



REACHING THE UNINTERESTED BY REFERRING TO VALENCE TRAITS DURING ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

DOCIERANIE DO NIEZAINTERESOWANYCH PRZEZ ODWOŁYWANIE SIĘ DO CECH WALENCYJNYCH PODCZAS KAMPANII WYBORCZYCH

Wojciech Rafałowski* 

— ABSTRACT —

Successful communication requires the sender of the message to adjust its content to the cognitive abilities of the receiver. Messages that are too complex or not interesting can be easily ignored. Failing to reach the voters with a message during a campaign is troubling for the parties competing in the election. In this study, I explore whether parties in countries in which the voters are less politically sophisticated are more inclined to emphasize their valence traits during campaigns – as these are deemed to be more cognitively accessible – at the expense of discussions of their policy propositions. The results obtained using data collected in ten European democracies show that parties in countries where the general public is less interested in politics tend to devote more attention to exhibiting their valence traits, especially honesty. The level of education of the electorate is not relevant to the relative salience of valence.

Keywords: competence; honesty; valence campaigning; political sophistication; interest in politics

— ABSTRAKT —

Efektywna komunikacja wymaga od nadawcy dostosowania wiadomości do możliwości poznawczych odbiorcy. Wiadomości, które są zbyt złożone lub mało interesujące, mogą łatwo zostać zignorowane. Niemożność dotarcia z przekazem do wyborców podczas kampanii stanowi problem dla startujących w wyborach partii. W niniejszym opracowaniu badam, czy partie w krajach, w których wyborcy są mniej wyrobieni politycznie, są bardziej skłonne do eksponowania swoich cech walencyjnych podczas kampanii, które uważa się za bardziej dostępne poznawczo, kosztem ich propozycji politycznych. Wyniki uzyskane na podstawie danych zebranych w dziesięciu demokracjach europejskich pokazują, że partie w krajach, w których opinia publiczna jest mniej zainteresowana polityką, poświęcają więcej uwagi cechom walencyjnym, zwłaszcza uczciwości. Poziom wykształcenia elektoratu nie ma znaczenia dla eksponowania cech walencyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencja; uczciwość; kampania walencyjna; wyrobienie polityczne; zainteresowanie polityką

* University of Warsaw, Faculty of Sociology.

INTRODUCTION

Addressing voters with messages that have been, first, tailored to them based on their position in the socio-economic structure, interests, and attitudes – and, second, adjusted to fit the context of the competition – has become a universal strategy employed by parties competing for office in contemporary democracies (see, e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994; Kolczyński, 2008; Adams, Haupt, & Stoll, 2009; Spoon & Klüver, 2014; Tavits & Potter, 2015). Depending on the views held by voters as well as on the social and demographic characteristics of the electorate, and the economic and institutional context, parties decide on the issues they want to emphasize, the positions they take, and the means they employ to control their image. It has been confirmed that parties are more likely to emphasize issues that are important to their voters (Aldrich & Griffin, 2003, p. 247; Spoon & Klüver, 2014), and to generate emotional tensions (Kaplan, Park, & Ridout, 2006). Parties also devote more attention in their manifestoes to, first, economy, if the income inequalities are high, and, second, to social issues if there are salient social divisions in the society (see, e.g., Tavits & Potter, 2015). They are also responsive to specific issues that arise in the media discourse even outside of the immediate period of the pre-electoral campaign (Rafałowski, 2020).

The level of the society's political sophistication, which translates into the voters' ability to process certain types of political messages, as well as their willingness to even pay attention to them is believed to be one of the more important factors influencing attitude formation and electoral behavior (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986; Lau, 1989; Zaller, 1992; Enns & Kellstedt, 2008; DeWitt, 2012; van der Heijden, & Verkuyten, 2020). Despite its significance for the processes of political reasoning and voting, political sophistication remains one of the understudied prerequisites for parties choosing certain campaigning strategies. This article is aimed at filling this gap in research. When addressing those who would not listen or are not able to process the majority of political issues, parties should adjust the contents of their message accordingly. This assumption is a point of departure for the current study.

Based on the evidence presented by Pierce (1993) and DeWitt (2012), as well as on the arguments put forward by Lau (1989), I assume that policy postulates are less cognitively accessible and, therefore, more difficult to comprehend, which is due to the fact that legitimate arguments can be developed both for and against every proposition. On the other hand, valence traits, such as competence or honesty, are easier for cognitive processing because of their straightforward

positive or negative evaluation. Therefore, they should be brought up by parties more often whenever voters are less politically sophisticated (Pierce, 1993). This expectation constitutes the general hypothesis of the study, which – using the Comparative Campaign Dynamics Dataset (CCDD; Debus, Somer-Topcu, & Tavits, 2018) – I test based on party statements published in newspapers in the last thirty days of electoral campaigns in ten European countries between 2005 and 2015. The data analysis confirms the expectations associated with the indicators of interest in politics of the given society, and disproves the ones regarding the consequences of the electorate’s cognitive capacities on the strategic use of valence. Parties are more inclined to emphasize their valence characteristics at the expense of policy arguments when fewer people are interested in politics and the expected turnout is low. In particular, it is low interest in politics that contributes to the relative saliences of arguments pertaining to honesty, while low electoral turnout incentivizes parties to discuss competence.

The article is structured as follows. The first two parts summarize the existing research and theoretical approaches to the notions of political sophistication and valence, while the third part discusses the mechanism that links them as well as formulates the tested hypotheses. The fourth section introduces the CCDD and describes how the data was used and what additional information on political parties and their social and economic context was collected. Then, data analysis follows. The final part summarizes and discusses the results.

POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The concept of political sophistication has been introduced into studies of electoral behavior in order to explain the diversity in the ways individuals process political notions such as ideological appeals, make sense of them, and decide who to support in elections (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964). Luskin (1990) explains that “a person is politically sophisticated to the extent to which his or her political cognitions are numerous, cut a wide substantive swath, and are highly organized, or ‘constrained’” (p. 332). Gordon and Segura (1997, p. 127) assume that “individual levels of sophistication are the product of choices which are driven by a contextual incentive structure”. A recent study by Coffé and von Schoultz (2021, p. 141) equates political sophistication with the extent to which a person has “knowledge of political activities, understands and assimilates political information, and forms political views”.

Feld and Grofman (1988) argue that while individuals may not be politically sophisticated, democracy is secure, because sophistication is a “collective phenomenon” (Gordon & Segura, 1997; see also: Skarżyńska, 2005). In the pioneer studies by Campbell et al. (1960, p. 193), sophisticated voters were the ones who had taken ideology into consideration when making voting decisions to a greater extent than concerning only their party identification. This was a result of their ability to make abstract sense of political events (see also: Knight, 1985, p. 830). Sophisticated voters are usually believed to be less susceptible to priming (Iyengar et al., 1984; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). It is worth noting, however, that political sophistication is argued to have an opposite effect, because priming requires the person to be able to receive, interpret, and store new information in their memory (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Goidel, Shields, and Peffley (1997) have demonstrated that political awareness resulting in greater openness to receiving new information among Democrats is associated with greater disapproval of the economic performance of the President. Republicans seem to be resistant to the effects of negative economic news coverage. This remains in line with a similar study by Gomez and Wilson (2001, p. 899).

Recent articles on political sophistication have also demonstrated its impact on conventional and unconventional political participation (Chrona & Capelos, 2017), the level of congruence between voter policy preferences and party positions (Boonen, Pedersen, & Hooghe, 2017), and citizens’ preferences regarding economic policies when the country faces an economic crisis (Kölln, 2018). Interestingly, the less sophisticated voters are more likely to support austerity measures, while the more sophisticated ones support anti-cyclical economic policies that can be linked to the ideas of John Maynard Keynes, as they are cognitively better equipped to recognize the complexities of societal needs during a financial crisis (Kölln, 2018, p. 197). Those politically sophisticated are also better at recognizing credible sources of information on corruption (Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2017) as well as at avoiding falling for false information (Vegetti & Mancosu, 2020), both of which are important qualities of a citizen in the post-truth reality of the 21st century.

Contrary to some well-founded expectations, political sophistication does not seem to influence whether voters build their preferences for party positions in the policy space based on proximity-based or directional considerations (Macdonald, Rabinowitz, & Listhaug, 1995, p. 473). Goren (2004, p. 462) shows that “beliefs about equal opportunity, self-reliance, and limited government in the social welfare domain and about militarism and anticommunism in the foreign

policy domain are structured coherently and equivalently in the minds of citizens at different levels of sophistication”. This contradicts the belief grounded in political science since the works of Campbell et al. (1960), who linked the ability to infer policy preferences from abstract principles with political sophistication. Similarly, Enns and Kellstedt (2008) demonstrate that the sophistication does not affect the pace in which individuals change their minds on political issues. Dalton (2021) argues that both less sophisticated voters and more sophisticated voters can make decisions that match their opinions well.

For the purposes of this study, I follow the conceptualizations of political sophistication by Gordon and Segura (1997) and DeWitt (2012). Gordon and Segura (1997, p. 129) distinguish three components of political sophistication: “(1) means, or sufficient cognitive capacity; (2) motive, or incentives toward collecting and using accurate political information; and (3) opportunity, or the availability of the aforementioned information”. In a similar manner, DeWitt (2012) distinguishes three inter-related dimensions: (1) political knowledge, (2) political interest, and (3) media exposure to political news. “Political Knowledge refers to the degree to which an individual receives, comprehends, and is able to recall specific information about the political environment surrounding the presidential campaign” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 275). “Political Interest refers to the degree to which an individual is motivated to seek out political information and pay attention to news about the political campaign” while “Media Exposure refers to the degree to which an individual is exposed to information through the mass media (television and newspapers) during the campaign season” (DeWitt, 2012, p. 276). The author also recognizes political knowledge to be closely connected to education level (see also: Campbell et al., 1960; Price, 1999; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fiske, Lau, & Smith, 1990), which is often used as an acceptable proxy measure for one’s sophistication (Krause, 1997; Miller et al., 1986; Converse, 1975).

In other words, in order to process information communicated to them during the electoral campaign, voters need to have the suitable cognitive capacity, be engaged in the campaign enough to pay attention, and have access to the media which transfer the messages to them. This conceptualization remains in line with the Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model of public opinion formation proposed by Zaller (1992, pp. 42–51). Political sophistication influences the selection of information accepted by citizens and used when making their voting decisions.

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, political sophistication influences numerous aspects of how political preferences are formed. Therefore,

political competitors who recognize the existence of those mechanisms should be able to adjust the content of their electoral appeals to the cognitive capacity of the electorate as well as its motivation to receive the information. Based on this assumption as well as on the consequences of political sophistication for attitude formation, I propose that when the political sophistication of the electorate remains at low levels, parties are incentivized to put greater emphasis on their valence characteristics at the expense of discussing policy.

VALENCE CAMPAIGNING

The concept of valence was put forward by Donald Stokes (1963, 1992), although the most common understanding of the notion in the existing literature slightly differs from the original proposition. Stokes defined the term as a dimension of politics “on which parties or leaders are differentiated not by what they advocate, but by the degree to which they are linked in the public’s mind with conditions or goals or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves” (1992, p. 143). In this study, I follow a more contemporary approach, i.e., one that was proposed by Clark (2009), whose concept of valence embraces general characteristics of parties or candidates which refer to “non-policy related aspects, namely parties’ images with respect to competence, integrity, and unity”. This definition excludes policy issues such as corruption or economic growth, on which citizens are supposed to agree, but which might be, in fact, controversial. Miller et al. (1986, p. 528) identified the following types of non-programmatic characteristics of political candidates: (1) competence, (2) integrity, (3) reliability (which they deem similar to integrity), (4) charisma, and (5) the personal dimension encompassing traits such as age and health or their background factors, e.g., military experience or religion. For the purposes of studying parties’ campaigning rhetoric, this typology was simplified due to the indistinguishability of reliability from both competence and integrity and the irrelevance of the personal dimension for political organizations (Baumann & Gross, 2016). In the current study, I focus on competence, which is one’s capability to enact their intentions regardless of what these are (Carrier et al., 2014, p. 348); it is related to a party’s ability to govern in an honest and competent way, as well as to honesty itself, which implies ruling the country in accordance with the law and the society’s ethical principles (see discussion in: Sayans-Jiménez, Rojas Tejada, & Cuadrado Guirado, 2017). I believe that these two are the crucial characteristics of a good

government, as references to these two categories of traits encompass over 90% of valence references in the studied dataset, with other features being leader charisma and party unity.

Unlike explaining the emphasis put on policy issues by political competitors (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Riker, 1993; Petrocik, 1996; Holian, 2004), devoting campaigning efforts to promoting one's own valence characteristics has received very little scholarly attention. Studies by Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2009, 2020), Bleck and van de Walle (2013), and Adams, Scheiner, and Kawasumi (2016) demonstrate that incumbents are the ones who remain vague regarding their policy propositions as they concentrate on the performance of their outgoing government. None of these studies, however, tests this expectation in a comparative setting. Rafałowski (2021) shows that parties' expectations regarding the electoral results based on pre-electoral polls significantly influence their emphasis on competence. It is also argued that valence campaigning can be affected by the level of programmatic differentiation across the parties, which is assumed to be higher in larger party systems (Green, 2007). Moreover, Bleck and van de Walle (2013, p. 1398) suggest that "the predilection for broad general valence competition is reinforced by the newness of electoral systems, the inexperience of parties, and the resulting uncertainty facing individual politicians", and thus can influence the intensity of valence campaigning.

The underpinnings of campaigning based on references to valence characteristics have been thoroughly analyzed only in regard to negative campaigning. It has been demonstrated that challengers (in comparison to incumbents), Republicans (vs. Democrats), and candidates operating in two-party settings are more inclined to criticize their competitors than what is the case in multiparty systems (Lau & Pomper, 2002; Hassell & Oeltjenbruns, 2016; Sanders & Norris, 2005; Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995). None of the publications studies the link between political sophistication of the electorate and valence campaigning. The current study is aimed at partially closing this gap.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AND VALENCE CAMPAIGNING

The hypotheses tested in this study regarding the relationship between the level of the electorate's political sophistication and parties' inclination to discuss their valence traits during an electoral campaign are primarily based on the findings

of the study published by Pierce (1993). It demonstrates that voters' political sophistication affects their perception and evaluation of candidates' personal traits. Namely, policy postulates are less cognitively accessible and thus more difficult to comprehend, which is due to the fact that legitimate arguments can be developed both for and against every proposition. In order to evaluate the validity of these arguments, voters need to understand how particular policies translate into their personal lives as well as what they mean for the society in general. Valence traits, however, are easier for cognitive processing due to their straightforward positive or negative evaluation, and thus should be brought up by parties more often if voters are less politically sophisticated (Pierce, 1993). It should be noted that a similar distinction based on cognitive accessibility of raised arguments can be made between easy and hard policy issues (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). Not all issues are equally complicated. Some of them are so strongly embedded in the popular consciousness – and thus accessible – that voters faced with a choice associated with these issues can make up their minds almost instantly by means of following the so-called “gut reasoning” (Popkin, 2020, p. 7). According to Carmines and Stimson (1980, p. 86), easy issues (1) are rather symbolic than technical, (2) deal with policy ends rather than means, and (3) have been on the political agenda for a long time. Following the logic built on the results obtained by Pierce (1993), parties should be expected to emphasize easy issues when the political sophistication of the electorate is low. Rafałowski (2018) demonstrates, however, that the emotional tension among the electorate that limits the cognitive capacity of the voters close to the election day leads parties to emphasize issues that become cognitively accessible due to their relationship with the socio-economic and cultural context of the competition instead of simply choosing the issues that seem objectively ‘easy’.

The link between political sophistication and making decisions based on either valence traits or policy issues had been studied by scholars long before Pierce's article was published. In his seminal works, Converse (1964) suggested that “better-educated people are more likely to focus on policy concerns rather than on non-substantive topics such as the candidates' personal features” (Miller et al., 1986, p. 522), which he deemed to be “irrational”. Contradictory results were obtained by Miller et al. (1986, p. 530), who concluded that “higher education is found to be correlated with a greater likelihood of using personality categories rather than with making issue statement”. They, however, argue that this tendency can be explained by the fact that better-educated people simply focus on the traits which are indeed important for the quality of governance, such as competence,

integrity, and reliability, rather than personal traits such as age or gender (Miller et al., 1986, p. 533; for further discussion see: Lau, 1989).

Converse's original proposition about the relationship between political sophistication and criteria used by voters when evaluating political candidates was corroborated by numerous studies in the 1990s and the 2000s. Macdonald et al. (1995, p. 473) note that "sophistication makes a difference – not in the way people use issues, but in the extent to which they use issues. Sophisticated voters are more aware of issue information and more readily incorporate it in their decision making". Goren (1997, p. 387) shows that increasing political expertise leads to higher levels of sociotropic, ideological, and policy voting. Studies published by DeWitt (2012) and Coffé and von Schoultz (2021) lead to the conclusion that while the less politically sophisticated are indeed more likely to base their decisions on valence traits than more knowledgeable and engaged voters, valence traits are not created equal. Traits that are truly important for the quality of government are taken into account by the sophisticated in their decision-making.

The hypotheses formulated in the remainder of this section rely on the assumption that parties adjust the contents of their campaigning messages to the conditions in which they operate (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994; Adams et al., 2009; Spoon & Klüver, 2014; Tavits & Potter, 2015). I expect that these conditions also influence the likelihood of the parties' emphasizing valence traits (see: Green, 2007; Rafałowski, 2021). I formulate my hypotheses separately for each of the two dimensions of political sophistication, namely (1) cognitive capacities on the one hand and (2) political interest on the other. In the analysis, I do not study the consequences of media access due to the limitations of the sample. The available data encompasses digital and literate societies of Western and Central Europe in the early 21st century, which is why the studied electoral campaigns do not differ sufficiently with regard to this aspect. However, since the availability of information is related to the competitiveness of the election (Gordon & Segura, 1997, p. 131) and the institutional setting, I control for party system fragmentation and the type of electoral system in the analysis. Nonetheless, the significance of this dimension of political sophistication should not be underestimated, as even individuals living in developed European countries differ with regard to their access to media. This link has been explained well by the RAS model (Zaller, 1992). It, simply, cannot be included in the current analysis, which is limited to studying differences among countries and campaigns as wholes.

My empirical expectations are also based on the assumption that political parties that are constructing their campaigning rhetoric obtain the relevant

knowledge about the level of political sophistication of the electorate. I further discuss this question in the “Data and variables” section, as it is important for selecting the most appropriate empirical indicators. The hypotheses are formulated in general theoretical terms for each of the two dimensions of political sophistication, and tested using relevant indicators in relation to valence in general as well as with regard to competence and honesty:

H1: Parties devote more attention to valence traits in countries where the electorate’s cognitive capacities are lower.

H2: Parties devote more attention to valence traits in countries where the electorate’s level of interest in politics is lower.

The theoretical rationale behind these hypotheses is as follows. References to valence traits are easier for cognitive processing by the voters, which is why political parties use them when they perceive the electorate as less capable to understand complicated arguments related to policy issues. Due to their simplicity, arguments pertaining to valence traits are also more likely to reach those citizens who are not interested in politics, and encourage them to engage themselves in the election by paying attention to the campaign and vote.

DATA AND VARIABLES

The empirical analysis was conducted using the Comparative Campaign Dynamics Dataset (Debus et al., 2018) created as a part of the ‘Where Is My Party? Determinants of Voter Agreement about the Ideological Positions of Political Parties’ project, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and appended with additional data about competing parties, countries, and elections. The main data was collected in a process of the comprehensive coding of the contents of press articles released in the last month before the elections in ten European countries: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom between 2005 and 2015. It is worth noting that this period encompasses the most serious economic crisis in Europe since the 1930s, which makes campaigning by referring to traits important to the formation of a good government particularly relevant. In order to represent the variety of political systems among European countries, the countries for the study were selected based on criteria such as population size, party system fragmentation, electoral system, time since democratization, and welfare state type. In each of the countries, data on two elections was gathered,

except for the UK, whose three elections were included. In each country, one right-leaning and one left-leaning daily newspaper was selected among those with the highest circulation (for details, see: Table 1, as well as Baumann & Gross, 2016). For each newspaper during every included electoral campaign, at least 60 articles were coded, which makes a total of at least 240 articles for each of the countries. All first-page headlines related to the campaign were coded along with a random sample of articles from further pages. The press articles were coded with regard to their policy- and valence-related contents in the parties' campaign messages. Coding rules and original data structure have both been described by Baumann and Gross (2016). The data has already been used in other publications (e.g., Baumann, Debus, & Gross, 2019; Somer-Topcu, Tavits, & Baumann, 2020).

Table 1. Countries, Daily Newspapers, and Elections Included in the CCDD

| Country | Daily newspapers | | Years of the election | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------|------|
| the Czech Republic | Mladá fronta Dnes | Právo | | 2010 | 2013 |
| Denmark | Jyllands-Posten | Politiken | | 2007 | 2011 |
| Germany | Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung | Süddeutsche Zeitung | | 2009 | 2013 |
| Hungary | Magyar Nemzet | Népszabadság | | 2006 | 2010 |
| the Netherlands | De Telegraaf | De Volkskrant | | 2010 | 2012 |
| Poland | Gazeta Wyborcza | Rzeczpospolita | | 2007 | 2011 |
| Portugal | Jornal de Notícias | Público | | 2009 | 2011 |
| Spain | El Mundo | El País | | 2008 | 2011 |
| Sweden | Aftonbladet | Dagens Nyheter | | 2010 | 2014 |
| the United Kingdom | The Guardian | The Daily Telegraph | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |

Source: Baumann & Gross (2016, p. 7).

Main variables and data structure

References to the following valence traits were coded: party and leader competence/performance, party and leader honesty/character, party unity, and leader charisma along with a residual category used to other valence mentions. Only those claims made by politicians about their own party were included in the analysis. The primary dependent variable does not differentiate between the traits

and disregards whether the claim was made in relation to a concrete policy issue or whether it pertained to general valence. The two remaining dependent variables used in the analysis denote references made to competence and honesty respectively, which constitute the vast majority of all references to valence in the dataset. Claims including references to a trait denoted by the variable (i.e., either competence or honesty) were coded as '1', while all other claims, i.e., those related to policy and remaining valence traits, were coded as '0'.

After the data on statements had been collected and coded, it was aggregated to the party level so that each observation could represent a party during a single electoral campaign. Therefore, the 'Valence', 'Competence', and 'Honesty' dependent variables simply represent fractions of references made by the party to respective traits among all the statements included in the dataset for that party during an electoral campaign; they were calculated as a mean of the original dummy variables. Thus, parties represent the level-1 observations. Each party's behavior was being investigated during certain pre-electoral campaigns embedded within the country's institutional and social context. The elections are level-2 observations. Accounting for the data structure requires the use of a multilevel modeling strategy with random intercepts. For the purposes of the study, I employ a linear model, which enables a straightforward interpretation of the estimated coefficients.

For the purpose of representing the two dimensions of political sophistication, namely cognitive capacities of the electorate and its interest in politics, in the empirical part of the study I employ two indicators per dimension. Their selection is determined by the criteria of theoretical relevance and data availability. It also takes into account the assumption that politicians campaigning on behalf of parties are aware of how politically-sophisticated the citizens are. Thus, the indicators need to be simple and available to the general public. Taking this criterion into account means that variables that under other circumstances would be considered imperfect proxy measures might, in fact, work better than those which remain more faithful to the original concept of political sophistication.

In the literature, two types of indicators of citizens' cognitive capacities are present: a direct measure of political knowledge employing questions about political facts, and the level of education. While the former one seems to be a straightforward choice, the latter one is considered a proxy. In comparative research, it can be assumed that the ability to process political information by citizens is usually pertinent to their level of education, since attaining a diploma should require certain cognitive capacities and training. There

is, however, some evidence that political sophistication is not linked to the level of one's education and depends on capacities that the individual had already possessed before they were trained (Highton, 2009). Nonetheless, an individual's highest achieved level of education remains the only indicator of intellectual capacity that is being measured in a manner useful for parties planning their campaigning efforts and international comparisons presented in the present study. All of the countries encompassed by the used data were members of the European Union at the time of the data collection and thus the information about their citizens' education levels is available in a standardized format. Until a better operationalization of the notion of capacity is available for the purposes of comparative research, using indicators of the education level remains the closest proxy.

The study employs two indicators of the education level. One is the percentage of the respondents with higher education in a relevant post-election survey from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (2015a, 2015b, 2017 – CSES modules 2, 3, and 4); it is labeled as 'Higher Education Prc'. Unfortunately, this data was available for only 13 out of 21 elections included in the CCDD. Therefore, the share of population aged 30–34, who had successfully completed tertiary studies in the year preceding the year of the studied electoral campaign – labeled as 'Tertiary Prc 30-34' – was used. This educational attainment refers to the ISCED 2011 level 5–8 for data from 2014 onward and to the ISCED 1997 level 5–6 for data up to 2013 (EUROSTAT, 2021). While the indicator remains informative of a small fraction of the given society, it can sufficiently represent the society's level of education for the purposes of this comparative analysis. It is the only internationally comparable indicator of educational attainment for adults in the EUROSTAT, available to all countries in the study.

Data on political knowledge was also obtained from the CSES (2015a, 2015b, 2017). The Political Knowledge Index was created by adding one point for a correct answer to each of three questions about the political reality of the given country (see relevant CSES country questionnaires). The score obtained by each respondent was normalized to the range between 0 and 1, and then averaged across all the respondents. In this study this index is treated as a secondary means of measuring the voters' capacity for political reasoning. This is caused by two things. First, its scores are only available for 13 out of 21 elections, which significantly limits the size and the representativeness of the sample of countries. Second, the questions pertaining to different questions were used in each of the countries, which is why the cross-country comparability is compromised.

The simplest way to measure one's interest in politics is a direct survey questions. In the current study, this variable is labeled as 'Interest High' and it represents a sum of percentages of the respondents who provided the 'Very interested' or 'Quite interested' answers to the question: 'How interested would you say you are in politics – are you...' in the European Social Survey (2018). The data was obtained from the last ESS wave, conducted before the year of the studied electoral campaign (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1–8, 2018).

Indicators of interest in politics, which matter for one's political sophistication, are, however, not limited to a survey declaration, but they should also take into account one's actions. Among the numerous variables representing political activity, electoral turnout is the one most relevant for studying citizens' engagement in politics. Individuals demonstrate their interest by making a decision regarding the affairs of politics and declaring it on a ballot. Furthermore, turnout is a readily available statistic for political parties, as it can be obtained with ease and with great accuracy. I expect parties to take information about turnout into account when making decisions about their campaigning strategies. Thus, I believe that electoral turnout in the previous election should be used as a macro-level indicator of political interest in the current analysis due to its possible influence on parties and close relationship with the behavioral aspect of interest in politics. The used data was obtained from the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon et al., 2020), and the variable was labeled as 'Previous Turnout'.

Controls

Three control variables are included in the models presented in the analytical part of the article. Party size is controlled by the 'Poll One Month Before' variable that includes the results of pre-electoral polls that had been published thirty days before the election day. Its influence on the relative salience of references to competence in party rhetoric was demonstrated by Rafałowski (2021). If a report from the exact time point was not available, results from no more than several days preceding that day were used instead (see Table A1 in the Appendix for information on data availability and for the used reports published by polling companies). There was no preference given to any of the polling companies in the studied countries.

Each election was also characterized by the Effective Number of Electoral Parties (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979), representing party system fragmentation, labeled as ‘ENEP’, which represents the level of internal diversity and competitiveness of the party system, and as such can influence valence campaigning (Green, 2007) and affect the voters’ motivation to collect political information (Gordon & Segura, 1997, p. 130). The final control is a dummy variable indicating whether the electoral system used in the election uses single-member districts, labeled ‘SMD’, based on the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon et al., 2020). These variables account for the political context of party system types and the variation of institutional settings among the countries included in the dataset.

The availability of data on main and control variables, mainly the ‘Poll One Month Before’ variable, as well as excluding outlier observations, has limited the size of the dataset used in the main analysis to $N1 = 101$ parties in $N2 = 17$ elections (see: Table A1 in the Appendix). Including the ‘Higher Education Prc’ variable and the Political Knowledge Index in the models further limits the sample to $N1 = 67$ parties and $N2 = 11$ elections. Data on the election-level variables and the descriptive statistics of the variables included in the analysis are presented in Table A2 and Table A3 in the Appendix.

DATA ANALYSIS

Each of the hypotheses formulated above has been tested with regard to the total fraction of references to valence made by a party during the campaign, as well as the relative salience of competence and honesty in party rhetoric. Thus, there are three dependent variables in the study. In order to make the most of the available data on the indicators of political sophistication, two sets of models were estimated. Models 1–3 (Table 2) employ the ‘Tertiary Prc 30–34’ variable to represent the cognitive capacities of the electorate, while Models 4–6 (Table 3) include the ‘Higher Education Prc’ and ‘Political Knowledge Index’ variables. All the models include both the ‘Interest High’ direct indicator of interest in politics and the turnout in the previous election.

Table 2. The Determinants of Parties Emphasizing Valence Traits during an Electoral Campaign: Models 1 to 3

| | Model 1 Dependent variable: Valence | | | Model 2 Dependent variable: Competence | | | Model 3 Dependent variable: Honesty | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|-------|--|-----------|-------|---|-----------|-------|
| | Coef. | Std. Err. | P > z | Coef. | Std. Err. | P > z | Coef. | Std. Err. | P > z |
| Poll One Month Before | .00258 | .000937 | 0.006 | .00204 | .00057 | 0.000 | .000593 | .000378 | 0.117 |
| Tertiary Prc 30-34 | -.00224 | .00206 | 0.276 | .00169 | .00127 | 0.183 | -.000679 | .000830 | 0.414 |
| Interest High | -.00204 | .00123 | 0.097 | -.000414 | .000754 | 0.583 | -.00171 | .000495 | 0.001 |
| Previous Turnout | -.00329 | .00160 | 0.041 | -.00351 | .000986 | 0.000 | .000466 | .000647 | 0.472 |
| ENEP | -.0312 | .0111 | 0.005 | -.00690 | .00683 | 0.312 | -.00745 | .00448 | 0.096 |
| SMD | -.0685 | .0388 | 0.077 | -.0536 | .0238 | 0.025 | -.0127 | .0157 | 0.417 |
| Constant | .815 | .0929 | 0.000 | .376 | .0571 | 0.000 | .178 | .0375 | 0.000 |
| Observations – level 1 (parties) | 101 | | | 101 | | | 101 | | |
| Groups – level 2 (elections) | 17 | | | 17 | | | 17 | | |
| Log – likelihood | 61.466 | | | 110.634 | | | 153.151 | | |

For each variable in each model, the row contains unstandardized linear regression coefficients, standard errors, and statistical significance. Source: Author's own calculations.

I begin the data analysis with testing the expectations regarding the impact of voters' capacity to process messages communicated during the campaign on the emphasis put by parties on valence traits expressed in H1. It is rejected based on the available data with regard to all available indicators and dependent variables. The coefficients associated with the 'Tertiary Prc 30–34' variable are statistically insignificant in Models 1, 2, and 3. The 'Higher Education Prc' variable in Models 4–6 is only significant at $p < 0.1$ in Model 4, predicting the overall share of references to valence traits. However, it remains statistically insignificant in Model 5

Table 3. The Determinants of Parties Emphasizing Valence Traits during an Electoral Campaign: Models 4 to 6

| | Model 4 Dependent variable: Valence | | | Model 5 Dependent variable: Competence | | | Model 6 Dependent variable: Honesty | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|-------|--|-----------|-------|---|-----------|-------|
| | Coef. | Std. Err. | P > z | Coef. | Std. Err. | P > z | Coef. | Std. Err. | P > z |
| Poll One Month Before | .00362 | .000969 | 0.000 | .00207 | .000745 | 0.005 | .000221 | .000526 | 0.675 |
| Higher Education Prc | -.00493 | .00288 | 0.087 | -.000429 | .00221 | 0.846 | .000995 | .00156 | 0.524 |
| Political Knowledge Index | -.218 | .3606 | 0.545 | -.416 | .277 | 0.133 | .145 | .196 | 0.458 |
| Interest High | -.00092 | .00285 | 0.747 | .00284 | .00219 | 0.196 | -.00285 | .00155 | 0.066 |
| Previous Turnout | -.00399 | .00246 | 0.106 | -.00560 | .00189 | 0.003 | .000541 | .00134 | 0.686 |
| ENEP | -.029 | .0125 | 0.020 | -.00568 | .00962 | 0.555 | -.00319 | .00680 | 0.639 |
| SMD | -.111 | .0637 | 0.082 | -.108 | .049 | 0.028 | .00832 | .0346 | 0.810 |
| Constant | .96 | .289 | 0.001 | .738 | .222 | 0.001 | .0547 | .157 | 0.727 |
| Observations – level 1 (parties) | 67 | | | 67 | | | 67 | | |
| Groups – level 2 (elections) | 11 | | | 11 | | | 11 | | |
| Log-likelihood | 58.608 | | | 76.258 | | | 99.519 | | |

For each variable in each model, the row contains unstandardized linear regression coefficients, standard errors, and statistical significance. Source: Author's own calculations.

and 6, predicting the relative salience of references to competence and honesty respectively. Also, all of the estimated coefficients associated with the Political Knowledge Index are far from reaching any conventional levels of statistical significance. Therefore, I consider the detected dependency not robust and thus reject H1.

The effects of 'Interest High' are statistically significant in Models 1 and 3 as well as Model 6, at $p < 0.1$, $p < 0.005$, and $p < 0.1$ respectively. According to Model 1, a one-percentage-point rise in the share of the respondents who are interested in politics decreases the share of references to competence by 0.00204 ($p = 0.1$). It might seem very little at first glance, but the dependent variable is a share expressed in values between 0 and 1. Also, the highest value of 'Interest High' in the studied sample of countries is 67.5 in Sweden in 2014, while the lowest one is 19.4 in the Czech Republic in 2010. This difference in the share of the respondents interested in politics translates into the estimated share of references to valence being greater in Sweden by 0.0981, which is nearly ten percentage points. The coefficients estimated in Model 3 and Model 6 equal -0.00171 and -0.00285 respectively. In the aforementioned cases of Sweden in 2014 and the Czech Republic in 2010, it translates into the estimated share of references to valence being greater in Sweden by 0.0822 and 0.137 respectively, which is more than eight and almost fourteen percentage points respectively.

Negative values of the coefficients indicate that the higher the percentage of people who declare being 'Very interested' or 'Quite interested' in politics, the lower the relative salience of reference to valence (Model 1) and honesty (Models 3 and 6). The variable does not affect the relative salience of references to competence. The failure to detect a consistent statistical dependency in Model 4 should be attributed to the decreased sample size. H2 was confirmed with regard to emphasizing valence in general and honesty in particular, when interest in politics is represented by its direct indicator.

A curious pattern can be observed with regard to the statistical effects of turnout in the previous parliamentary election on valence campaigning. The coefficient associated with the 'Previous Turnout' variable is significant in Models 1, 2, and 5 (at $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.001$, and $p < 0.005$ levels respectively). It exerts a negative influence on the relative salience of valence (Model 1) and competence (Models 2 and 4). According to Model 1, a one-percentage-point rise in turnout in the previous election decreases the share of references to competence by 0.00329 ($p = 0.05$). The highest value of 'Previous Turnout' in the studied sample of countries is 84.6 in Sweden in 2014, and the lowest one is 40.6 in Poland in 2007. This difference in the share of the respondents interested in politics translates into the estimated share of references to valence being greater in Sweden by 0.144, which is more than fourteen percentage points. The coefficients estimated in Model 2 and Model 5 equal -0.00351 and -0.00560, which in the aforementioned cases of Sweden in 2014 and Poland in 2007 translates into

the estimated share of references to valence being greater in Sweden by 0.154 and 0.246 respectively, which is more than fifteen and twenty-four percent points respectively. Therefore, H2 is confirmed with regard to valence and competence, but not honesty, when interest in politics is represented by electoral turnout.

The results obtained with regard to control variable are consistent with the existing research. The positive influence of pre-electoral polls on emphasizing valence in general and competence ($p = 0.006$, $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$, and $p = 0.005$ in Models 1, 2, 4, and 5 respectively) remains in line with the results presented by Rafałowski (2021). ENEP also exerts a predictable negative influence on valence campaigning ($p = 0.005$, $p < 0.001$, and $p < 0.005$ in Models 1, 4, and 5 respectively). Countries using single-member electoral districts also experience fewer references to valence during electoral campaigns ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$, $p = 0.001$, and $p = 0.028$ in Models 1, 2, 4, and 5 respectively).

THE ROBUSTNESS OF THE RESULTS

The robustness of the presented results has been assessed by means of restricting the sample by filtering out the observations from the studied countries one by one and re-estimating each relevant model. Every time, the estimated results lead to the same substantial conclusions, which means that – despite the limited number of countries in the study – they cannot be treated as purely haphazard findings.

Conclusion and Discussion

The study shows that parties competing for votes in parliamentary elections in European democracies are more likely to emphasize their valence traits when the electorate is less interested in politics. In countries where citizens declare lower interest in politics, parties are more likely to refer to honesty, while low electoral turnout – as a behavioral indicator of political engagement – decreases the relative salience of references to valence in party rhetoric and negatively affects the use of references to competence. Contrary to expectations, there is no relationship between the level of education or political knowledge and campaigning on valence.

The failure to confirm the hypotheses associated with the education and political knowledge shows that treating the electorate's political sophistication

as a wholesome incentive for parties choosing certain campaigning strategies is not adequate. The level of public interest in politics stands on its own as a factor determining the salience of valence campaigning. This finding remains in line with the existing research on the consequences of various dimensions of political sophistication (see: DeWitt, 2012; Coffé & von Schoultz, 2021).

Campaigning when citizens are not engaged in politics and thus fail to turn up at the polling stations on the election day constitutes a challenge for parties. Rather than trying to convince the supporters of other parties to change their minds about their preferred policies, competitors need to make effort to mobilize those citizens who are less likely to vote. This study shows that attracting their attention involves turning to valence-related arguments.

While a low level of declared interest in politics within a society increases the relative salience of arguments pertaining to parties' honesty, low electoral turnout incentivizes parties to emphasize competence. This inconsistency is difficult to explain based on the available data. A theoretical insight into the issue can be gained from social psychologists who argue that competence and honesty differ with respect to the mechanisms that form opinions about possessing these traits (Peeters, 1983, 1992; Wojciszke, 2005a, 2005b, etc.) The difference lies in the unequal diagnostic value of positive and negative information related to competence and honesty. "Perceivers assume that moral people behave in moral but not immoral ways, although immoral people can behave both in immoral and moral ways, because the latter are socially demanded and rewarded" (Wojciszke, 2005a, p. 61). Thus, evaluating one's honesty requires paying attention to immoral behavior, because it is more informative about the underlying trait than honest actions are. This tendency is reversed with regard to competence. Everybody sometimes fails to accomplish an objective due to its level of difficulty, a lack of motivation, or fatigue, but "only persons of high ability are capable of competent actions" (Wojciszke 2005b, p. 159). There is also some evidence that in voters' evaluations of politicians morality is more important than competence (Rosón & del Mar, 2016; Cwalina & Falkowski, 2016, p. 237).

As a result, forming an opinion about honesty requires less information than what is needed to evaluate competence. The former is also more important than the latter; as a result, by emphasizing honesty it might be easier to draw the attention of those who declare themselves as not interested in politics. When people did not vote in the previous election, it remains more of a structural disposition of the society and it takes slightly more elaborate arguments to convince them to engage themselves in the political process. Honesty might be the easier valence

trait, as it is rather symbolic and not policy-related, while competence is the slightly more complicated one to evaluate – to use the analogy to the notion of ‘easy’ and ‘hard’ issues (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). This explanation, however, should be treated as tentative and as a speculation that should be tested in future research.

The answers to the main questions of the study – which revolve around the exploration of when and why parties tend to emphasize valence traits rather than policy propositions – have several implications for recognizing the sources of some of the problems afflicting contemporary democracies. What is more, the study will also contribute to filling the gap with regard to the existing research on electoral campaigning and strategies of issue emphasis. The question of the means that political parties use in order to secure electoral support has also implications for evaluating their rationality as collective agents as well as the ways of the reproduction of the political order.

A greater proportion of references to valence traits translates into less room for a programmatic debate, which is why an understanding of the conditions that incentivize parties to turn to valence is essential and required. A discussion about programmatic issues is crucial to the ability to elect politicians who will lead the country in the direction supported by as many citizens as possible, while averting the public attention away from policy undermines chances of an enlightened choice. That being said, worth noting is the fact that electing competent and honest politicians is a necessary condition for the proposed policies to be implemented for the good of the people. Therefore, campaigning by means of referring to valence traits cannot be treated as something unequivocally detrimental to democracy. It is understandable that when a successful government showcases their accomplishments in order to be re-elected – or when the opposition capitalizes on a corruption scandal that strains the incumbent – those are valid arguments in a political debate. However, it is distressing when the prevalence of valence campaigning depends on the context of past legacies, electorates’ political socialization, or the institutional setting. The phenomenon of parties taking advantage of citizens’ incompetence in political matters impairs the quality of democracy (Andersen, Tilley, & Heath, 2005). The lack of a proper programmatic debate can only be rectified by the voters demanding that politicians engage in an actual discussion and explain their policy proposals adequately.

A final caveat is in order with regard to the obtained results. The presented study uses data collected from mainstream daily newspapers. It might be that journalistic framing influences the relative salience of traits in the reported party

rhetoric. This possibility cannot be ruled out with the use of the CCDD. However, the mechanism behind publishing more claims about valence traits made by parties in countries where people are less interested in politics would be similar to the one motivating the parties. Journalists know that the issue of honesty can attract the attention of the uninterested more effectively than discussions of policy can, which is why they inform readers about parties' discourse on valence traits more often.

With all of the above in mind, it needs to be noted that the presented results are tentative in nature and not entirely perspicuous within the existing theoretical frameworks. The important limitation lies in the fact that only differences between countries are studied and parties usually address a certain segment of the electorate, not the society in general. Thus, they do not take into account the characteristics of the society as a whole, but only of the groups they choose to represent. Therefore, future research on the impact of the electorate's political sophistication on parties' and individual candidates' campaigning styles should explore whether parties which target less politically sophisticated voters adjust their messages accordingly. However, a study of such kind would be difficult to carry out, as parties' potential electorates cannot be identified post-factum based on their actual voting decisions, because those can be affected by parties' actual rhetoric. Solving this question would require collecting an entirely different kind of empirical data, one which was not available for the current study.

APPENDIX

Table A1. Polling Reports Used as Data Sources of Pre-electoral Poll Results

| Country | Election | 'Poll One Month Before' source |
|--------------------|----------|---------------------------------|
| the Czech Republic | 2010 | 13–28 April 2010 Médea Research |
| | 2013 | 24 September 2013 CVVM |
| Denmark | 2007 | Not available |
| | 2011 | Not available |
| Germany | 2009 | GMS 24 Aug |
| | 2013 | 21 Aug <i>Forsa</i> |
| Hungary | 2006 | Gallup March |
| | 2010 | Gallup 25 March 2010 |

| Country | Election | 'Poll One Month Before' source |
|--------------------|----------|--|
| the Netherlands | 2010 | Not available |
| | 2012 | 27 July 2012 <i>Ipsos Neth.</i> |
| Poland | 2007 | TNS OBOP 16 September 2007 |
| | 2011 | 1–4 September 2011 TNS OBOP |
| Portugal | 2009 | 23–28 Jul <i>Eurosondagem</i> |
| | 2011 | 28 Apr–3 May <i>Eurosondagem</i> |
| Spain | 2008 | <i>Obradoiro de Sociología/Público</i> 7 Jan–12 Feb 2008 |
| | 2011 | <i>Sigma Dos/El Mundo</i> 7–20 Oct 2011 |
| Sweden | 2010 | Not available |
| | 2014 | 6–12 Aug <i>Sentio</i> |
| the United Kingdom | 2005 | 1–3 Apr 2005 ICM/ <i>Guardian</i> |
| | 2010 | 6 Apr <i>Populus/The Times</i> |
| | 2015 | 2–6 Apr <i>Populus</i> |

Table A2. Data on the Election-Level Variables

| Country | Year of the election | SMD | ENEP | Previous Turnout | Political Knowledge Index | Higher Education Prc | Interest High | Tertiary Prc 30–34 |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----|------|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| the Czech Republic | 2010 | 0 | 6.76 | 64.5 | 0.68 | 11.97 | 19,4 | 17.5 |
| the Czech Republic | 2013 | 0 | 7.62 | 62.6 | 0.64 | 14.87 | 22,1 | 25.6 |
| Denmark | 2007 | 0 | 5.40 | 84.5 | 0.51 | 24.69 | 67,8 | 43.0 |
| Denmark | 2011 | 0 | 5.72 | 86.6 | | | 69,8 | 41.1 |
| Germany | 2009 | 1 | 5.59 | 77.7 | 0.69 | 11.54 | 61,6 | 27.7 |
| Germany | 2013 | 1 | 4.82 | 70.8 | 0.76 | 15.89 | 64,3 | 31.8 |
| Hungary | 2006 | 1 | 2.70 | 70.5 | | | 41,4 | 17.9 |
| Hungary | 2010 | 1 | 2.87 | 64.8 | | | 38,5 | 24.0 |
| the Netherlands | 2010 | 0 | 6.99 | 80.4 | 0.51 | 25.84 | 66,5 | 38.3 |
| the Netherlands | 2012 | 0 | 5.97 | 75.4 | | | 64,7 | 41.2 |
| Poland | 2007 | 0 | 3.33 | 40.6 | 0.89 | 13.13 | 39,3 | 24.7 |
| Poland | 2011 | 0 | 3.74 | 53.8 | 0.73 | 15.19 | 39,4 | 34.8 |
| Portugal | 2009 | 0 | 3.84 | 64.3 | 0.73 | 11.35 | 30,3 | 21.6 |
| Portugal | 2011 | 0 | 3.67 | 59.7 | | | 29,5 | 24.0 |
| Spain | 2008 | 0 | 2.82 | 75.7 | 0.54 | 31.1 | 26,3 | 40.9 |
| Spain | 2011 | 0 | 3.45 | 73.9 | | | 28,8 | 42.0 |

| Country | Year of the election | SMD | ENEP | Previous Turnout | Political Knowledge Index | Higher Education Prc | Interest High | Tertiary Prc 30–34 |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----|------|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Sweden | 2010 | 0 | 4.78 | 82.0 | | | 61,5 | 43.9 |
| Sweden | 2014 | 0 | 5.41 | 84.6 | 0.87 | 24.45 | 67,5 | 48.3 |
| the United Kingdom | 2005 | 1 | 3.60 | 59.4 | 0.68 | 21.26 | 47,5 | 33.6 |
| the United Kingdom | 2010 | 1 | 3.73 | 61.8 | | | 53,5 | 41.4 |
| the United Kingdom | 2015 | 1 | 3.93 | 65.8 | 0.77 | 25.59 | 58,2 | 47.7 |

Sources: see the “Data and variables” section.

Table A3. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Employed in the Analysis in the Sample Used in Model 1

| | N | Mean | Standard deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------------------|-----|--------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Valence | 101 | 0.307 | 0.170 | 0 | 1 |
| Competence | 101 | 0.159 | 0.0985 | 0 | 0.571 |
| Honesty | 101 | 0.0826 | 0.0644 | 0 | 0.286 |
| Poll One Month Before | 101 | 17.32 | 14.719 | 0 | 67 |
| Tertiary Prc 30-34 | 101 | 32.673 | 9.790 | 17.5 | 48.3 |
| Interest High | 101 | 44.670 | 9.790 | 17.5 | 48.3 |
| Previous Turnout | 101 | 67.714 | 10.541 | 40.6 | 84.6 |
| ENEP | 101 | 4.534 | 1.419 | 2.701 | 7.617 |
| SMD | 101 | 0.356 | 0.481 | 0 | 1 |
| Higher Education Prc | 67 | 17.676 | 6.371 | 11.35 | 31.1 |
| Political Knowledge Index | 67 | 0.733 | 0.0983 | 0.544 | 0.891 |

Own calculations. Sources: see the “Data and variables” section.

REFERENCES:

- Adams, J., Haupt, A.B., & Stoll, H. (2009). What Moves Parties? The Role of Public Opinion and Global Economic Conditions in Western Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(5), 611–639. DOI: 10.1177/0010414008328637.

- Adams, J.F., Scheiner, E., & Kawasumi, J. (2016). Running on Character? Running on Policy? An Analysis of Japanese Candidates' Campaign Platforms. *Electoral Studies*, 44, 275–283. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2016.06.017.
- Aldrich, J.H., & Griffin, J.D. (2003). The Presidency and the Campaign: Creating Voter Priorities in the 2000 Election. In: M. Nelson (Ed.). *The Presidency and the Political System* (7th Ed.) (pp. 239–256).
- Andersen, R., Tilley, J., & Heath, A.F. (2005). Political Knowledge and Enlightened Preferences: Party Choice Through the Electoral Cycle. *British Journal of Political Science*, 35(2), 285–302. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123405000153.
- Ansolabehere, S., & Iyengar, S. (1994). Riding the Wave and Claiming Ownership Over Issues: The Joint Effects of Advertising and News Coverage in Campaigns. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 58(3), 335–357. DOI: 10.1086/269431.
- Armingeon, K., Wenger, V., Wiedemeier, F., Isler, Ch., Knöpfel, L., Weisstanner, D., & Engler, S. (2020). *Comparative Political Data Set 1960–2018*. Institute of Political Science, University of Zurich.
- Baumann, M., & Gross, M. (2016). Where Is My Party? Introducing New Data Sets on Ideological Cohesion and Ambiguity of Party Positions in Media Coverage. *Arbeitspapiere/Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, Working papers*, 167.
- Baumann, M., Debus, M., & Gross, M. (2019). Strategic Issue Emphasis in Parties' Election Campaign Statements. *Party Politics*, 27(3), 515–527. Published early online, August 2019. DOI: 10.1177/1354068819864091.
- Boonen, J., Pedersen, E.F., & Hooghe, M. (2017). The Effect of Political Sophistication and Party Identification on Voter–Party Congruence. A Comparative Analysis of 30 Countries. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 27(3), 311–329. DOI: 10.1080/17457289.2016.1273226.
- Budge, I., & Farlie, D.J. (1983). *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Bleck, J., & van de Walle, N. (2013). Valence Issues in African Elections: Navigating Uncertainty and the Weight of the Past. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(11), 1394–1421. DOI: 10.1177/0010414012453448.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P.E., Miller, W.E., & Stokes, D.E. (1960). *The American Voter*. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons.
- Carmines, E.G., & Stimson, J.A. (1980). The Two Faces of Issue Voting. *American Political Science Review*, 74(1), 78–91. DOI: 10.2307/1955648.
- Carrier, A., Louvet, E., Chauvin, B., & Rohmer, O. (2014). The Primacy of Agency Over Competence in Status Perception. *Social Psychology*, 45(5), 347–356. DOI: 10.1027/1864-9335/a000176.
- Chrona, S., & Capelos, T. (2017). The Political Psychology of Participation in Turkey: Civic Engagement, Basic Values, Political Sophistication and the Young. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17(1), 77–95. DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2016.1235002.
- Clark, M. (2009). Valence and Electoral Outcomes in Western Europe, 1976–1998. *Electoral Studies*, 28(1), 111–122. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2008.07.009.

- Coffé, H., & von Schoultz, Å. (2021). How Candidate Characteristics Matter: Candidate Profiles, Political Sophistication, and Vote Choice. *Politics*, 41(2), 137–155. DOI: 10.1177/0263395720922077.
- Converse, P.E. (1964). The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In: D.E. Apter (Ed.). *Ideology and Its Discontents*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe. DOI: 10.1080/08913810608443650.
- Converse, P.E. (1975). Public Opinion and Voting Behavior. In: F. Greenstein, & N. Polsby (Eds.). *The Handbook of Political Science*. Vol. 4 (pp. 75–171). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cwalina, W., & Falkowski, A. (2016). Morality and Competence in Shaping the Images of Political Leaders. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 15(2–3), 220–239. DOI: 10.1080/15377857.2016.1151121.
- Dalton, R. (2021). The Representation Gap and Political Sophistication: A Contrarian Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(5), 889–917. DOI: 10.1177/0010414020957673.
- Debus, M., Somer-Topcu, Z., & Tavits, M. (2018). *Comparative Campaign Dynamics Dataset*. Mannheim: Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, University of Mannheim.
- Delli Carpini, M.X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- DeWitt, J.R. (2012). Political Sophistication and Presidential Candidate Considerations: Disentangling the Effects of Knowledge, Interest, and Media Exposure. *American Review of Politics*, 33, 271–293. DOI: 10.15763/issn.2374-7781.2012.33.0.271-293.
- Druckman, J.N., Kifer, M.J., & Parkin, M. (2009). Campaign Communications in U.S. Congressional Elections. *American Political Science Review*, 103(3), 343–366. DOI: 10.1017/S0003055409990037.
- Druckman, J.N., Kifer, M.J., & Parkin, M. (2020). Campaign Rhetoric and the Incumbency Advantage. *American Politics Research*, 48(1), 22–43. DOI: 10.1177/1532673X18822314.
- Enns, P.K., & Kellstedt, P.M. (2008). Policy Mood and Political Sophistication: Why Everybody Moves Mood. *British Journal of Political Science*, 38(3), 433–454. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123408000227.
- European Social Survey. (2018). *ESS 1–8, European Social Survey Cumulative File, Study Description*. Bergen: NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data for ESS ERIC. DOI: 10.21338/NSD-ESS-CUMULATIVE.
- European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1–8. (2018). *Data File Edition 1.0*. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and Distributor of ESS Data for ESS REIC. DOI: 10.21338/NSD-ESS-CUMULATIVE.
- EUROSTAT. (2021). *Tertiary Educational Attainment by Sex [SDG_04_20]*. Retrieved February 8, 2021 from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/SDG_04_20/default/table.
- Feld, S.L., & Grofman, B. (1988). Ideological Consistency as a Collective Phenomenon. *The American Political Science Review*, 82(3), 773–788. DOI: 10.2307/1962490.

- Fiske, S.T., Lau, R.R., & Smith, R.A. (1990). On the Varieties and Utilities of Political Expertise. *Social Cognition*, 8(1), 31–48. DOI: 10.1521/soco.1990.8.1.31.
- Goidel, R.K., Shields, T.G., & Peffley, M. (1997). Priming Theory and RAS Models: Toward an Integrated Perspective of Media Influence. *American Politics Research*, 25(3), 287–318. DOI: 10.1177/1532673X9702500303.
- Gomez, B.T., & Wilson, J.M. (2001). Political Sophistication and Economic Voting in the American Electorate: A Theory of Heterogeneous Attribution. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(4), 899–914. DOI: 10.2307/2669331.
- Gordon, S.B., & Segura, G.M. (1997). Cross-National Variation in the Political Sophistication of Individuals: Capability or Choice? *The Journal of Politics*, 59(1), 126–147. DOI: 10.2307/2998218.
- Goren, P. (1997). Political Expertise and Issue Voting in Presidential Elections. *Political Research Quarterly*, 50(2), 387–412. DOI: 10.1177/106591299705000207.
- Goren, P. (2004). Political Sophistication and Policy Reasoning: A Reconsideration. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(3), 462–478. DOI: 10.1111/j.0092-5853.2004.00081.x.
- Green, J. (2007). When Voters and Parties Agree: Valence Issues and Party Competition. *Political Studies*, 55(3), 629–655. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00671.x.
- Hassell, H.J.G., & Oeltjenbruns, K.R. (2016). When to Attack: The Trajectory of Congressional Campaign Negativity. *American Politics Research*, 44(2), 222–246. DOI: 10.1177/1532673X15589613.
- van der Heijden, E., & Verkuyten, M. (2020). Educational Attainment, Political Sophistication and Anti-Immigrant Attitudes. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 8(2), 600–616. DOI: 10.5964/jspp.v8i2.1334.
- Highton, B. (2009). Revisiting the Relationship between Educational Attainment and Political Sophistication. *The Journal of Politics*, 71(4), 1564–1576. DOI: 10.1017/s0022381609990077.
- Holian, D.B. (2004). He's Stealing My Issues! Clinton's Crime Rhetoric and the Dynamics of Issue Ownership. *Political Behavior*, 26(2), 95–124. DOI: 10.1023/B:P OBE.0000035959.35567.16.
- Iyengar, S., Kinder, D.R., Peters, M.D., & Krosnick, J.A. (1984). The Evening News and Presidential Evaluations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(4), 778–787. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.778.
- Kaplan, N., Park, D.K., & Ridout, T.N. (2006). Dialogue in American Political Campaigns? An Examination of Issue Convergence in Candidate Television Advertising. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 724–736. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00212.x.
- Knight, K. (1985). Ideology in the 1980 Election: Ideological Sophistication Does Matter. *The Journal of Politics*, 47(3), 828–853. DOI: 10.2307/2131213.
- Kolczyński, M. (2008). *Strategie komunikowania politycznego*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

- Kölln, A.K. (2018). Political Sophistication Affects How Citizens' Social Policy Preferences Respond to the Economy. *West European Politics*, 41(1), 196–217. DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2017.1332314.
- Krause, G. (1997). Voters, Information Heterogeneity, and the Dynamics of Aggregate Economic Expectations. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(4), 1170–1200. DOI: 10.2307/2960486.
- Krosnick, J.A., & Brannon, L.A. (1993). The Impact of the Gulf War on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Multidimensional Effects of Political Involvement. *American Political Science Review*, 87(4), 963–975. DOI: 10.2307/2938828.
- Krosnick, J.A., & Kinder, D.R. (1990). Altering the Foundations of Support for the President through Priming. *American Political Science Review*, 84(2), 497–512. DOI: 10.2307/1963531.
- Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. (1979). 'Effective' Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, 12(1), 3–27. DOI: 10.1177/001041407901200101.
- Lau, R.R. (1989). Construct Accessibility and Electoral Choice. *Political Behavior*, 11(1), 5–32. DOI: 10.1007/BF00993365.
- Lau, R.R., & Pomper, G.M. (2002). Effectiveness of Negative Campaigning in U.S. Senate Elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(1), 47–66. DOI: 10.2307/3088414.
- Luskin, R.C. (1987). Measuring Political Sophistication. *American Journal of Political Science*, 31(4), 856–899. DOI: 10.2307/2111227.
- Luskin, R.C. (1990). Explaining Political Sophistication. *Political Behavior*, 12(4), 331–361.
- Macdonald, S.E., Rabinowitz, G., & Listhaug, O. (1995). Political Sophistication and Models of Issue Voting. *British Journal of Political Science*, 25(4), 453–483. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123400007316.
- Miller, A.H., Wattenberg, M.P., & Malanchuk, O. (1986). Schematic Assessments of Presidential Candidates. *American Political Science Review*, 80(2), 521–540. DOI: 10.2307/1958272.
- Peeters, G. (1983). Relational and Informational Pattern in Social Cognition. In: W. Doise, & S. Moscovici (Eds.). *Current Issues in European Social Psychology* (pp. 201–237). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peeters, G. (1992). Evaluative Meanings of Adjectives in Vitro and in Context: Some Theoretical Implications and Practical Consequences of Positive-Negative Asymmetry and Behavioral-Adaptive Concepts of Evaluation. *Psychologia Belgica*, 32(2), 211–231. DOI: 10.5334/pb.833.
- Petrocik, J.R. (1996). Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(3), 825–850. DOI: 10.2307/2111797.
- Pierce, P.A. (1993). Political Sophistication and the Use of Candidate Traits in Candidate Evaluation. *Political Psychology*, 14(1), 21–35. DOI: 10.2307/3791391.
- Popkin, S.L. (2020). *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Price, V. (1999). Political Information. In: J.P. Robinson, P.R. Shaver, & L.S. Wrightsman (Eds.). *Measures of Political Attitudes* (pp. 591–639). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Rafałowski, W. (2018). Values versus Interests Dynamics of Parliamentary Campaigns. *Political Preferences*, 19, 31–51. DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.672693.
- Rafałowski, W. (2020). Parties' Issue Emphasis Strategies on Facebook. *East European Politics and Societies*, 34(1), 96–123. DOI: 10.1177/0888325419859632.
- Rafałowski, W. (2021). Campaigning on the Ability to Govern: A Study of Strategic References to Competence Made by Political Parties in Europe. *Government and Opposition*, 1–23. DOI: 10.1017/gov.2021.38.
- Riker, W.H. (1993). Political Interaction in the Ratification Campaigns. In: W.H. Riker (Ed.). *Agenda Formation* (pp. 81–125). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. DOI: 10.3998/mpub.13524.
- Rosón, M., & del Mar, M. (2016). I Prefer the Corrupt One: A Profile of Citizens Who Choose Dishonest but Competent Politicians. *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 153, 77–92. DOI: 10.5477/cis/reis.153.77.
- Sanders, D., & Norris, P. (2005). The Impact of Political Advertising in the 2001 U.K. General Election. *Political Research Quarterly*, 58(4), 525–536. DOI: 10.2307/3595639.
- Sayans-Jiménez, P., Rojas Tejada, A.J., & Cuadrado Guirado, I. (2017). Is It Advisable to Include Negative Attributes to Assess the Stereotype Content? Yes, but Only in the Morality Dimension. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 58(2), 170–178. DOI: 10.1111/sjop.12346.
- Skaperdas, S., & Grofman, B. (1995). Modeling Negative Campaigning. *American Political Science Review*, 89(1), 49–61. DOI: 10.2307/2083074.
- Skarżyńska, K. (2005). *Człowiek a polityka. Zarys psychologii politycznej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Somer-Topcu, Z., Tavits, M., & Baumann, M. (2020). Does Party Rhetoric Affect Voter Perceptions of Party Positions? *Electoral Studies*, 65, 102153. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102153.
- Spoon, J.J., & Klüver, H. (2014). Do Parties Respond? How Electoral Context Influences Party Responsiveness. *Electoral Studies*, 35, 48–60. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2014.04.014.
- Stokes, D.E. (1963). Spatial Models of Party Competition. *American Political Science Review*, 57(2), 368–377. DOI: 10.2307/1952828.
- Stokes, D.E. (1992). Valence Politics. In: D. Kavanagh (Ed.). *Electoral Politics* (pp. 141–164). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tavits, M., & Potter, J.D. (2015). The Effect of Inequality and Social Identity on Party Strategies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 744–758. DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12144.
- The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. (2015a). *CSES Module 2 Full Release [dataset]*. December 15, 2015 version. DOI: 10.7804/cses.module2.2015-12-15.
- The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. (2015b). *CSES Module 3 Full Release [dataset]*. December 15, 2015 version. DOI: 10.7804/cses.module3.2015-12-15.

- The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. (2017). *CSES Module 4 Fourth Advance Release [dataset]*. April 11, 2017 version. DOI: 10.7804/cses.module4.2017-04-11.
- Vegetti, F., & Mancosu, M. (2020). The Impact of Political Sophistication and Motivated Reasoning on Misinformation. *Political Communication*, 37(5), 678–695. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2020.1744778
- Weitz-Shapiro, R., & Winters, M.S. (2017). Can Citizens Discern? Information Credibility, Political Sophistication, and the Punishment of Corruption in Brazil. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(1), 60–74. DOI: 10.1086/687287.
- Wojciszke, B. (2005a). Affective Concomitants of Information on Morality and Competence. *European Psychologist*, 10(1), 60–70. DOI: 10.1027/1016-9040.10.1.60.
- Wojciszke, B. (2005b). Morality and Competence in Person – and Self-Perception. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 16(1), 155–188. DOI: 10.1080/10463280500229619.
- Zaller, J.R. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511818691.