

Valence Attacks and Vote Choice in Europe¹

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Abstract:

Political parties spend parts of their campaigns criticizing each others' valence characteristics, such as their honesty, integrity, and competence. The goal with these attacks is to educate voters about other parties' traits and influence their voting decisions against the targeted party. But do they work as expected? We argue that how voters react to these valence discussions is conditional on their partisanship. While copartisans are more likely to get mobilized in favour of their own party, we expect non-copartisans to punish the targeted party. Combining a dataset on party valence rhetoric with cross-national survey data from eight European countries we show that copartisans indeed rally behind their party when it is being targeted. Yet, our results also suggest that most non-copartisans, surprisingly, also reward the targeted party. These results

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have important implications for the political campaigns literature and for our understanding of voter behaviour.

Introduction

Leading up to the 2015 election in the United Kingdom, the governing Conservative Party was losing in the polls and trailing behind the Labour Party, despite the call for the Brexit referendum and the appeal to the Eurosceptic conservatives, who had been mostly lost to the UK Independence Party. David Cameron, as the leader of the party, as well as the party's old guard were hard at work warning voters about a potential Labour government. The Telegraph reported the following on its front page on May 6, the day before the election:

The British people must come together and unite against the nightmare prospect of a Labour-SNP government which will "tear our nation apart", Sir John Major [Conservative Party] says today. ... Meanwhile, David Cameron, the Prime Minister, described Mr Miliband [the leader of the Labour Party] as a "very dangerous person" who is using a "con trick" to get into Downing Street. ... In an emotional appeal, Sir John says that Labour offers people a "hand out" whereas only the Conservatives offer voters a "hand up". (Dominiczak 2015).

The next day the Conservatives won the election in a landslide and formed a single-party government with Cameron becoming the Prime Minister again.

Does this example mean that valence attacks work? Do parties that are targeted by valence attacks lose in the elections? The evidence presented in the literature is either mixed (especially in the case of the United States, see Lau and Rovner 2009 for a summary) or is largely missing (especially in Europe, but see Pattie, Denver, Johns, and Mitchell 2011, and Jung

and Tavits 2018). In this paper, we examine how valence attacks affect voter behaviour in the multiparty systems of Europe. We follow Stokes (1992), Clark (2009), Abney et al. (2013), and Jung and Tavits (2018) and refer to any type of campaign discussions about honesty, integrity, competence, unity, and charisma as “valence discussions.”

We argue that being attacked can work in two different directions. On the one hand, we know that parties attack each other to hurt their opponents. By highlighting their weaknesses and negative characteristics, they aim to educate voters about their opponents. If these attacks work as intended and inform voters about the negative traits of a party, then we should see them hurt the targeted party. Yet, valence attacks may also backfire and help the targeted party by motivating voters to rally behind it (see Banda and Windett 2016 for a similar argument in the United States).

We expect the effects of valence attacks to vary among different partisan groups. Our expectations build on the cognitive dissonance theory, which argues that individuals seek information that is consistent with their beliefs and behaviours. We argue that copartisans of the targeted party (i.e. those who identify with the targeted party) should find the attacks unjust and mobilize for their party. On the other hand, we expect that valence attacks should work as intended (and hurt the targeted party) for non-copartisans (i.e. those who do not identify with the targeted party).

We combine a new dataset on party valence discussions with survey data to test the effects of valence discussions on individual vote choice. The valence discussions are part of a larger data collection project, called the Comparative Campaign Dynamics dataset (Debus, Somer-Topcu, Tavits, 2016). Using newspaper articles from the one-month campaign period in eight European countries, human coders in each of our countries coded how parties discussed

each other's valence characteristics, along with other aspects of the campaign (such as parties' policy discussions, and journalists' framing of party policy positions). Using these data, we calculated how much each party was attacked on valence characteristics in each election campaign.

We combine these valence attacks data with survey data and show support for our copartisan hypothesis. Copartisans are more likely to reward their own party under attack. The effects, however, are not as hypothesized for non-copartisans. The results suggest that, on average, non-copartisans also award the targeted party (although the effect is not statistically significant). We then inquire about the varying effects of valence attacks on two different groups of non-copartisans. Separating non-copartisans into *nonpartisans* (i.e. those who do not identify with any party) and *outpartisans* (i.e. those who identify with rival parties), we show that while nonpartisans do not react to valence attacks, outpartisans are more likely to reward the targeted party.

These findings have important implications for several literatures. First, a growing comparative literature on campaign effects examines whether and how election campaigns affect voter behaviour (see, e.g., Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu 2017, Somer-Topcu, Tavits, and Baumann 2017). Most work in this literature, however, has focused on how *party policy positions* affect voter perceptions and behaviour. Valence discussions have received much less attention, mostly due to a lack of data. We fill this gap in the comparative literature.

Second, our findings also have important implications for the large and growing negative campaigning literature, which mainly focuses on the American case (see Lau et al. 2007 and Lau and Rovner 2009). As we detail below, there have been mixed findings in terms of how valence attacks affect party performance in the United States. Our findings suggest that being attacked

may not move nonpartisans, i.e. those who do not identify with a party and those the parties aim to win over in order to increase their vote shares. In that sense, one may argue that the strategy actually works to some extent: political parties would attack each other to highlight their rivals' negative traits. Nonpartisans do not punish the targeted party (as the attacking party would hope for), but they also do not mobilize in favour of the targeted party. The results, however, also suggest that copartisans are even more likely to support their own party in the elections when it is attacked, and more importantly, outpartisans across Europe also react to these attacks by indicating that they voted for the targeted party even though they identify with a different party. These results suggest that valence attacks are, on average, not a good strategy in Europe and benefit the targeted party.

Theory:

Political parties have different goals (Müller and Strøm 1999). Some may have office aspirations or survival concerns, and some may seek policy influence during the inter-election period while being the prime ministerial party, a coalition partner, or simply a pivotal party in the parliament forcing the hand of the government. Whatever the ultimate goal of the party is, at the end, all of them require votes. In order to increase votes, parties need to keep their existing supporters and attract new voters (from independents and other parties' supporters). Over the past 60-70 years an extant literature has developed examining the factors that shape voter behaviour, and how parties can affect voters' electoral choices strategically. The famous Downsian model, for instance, expects candidates in a two-party system to converge on the median voter position to maximize their vote shares, while parties in multi-party systems are expected to represent their distinct non-centrist issue areas to win votes (Downs 1957). More recent work in multiparty

elections suggest that political parties gain in the short-term by ideologically moving to the median voter position (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), although in the long-term, they seem to lose their core supporters with preferences away from the centre (Karreth et al. 2013). Others have argued that voters discount political parties' messages, and hence, more extreme positions away from the centre are more beneficial for party vote shares (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989, Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012).

Beyond spatial issue and ideological position taking, one other tool parties can use to influence voter behaviour during campaigns is valence discussions. While we have a large literature examining how voters use parties' *policy positions* for their vote choices, less is known on how parties' discussions of *valence characteristics*, that is, their policy or non-policy related traits, such as honesty, integrity, competence, and unity, affect voter behaviour.

To be clear, there is a quite extensive literature in the US that has burgeoned over the last two decades, which examines how negative campaign advertisements affect voter behaviour (see Lau and Rovner, 2009 for a summary of this literature, and Banda and Windett 2016 for a recent examination of the consequences of negative advertisements in the U.S.). However, this literature has so far almost solely focused on campaigns in the U.S. and the findings of observational and experimental studies on the consequences of negative campaigns are mixed. As reported by Lau et al. (2007), out of 43 studies examining the effects of negative campaigning on actual or intended vote choice, 12 reported that attacks decrease the vote shares of the targeted party with only four of them having statistically significant effects, and 28 reported that attackers are punished in the elections, with only six being statistically significant.

Compared to this U.S. literature there are only a handful of comparative studies that examine valence attacks. Walter (2014) and Walter, van der Brug and van Praag (2014) examine

when parties go negative in Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands. With a focus on the 2007 Scottish elections, Pattie et al. (2011) show that attacks can actually backfire and reduce the vote share of the attacker. Most relevant for our study, Jung and Tavits (2018) show that only voters with a left leaning ideological position punish their own parties when their parties get negatively attacked by other parties.² To summarize, there is a lot that we do not know about how negative valence discussions in Europe affect voter behaviour.

Should we expect valence attacks to hurt the targeted party's electoral performance? On the one hand, yes, we expect negative campaigns to work, i.e. harm the party that is the subject of the attack. After all, if negative campaigns do not work as intended, then why would candidates and parties spend their valuable campaign resources, such as money and time, on these attacks? Theoretically, as well, there are reasons to expect received valence attacks to harm the targeted party. We know that voters have limited knowledge about and minimal interest in politics (Converse 1964, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). However, in order to make informed decisions citizens must acquire a significant amount of information (Zaller 1992). Election campaigns provide this information. There is a growing literature that shows that campaigns help voters learn about party positions and that they then vote according to their newly acquired information (e.g., Fernandez-Vazquez 2014, Somer-Topcu, Tavits, Baumann 2017). If an election campaign provides voters with a significant amount of negative valence information

² We replicated our findings with a left ideology variable interaction, similar to Jung and Tavits's approach (2019). We do not find that leftists are more likely to punish the targeted party, although we note that we have a quite different sample than Jung and Tavits due to data limitations.

about a party, then it is likely that voters learn about these negative traits (regardless of whether these depictions of parties are accurate or not), and incorporate them in their voting decisions.

We therefore expect the targeted party to be punished in an election.

H1a: Valence attacks decrease the likelihood of voting for the targeted party.

Yet negativity may backfire if voters believe that valence attacks are unjust, untrue, or simply not necessary. Character attacks and incivility may mobilize otherwise unaffiliated or apolitical voters and encourage them to vote for the attacked party. Banda and Windett (2016) show that in the U.S. candidates that attack other candidates suffer in elections, which means in a two-party system the targeted candidate may benefit from these attacks. Anecdotal evidence suggests that political parties also consider this possibility in deciding whether to attack or not. One such example comes from the recent 2017 German federal election campaign. The German Social Democratic Party had an initial surge in the polls in January and February 2017 when they elected Martin Schulz as their new leader. However, this surge did not last long. As the party began losing support in the polls, it had to decide whether to attack the Christian Democrats and their leader, Angela Merkel. Feldenkirchen (2018) accompanied Schulz's campaign during this time and summarizes the events of those days. He reports that Schulz's advisors warned him explicitly that if they attacked Merkel, many people who are deciding between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats would vote for Merkel (p. 98). Merkel herself consistently avoided attacking Schulz personally during the campaign, much to the dismay of the Schulz campaign which was waiting for such a move.³

³ This example suggests that valence attacks are strategic. Political parties carefully assess potential consequences of attacking their rivals. We address this potential endogeneity concern in

H1b: Valence attacks increase the likelihood of voting for the targeted party.

The conditioning effects of partisanship:

We argue that these contradictory expectations are likely due to how different groups of voters react to valence attacks. For *copartisans* of the targeted party, i.e. those who identify with the targeted party, we may expect the valence attacks to increase their likelihood to vote for the party. We know from the political psychology literature that party supporters are more likely to discount political messages that are inconsistent with their beliefs and project their ideals onto their own party (Heider 1958). Copartisans, therefore, are likely to discount or flat out reject the valence attacks against their own party. In addition, it is likely that copartisans might be mobilized to vote for their party under attack. Martin (2004) argues that emotions, such as anxiety, which result from valence attacks, motivate participation. When opponents paint a party's valence traits in a negative light, this effort, as Martin argues, may raise fears among copartisans about their own party's electoral performance. All this would result in strengthening of their ties to their party, and increase the likelihood to vote for their own party for the copartisans (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995).

At the same time, we expect the valence attacks to hurt the targeted party especially for non-copartisans, i.e. those voters who do not identify with the targeted party. The information-environment argument we stated above, that attacks inform voters about the undesirable traits and characteristics of the targeted party, should especially apply to this group of voters. This is

the research design by adding performance indicators as control variables. When political parties engage in valence attacks is an interesting research question but beyond the scope of this paper. For a recent work examining this strategic behaviour, see Weitzel (2020).

because non-copartisans are likely to be less interested in the targeted party to start with, and hence know less about the party. Valence attacks in a high information campaign environment, therefore, would provide information about the negative traits of the rival party to individuals that have little prior knowledge and motivation to counter it.

Non-copartisans are also less likely to immediately reject negative information about a rival party, compared to copartisans. As the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) states, individuals seek consistency among their beliefs and behaviours. Hence, while voters are likely to reject or ignore the valence attacks against a party they identify with, accepting negative information is less cognitively costly for voters who do not have an attachment to that political party. We, therefore, expect non-copartisans to be more receptive to valence attacks and more likely to incorporate them in their assessment of a party. This, in turn, should decrease the likelihood to vote for the targeted party.

H2: Valence attacks increase (decrease) the likelihood that copartisans (non-copartisans) vote for the targeted party.

Research Design

To test our hypotheses, we need data on valence attacks, as well as survey data for our dependent variable, *vote choice*, and the conditioning variable, *copartisanship*. The valence data come from an original dataset on campaign rhetoric of political parties, the Comparative Campaign Dynamics (CCD) project (Debus, Somer-Topcu, and Tavits 2016). For the dataset, Debus et al. collected newspaper articles from ten European countries and 21 elections for the

one-month period before each election.⁴ We use eight of these countries and 15 of these elections in this paper due to the availability and accessibility of the survey and polling data.⁵

The newspaper articles come from the two highest circulating newspapers in each country, chosen to represent one centre-left-leaning and one centre-right-leaning newspaper. All election related front page articles, as well as a 5-10% random sample of the rest of the election articles, were gathered by country experts. From each newspaper at least 60 and at most 100 articles were collected for each election, yielding between 120-200 articles for every campaign covered. Three coders, who are native speakers of the respective language, coded each article using an extensive online questionnaire. Table 1 shows these countries, elections, and the newspaper coverage in each country in our data.

Table 1: Campaign Dynamics Data Coverage and Newspapers Used

Country	Years	Left-Leaning Daily	Right-Leaning Daily
Czech Rep.	2010, 2013	Právo	Mladá fronta Dnes
Denmark	2007, 2011	Politiken	Jyllands-Posten
Germany	2009, 2013	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Frankfurter Allgemeine
Poland	2007, 2011	Gazeta Wyborcza	Rzeczpospolita
Portugal	2009, 2011	Público	Jornal de Notícias
Spain	2008	El País	El Mundo
Sweden	2014	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet
UK	2005, 2010, 2015	The Guardian	The Daily Telegraph

⁴ Resource constraints limited the number of countries for which the media coverage data for our valence attacks measure was collected. Yet with our diverse case selection we ensure that we have variation across a number of potentially relevant contextual factors. Therefore, the cross-national analysis allows us to make generalizable inferences about all advanced democracies.

⁵ Both elections in Hungary and the Netherlands, the 2010 Swedish and 2011 Spanish elections are not part of the analysis because there is no survey data available, specific questions were not included in the available surveys, or polling data could not be collected.

The CCD project provides data on 1) how parties discuss their own and other parties' valence characteristics, 2) how parties discuss their own and other parties' issue positions, and 3) how newspapers and journalists frame parties' issue positions and valence characteristics. Relevant for this article is the first item, the data on valence statements by political parties about other parties.

Valence discussions are coded as follows. Each coder first identifies the subject party, i.e. the party that makes a statement via the newspaper article. Next, the coder is asked to evaluate whether the subject party discusses an issue position or a valence characteristic of another party. If the coder identifies the discussion of an issue position, they then are asked to indicate whether there is any valence characteristics discussion associated with that issue discussion. The coder is expected to evaluate whether the subject party discusses another party's valence issue- or nonissue-related valence in any of the following categories: 1) party's honesty/integrity, 2) party's competence/performance, 3) party's unity, 4) party leader's honesty/integrity/character, 5) party leader's competence/performance, or 6) party leader's charisma. Finally, the subject evaluates whether the specific valence characteristic is presented as positive or negative for the targeted party. As an example, the Daily Telegraph reported the following in the 2015 election campaign: "In a highly personal attack, Michael Fallon, the Defence Secretary, wrote in The Times that Mr Miliband has a "lust for power" and would betray Britain's defences just as he "stabbed his own brother in the back to become Labour leader" (Holehouse et al. 2015). The CCD codes this statement as the Conservative Party (the subject party in the article) discussing the Labour Party's (the targeted party) party leader's (Mr. Miliband) honesty/integrity/character

in a negative direction. The Appendix shows three snapshots of the online survey the coders used to code the issue-related and nonissue-related valence discussions.⁶

The *received valence attack* variable is then calculated by summing the negative party and leader valence discussions of the targeted party by all other parties (ω_{other}) and dividing this number by the total number of positive (α) or negative (ω) valence statements made by that party or made by other parties about that party.⁷

$$Received\ Valence\ Attack = \frac{\omega_{other}}{\alpha_{self} + \alpha_{other} + \omega_{self} + \omega_{other}}$$

For instance, during the one-month campaign period in the 2007 Danish parliamentary elections the Liberal Alliance party (LA) received a total of 26 valence attacks ($\omega_{other} = 26$). The party only made two negative self-valence statements ($\omega_{self} = 2$) but 15 positive self-valence statements ($\alpha_{self} = 15$). There were two positive valence statements made about the LA by other parties ($\alpha_{other} = 2$). The main independent variable, *received valence attack*, therefore, is coded as 0.578 for the LA in 2007. In our dataset valence attacks received by targeted parties

⁶ Three research assistants coded each article. For each coded statement, they also indicated how confident they were about that coding. When finalizing the data, only the responses on which either two or more assistants agreed (while being at least “mostly confident”), or on which at least one assistant provided a unique code and was “fully confident” in his/her coding were used.

⁷ If there are less than five total number of valence statement (about a party) then we exclude those parties from our analysis. We also replicated our results using an alternative, more restrictive, exclusion criterion and dropped all cases where there are less than 10 statements about a party. The results, which are reported in the Appendix, continue to support our conclusions.

constitute, on average, around 53% (SD 25%) of all valence campaign discussions during election campaigns.⁸

Our dependent variable is *vote choice*. We rely on the post-election surveys from each country and use the question, “which party did you vote for in the most recent election?” to identify the voters. Most post-election surveys come from waves 2-4 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset. Those survey data from the countries and elections that are not available via CSES were added separately. These were the British National Election Study 2010, the Danish National Election Study 2011, and the Portuguese National Election Study 2011. Our data are stacked, i.e. each respondent from each survey enters the data as many times as there are parties. The dependent variable, *vote choice*, then is coded 1 for the party the respondent voted for in the most recent election and 0 for all other party-respondent pairs.

To test our partisanship conditioning hypotheses, we rely on the same survey data we use for our dependent variable. *Copartisan* is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondents’ party identification matches the party in the party-election observation, *non-copartisan* is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent identifies with a different party than the focal party being attacked or if the person either indicated “none” for the partisanship question or left it missing in the survey.

We also control for several variables. First, we include two measures of party performance: how the party is polling at the beginning of the campaign data collection (*Party*

⁸ To note, the average received valence attack is 20% (SD 14%) of the whole campaign rhetoric across all of our elections in the data (out of all issue and valence discussions made through the campaign period).

performance) and how much the party's polling performance at the beginning of the campaign period has changed compared to the party's last election result ($\Delta Party\ performance$). The election result data come from the Comparative Manifesto Project dataset and our polling data are from Jennings and Wlezien (2016) and Pereira (2019). It is important that we control for these factors given that the extent of valence attacks a party receives are possibly a result of their performance. One may argue that larger parties and especially those that are gaining in the polls at the expense of others are more likely to receive valence attacks.

We also include the government variable ($Government_{(t-1)}$) coded 1 for parties that were in the last non-caretaker government before the election. We expect governing parties to be punished in the elections. We use ParlGov data (Döring and Manow 2016) to code this variable. Following the extant economic voting literature, where it is expected that governing parties that had poor economic performance in office are more likely to be punished, we include the change in unemployment rate variable ($\Delta Unemployment$), which is coded as the change in the unemployment rate from the month of the last election to the month of the current election, and its interaction with the government variable ($Government_{(t-1)} * \Delta Unemployment$). The data for the unemployment rates come from the International Labor Organization (2017).

At the respondent level we control for political knowledge, gender, and age, which we expect should affect vote choice. The knowledge variable (*Political knowledge*) is based on the knowledge batteries in the CSES and NES data. The number of knowledge items varies between the different election studies and ranges from 3 to 8 items. In order to have a comparable measure across our cases we constructed our political knowledge variable such that it is the amount of correct responses to three political knowledge questions. For NES with more than

three knowledge items an algorithm randomly selected three items for each individual.⁹ The *age* and *male* variables are from the CSES and NES, and the latter is coded such that 1 refers to male and 0 refers to female. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for our variables.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev.
Party-level variables				
Received valence attacks	0	0.84	0.53	0.18
Party Performance (at Campaign Start)	1.60	46.31	19.50	11.86
Δ Party Performance (Poll – Vote _{t-1})	-15.28	7.36	-0.74	5.16
Government _{t-1}	0	1	0.43	0.49
Individual-level variables				
Vote choice (DV)	0	1	0.20	0.40
Copartisan	0	1	0.15	0.36
Political knowledge	0	3	1.54	0.95
Age	18	106	51.21	17.35
Male	0	1	0.48	0.50
Country-level variables				
Δ Unemployment	-4.24	3.02	0.11	1.17

Note: Data set includes 16,467 individuals, 38 parties, eight countries, and 15 country-elections.

Because our main independent variable is at the party-level while our dependent variable is at the individual level, and because our dependent variable is a dummy variable, coded 1 if the person is voting for the focal party and 0 otherwise, we run multi-level logit models with random effects for the country-election level to test our hypotheses. We also add country fixed effects to our models to control for the effects of any unobserved country-specific variables.

⁹ The randomization is done for each survey respondent individually to mitigate potential issues with varying difficulty or complexity of knowledge items in the surveys.

Results:

Table 3 presents the results. Column 1 shows the results for all respondents, and Columns 2 and 3 show the effects of being attacked for copartisans and non-copartisans, respectively. To recap, we expect copartisans to rally behind their own party when it is attacked by other parties. We also expect non-copartisans to punish the targeted party. Since we are using multilevel logit models to model our binary dependent variable we report odds ratios. An odds ratio value above (below) 1 indicates increased (decreased) likelihood in the tables below.

Our key independent variable is the share of valence attacks received. Interpreting a coefficient for this variable (the effect of a one unit increase) is a change from no attacks received (the share is 0) to only attacks received (the share is 1). In the first column of Table 3 we can see that if the share of valence attacks a party receives goes from 0 to 1 voters are, on average, about 1.34 times more likely to vote for that party. The effect is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, recall that Model 1 pools all voters and we formulated expectations of distinctly different effects for copartisans and non-copartisans. It is possible that the results hide heterogeneous dynamics in subgroups of the electorate.

We test these different group dynamics (our second hypothesis) in Columns 2 and 3. As hypothesized, copartisans of the targeted party rally behind their own party. The coefficient 2.76 suggests that copartisans respond strongly to the valence attacks their party receives and are more likely to vote for their party. For the non-copartisans, on the other hand, the effect is not statistically significant. They appear not to respond to valence attacks on parties.

Table 3: The Effect of Valence Attacks on Vote Choice—Cross-National Analyses

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	All Partisans	Copartisans	Non-Copartisans
Received Valence Attacks (share)	1.34* (0.17)	2.76* (0.95)	1.25 (0.19)
Δ Party Performance	1.01 (0.00)	1.03* (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)
Party Performance	1.05* (0.00)	1.02* (0.01)	1.05* (0.00)
Copartisan	87.84* (3.22)		
Political Knowledge	0.90* (0.01)	0.97 (0.04)	0.89* (0.02)
Age	1.00* (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)
Male	0.92* (0.03)	0.91 (0.06)	0.91* (0.03)
Government _{t-1}	0.97 (0.04)	1.01 (0.11)	0.96 (0.05)
Δ Unemployment	0.86 (0.07)	0.91 (0.09)	0.85 (0.08)
Government _{t-1} * Δ Unemployment	1.08* (0.02)	0.89 (0.06)	1.11* (0.03)
Constant	0.03* (0.01)	1.58 (0.51)	0.03* (0.01)
Observations	69,559	10,698	58,861
Country-Elections	15	15	15

Note: Dependent variable is vote choice. Standard errors in parentheses. The models also include country fixed effects. Odds ratios reported. * $p < 0.05$

We argue that this null finding may be because of two possible reasons. First, the non-copartisans may be ignoring how much a rival party is being attacked. Their votes are affected by how much their own party is being targeted but they do not care about attacks on other parties when making their vote decisions. If this is correct, it contradicts our story that valence attacks educate otherwise non-interested respondents about other parties' traits. But there is a second possible explanation for this null finding. Non-copartisans are a diverse group of respondents. The broad group is composed of *outpartisans*, i.e. those who identify with a party other than the

targeted party, and *nonpartisans*, i.e. those who do not identify with any party. Is it possible that outpartisans and nonpartisans respond differently to attacks?

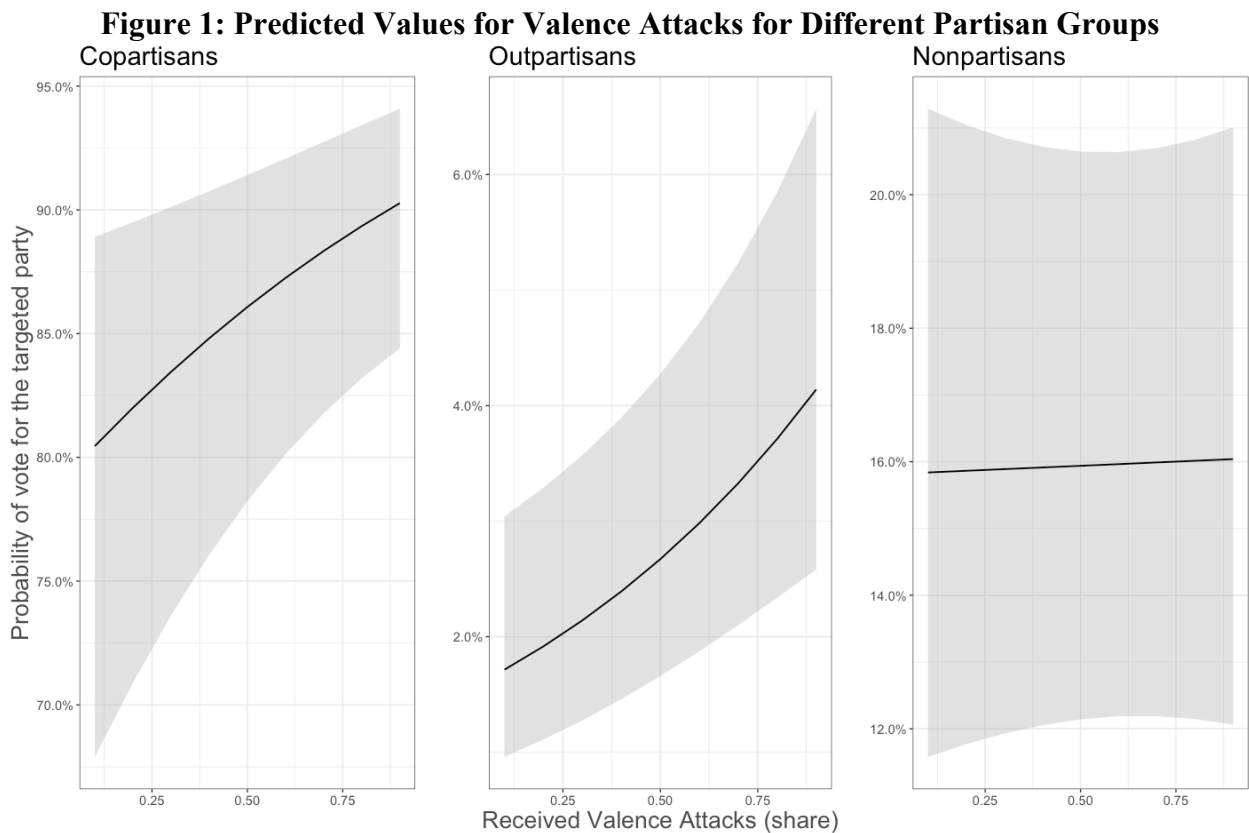
Table 4 shows the effects of being targeted by valence attacks on the vote choice of outpartisans and nonpartisans. The results are interesting. While outpartisans rally behind the targeted party nonpartisans appear not to take valence attacks into consideration. Outpartisans, voters that indicated that they identify with a different party than the targeted party, are more likely to cast their votes for the targeted party. They are three times more likely to vote for the targeted party when it receives only valence attacks than when it receives no valence attacks.

Table 4: Non-Copartisans examined more closely: Outpartisans and Nonpartisans Results

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)
	Model 4	Model 5
	Outpartisans	Nonpartisans
Received Valence Attacks (share)	3.10*	1.02
	(0.92)	(0.19)
Δ Party Performance	1.00	1.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Party Performance	1.01*	1.07*
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Political Knowledge	1.01	0.98
	(0.04)	(0.02)
Age	1.00*	1.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Male	0.93	0.96
	(0.06)	(0.04)
Government _{t-1}	0.91	0.98
	(0.09)	(0.06)
Δ Unemployment	0.90	0.79*
	(0.08)	(0.04)
Government _{t-1} * Δ Unemployment	1.41*	1.03
	(0.09)	(0.03)
Constant	0.02*	0.05*
	(0.00)	(0.01)
Observations	39,735	19,126
Country-Elections	15	15

Note: Dependent variable is vote choice. Standard errors in parentheses. The models also include country fixed effects. Odds ratios reported. * p<0.05

The coefficients in the table represent changes from one extreme to the other. Figure 1 is more nuanced and shows the predicted probabilities of voting for the targeted party for copartisans, outpartisans, and nonpartisans using the Column 2 from Table 3 for the copartisans graph, and Columns 1 and 2 from Table 4 for the outpartisan and nonpartisan graphs, respectively. If the received valence attacks increase from 35% to 71% of all valence discussions (from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean), the likelihood of voting for the targeted party increases by about four percentage points for copartisans (from about 84% probability to about 88% probability), one percentage point for outpartisans (from about 2% probability to 3% probability), and remains de facto constant for nonpartisans.



Notes: These graphs are generated using Column 2 of Table 3, and Columns 1 and 2 of Table 4.

Central for the relevance of our findings is the prevalence of co-, out-, and nonpartisans in the data. How many of the respondents in the survey data, for example, identify with a party but then vote for a different party? Table 5 shows the distribution of the different cases in our data.

Overall, as one might expect, most respondents vote for the party they identify with. However, there are significant number of people (9% of our sample) who identified with and then voted for different parties (outpartisans). 26% of our sample also did not indicate any partisanship but then voted for a party (nonpartisans). These numbers are not surprising given the growing literature on partisan dealignment across advanced democracies (see, e.g., Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg 2000). More importantly, these numbers suggest that our findings are meaningful.

Table 5: Partisanship and Voting Behaviour among the Sample of 16,467 respondents

Groups	Percentage of our sample
Partisans who voted for the party they identify with	65%
Respondents who identified with and voted for different parties	9%
Respondents who did not identify with any party but voted for a party	26%

One may argue that these results are not surprising given that political parties are more likely to attack a rival party when the rival is performing well. Hence the likelihood to vote for the party increases even among non-copartisans not because of the valence attacks but because they are performing better. However, for two reasons we argue that this is not the case. First, we control for party performance and change in party performance in the models, and still have statistically significant effects of the valence attacks on vote choice. Second, if this argument were true, then we should also see nonpartisans to be more likely to vote for the targeted party, in addition to

outpartisans. Our results show, however, that nonpartisans do not react to the attacks while outpartisans are more likely to vote for the targeted party.

Conclusion

While policy discussions dominate elections campaigns, political parties also discuss other parties' valence characteristics throughout campaigns. Using original data on valence discussions of parties during election campaigns in eight European countries over 15 elections, we showed that voters react to these discussions about how honest, unified, or competent the party or its leader is with their vote choice. While copartisans rally behind their party when it is attacked, nonpartisans do not react to valence attacks. Outpartisans, on the other hand, are also more likely to vote for the targeted party.

These results have important implications for our understanding of European voter behaviour and for the campaigns literature, as we described in the introduction section. In addition, these results have important implications for political parties as they decide on their campaign strategies. In the theory section we argued that political parties need votes to achieve their goals. Therefore, they aim to keep their supporters attached to the party and also try to attract independents and other parties' supporters to the party line. Being targeted by valence attacks helps with the first goal. Copartisans appear to be more motivated to vote for their own party under attack. At the same time, nonpartisans, from whom the party aims to recruit to its ranks, ignore valence attacks while outpartisans rally behind the target party. These results then suggest that political parties should carefully assess the possibility that some of their own partisans may shift ranks to vote for the targeted party, and copartisans would be mobilized to vote for their own party.

There are other questions that are left open and require a more detailed look in the near future. First, we have not answered the question of when and why political parties decide to resort to nonissue-related valence discussions. Second, we do not know whether the effects of valence discussions on performance are the same for different types of parties. Are governing parties more likely to be punished if they use self-praises? Do opposition parties benefit from valence attacks on governing parties? Are there differences between niche versus mainstream parties in terms of how they benefit from valence discussions? We leave these interesting questions to future research.

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Appendix

Valence Attacks and Vote Choice in Europe

Appendix 1: Online Survey used by the Comparative Campaign Dynamics Project

<p>Does the subject of the article you identified discuss any issue positions or valence characteristics of another party, of the government or of the establishment? <i>* must provide value</i></p>	<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Note that if the subject discusses another party's leader or member of the parliament etc. you should still code this as "Yes" and code the party of that leader/member in the next question. If the subject refers to the "government" determine who was in government that year and code the party accordingly.</p> <p>reset</p>
<p>If the subject talks about another party or the government, identify the first (or the only) other actor it talks about?</p>	<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Labour Party <input type="radio"/> Liberal Democratic Party <input type="radio"/> Conservative Party <input type="radio"/> UKIP <input type="radio"/> Scottish National Party <input type="radio"/> Establishment</p> <p>reset</p>
<p>Does the subject refer to an issue position of this other actor? <i>* must provide value</i></p>	<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>reset</p>
<p>What is the first (or the only) issue the subject refers to for the other actor?</p>	<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Taxes <input type="radio"/> Social Policy/Public Services <input type="radio"/> Inflation <input type="radio"/> Unemployment <input type="radio"/> Other Economic Performance <input type="radio"/> Centralization vs. Regional Autonomy <input type="radio"/> Environment <input type="radio"/> Immigration, Asylum <input type="radio"/> Justice System <input type="radio"/> Law and Order, Security, Terrorism <input type="radio"/> National Way of Life, Patriotism <input type="radio"/> Traditional Morality, Family Values, Religion <input type="radio"/> Europe/European Union <input type="radio"/> Internationalism (not EU) <input type="radio"/> Foreign Intervention <input type="radio"/> Agriculture/Rural Affairs <input type="radio"/> Other Issue</p> <p>"Social policy/public services" is an umbrella category on welfare state related policies that includes (but is not limited to) sub-issues such as: Social services, Education, Social security, Health care, Public housing, Public transportation, Childcare, Family policies (e.g., maternity leave, Elderly care, Minimum wage</p> <p>reset</p>
<p>Issue direction</p>	<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> -1 <input type="radio"/> 0 (status quo; no clear position taken/vague; or just mentions the issue) <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 99 (takes a contradictory position)</p> <p>Refer to your notes to decide how to code this variable</p> <p>reset</p>
<p>How confident are you with your answer to the questions so far about the issue you identified above? <i>* must provide value</i></p>	<p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Fully confident <input type="radio"/> Somewhat confident <input type="radio"/> Not confident</p> <p>reset</p>

<p>When the subject discusses the other actor's position on the issue you identified above, does the subject refer to any valence characteristics of this other actor?</p>	<p> <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p> <p>Valence includes references to party/leader honesty, integrity, character, competence, performance; party unity; leader charisma. You should answer this question "yes" only if the subject is clearly and openly saying that they are the competent, unified, honest etc. party/leader to deal with that issue. If they do not clearly discuss their competence, integrity etc. when discussing this specific issue, say no.</p>
<p>What is the valence content?</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est honesty/integrity/character <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est (past, current, future) competence/performance <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est unity <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est other valence dimension <input checked="" type="radio"/> Leader honesty/integrity/character <input type="radio"/> Leader (past, current, future) competence/performance <input type="radio"/> Leader charisma <input type="radio"/> Leader other valence dimension <input type="radio"/> Other target actor (e.g., an MP of the party, the deputy leader, a minister etc.) </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p>
<p>Is the valence category referred to in a negative or positive light?</p>	<p> <input checked="" type="radio"/> negative direction <input type="radio"/> neutral <input type="radio"/> positive direction </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p>
<p>When the subject discusses the position of the other actor on the issue you identified above, does the subject refer to a second valence characteristic of the party/government/establishment?</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p> <p>Valence includes references to party/leader honesty, integrity, character, competence, performance; party unity; leader charisma. You should answer this question "yes" only if the subject is clearly and openly saying that they are the competent, unified, honest etc. party/leader to deal with that issue. If they do not clearly discuss their competence, integrity etc. when discussing this specific issue, say no.</p>
<p>How confident are you with your answers to the issue-related valence questions? * must provide value</p>	<p> <input checked="" type="radio"/> Fully confident <input type="radio"/> Somewhat confident <input type="radio"/> Not confident </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p>
<p>Does the subject talk about the other actor's valence (the actor you identified above) without any specific reference to an issue position? * must provide value</p>	<p> <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p> <p>Note that if the subject is saying that the other party is (in)competent/(dis)unified etc. to deal with a particular issue, you should have already coded it above as an issue category. This question should be answered as "yes" only if the subject says that the other actor is (in)competent, (dis)unified, (dis)honest, (not) charismatic etc. WITHOUT a reference to any specific issue positions</p>
<p>First (or Only) Valence Content</p>	<p> <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est honesty/integrity/character <input checked="" type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est (past, current, future) competence/performance <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est unity <input type="radio"/> Party/Govt/Est other valence dimension <input type="radio"/> Leader honesty/integrity/character <input type="radio"/> Leader (past, current, future) competence/performance <input type="radio"/> Leader charisma <input type="radio"/> Leader other valence dimension <input type="radio"/> Other target actor (e.g., an MP of the party, the deputy leader, a minister etc.) </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p>
<p>Is the valence category referred to in a negative or positive light?</p>	<p> <input checked="" type="radio"/> negative direction <input type="radio"/> neutral <input type="radio"/> positive direction </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p>
<p>How confident are you with your answer for identifying the questions related to this valence content? * must provide value</p>	<p> <input checked="" type="radio"/> Fully confident <input type="radio"/> Somewhat confident <input type="radio"/> Not confident </p> <p style="text-align: right;">reset</p>

Appendix 2: Statement Threshold at 10 Valence Statements

The models in Table 3 and 4 of our article have a valence statement threshold of at least five statements. In this appendix we increase the threshold. Instead of at least five statements we set the threshold at least ten statements that needed to be made about a party. The results in Appendix 2 Table 1 and Appendix 2 Table 2 below report the odds ratios. The results are very similar to the results we report in the text.

Appendix 2 Table 1: The Effect of Valence Attacks on Vote Choice—Cross-National Analyses with 10 Statement Threshold

VARIABLES	(1) Model 1 All Partisans	(2) Model 2 Copartisans	(3) Model 3 Non-Copartisans
Received Valence Attacks (share)	1.32 (0.19)	4.59* (1.78)	1.12 (0.18)
Δ Party Performance	1.01 (0.00)	1.03* (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)
Party Performance	1.05* (0.00)	1.02* (0.01)	1.05* (0.00)
Copartisan	86.28* (3.27)		
Political Knowledge	0.91* (0.02)	0.97 (0.04)	0.90* (0.02)
Age	1.00* (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)
Male	0.92* (0.03)	0.92 (0.06)	0.92* (0.03)
Government _{t-1}	0.93 (0.04)	0.97 (0.11)	0.93 (0.05)
Δ Unemployment	0.87 (0.08)	0.94 (0.09)	0.86 (0.08)
Government _{t-1} * Δ Unemployment	1.08* (0.02)	0.87 (0.06)	1.11* (0.03)
Constant	0.03* (0.01)	1.05 (0.37)	0.04* (0.01)
Observations	63,759	10,008	53,751
Number of groups	15	15	15

Note: Dependent variable is vote choice. Standard errors in parentheses. The models also include country fixed effects. Odds ratios reported. * p<0.05. Statement threshold is >9.

Appendix 2 Table 2: Non-Copartisans examined more closely: Outpartisans and Nonpartisans results with 10 Statement Threshold

VARIABLES	(1) Model 4	(2) Model 5
Received Valence Attacks (share)	3.41* (1.17)	0.87 (0.17)
Δ Party Performance	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)
Party Performance	1.01* (0.00)	1.06* (0.00)
Political Knowledge	1.00 (0.04)	0.99 (0.02)
Age	0.99* (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)
Male	0.96 (0.06)	0.96 (0.04)
Government _{t-1}	0.93 (0.10)	0.94 (0.06)
Δ Unemployment	0.91 (0.08)	0.80* (0.05)
Government _{t-1} * Δ Unemployment	1.38* (0.08)	1.04 (0.03)
Constant	0.01* (0.00)	0.06* (0.02)
Observations	35,939	17,812
Country-Elections	15	15

Note: Dependent variable is vote choice. Standard errors in parentheses. The models also include country fixed effects. Odds ratios reported. * p<0.05. Statement threshold is >9