable in each election study are presented in appendix D.

2. Whenever individuals' highest rating was attributed to more than one party leader (i.e., whenever there are "ties" in the highest score), they were categorized as having voted for the party of their highest-rated leader if the vote is cast for the party of any of the highest-rated leaders.

3. The existence of varying choice sets may be incompatible with the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives assumption inherent to conditional logit models. Relaxing this assumption requires modelling the variations in the choice sets. Therefore, we experimented with different conditional logit configurations that allow for variation in voters' choice sets by interacting a choice-set indicator with each alternative-specific covariate (i.e., leader evaluations, partisanship, ideological proximity). This produces estimates that are choice set-specific, but this comes at the cost of misleading generalizations. For instance, the choice-set configurations usually involve one or two specific countries and therefore convey the effect of idiosyncratic context rather than the absence or presence of certain party families. Moreover, these models involve excessive complexity. In fact, our argument of the diachronic increase in the relative importance of leaders and parties would also demand a triple interaction to model the change of the coefficients of interest over time. While this would represent

a feasible option for analyses of the dynamics of a single-party system, or in the synchronic variation across party systems, in our long- term comparative setting a more pragmatic approach that dissects the change within party families is preferable. Readers interested in modelling choices with varying choice set can refer to Alvarez and Nagler (1995).

4. Full list of parties for each country and election included in the stacked data matrix analysis is presented in appendix C.

5. Note that this strategy is unable to account for respondent-specific variables that do not have a direct counterpart at the respondent × party level (e.g., sociodemographics) and therefore cannot be meaningfully estimated under such framework.

6. Detailed question wording for each election study included in our pooled dataset and our recoding strategy is presented in appendix E.

7. We acknowledge that this approach is not without caveats, but it has the undeniable merit of offering a feasible measure of ideological proximity across electoral studies spanning over six decades in multiple countries.

8. Admittedly, our model specification is parsimonious, due to the constraints of the stacked data matrix framework. The inclusion of further controls at the respondent level poses a problem since sociodemographic variables are constant at the party × respondent level. However, since it can be claimed that the effects of these variables are indirectly accounted for—in the sense that they are largely subsumed into party identification and ideological self-positioning—we are confident that such a parsimonious model is nonetheless appropriate.

9. These include contextual differences as well as inconsistencies in question wording across countries and elections.

10. The difference in the N of party*respondent combinations and the N of respondents is due to the stacked data matrix framework. In our sample, on average, each respondent observation was repeated 5.27 times (i.e., the mean number of parties considered for inclusion in our national election studies).

11. For example, Tony Blair's leadership in the British Labour Party set new programmatic agendas aimed at targeting the median voter by advocating a style of valence politics—the so-called "Third Way"—that went beyond left–right ideological considerations. The Third Way triggered a reconfiguration of the ideological framework of mainstream parties much throughout Europe during this period. Other examples include the leadership of Gerhard Schröder over the German SPD, Wim Kok as leader of the Labour Party in the Netherlands, and Olof Palme as head of the Swedish Social Democratic Party.

12. Indeed, the 1980s coincide with the leaderships of very noteworthy conservative leaders associated with the emergence of neoliberalism, such as Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl, and Ruud Lubbers. These lightning-rod leaders were popular personalities whose agendas recruited many (new) voters for their parties.

13. Bittner (2011, pp. 148–50) finds stronger leader effects for politically sophisticated voters. However, her index does not include levels of education but only general interest in politics (alongside four other components).

14. Dalton (2007) tested this relationship through a regression model of education and political interest on political knowledge. The reported coefficients for education

(.387) and interest (.391) are of similar magnitude and the model fit is of .621, leaving a significant degree of unexplained variance.

CHAPTER 4

1. The national election studies containing a measure of exposure to political information through *both* newspapers and television within our "West European Voter" dataset are the following: Austria 2013; Denmark 2005, 2007, 2011; Finland 2003, 2007, 2011; Germany 2002, 2009, 2013; Greece 1996; Ireland 2007; Italy 1990, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2013; the Netherlands 1986, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010; Portugal 2002, 2005, 2009, 2015; Spain 2000, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016; Sweden 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010; Switzerland 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015; the United Kingdom 2015. This more restricted set of studies constitutes the basis for the empirical analysis of this chapter.

2. Detailed question wording, answer categories, and recoding strategy for media consumption items in each election study are presented in appendices F (newspaper usage) and G (television usage).

3. Because of the dichotomous configuration of the cognitive mobilization variable, a zero-sum logic applies with regard to noncognitive voters.

CHAPTER 5

1. The national election studies containing a measure of exposure to political information online within our "West European Voter" dataset are the following: Austria 2013; Denmark 2005, 2007, 2011; Finland 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015; Germany 2002, 2009, 2013; Greece, 2012; Ireland 2002, 2007, 2011; Italy 2001, 2006, 2008, 2013; the Netherlands 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010; Norway 2005, 2009, 2013; Portugal 2009, 2011, 2015; Spain 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016; Sweden 2002, 2006, 2010; Switzerland 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015; the United Kingdom 2005, 2010, 2015.

CHAPTER 6

1. We borrow the term from Pruysers and Cross (2016), who explore patterns of campaign communication in the Canadian case. They define negative personalization as "an emphasis on opposing party leaders in campaign communication more so than on the parties that they lead" (ibid., 540). Our own conception of negative personalization is similar to theirs but focuses on the way in which leader evaluations play out in voters' attitudes and behavior.

2. It should be noted that Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner's (2007, p. 1185) meta-analysis finds "no consistent evidence . . . that negative campaigning 'works' in achieving the electoral results the attackers desire." However, Geer (2012, p. 422) highlights

that "while the scholarly literature does not indicate that attack ads work better than positive ads, practitioners clearly believe that they work better and it is that perception that helps account for this rise." Lau and Rovner (2009, p. 286) appear to support this interpretation when they argue that "an accelerated proliferation of negative advertising over the past 30 years—or at least a rise in the number of people complaining about it—seems apparent."

3. Austria is excluded from the calculation because it only features a single time point, impeding a longitudinal analysis.

4. As reasoned before, these results could be biased by a wider party supply potentially inflating negative evaluations, that is, a higher number of parties competing against a respondent's preferred party could prompt her/him to ascribe a greater number of negative vis-à-vis positive scores. However, this possibility can be discarded, as congested and noncongested party systems report virtually identical downward trends.

5. As explained in the previous chapter, the sample size is reduced given that the first election study with data on consumption of political information online appeared only in 1998, and because this measure is also unavailable in many of the more contemporary election studies.

APPENDIX A

1. In the development of the dataset, numerous people helped us accessing or translating data that we would have otherwise been unable to include. For this, we are grateful to Paolo Bellucci, David Farrell, Kostas Gemenis, Henrik Oscarsson, Laura Sudulich, Guillem Rico, and Michael Marsh.

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Index

Note: Page references for figures are *italicized* and for notes are **in bold**.