



ATTITUDES TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND BEHAVIOR IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

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*To my beloved parents
who always encouraged me to go on every journey including this one*

*In memory of my grandfather Herbert (1925-2019)
« Glück auf! »*

Summary

Does Europe matter? This paper-based dissertation investigates to what extent “European factors” matter for citizens during European Parliament (EP) elections. In three original research articles, I analyze the electoral impact of individual attitudes towards the European Union (EU) and the European integration process, political representation on the EU integration policy dimension and the politicization of EU issues across different member states. The empirical analyses are based on the voter surveys of the European Election Studies, but also integrate party-level data, such as the Euromanifesto Study. The results demonstrate the continuing relevance of the “second-order election” research framework for individual-level electoral behavior, but also illustrate various ways in which “Europe matters” for citizens’ participation and vote choice in European elections. I show that EP election behavior is significantly shaped by trust in European institutions, by ideological and policy-specific voter-party congruence and by the degree to which European integration is politicized by political elites. These findings have important implications for our understanding of present-day European Parliament elections and the democratic legitimacy of the European Union.

Keywords: Democratic Legitimacy, EP Elections, European Integration, Euroscepticism, Issue Politicization, Participation, Representation, Voting Behavior

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Preface and list of publications

This paper-based dissertation builds on three original research articles that have been published in or submitted to peer-reviewed political science journals. The following manuscript provides an introduction, the theoretical framework, a summary of the contributions and a concluding discussion to the three empirical studies, which are listed below in the order of their publication dates.

- Study I:** Schäfer, Constantin (2017). Euroskeptizismus und Wahlenthaltung. Motivationen unterschiedlicher Nichtwählertypen bei der Europawahl 2014. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 11(1), 50-80, doi:10.1007/s12286-017-0327-z.
- Study II:** Schäfer, Constantin & Marc Debus (2018). No participation without representation. Policy distances and abstention in European Parliament elections. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(12), 1835-1854, doi:10.1080/13501763.2017.1363806.
- Study III:** Schäfer, Constantin (*under review*). Exit or voice? The role of political awareness, ideological congruence and party polarization in the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens. [*published here as pre-print version*]

The following manuscript provides a comprehensive framework that connects and jointly reflects the individual articles. Since this dissertation is the product of several years of work (starting in late 2014), the state of research on which the papers draw has naturally developed since then (and so has my own thinking). Therefore, this framework paper also allows me to integrate more recent scholarly work – without being restrained by the usual word limit of journal articles. However, this manuscript does not serve as a substitute for the more targeted literature reviews, theoretical argumentations and empirical analyses of the three papers. Lastly, I would like to add that three more articles related to the topic have been published or submitted for publication during the development of this thesis (Schäfer 2019, Schäfer & Gross 2020, Schäfer et al. [forthcoming](#)). Yet, although they will be referred to in the manuscript and listed in the references, they do not form part of this dissertation for the reason of greater coherence.

1 Introduction

The recent elections to the European Parliament (EP) in 2019 have surprised many political observers. For the first time since 1979, overall voter turnout increased and was the highest in the past 25 years (50.6 %). This boost in turnout – an increase of around eight percentage points compared to 2014 – was observed in 20 of the 28 EU member countries without any geographical pattern. Notwithstanding the country-specific variations, many analysts attribute this dramatic increase in electoral participation to the higher politicization of EP elections (De Sio et al. 2019: 64) and see it as a sign of increasing legitimacy of EU governance (Tallberg 2019: 13). However, many mainstream centrist parties experienced significant vote losses, whereas EU-critical parties consolidated their presence in the EP and even slightly increased their seat share (~30 %) compared to the previous legislature (Brack 2019: 64). Nevertheless, although Eurosceptic parties dominated the election in several member states, they did not experience another major breakthrough as in the previous EP election in 2014 (Wilhelm 2019) that had been described as “Eurosceptic” or “political earthquake” by media outlets across Europe.¹

In fact, the strong surge in Euroscepticism – both in public opinion and voting behavior – had been the major theme of the 2014 EP election (Nielsen & Franklin 2017), alongside with a historically low voter turnout (42.6 %) and an increasing importance of EU issues during the election campaign. Prior to the 2014 EP election, the EP itself had announced that “this time it’s different”, mainly because European level parties presented top candidates for the European Commission presidency in order to strengthen the electoral connection between citizens and the EU executive and to increase democratic legitimacy. In hindsight, however, this “Spitzenkandidaten system” had limited effects on both party strategies as well as voting behavior (see, e.g., Quinlan & Okolikj 2016, Braun & Popa 2018). The remarkable differences from earlier EP elections turned out to be others: after several years of economic crisis in Europe – commonly called the “Euro crisis” – many citizens expressed discontent with the EU and its crisis management at the

¹ See, e.g., the British *BBC*, the French *Le Figaro* or the Spanish *El Mundo*.

ballot boxes, which led some observers to the conclusion that “for the first time, these elections were clearly ‘about Europe’” (Russo et al. 2019: 9). Most notably, the campaign and public debates were “strongly framed as a contest between parties wanting more Europe vs. parties wanting less Europe” (Thomassen 2016: 546). Interestingly, this observation runs counter to the “second-order elections” assumptions that researchers traditionally use to explain electoral behavior in European elections (Reif & Schmitt 1980), but lends support to scholars who claim that “Europe matters” in present-day EP elections (Hobolt 2015).

The debate between these two camps and its implications for the democratic legitimacy of the EU provides the theoretical framework of this paper-based dissertation. Analyzing the character of contemporary EP elections is of crucial importance for the legitimacy of EU governance, because without European issues playing a role for parties and voters, EP elections can hardly fulfil their legitimizing function for the European political system. To put it bluntly, my main research interest therefore lies in the question how and to what extent “Europe” actually mattered for citizens in the 2014 European elections. More specifically, I analyze the electoral effects of individual orientations towards the EU and the European integration process. By doing so, I am particularly interested in how the relationship between attitudes and EP election behavior is conditioned by the degree to which EU issues are politicized in the different EU member states, especially as a consequence of the Euro crisis.

This dissertation consists of three empirical studies that address the research questions laid out above. Before presenting these studies, I provide the reader with the theoretical background that underlies the research interest in citizen attitudes towards European integration and EP election behavior in the next section (2). The subsequent section (3) then discusses the empirical studies and their contributions to the literature, before the concluding section (4) reflects implications, limitations and avenues for further research. Appended to these introductory chapters are the copies of the three articles that have been published in (or submitted to) peer-reviewed political science journals.

2 Theoretical background

The theoretical framework of this dissertation integrates several streams of academic literature, which build the foundation for the research interest in citizens' attitudes towards European integration and their behavior in European Parliament elections. Therefore, the following section is primarily concerned with conceptions of legitimacy and democracy at the European level (2.1), before discussing the contested nature of contemporary EP elections and its implication for individual electoral behavior (2.2). A third section then connects the two previous sections and lays out the general research hypotheses of this dissertation (2.3).

2.1 Legitimacy and democracy in the European Union

In this section, I discuss theoretical and empirical contributions in the research field of legitimacy and democracy in the EU, which entails an overview of different concepts and sources of political legitimacy as well as their application to the European political system. At this stage, I also introduce the two central concepts of citizen-based Euroscepticism and political representation, which are of vital importance for evaluating the legitimacy of EU governance. Lastly, I discuss the EU's alleged democratic deficit as well as the role of the European Parliament and EP elections in legitimizing the political system of the EU.

2.1.1 Concepts and sources of political legitimacy

The concept of political legitimacy – which refers to the acceptability, rightfulness and justification of political order, power and authority – has a long history in political philosophy (see, e.g., Locke 1952[1690], Rousseau 1988[1762], Weber 1922). The main reason for its prominence is that legitimacy confers a right to exercise political power and the obligation to comply with it, which implies that “legitimate political systems are more likely to enjoy the voluntary compliance of those over whom they exercise power” (Lord 2015: 1). Until today, the study of political legitimacy is central for several sub-fields of political science, especially political theory (see, e.g., Rawls 1993, Buchanan 2002) and political

behavior (see, e.g., Weatherford 1992, Levi et al. 2009). In accordance with these two research areas, most contemporary authors distinguish between two types of political legitimacy or two ways of assessing the legitimacy of a political order: *normative* and *descriptive* legitimacy (see, e.g., Schmitt & Thomassen 1999, Lindgren & Persson 2010, Fuchs 2011, Weiler 2012).

Normative legitimacy refers to a theoretical benchmark that a political authority can be evaluated against. Whether a political system or body is legitimate or not depends on the extent that it conforms to specific normative criteria and whether the coercive power it exercises can be theoretically justified. These normative criteria can be set, for example, by theories of liberal, representative or deliberative democracy (Holzhacker 2007: 259). In contrast, *descriptive legitimacy* focuses on people's legitimacy beliefs and asks whether the members of a political community accept – at least passively – a given political order.² In this sense, political authority can be regarded as legitimate, “when it is accepted as appropriate and worthy of being obeyed by those affected by its policies” (Lindgren & Persson 2010: 451). Derived from the descriptive form of political legitimacy is the empirical research program on political culture and political support, which highlights the importance of citizens' attitudes and legitimacy beliefs for the stability of a political system (Lipset 1959, Almond & Verba 1963, Easton 1975).³

Although the sharp distinction between the normative and descriptive concepts of political legitimacy is not without problems and critics (see, e.g., Habermas 1979, Beetham 1991), it provides “two different vantage points in the study of political legitimacy, a macro perspective emphasizing formal system properties, and a micro view emphasizing citizens' attitudes and actions.” (Weatherford 1992: 149).⁴ However, although both concepts of legitimacy allow to compare different political systems, it seems problematic that there are often no clear criteria

² Descriptive legitimacy is at times also labelled “social” (Føllesdal 2004) or “sociological” (Lindgren & Persson 2010) legitimacy.

³ Until today, this research area has produced a plethora of empirical studies relating to different modes of attitudes and various political objects (see, e.g., Kaase & Newton 1995, Norris 1999, Putnam 2000).

⁴ Accordingly, Weatherford uses the terms “macro legitimacy” and “micro legitimacy” when referring to normative and descriptive concepts of political legitimacy.

which help to assess whether a political authority is regarded as sufficiently legitimate.

The *sources* of a political regime's legitimacy are argued to lie in both its performance as well as its processes (Scharpf 1999). On the one hand, a political order can be regarded as legitimate, because it provides policies from which the majority of the people benefit. This form of legitimacy, which is derived by positive outcomes of political decisions and the efficiency of the policies adopted, is usually labeled *output legitimacy*. On the other hand, people can accept political authority, because they appreciate the decision-making processes of the political system. In democracies, citizens usually demand the chance to influence policy-making, which implies the need for equal participation opportunities, fair political competition, transparency of decision-making processes and accountability of the decision-makers. Such an *input legitimacy*, therefore, rests on the participatory quality of democratic processes (Lindgren & Persson 2010: 451).⁵ Although it is widely accepted that political legitimacy rests on a combination of both sources, descriptive legitimacy seems to be mainly created by beneficial outputs in most circumstances (Rothstein 2009).

2.1.2 The legitimacy of European governance

The European Union is a political regime in particular need of legitimacy, as it possesses extensive policy-making competencies but does not itself have any coercive means of enforcing its policies. Being designed as a supranational, multi-level system, it rests on the voluntary compliance of sovereign nation states as well as their respective citizens. However, research on the democratic legitimacy of European governance has only gained traction with the formal establishment of the EU in the 1990s. The emerging literature on the EU's legitimacy also reveals

⁵ In addition, Schmidt (2013) introduces the concept of *throughput legitimacy*, which focuses on "the 'black box' of governance between input and output", namely "governance processes with the people, analyzed in terms of their efficacy, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and openness to interest consultation." (Schmidt 2013: 2).

the aforementioned divide between normative and descriptive concepts of political legitimacy.

Regarding the *descriptive* concept of political legitimacy, the conventional wisdom is that the European integration project has for long enjoyed a “permissive consensus” (Inglehart 1970, Lindberg & Scheingold 1970) by its citizens. The notion implies that the European publics were passively supportive or largely indifferent to the slow development of a political system on the European level, which was pursued mostly by political elites. However, with the signing and ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992/93, the nature of European integration changed dramatically, as it transformed the predominantly economic and inter-governmental European Communities into a genuine political union with a more supranational character (Fuchs 2011, Van Elsas & Van Der Brug 2015). Citizens in many member states reacted to these fundamental changes⁶ with reservation, with the results that public opinion towards the EU became increasingly critical in the years to follow – a development coined as the “post-Maastricht blues” (Eichenberg & Dalton 2007). The new “constraining dissensus” (Hooghe & Marks 2009), which replaced the former permissive consensus, finally manifested in the political arena, when the French and the Dutch citizens voted against ratifying the Constitution Treaty in 2005.

Around the same time, *Euroscepticism* became popular in the academic literature on party politics (Taggart 1998, Kopecký & Mudde 2002, Szczerbiak & Taggart 2008) and public opinion (Hooghe & Marks 2007, Weßels 2007, Leconte 2010). The term explicitly emphasizes critical and opposing preferences towards the EU and the European integration process, which can be held by various political actors. In attitudinal research, Euroscepticism is commonly defined as “a subset of negative attitudes towards the European Union (EU) and/or European integration” (Serricchio et al. 2013), which hints to the multidimensional nature of these orientations (Boomgaarden et al. 2011). Authors who investigate – both positive and negative – attitudes towards European integration often refer to the concept

⁶ In Denmark, the Maastricht Treaty was initially rejected by the citizens in a referendum, but it was finally accepted in an adapted form.

of political support developed by Easton (1975) and apply it to the political system of the European Union (see, e.g., Niedermayer & Westle 1995, Weßels 2007, Boomgaarden et al. 2011).⁷ The concept is particularly useful to distinguish between different attitudinal objects – e.g., the regime as a whole, the regime institutions and the political community – and between different modes of support. Regarding these support modes, authors often separate utilitarian/specific/output-orientated orientations from affective/diffuse/input-orientated attitudes (Boomgaarden et al. 2011: 245), implying that the latter mode of support is particularly relevant for the EU’s democratic legitimacy (Easton 1975).⁸

Yet, although citizens’ support for different political objects on the European level – such as the general principle of European integration and the EU membership of their country, the trust in the EU institutions and the self-identification as Europeans – are all regarded as essential for the stability and legitimacy of the Union, it is still debated whether the surge in popular Euroscepticism has significantly threatened the EU’s legitimacy. In fact, empirical studies suggest that the Euro crisis led to significant drops in utilitarian-specific EU support in countries most affected by severe economic hardship (Braun & Tausendpfund 2014, Schäfer & Gross 2020). However, it seems that this is not the case for more affective-diffuse modes of support, implying that even “in times of crisis, the European Union can draw on mass public support as a source of resilience” (Ringlerova 2015: 558). Nevertheless, with the negative outcome of the Brexit referendum in 2016, the drastic political consequences of citizen-based Euroscepticism have become as visible as never before and, thus, seem to be of continuing concern (Vasilopoulou 2016).⁹

⁷ From the research program on public opinion towards European integration, a rich literature emerged on the causes and consequences of EU support and Euroscepticism (see for an overview, e.g., Hobolt & De Vries 2016a, Ejrnæs & Jensen 2019).

⁸ According to Easton (1965, 1975), diffuse support for a political system is a generalized attachment that represents “a reservoir of [...] good will” (Easton 1975: 444), which is unaffected by short-term discontent due to negative political outputs.

⁹ Interestingly, Europe-wide attitudes towards the EU have become more positive again since the Brexit referendum, which indicates the relevance of benchmarks and potential “alternative states” when people evaluate the EU (De Vries 2018).

From the *normative* perspective, the EU's legitimacy has been intensively discussed from different perspective since the beginning of the 1990s (see, e.g., Beetham & Lord 1998, Bellamy & Castiglione 2003, Lord & Magnette 2004, Kohler-Koch & Rittberger 2007), which has led some scholars to assess "a theoretical labyrinth with no exit" (Wimmel 2008: 49). In most instances, the common theme is the dual character of the EU's political legitimacy, since the Union, much like a federal state, derives its legitimacy from both its constituent states as well as its citizens (De Vries & Hobolt 2016: 103). Rather recently, Kröger and Friedrich (2013) diagnose a "representative turn in EU studies" (see also Norris 1997a, Schmitt & Thomassen 1999, Lord & Pollack 2010). The authors highlight the importance of *political representation* for the political system of the EU, as "it is accepted today that political representation is a sine qua non for the legitimacy of any democratic political system" (Kröger & Friedrich 2013: 156).¹⁰ For Kröger (2015), representation is "the institutional translation of the principle of political equality" (Kröger 2015: 469), which refers to both the equality of sovereign nation states and the equality of self-determined citizens. Political representation and, thus, political legitimacy in the EU have to be realized through regular, free and fair elections as well as a representative government, which aggregates societal interests and preferences, via "two channels of representation" (Mair 2005, 2007): an indirect intergovernmental channel through national elections and national government in the Council as well as a direct supranational channel through elections to the European Parliament.

The new focus on political representation in EU studies has much to do with the way that the EU understands its own democratic legitimacy. With the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the entering into force of the consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 2009, the EU officially adopted democratic

¹⁰ According to the most basic definition in representation theory (Pitkin 1967), political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices and preferences "present" in policy-making processes. It is, however, apparent that representation is a multi-faceted concept (see, e.g., Mansbridge 2003, 2011) that is not discussed in detail here. In the empirical study of representation, for example, two distinct strands of literature have emerged that focus either on "(issue) congruence" between elites and voters or on "(policy) responsiveness" by elites to the wishes of the people (Powell 2004, Wlezien 2017, Beyer & Hänni 2018).

principles declaring it is founded on representative democracy (Art. 10.1 [TEU](#)) and on the principle of equality (Art. 9 [TEU](#)). Hence, political equality and representative democracy can serve as legitimate “meta-standards” (Lord & Pollak [2010](#): 126) to evaluate the EU’s political legitimacy. Moreover, the treaty makes explicit reference to the dual electoral representation in the EU’s political system (Art. 10.2 [TEU](#)).¹¹ However, it can be argued that the supranational “chain of delegation and accountability” (Strøm [2000](#)) is incomplete because of the limited powers that the Parliament has to vote in and control a government. This situation creates a “crisis of political representation” (Hayward [1995](#)), which is detrimental to the legitimacy of EU governance. Rittberger ([2012](#)), therefore, diagnoses a “legitimacy gap” in the EU, as “the principle of representative democracy is undermined” (Rittberger [2012](#): 29).

A critical role for the process of political representation is played by political parties, as they embody the central linkage between citizens and their government (Sartori [2005](#)). This essential function of political parties for representative democracies is at the heart of the “responsible party model” laid out by Schattschneider ([1942](#)) who famously remarked that “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties” (Schattschneider [1942](#): 1). In a similar fashion, Sartori ([1968](#)) underlines that “citizens in modern democracies are represented *through* and *by* parties” (Sartori [1968](#): 417). From this perspective, parties’ capacity to represent citizens on the European level is therefore of central importance for the legitimacy of the EU’s political system. Moreover, political representation also plays a vital role for rational choice theories of democracy (Downs [1957](#)), which rest on the assumption that effective representation requires political parties that compete on the same ideological dimensions as their electorate.

Consequently, the Lisbon Treaty introduced an explicit reference to the representative role of parties by stating that “political parties at European level

¹¹ This dual representation hints at the coexistence of two forms of political equality on the European level, where equality refers both to citizens (principle of individual self-determination) and to nation states (principle of national sovereignty) with no particular hierarchy (Kröger [2015](#)).

contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union” (Art. 10.4 TEU). However, there is no real party structure on the European level and even the national parties do not fulfill a governmental function in European politics. The result is a representation gap between political elites on the European level and the electorates, especially when it comes to the issue of European integration (Costello et al. 2012). Nevertheless, Mair and Thomassen (2010) claim that “because they don’t govern, parties have a much greater capacity to act as representatives” (Mair & Thomassen 2010: 27), thus implying that political parties on the European level actually fulfill the function of controlling and scrutinizing the executive. This can actually be observed when concentrating on the left-right dimension of political competition (Costello et al. 2012). Yet, it is still highly debated whether political parties serve as effective instruments of political representation in European politics (see, e.g., Sorace 2018) and to what extent the quality of representation has been affected by the recent European crises (see, e.g., Conti et al. 2018, Traber et al. 2018).

The gap between normative and descriptive conceptions of legitimacy is bridged by streams of empirical literature that analyzes the extent to which (perceived) political representation affects political support and legitimacy beliefs of individuals. As such, it has been consistently shown that different measures of representation, such as ideological and policy-based congruence or perceived responsiveness of political elites, increase satisfaction with democracy and political support (Ezrow & Xezonakis 2011, Reher 2015, Stecker & Tausendpfund 2016, Esaiasson et al. 2017, Ferland 2017, Mayne & Hakhverdian 2017). These findings imply that normative and descriptive political legitimacy are indeed closely related. However, there is much less scholarly knowledge about the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of (lacking) political representation in the case of the EU’s political system.

2.1.3 The EU’s democratic deficit and the European Parliament

The ambivalent and inconclusive nature of electoral representation in European politics is also a core feature of the debate on the EU’s alleged *democratic deficit*,

particularly from the perspective of scholars who mainly identify institutional deficits (Føllesdal & Hix 2006).¹² The “standard version” (Weiler et al. 1995) of the democratic deficit thesis rests on the assumption that European integration led to “an increase in executive power and a decrease in parliamentary control” (Føllesdal & Hix 2006: 534) across Europe, in particular because of the dominant role of the Council in EU policy-making. National legislatures subsequently lost the ability to exercise control over governments in certain policy areas. Since this loss in parliamentary oversight had not been adequately substituted by sufficient democratic control at the European level, the democratic quality of the EU’s political decisions decreased with the step-wise transfer of policy-making power from the national to the supranational level. More specifically, the EP’s lacking capacities to nominate and control the EU executive, to initiate legislation and to act as an equal co-legislator have been diagnosed as most relevant contributors to the EU’s institutional democratic deficit (Føllesdal & Hix 2006).

In response, repeated efforts of democratizing the EU have mostly focused on the supranational solution, namely on the role of the European Parliament “as the ‘democratic pillar’ of the Union” (Blondel et al. 1998: 11). Many hopes had already been put into the first direct elections of the EP in 1979, when Belgium prime minister Leo Tindemans expected that “direct elections to the Parliament [...] will reinforce the democratic legitimacy of the whole European institutional apparatus” (*Tindemans Report* 1975: 29). The process of strengthening democracy and accountability in the EU also led to an increase in the EP’s legislative powers (Rittberger 2005, Hix et al. 2007). But it was not before the introduction of the “Co-decision Procedure” by the Maastricht Treaty and its institutionalization as “Ordinary Legislative Procedure” (OLP) in the Lisbon Treaty that the European Parliament obtained the status of a fully equal co-legislator in most policy areas. The eventual introduction of the OLP was thus seen as a further step for “the

¹² Other camps in this debate are formed, for example, by scholars who do not see a democratic deficit in the EU (Majone 1996, Moravcsik 2002) or by those who rather identify a structural (“no demos” thesis) than an institutional deficit (Höreth 1999, Kielmansegg 2003).

gradual institutionalization of representative democracy as a constitutional principle of the EU” (Rittberger 2012: 18).

Apart from establishing a direct legitimation of the EP via elections and granting the Parliament more powers in EU policy making, treaty reforms also concentrated on establishing a better link between voters and EU institutions by reforming European Parliament elections and the formation of the European Commission. Although it has proven to be difficult to establish uniform electoral procedures¹³, the Amsterdam Treaty provided the opportunity to introduce “common principles” for EP elections in all member states. In 2002, the Council finally adopted the *Anastassopoulos Report* (1998), which put forward a number of common electoral principles, such as the proportional representation (PR) voting system with the allowance of single transferable and preferential voting. However, there are still “significant variations in the way in which these elections are conducted in member states” (Franklin & Hobolt 2015: 401).¹⁴

Beside the electoral reforms, successive treaty changes gave the EP the power to approve the European Commission (Maastricht), which de facto resulted in the possibility to veto individual commissioners, and to elect the Commission president with absolute majority (Amsterdam). These control powers were added to the right to dismiss the entire Commission by a two-thirds majority. Moreover, the terms of office for both institutions – Parliament and Commission – were harmonized by the Maastricht Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty then granted the most far-reaching appointment powers to the EP to date by demanding that the European Council has to “take into account” the elections to the European Parliament when nominating a candidate for President of the European Commission (Art. 17.7 TEU). Following this reform, the EP successfully called the European level political parties to present top candidates for the Commission presidency – so-called

¹³ See for attempts of introducing uniform electoral procedures, for example, the *Seitlinger Report* (1982) or the *Bocklet Report* (1985).

¹⁴ These differences in electoral procedures concern, for example, the exact day of the election, the size of the constituencies, the existence of compulsory voting and electoral thresholds as well as the minimum age for voting and for standing as a candidate. These differences persist due to the specific traditions in the electoral systems and rules of the different nation states.

“Spitzenkandidaten” – during the 2014 EP election campaign (*Duff Report* 2008). Directly after the election, national governments nominated the candidate of the biggest political group, Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP), in order to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the European Union (Hobolt 2014). As a result, the executive branch of the Union has been for the first time selected in a “quasi-parliamentary” manner (Franklin & Hobolt 2015: 400).

Although the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure has experienced a significant setback in the 2019 EP elections, it can be concluded that the steady development of European elections points to the important function that these elections have for the political legitimacy of the Union. A central reason for this assumption is that elections are not only about selecting representatives and holding them accountable for past performances. Elections are also crucial for the legitimization of authority – both to the ones exercising political power and to the political system more generally (Rose & Mossawir 1967: 178).

It is therefore not surprising that one additional and important feature of the “standard version” of the EU’s alleged democratic deficit is the inability of EP elections to provide democratic legitimacy (Weiler et al. 1995, Føllesdal & Hix 2006). Apart from certain problematic features of the electoral system¹⁵, authors usually provide two main justifications for this assessment. First, voter turnout is usually much lower than turnout in national elections and has even decreased over time, which appears almost “paradoxically” given the gradual increase in powers of the European Parliament (Weiler et al. 1995: 8). Lutz and Marsh (2007) argue that “the legitimacy of democracy in general and the outcomes of elections in particular are undermined when many citizens do not vote” (Lutz & Marsh 2007: 539). Although this argument is not uncontested in the literature, Norris (1997a) highlights that “voting participation is commonly regarded as one major indicator of the health of a democracy, reflecting trust and confidence in the political system” (Norris 1997a: 281).

¹⁵ Since the number of MEPs per country is generally rather low (compared to national elections) and since there are no local constituencies, there is hardly any direct contact and accountability between individual MEPs and citizens.

Second, the EP elections are commonly denied their “European” character by European integration scholars. Føllesdal and Hix (2006) state that they are neither “about the personalities and parties at the European level [n]or the direction of the EU policy agenda” (Føllesdal & Hix 2006: 536). Elections are fought over domestic issues by national parties that communicate and compete in nationally fragmented discourse arenas. In addition, people have much less interest and knowledge in European politics than in national politics (Pannico 2017: 3, see also Hobolt 2007). The combination of the aforementioned factors leads Weiler et al. (1995) to conclude that “no one who votes in the European elections has a strong sense at all of affecting critical policy choices at the European level, and certainly not of confirming or rejecting European governance” (Weiler et al. 1995: 8).

Taken together, it is highly questionable whether the European Parliament and its regular elections provide the EU with the democratic legitimacy that it needs and that it claims to have. Thomassen and Schmitt (1999) remark that democratic representation in the EU is not only “failing because of the lack of a system of responsible government, but also because elections for the European Parliament fail for a number of reasons to link the views of the European people on political matters to the agenda of the European Parliament” (Thomassen & Schmitt 1999: 4). Franklin and Hobolt (2015) add to this assessment that “what the European Parliament lacks most today is not more legislative power – that has been expanded by successive treaty reforms – but a mandate to use that power in any particular manner. It lacks that mandate because of the way in which European elections have been conducted, not least due to the lack of any real contestation over alternative policy agendas” (Franklin & Hobolt 2015: 414).

As an important specification, Blondel et al. (1998) assume that the main question regarding the legitimizing function of European elections is “whether or to what extent they are conducted independently from other elections” (Blondel et al. 1998: 14). In other words, they ask whether EP elections have a ‘sui generis’ character or whether they are just subordinate to national elections. The answer to this question concerns the debate between proponents of the “second-order elections” research paradigm and authors of the “Europe matters” literature, which will both be discussed in the following section.

2.2 EP election theories and citizens' electoral behavior

In this section, I lay out two theoretical approaches of understanding the nature of contemporary EP elections – the “second-order election” framework and the “Europe matters” approach – as well as their implications for the electoral behavior of EU citizens and the legitimizing function of European elections.

2.2.1 The “second-order elections” framework

“European elections are additional national second-order elections. They are determined more by the domestic political cleavages than by alternatives originating in the EC.”
(Reif & Schmitt 1980: 3)

For the last forty years, the dominant paradigm in European election research has been the “second-order (national) elections” approach developed by Reif and Schmitt (1980) in their seminal work on the first direct EP elections. Although it is mostly tested by using aggregate-level data, it has become the “standard theory of European Parliament elections” (Hix & Marsh 2007: 495), as it consistently helps to explain patterns in the election results across EU member states (Reif 1984, Schmitt 2005, Hix & Marsh 2007, 2011, Schmitt & Teperoglou 2015, Schmitt & Toygür 2016). The term *second-order election* (SOE) describes the relationship that characterize these less relevant and less salient elections compared to the more important elections in a (national) political system, in which the government is determined: so-called *first-order elections* (FOE). Most political power is located in FOE arenas and then delegated from citizens to representatives in a “prevalent process of democratic political legitimization” (Reif 1997: 116). SOE are only secondary in this regard, which is why the term can be applied to all other elections including European but also regional electoral contests.

A number of electoral patterns characterize SOE. Most strikingly, voter turnout is lower than in FOE and one can observe electoral losses for large and governing parties to the benefit of small and opposition parties (Van Der Eijk & Franklin

1996, Ferrara & Weishaupt 2004, Hix & Marsh 2007).¹⁶ In the case of EP elections, it has been observed, first, that the turnout difference between European and national elections – which Rose (2004) coined the “Euro gap” – lies on average between 15 and 25 points. Second, the main beneficiaries of electoral gains in EP elections have so far been Green and anti-EU parties on both sides of the ideological spectrum, whereas centrist parties – such as Socialists, Conservatives and Liberals – have been the losers of the second-order mechanisms (Franklin & Hobolt 2015: 403). Third, the electoral pattern is affected by the timing of the SOE with regards to the electoral cycle of the respective FOE. Those cyclical effects are explained with the downward trend in popular popularity of governments around the national midterm (Reif & Schmitt 1980). This “cycle of popularity” (Marsh 1998), thus, is a function of the national electoral cycle, where losses of big and governing parties are “highest at midterm and fade toward the beginning and the end of a legislative period” (Weber 2011: 909). Fourth, there are further contextual factors that determine electoral results in European Parliament elections, especially features of the electoral system, such as the question whether or not voting is compulsory, and whether an EP election is conducted for the first time in a country (Franklin & Hobolt 2015). Lastly, the second-order model explains the electoral patterns in the older Western European member states significantly better than in the former communist countries that joined the EU after 2004 (Schmitt 2005).

Regarding the underlying individual-level mechanisms for these patterns, Reif (1984: 246-247) remarks that citizens are less interested in SOE, because “there is less at stake” than in FOE. This notion implies that the lower turnout is mainly caused by personal indifference or a lack of political awareness, especially when it comes to European affairs. Apart from that, individual electoral participation is affected by the same factors that determine turnout in FOE. Moreover, the perception that SOE are of lower importance invites people to vote less tactically or

¹⁶ There are also institutional reasons why smaller parties benefit, at least in some electoral contexts. The reason is that different electoral rules, for example the fact that European elections are more proportional, can provide citizens with the chance to vote (sincerely) for parties they would not vote for (strategically) in national elections.

strategically (“voting with the head”) and provides them with the opportunity to vote sincerely for their most preferred party (“voting with the heart”) or to punish (national) government parties for bad performances (“voting with the boot”) as a sign of protest (Oppenhuis et al. 1996).¹⁷ Taken together, the SOE approach postulates that the individual vote choices in European elections mainly depend on first-order issues and considerations, which indicates that national issues dominate European issues in EP election campaigns.

This assumption has important implications for the legitimizing function of European elections. Blondel et al. (1998) remark that if there are no arena-specific European considerations at play in European Parliament elections, then “European elections would have no effect whatsoever on the legitimacy of the Union” (Blondel et al. 1998: 14). Even more specifically, Føllesdal and Hix (2006) note that the absence of a “European” element in EP elections means that “EU citizens’ preferences on issues on the EU policy agenda at best have only an indirect influence on EU policy outcomes” (Føllesdal & Hix 2006: 536). It is for this reason that Norris (1997b) notes: “so long as elections to the EP remain second-order contests, the legitimacy and authority of this body remains under question, and the ghost of the ‘democratic deficit’ will continue to haunt the European Union.” (Norris 1997b: 114). Evidently, the implication is that EP elections can only legitimate policy-making on the EU level and the political authority of the EU more generally, when EU issues play a significant role for citizens in the election.

2.2.2 The “Europe matters” approach

“In other words, the combined effect of the overall strengthening of EP powers – both in absolute and relative terms – and the visibility of EU measures in the management of the economic and financial crisis leads us to believe that European Parliamentary elections may start to matter, becoming an electoral battlefield where something is at stake.” (Trechsel et al. 2017: 4)

¹⁷ The argument that voters punish incumbent parties for bad performances picks up on the economic voting literature (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2000, Kousser 2004).

Although the second-order approach remains powerful in explaining general electoral patterns in European elections up to this date (De Sio et al. 2019), recent literature highlights that European integration has become an increasingly important issue in EP elections (De Vries et al. 2011, Hobolt 2015, Braun et al. 2016). While aggregate-level studies already indicate that political parties with a clear position on European integration, such as anti-EU parties, gain votes in EP elections (Hix & Marsh 2007), individual-level research adds that arena-specific European considerations matter for citizens in their decision whether or not to vote in European elections and whom to vote for (Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Hernández & Kriesi 2016). Empirical studies that focus on these “European” explanatory factors for citizens’ electoral behavior are often subsumed under the label “Europe matters” (Franklin & Hobolt 2015) or “Europe salience” (Viola 2016). Although the *Europe matters* literature does not repudiate the SOE model, it discusses the extent to which EP elections have become “less ‘second-order national elections’ and more truly European contests” (Hobolt 2015: 8).

Considering electoral (non-)participation in EP elections, various “European” factors seem to play a role for the individual turnout decision (Mattila 2003, Flickinger & Studlar 2007, Steinbrecher & Rattinger 2012). In particular, an individual’s attitudes towards European integration and the EU (Blondel et al. 1998, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Kentmen-Cin 2017), often measured by the support for the EU membership of one’s country (Rosema 2007, Steinbrecher 2014), contribute to the likelihood of taking part in EP elections. This finding is supported by aggregate-level analyses which show that EP election turnout is higher in countries with a pro-European public opinion (Flickinger & Studlar 2007, Evans & Ivaldi 2012, Stockemer 2012, Steinbrecher 2014, Fiorino et al. 2019) and countries which are net recipients of EU subsidies (Mattila 2003, Evans & Ivaldi 2012). Furthermore, individual interest in European politics (Clark 2014) and knowledge about EU politics (Blondel et al. 1998) as well as about the *Spitzenkandidaten* (Schmitt et al. 2015) mobilize people to turnout.

If people vote with European considerations in mind, we are faced with a phenomenon that scholars call “EU issue voting” (De Vries 2007, De Vries & Hobolt

2016).¹⁸ While the classic SOE approach assumes that voting is wholly determined by national level factors, the *Europe matters* literature shows that citizens make their voting decision in EP elections dependent on their attitudes towards European integration and the EU (Clark & Rohrschneider 2009, De Vries et al. 2011, Van Spanje & De Vreese 2011, Van Elsas et al. 2019). When citizens rely on EU attitudes in European elections, they might be incentivized to switch their vote compared to previous national elections where other issues are usually more important. Empirical studies illustrate, for example, that holding Eurosceptic attitudes increases the likelihood to defect from more pro-European government parties (Hobolt et al. 2009). In addition, decreasing policy congruence on the EU integration dimension to parties previously voted for makes it more likely that voters switch parties in EP elections (Hobolt & Spoon 2012).

However, the degree to which *EU issue voting* can be observed in European elections is context-dependent. Cross-national studies demonstrate that attitudes towards the EU matter for EP election behavior in contexts where the media devote more attention to EU issues (De Vries & Hobolt 2016) and where the party system is more polarized regarding the issue of European integration (Van Spanje & De Vreese 2011, Hobolt & Spoon 2012). The systemic issue salience and the issue polarization of political actors are sub-dimensions of the “issue politicization” concept (De Wilde 2011, Hutter et al. 2016, Kriesi 2016, Hutter & Kriesi 2019), commonly defined as the “expansion of the scope of conflict’ within the political system” (Hutter & Grande 2014: 1003).

For a long time, European integration had not been a contested issue in the EU member states, mainly because mainstream parties actively depoliticized the issue in various ways, thereby turning it into a “sleeping giant” (Van Der Eijk & Franklin 2004, De Vries 2007, De Wilde & Zürn 2012). Existing and emerging Eurosceptic parties exploited this situation by acting as “issue entrepreneurs”

¹⁸ EU issue voting is also studied on the national level (see, e.g., Tillman 2004, De Vries & Hobolt 2016, Schoen 2019). Although this research is of vital importance considering the dual electoral connection in between the EU and its citizens, I solely focus here on EU issue voting in European Parliament elections.

(Hobolt & De Vries 2015),¹⁹ which means that they politicized the issue of European integration in order to gain votes of Eurosceptic citizens in national and European elections (Hooghe & Marks 2009, 2018). The economic and sovereign debt crisis led to a further politicization of European integration, as both the salience and the polarization of this issue increased after the year 2010 (Hutter & Kriesi 2019). However, degree of EU issue politicization varies considerably over the EU member states yielding a “regionally differentiated politicization” (Hutter & Kriesi 2019: 19) with a particularly strong politicization boost in Southern Europe whereas EU issues are still hardly politicized in Central and Eastern Europe.

There are several reasons why the level of *EU issue politicization* influences the degree to which attitudes towards the EU matter for people’s electoral behavior. Since citizens are usually not well informed about European politics prior to the EP election, electoral campaigns can exert strong effects on individuals who receive information on EU issues and the programmatic positions of political parties. Beach et al. (2018) illustrate for Danish voters that their vote intention became increasingly dependent on their view on European integration over the course of 2014 EP election campaign. This is supported by an experimental study of Hobolt and Wittrock (2011) who show that “when participants were given more information about party placements on the EU dimension, they were more likely to vote on the basis of their EU attitudes” (Hobolt & Wittrock 2011: 39). This conditioning effect is enhanced when parties occupy more dispersed positions on EU issues, as “voters only take EU-specific considerations into account when political parties provide them with clear choices” (Hobolt & Spoon 2012: 719). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that in electoral contexts that provide citizens with more information on EU issues and party positions regarding European integration – due to a higher issue salience and a stronger issue polarization – EU attitudes become more relevant for people’s electoral behavior.

¹⁹ Hobolt and De Vries (2015) define a party as issue entrepreneur “when it actively promotes a previously ignored issue and adopts a position that is different from that of the mean position in the party system.” (Hobolt & De Vries 2015: 1168).

Taken together, the “Europe matters” literature offers important insights in the study of EP elections and their implications for the legitimizing function of European elections. However, respective authors rarely approach individual electoral behavior as directly targeting the legitimacy and stability of the EU. Yet, it seems worth mentioning that the electoral behavior of citizens can be regarded a direct expression of individual political support or the lack thereof. Both the mere participation in an EP election and the vote for a pro-European political party represent forms of “system-supporting behavior” (Bauer 2020). On the contrary, staying at home during European elections or voting for anti-EU parties can be seen as “system-critical behavior”, implying that they are “micro-level manifestation[s] of low levels of EU regime support” (Bauer 2020: 154, see also Fuchs 2002: 39). In his empirical study, Bauer (2020) shows that relationship between EU support and EP election behavior has become stronger after the Euro crisis “rendering the electoral choice a true supporting or sceptical action as a systemic consequence of individual generalized EU regime support” (Bauer 2020: 281).

Besides this expressive view on electoral behavior, it might also be assumed that Eurosceptic citizens are aware that both electoral decisions – the participation decision and the vote choice – bear consequences for the legitimacy and stability of the Union. In this line of argument, electoral behavior is based on rational and instrumental grounds. Eurosceptic citizens, for example, face two viable options to delegitimize the EU in EP elections – non-voting or voting for anti-EU parties – that both constitute threats to the future of the European integration process, if done on a mass level. This is, on the one hand, because low voter turnout is often seen as indicating problems with the “health” of a political system (Norris 1997b: 281). Non-voting in EP elections can thus be regarded as a delegitimizing act and, if done intentionally, as “one way of expressing opposition to the European political system and the integration process” (Steinbrecher & Rattinger 2012: 171). On the other hand, voting for Eurosceptic parties in EP elections might contribute to a growing instability of EU institutions. As an example, high seat shares for anti-EU parties in the European Parliament might seriously affect the way in which this institution functions (Brack 2018: 3). As most citizens should be vaguely aware of these political consequences, it seems not totally unthinkable

that strong, negative attitudes towards European integration result in – one of the two forms of – system-critical behavior, when “Europe matters” to them.

2.3 Basic research interest and hypotheses

As it has been argued, this thesis departs from the basic assumptions that elections to the European Parliament have an important legitimizing function for the political system of the EU. However, their capability to legitimize political authority on the European level depends on the degree to which citizens regard those elections as independent from other elections, especially from those that allocate power at the national level. While the SOE theory implies that the legitimizing character of European elections is rather limited, the “Europe matters” approach postulates that citizens actually do consider “European” factors during EP elections. This is momentous, because European elections should be less second-order to citizens, so that they can fulfill their legitimizing function. The general interest of this dissertation is, thus, to further our understanding of *how Europe matters* for the individual electoral behavior of EU citizens.

As *individual electoral behavior* I understand both the decision of whether or not to vote in an EP election and the choice of whom to vote for. With this conceptualization, I rely on previous research in the areas of electoral (non-)participation and voting behavior. Both research fields have identified a variety of determinants that explain why people participate in elections and why they vote for a particular party. By controlling for the traditional determinants of individual electoral behavior and by accounting for the individual-level assumptions of the SOE framework, I aim to assess the additional explanatory power of “European” explanatory factors during EP elections.

Evidently, the notion of *European factors* is rather broad and in need of further specification. As I am particularly interested in the legitimacy of EU governance, I build on the literature of political support and political representation that I discussed above. Hence, I focus on citizens’ attitudes towards the EU as well as voter-party congruence, especially regarding the issue of European integration, as most relevant individual level dispositions. Moreover, I acknowledge the

context-dependency of both EP elections and the relationship between individual orientations and electoral choices in European elections. Therefore, I am also interested in the extent to which European issues are politicized in the EU member states, especially following the European economic and sovereign debt crisis.

Figure 1: General research interest and research hypotheses of the dissertation

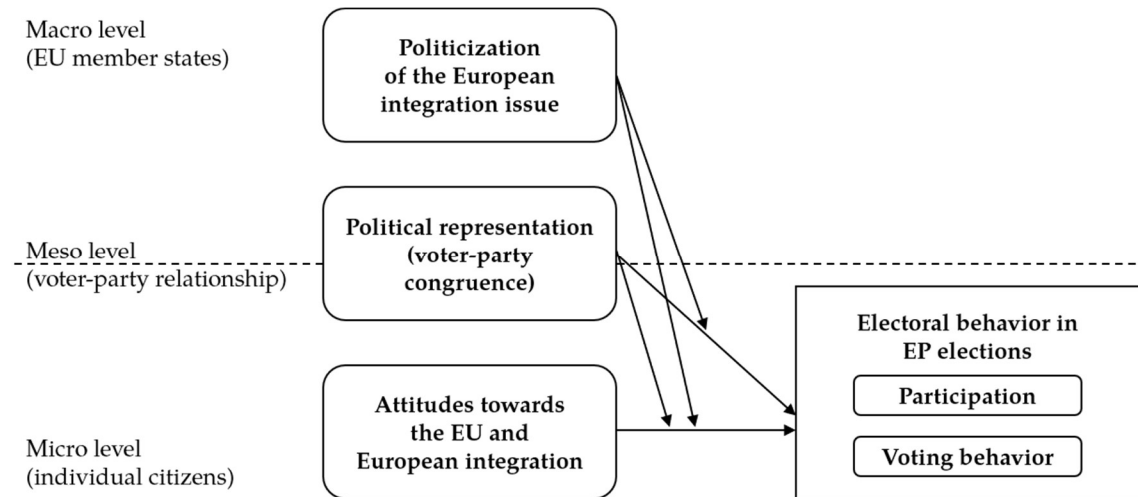


Figure 1 visualizes the research interest of this dissertation highlighting the different analytical levels of the explanatory factors for the individual-level electoral behavior of EU citizens. Following the “Europe matters” approach, the arrows represent hypotheses about theoretical mechanisms that were already mentioned in the theoretical background, but are extensively discussed and analytically tested in the empirical studies. These hypotheses concern, first, the direct effects of citizen preferences towards European integration on their EP election behavior. Second, they address the conditioning effects of EU issue politicization and political representation on the electoral impacts of individual orientations towards European integration. If “Europe matters” for citizens in European elections, the studies should find significant effects of “European” factors both on the participation decision and the vote choice of EU citizens.

Furthermore, several assumptions about the impact of these electoral effects on the legitimizing capacity of EP elections are underlying these research hypotheses, as already addressed in the theoretical background (see also fig. 1). First, the greater the influence of individual attitudes towards the EU is for citizens’

behavior in EP elections, the more can European elections fulfill their legitimizing function. Second, the greater the influence of voter-party congruence, especially regarding the issue of European integration, is for citizens' behavior in EP elections and the more it enhances the electoral impact of EU attitudes, the more can European elections fulfill their legitimizing function. Third, the more the politicization of European integration in an EU member state enhances the electoral impact of EU attitudes and voter-party congruence, the more can European elections fulfill their legitimizing function. These three assumptions as well as the research hypotheses sketched out above underly the more specific research questions and the empirical hypotheses that are derived and tested in the empirical studies that are discussed in the following section.

3 Empirical Studies

In this section, I depart from the general research interest and discuss the more specific research questions and contributions of the three empirical studies on *Attitudes towards European Integration and Behavior in European Parliament Elections*. Therefore, I lay out the research gaps and empirical research questions of the studies (3.1), before summarizing the single articles (3.2) and discussing their contributions to the literature on European elections (3.3).

3.1 Research gaps and empirical research questions

The thesis addresses several research gaps that can be identified in the EP election literature. First, although previous research shows that preferences towards European integration are increasingly important for the electoral behavior of EU citizens (Clark & Rohrschneider 2009, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Bauer 2020), it is much less clear which attitudes exactly determine the electoral choices of voters in EP elections. Despite the observed multidimensionality of EU attitudes in general (Boomgaarden et al. 2011) and Euroscepticism in particular (Weßels 2007), empirical studies too often rely on single attitudinal indicators and one-dimensional survey items when measuring EU support (see, e.g., Stockemer 2012, Steinbrecher 2014). This is particularly surprising, since the original political support concept was already developed as a multidimensional concept (Easton 1975). Therefore, this thesis aims at disentangling the electoral impact of different theoretically derived dimensions of attitudes towards the EU.

Second, despite the increasing prominence of Euroscepticism in the public discourse and as an own sub-field of European studies (Leconte 2015, Leruth et al. 2017), there is astonishingly little empirical evidence on the behavioral consequences of Eurosceptic attitudes (but see Werts et al. 2013, McDonnell & Werner 2018, Schneider 2019). Even in the area of EP election research, the electoral impacts of preferences towards European integration, such as the vote for Eurosceptic parties, are usually studied without a specific focus on negative EU attitudes (but see Van Spanje & De Vreese 2011, Treib 2014). Moreover, there are only few studies that analyze both forms of Eurosceptic electoral behavior – non-voting

and Eurosceptic voting – as dependent variables in a joint approach. Where it is done, scholars do not follow an integrated methodological approach, but rather study both phenomena in separate analyses (Hobolt et al. 2009, Hernández & Kriesi 2016, but see Hobolt & Spoon 2009). This thesis, therefore, puts a stronger focus on the consequences of Eurosceptic attitudes for electoral behavior and also explicitly models a Eurosceptic person's electoral trade-off between abstaining and Eurosceptic voting.

Third, although the great difference in turnout between national and European elections is widely noticed – and forms part of both the democratic deficit debate and the SOE framework – it is rarely studied on the individual level (Boomgaarden et al. 2016: 132). Although some advances have been made in understanding vote-switching behavior (Hobolt et al. 2009, Marsh 2009, Hobolt & Spoon 2012), there has been little scholarly attention to the group of “European-only” abstainers (but see Blondel et al. 1997, 1998, Boomgaarden et al. 2016) who constitute the so-called “Euro gap” (Rose 2004) on the aggregate level. This is an important blind spot of EP election research, as the motivations of these people have important implications for the assumptions of the SOE and the “Europe matters” approaches. Moreover, analyzing individual electoral behavior on the aggregate level risks the occurrence of ecological fallacy (Clark & Rohrschneider 2009: 649, Giebler & Wagner 2015: 132), which in fact concerns most empirical studies within the traditional SOE framework (see, e.g., Hix & Marsh 2007, Schmitt & Toygür 2016). In this thesis, I therefore analyze the motivations of EU-only abstainers on the more appropriate, i.e. the individual, level.

Fourth, preferences regarding European integration do not only entail positive or negative attitudes towards the EU, but also concern views on the further development of the Union. Such a policy dimension ranging from expansive further political integration to completely reversing the unification process, seems electorally important, as political parties compete on this issue both in national and European elections (Marks et al. 2006, Kriesi 2007, Hobolt & De Vries 2015, Rohrschneider & Whitefield 2016, Meijers 2017, Schäfer et al. forthcoming). Although European integration has become more relevant to voters during the last two decades, voter-party congruence is traditionally believed to matter for electoral

behavior mainly regarding the traditional left-right dimension (Downs 1957, Riker & Ordeshook 1968, Lefkofridi et al. 2014). In only few instances, the effect of other policy dimensions, such as the European integration dimension, has been tested for EP elections, albeit with mixed findings (Hobolt et al. 2009, Hobolt & Spoon 2012). I therefore aim to understand the degree to which voter-party congruence, i.e. the perceived policy representation by political parties, regarding both the ideological left-right conflict and the European integration dimension matters nowadays for EP election behavior.

Fifth, although the field of European studies has produced a multitude of scholarly works dealing with the politicization of European integration (De Wilde 2011, Statham & Trenz 2013, De Wilde et al. 2016, Hoeglenger 2016, Hutter et al. 2016, Anders et al. 2018, Zeitlin et al. 2019), there has been little attention to the electoral consequences of this process, in particular for European Parliament elections. Yet, single studies show that the level of issue salience (De Vries et al. 2011, Hobolt & Wittrock 2011, De Vries & Hobolt 2016) as well as the degree of actor polarization (Van Spanje & De Vreese 2011, Hobolt & Spoon 2012) can be relevant for voting behavior in EP elections. This seems intuitively plausible, as higher issue salience provide citizens with more electorally relevant information (see also Beach et al. 2018) and higher actor polarization can offer clearer electoral choices to voters (see also Hobolt & Hoerner 2019). In this context, it seems important to also account for the electoral impacts of the European economic and debt crisis. The Euro crisis did not only cause people to turn to Eurosceptic parties (Hobolt & De Vries 2016b), but it also led to a stark, yet highly differentiated pattern of EU issue politicization across the different EU member states (Hutter & Kriesi 2019). Moreover, identifying the effects of the European economic and sovereign debt crisis as well as its management by the EU institutions has crucial implications for the EU's political legitimacy, because the Euro crisis represents a crisis of (economic) outputs and a crisis of (democratic) inputs at the same time (Scharpf 2015), especially in the most severely affected countries. Therefore, I account for the contextual variation in the politicization of European integration when analyzing the impact on preferences towards European integration on EP election behavior.

In summary, I aim to explore the direct and indirect effects of three independent variables – micro-level *EU attitudes*, meso-level *voter-party congruence* and macro-level *EU issue politicization* – on the individual behavior in EP elections, which itself consists of the two dependent variables *electoral participation* and *vote choice*. The specific research questions of my thesis, which are derived from the literature gaps discussed above, are laid out in [table 1](#).

Table 1: Research questions of the paper-based dissertation

Independent variables	Research questions
Attitudes towards the EU	RQ1 Which type of EU attitudes play the most important role for electoral behavior in EP elections?
	RQ2 Can attitudes towards the EU explain the turnout gap between national and European elections?
	RQ3 Which factors condition the electoral choice of Eurosceptic citizens between abstaining and voting for anti-EU parties?
Voter-party congruence	RQ4 Does perceived political representation, i.e. voter-party congruence, affect individual EP election behavior?
	RQ5 Which congruence dimension matters most for EP election behavior: the left-right conflict or the European integration dimension?
	RQ6 Does perceived political representation affect the way that EU attitudes relate to electoral behavior?
EU issue politicization	RQ7 Does the level of EU issue politicization in a country affect the way that EU attitudes relate to individual behavior in EP elections?
	RQ8 Has the increased politicization of EU issues during the Euro crisis affected the impact of EU preferences on EP election behavior?

3.2 Summaries

In this section, I shortly present all three empirical studies, before jointly discussing their contributions to the literature on attitudes towards European integration and EP elections in the following section. [Table 2](#) provides an overview about the three single articles which cover different aspects of the overall research interest: [Study I](#) deals with [RQ1](#) and [RQ2](#), [Study II](#) answers [RQ4](#), [RQ5](#) and [RQ8](#), and [Study III](#) tackles [RQ3](#), [RQ6](#) and [RQ7](#) (see also [tab. 1](#)). As indicated, all three studies are based on representative, post-electoral voter surveys from the

European Election Studies (EES), which appear to the best openly available data source to study individual EP election behavior in a comparative, cross-national perspective. While [Study I](#) relies on the 2014 EES survey (Schmitt et al. 2016b), [Study II](#) makes additionally use of the 2009 EES survey (Van Egmond et al. 2013). [Study III](#) integrates these voter-level data with party-level data extracted from the 2014 Euromanifesto study (Schmitt et al. 2016a) consisting of all election programs published by political parties during the EP election campaign.

Table 2: Overview of the three empirical studies of the paper-based dissertation

	Study I	Study II	Study III
Title	<i>“Euroskeptizismus und Wahlenthaltung. Motivationen unterschiedlicher Nichtwählertypen bei der Europawahl 2014.”</i>	<i>“No participation without representation. Policy distances and abstention in European Parliament elections.”</i>	<i>“Exit or voice? The role of political awareness, ideological congruence and party polarization in the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens.”</i>
Authorship	Single-authored	Co-authored (with Marc Debus)	Single-authored
Research questions	RQ1, RQ2	RQ4, RQ5, RQ8	RQ3, RQ6, RQ7
Dependent variable(s)	Participation	Participation	Participation + vote choice
Main independent variables	Attitudes towards the EU, esp.: - Institutional trust - Regime support - European identity	Voter-party congruence on: - Left-right conflict - European integration policy dimension	Eurosceptic attitudes + : - Political awareness - Ideological voter-party congruence - Party polarization
Data	EES 2014 voter survey	EES 2009 and 2014 voter surveys	EES 2014 voter survey, Euromanifesto study

In summary, [Study I](#) (*“Euroskeptizismus und Wahlenthaltung”*) sets out to assess the impact of attitudes towards the European Union on citizens’ electoral participation in European elections. The analytical framework focuses particularly on negative, Eurosceptic attitudes and their influence on the tendency to abstain in the 2014 EP election. Importantly, I derive three different kinds of EU attitudes from the political support concept laid out by Easton (1965, 1975): institutional

trust, regime support and identification with the political community. Following Blondel et al. (1997, 1998), I differentiate between three groups of non-voters: *circumstantial abstainers*, i.e. non-voters who abstain involuntarily, *habitual abstainers*, i.e. non-voters who rarely or never vote, and *EU-only abstainers*, i.e. people who participate in national elections but abstain in European elections. In the empirical analysis based on the EES 2014 voter survey, I estimate multinomial logistic regression models with country fixed effects and the replacement of missing values through multiple imputation. The results show, first, that individual trust in EU institutions plays a major role for citizens' participation in EP elections – which is much less the case for the other two types of EU attitudes. Second, the findings indicate that Eurosceptic attitudes exert a particular effect on *EU-only non-voting*, which implies that the difference in voter turnout between national and European elections – the “Euro gap” (Rose 2004) – is, at least partly, a consequence of individual Eurosceptic behavior.

Study II (“*No participation without representation*”) investigates how the degree of perceived political representation, measured as voter-party policy congruence, relates to citizens' decision whether to participate or not in European Parliament elections. Based on the proximity model of electoral behavior (Downs 1957), the study aims to compare the impact of distances on the *European integration policy dimension* with the influence of *ideological left-right distances*. Moreover, I analyze these effects in different electoral contexts, in order to identify the conditioning effect of the increased politicization during the Euro crisis. In the empirical analysis based on the 2009 and 2014 EES voter surveys, binary logistic regression models yield that only the left-right conflict dimension produces statistically significant effects. However, when taking the electoral context into account, it shows that voter-party congruence on the European integration dimension is a significant predictor of electoral participation in 2014 for countries that are members of the Eurozone. This finding implies that the EU policy dimension has gained importance for electoral behavior due to the increased politicization during the Euro crisis.

Study III (“*Exit or voice?*”) focuses on the individual decision-making process of Eurosceptic citizens in European Parliament elections, in particular on the trade-

off between protest-based abstention (*exit*) and Eurosceptic voting (*voice*) following the argumentative framework of Hirschman (1970). Based on the rational theory of electoral behavior (Downs 1957), I argue that a voter's level of political awareness, the perceived ideological congruence to Eurosceptic parties and the degree of party polarization on EU issues affect the choice of Eurosceptic citizens between *exit* and *voice*. As mentioned, the empirical analysis integrates citizen-level and party-level data and is based on a sub-sample of Eurosceptic citizens from the 2014 EES voter survey and the 2014 Euromanifesto study. A multinomial logistic regression analysis finds that Eurosceptic citizens tend to choose *voice* over *exit* when they are more interested and knowledgeable in politics, when they feel better represented by Eurosceptic parties and when the issue of European integration is highly polarized by the political parties in their country. In addition, the results demonstrate that protest-based abstention is more likely in contexts where political parties fail to represent Eurosceptic citizens and do not politicize the issue of European integration.

3.3 Findings and contributions

This section is concerned with how the three empirical studies summarized above help to further our understanding about the nature of European Parliament elections, with particular regards to the research gaps identified before.

A first central contribution is the finding that preferences towards European integration indeed matter for EP election behavior, but they do not employ uniform effect across different kinds of EU attitudes. [Study I](#) discovers that electoral participation is mostly affected by more specific attitudes towards EU institutions, such as the European Parliament itself, but not at all by rather diffuse, emotional attachments to the European political community, i.e. by a personal identification with the EU. The difference between these preferences is that the former – institutional trust – has a rather utilitarian origin, whereas the latter has a more affective character. From the perspective of the political support literature (Easton 1975, Weßels 2007), this finding implies that citizens' EP election behavior is much more affected by the recent – political and economic – performance of the

EU that leads to changes in specific support for the EU (see also Schäfer & Gross 2020).²⁰ Output failures of the political system, like it occurred during the Euro crisis, can then translate into electoral protest, such as *EU-only abstention*.

This implication leads to a second important contribution. The difference in turnout between European and national level elections is traditionally seen as a core feature of the SOE framework. It is usually explained by the fact that there is “less at stake” in European elections, by the low salience of EP elections and by people’s lack of interest for European affairs (Reif 1984). However, Study I provides evidence for the conclusion that *EU-only abstention* is additionally enhanced by Eurosceptic attitudes. Therefore, the *Euro gap* (Rose 2004) seems to be not only the corollary of differences in importance between elections, but also a phenomenon that results from a conscious choice of many Eurosceptic citizens. In this understanding, the Euro gap seems to be, at least partly, an aggregate-level consequence of individual-level protest-based behavior.

This conclusion is supported by findings of Study III, which adds another relevant contribution to the literature on EP election behavior. It shows that Eurosceptic citizens who aim to express discontent with the EU act in accordance with rational choice theory. While *protest-based abstention* is slightly enhanced by a lack of ideologically congruent Eurosceptic parties and low party polarization on European integration, *voting for Eurosceptic parties* is strongly enabled by identifying ideologically close Eurosceptic parties and high EU issue politicization in a party system. This shows that the way in which Eurosceptic citizens express protest in EP elections is shaped by several “European” explanatory factors located at different analytical levels. These findings illustrate the different ways in which *Europe matters* for citizens during European elections.

One decisive factor is the degree of perceived political representation by the eligible parties in an EU member state. As it can be seen in Study III, ideological representation plays an important role for the way in which Eurosceptic attitudes can be translated into Eurosceptic voting behavior. This is because voters do not

²⁰ However, diffuse support forms were not only much less affected by the European crises, but also exert little influence on people’s electoral participation.

only consider EU preferences when engaging in *EU issue voting*, but also place great emphasis on a party's ideological profile. Left-Eurosceptic citizens, for example, hardly vote for right-wing Eurosceptic parties, and vice versa. In addition, perceived political representation on the left-right dimensions also matters for individual participation in EP elections. The results of [Study II](#) indicate that low congruence between voters and parties regarding this basic ideological conflict demobilizes voters during EP election campaigns. This conclusion bears an important meaning for the quality of representative democracy in Europe, as it implies that voters who do not feel represented by existing parties are less likely to cast a vote in European elections, which results in a lack of political representation in the EP and in EU policy-making. Furthermore, [Study II](#) finds that although the left-right dimension prevails in determining EP election behavior thus lending support to the SOE framework, the European integration policy dimension matters in electoral contexts where EU integration is a highly politicized issue.

This leads me to another major contribution of this thesis, namely the importance of EU issue politicization for the electoral impact of EU preferences. [Study II](#) demonstrates that political representation on the European integration dimensions affects electoral behavior only after the Euro crisis in the Eurozone member states. This rather implicit indication for the conditioning effect of EU issue politicization is supported by the findings of [Study III](#). Here, a more explicit operationalization of issue politicization, namely a measure for the party (system) polarization on European integration, shows that *EU issue voting* is enhanced in party systems that offer clear choices to voters and that carry out conflicts over Europe. In essence, these findings imply that the electoral effects of preferences towards European integration are highly context-dependent. Where EU issues are more politicized by political elites, electoral behavior is more connected to EU attitudes and less in accordance with the SOE theory of EP elections. When *Europe matters* for political elites, it apparently also does for voters.

Interestingly, [Study II](#) also finds that indifference and ambivalence towards European integration is related to a higher tendency of abstaining during EP elections than clearly positive or negative attitudes. This results not only adds to recent empirical findings regarding the electoral relevance of indifferent and

ambivalent EU attitudes (Stoeckel 2013, Van Ingelgom 2014, Kentmen-Cin 2017), but also displays that orientations towards European integration can only exert electoral effects when these attitudes exist and when they have an either positive or negative connotation. When Europe does not matter for people, it will not matter for their electoral behavior.

Lastly, all three studies support previous research on electoral behavioral in providing evidence that many standard determinants of participation and vote choice matter in EP elections. This is particularly true for socio-economic factors such as a recent job loss or macro-economic evaluations (see, e.g., Study I), socio-psychological factors such as political efficacy or party identification (see, e.g., Study II), socio-political factors such as government support or contact to political parties (see, e.g., Study III) as well as socio-demographic factors such as age, gender or education. Most importantly, however, are predictors that relate to the concept of political awareness (Zaller 1992). This is most explicitly shown in Study III, which yields that the degree of political interest and knowledge are central for a Eurosceptic citizen's choice between ordinary abstention behavior and voting for a Eurosceptic party (see also Schäfer 2019). In fact, the great relevance of political awareness supports the assumptions of the SOE framework which postulates that the patterns observed in EP elections are a consequence of the low salience of these elections to voters. The degree to which *Europe matters* in European elections is, therefore, existent but still limited.

4 Discussion

This dissertation aimed at identifying the impacts of citizen orientations towards European integration and the systemic politicization of EU issues on the electoral behavior in European elections by conducting three empirical studies which analyzed the determinants of participation and voting behavior in the 2014 EP elections. The findings of these studies have several implications for our theoretical understanding of present-day European elections and for their role in legitimizing governance on the supranational level.

On the one hand, it can be concluded that the “second-order election” approach, once developed to explain aggregate level patterns of EP election outcomes, remains powerful when explaining electoral choices on the individual level. This is indicated by the explanatory power of traditional determinants of election behavior, in particular regarding the ideological left-right dimension and an individual’s level of political awareness. First, both the participation decision and the vote choice in European elections are affected by people’s self-placement and the (perceived) positions of political parties on the left-right dimension of political conflict. This is also true for Eurosceptic citizens, which do hardly vote for a Eurosceptic party, if it is located at the other end of the ideological spectrum. This indicates that the left-right dimension trumps single policy dimensions, such as European integration, when it comes to citizens’ electoral behavior. Second, political awareness is of utmost importance for people’s EP election behavior, especially regarding their electoral participation. Abstainers in European elections are, to a large degree, citizens who are neither interested nor sophisticated in political matters. In line with the assumptions of the SOE approach, the comparably low turnout in EP elections can thus mainly be explained by the low salience and perception that there is *less at stake* in European elections.

On the other hand, this dissertation demonstrates various ways in which “Europe matters” in contemporary EP elections. In particular, citizen-based Euroscepticism is not only a predictor of ordinary non-voting in EP elections, but it also leads people to express this negative attitude by actively staying at home during European elections. This *protest-based abstention* behavior also explains

why some people only abstain in European elections, whereas they participate in national elections. Moreover, the effects of EU support and political representation regarding the European integration policy dimension on people's electoral choices in EP elections are shaped by the way in which EU issues are politicized by political elites in a given electoral context. In essence, Europe does not matter unconditionally for citizens' electoral behavior, but is moderated by the systemic salience and actor polarization regarding the issue of European integration.

Taken together, both the SOE framework and the *Europe matters* approach have their merits for the EP election literature, as they both continue to explain electoral patterns and individual behavior in European Parliament elections. Overall, this thesis contributes to our understanding *how* "European" explanatory factors matter for voters and non-voters when they are confronted with the electoral choices in European elections. These contributions have important implications regarding the role of EP elections for the legitimacy of the EU's political system. First, although the continuing importance of the SOE approach indicates that the legitimizing ability of EP elections is still considerably limited, the individual-level findings show that European elections fulfill their central function at least partly. Nowadays, many citizens actually take preferences towards European integration into account during European elections. Second, it shows that contemporary EP elections are particularly capable of legitimizing EU governance in contexts where the issue of European integration is no longer a "sleeping giant", but is politicized by political elites. When parties campaign on Europe and polarize European integration, the issue becomes relevant for voters and, eventually, matters during EP elections. In these instances, European elections can be regarded as providing legitimacy not only to the European Parliament, but also to the EU political system in general.

However, several limitations and shortcomings of this dissertation are worth a critical reflection. Maybe most obviously, the three empirical studies have focused much more on electoral participation than on voting behavior. Therefore, the main findings and contributions appear more relevant for the question why citizens take part in EP elections and less for the question why they vote for a particular party. However, the assumptions of the SOE and *Europe matters*

approaches concern participation and vote choice alike and their validity can be tested in similar ways. In analogy to the *EU-only abstainers* that were identified in this thesis, future empirical research should put particular focus on citizens who switch votes between national and European elections, since their characteristics and motivations lie at the heart of the debate between the two election theories.

A second limitation of this thesis is the strong focus on negative attitudes towards European integration, commonly labelled as “citizen-based” or “popular” *Euro-scepticism*. Yet, the increasing politicization of European integration implies that not only opposition towards the EU and further European integration are more important in present-day EP elections, but so are more positive orientations towards these objects. Hence, future research could place more importance to the electoral behavior of citizens with supportive attitudes and parties who explicitly mobilizes with pro-European election campaigns, which has already played a role during the most recent 2019 EP elections in many EU member states (Bolin et al. 2019).

Third, although this thesis places much emphasis on the relevance of the European integration issue dimension and the politicization of EU issues for the legitimizing function of EP elections, it has to be noted that policy decisions relating to more versus less European integration are mostly “taken under the intergovernmental regime and therefore paradoxically are national rather than European issues” (Thomassen 2016: 546). In contrast, the ideological left-right axis is not a purely domestic or national conflict dimension, but also the most relevant political conflict in the European Parliament (Hix et al. 2006). Therefore, some authors question one of the core assumptions of the *Europe matters* approach and state that an increased relevance of the European integration dimension in EP elections might create “a mismatch between the electoral arena and the parliamentary arena” (Thomassen 2016: 546). Although this criticism should not be easily dismissed, it seems odd that the legitimizing function of EP elections could be fulfilled without European issues playing any role for citizens’ electoral behavior in European elections. A possible way forward for future research could be the distinction between “EU polity issues” and “EU policy issues” (Braun et al. 2016). While the former concern constitutive issues that are dealt with in

intergovernmental national settings, the latter relate to EU policy-making and are thus decided in the supranational arena, i.e. the European Parliament (see also Mair 2000). From this perspective, it seems important that electoral campaigns and voting behavior is not only limited to constitutive polity issues (i.e. more versus less European integration), but also refers to specific policy issues at the EU level.

Last but not least, this dissertation also contains some methodological shortcomings which are discussed in greater detail in the three articles. Among them are problems with recall questions in surveys due to social desirability, bias towards current preferences or forgetfulness (see, e.g., Van Elsas et al. 2014). Moreover, there might be problems with the ideological and policy-related self-placement of survey respondents, as voters can have different understandings of these scales. This concern should be particularly problematic in cross-national surveys, but is also relevant for individual variation, for example when it comes to a respondent's level of political sophistication. In addition, data restrictions in the 2014 EES made it necessary to estimate average party positions regarding the EU issue dimension instead of individually perceived party positions. Finally, the operationalization of EU issue politicization is certainly debatable. Apart from measuring party polarization via electoral manifestos, one could have also analyzed other sub-dimensions of issue politicization (e.g., issue salience), other political actors than parties (e.g., media discourses) or even party-level data from other sources (e.g., speeches). Future research should address the methodological restrictions mentioned here, in order to confirm the empirical findings and conclusions of this thesis.

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Appendix: Empirical studies

Study I

Schäfer, Constantin (2017). Euroskeptizismus und Wahlenthaltung. Motivationen unterschiedlicher Nichtwählertypen bei der Europawahl 2014. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 11(1), 50-80, doi:10.1007/s12286-017-0327-z. [<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12286-017-0327-z>]

Study II

Schäfer, Constantin & Marc Debus (2018). No participation without representation. Policy distances and abstention in European Parliament elections. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(12), 1835-1854, doi:10.1080/13501763.2017.1363806. [<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13501763.2017.1363806>]

Study III

Schäfer, Constantin (under review). Exit or voice? The role of political awareness, ideological congruence and party polarization in the electoral behavior of Euro-sceptic citizens. [*published here as a pre-print version*]

Exit or voice?

The role of political awareness, ideological congruence and party polarization in the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens.

1. Introduction

In his seminal book *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Albert Hirschman (1970) describes that people have different response options when being dissatisfied with the performance of an organization: they can either “exit” and withdraw from the relationship to that organization or “voice” their discontent to the organization. Transferring this logic to the alternatives that citizens frustrated with a political system face in an election yields a similar choice set: they can either withdraw from participation (*exit*) or vote for a system-opposing party (*voice*) in order to signal protest and channel their discontent (Bélanger 2004, Dassonneville et al. 2015, Hooghe et al. 2011, Kemmers 2017). This paper aims to understand the determinants of this electoral choice for dissatisfied citizens: “*Under what conditions will the exit option prevail over the voice option and vice versa?*” (Hirschman 1970: 59).

An interesting case to study this question is the behavior of Eurosceptic citizens during elections to the European Parliament (EP). In 2014, citizens made excessive use of both options resulting in the lowest overall turnout in the history of the EP (42.6%) and the highest ever seat share (~30%) for parties that are critical or opposed to the European Union (EU). Empirical research has shown that both the tendency to abstain as well as the vote for anti-EU parties in European elections are consequences of Eurosceptic attitudes among EU citizens (Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Hobolt & Spoon 2012). Yet, the EP election literature has left one question unanswered: What makes some Eurosceptic citizens actively choose the

“exit” option by abstaining, whereas others decide to “voice” their dissatisfaction by voting for Eurosceptic parties?

In this paper, I argue that the choice between protest-based abstention (*exit*) and Eurosceptic voting (*voice*) is shaped by three important determinants situated on different analytical levels. The first factor is the level of individual political awareness. The more Eurosceptic citizens receive political information and possess political knowledge, the rather they are mobilized to vote and can identify a party that matches their preferences. Hence, their tendency to vote for a Eurosceptic party instead of actively abstaining should increase with their degree of political awareness. The second factor takes the supply side of political competition into account. When Eurosceptic citizens intend to express discontent at the ballot boxes, they need a party that they can relate to in ideological terms. The more politically represented they feel by Eurosceptic parties in their country, the rather they should choose to vote for a Eurosceptic party than to stay at home for protest-related reasons. Third, the behavior of Eurosceptic citizens in EP elections also depends on whether or not EU issues are politicized by political elites. Hence, the more national parties diverge on European integration, the more likely should Eurosceptic citizens choose to voice dissatisfaction by voting for a Eurosceptic party instead of actively abstaining.

In the following section, I briefly review the literature on Euroscepticism and EP elections, before laying out my theoretical arguments in detail. In section three, I empirically test the theoretical hypotheses by analyzing voter survey data provided by the European Election Studies (EES) and the electoral programs of the political parties which competed in the 2014 EP election (Euromanifestos). The results show the relevance that all three factors have for the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens, especially by increasing the likelihood of Eurosceptic voting (*voice*). In the concluding section, I discuss the implications of the empirical

results for our understanding of, first, the electoral behavior of dissatisfied citizens more generally, and second, the nature of contemporary European Parliament elections. Overall, the unique contribution of this study is a joint approach to explain both the participation decision and the vote choice of disaffected voters with a common set of explanatory factors located at different analytical levels – and a special focus on two reactions to dissatisfaction: *exit* versus *voice*.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The literature on Euroscepticism and European Parliament elections

In electoral research, European Parliament elections are – ever since their first occurrence – understood to be “second-order national elections” (Reif & Schmitt 1980). They usually yield lower levels of voter participation, a fall in support for governing parties, and a gain in support for smaller parties (see, e.g., Hix & Marsh 2011, Schmitt 2005). From the second-order perspective, non-voting can be mainly explained by the low importance and salience of EP elections, or simply put that “there is less at stake” (Reif 1984: 246) in European elections. Voting for Eurosceptic parties, on the other hand, is interpreted as a punishment of national governments that happened to be consisting of mostly pro-European parties (Hix & Marsh 2007).

However, individual level research of the last two decades has shown the increasing importance of “European” factors for electoral behavior in these supra-national elections. First, individual participation in EP elections has been diagnosed to relate to several *European* attitudes, such as support for the EU membership of one’s country (Stockemer 2012), trust in EU institutions (Schäfer 2017), satisfaction with democracy in the EU (Hobolt & Spoon 2012), as well as

knowledge about and interest in European politics (Blondel et al. 1998, Clark 2014, Schmitt et al. 2015). Moreover, studies on the 2014 EP elections have shown that it matters for turnout whether EU issues are politicized in a given context (Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Schäfer & Debus 2018). Second, attitudes towards European integration and the EU also matter for citizens' vote choice (Clark & Rohrschneider 2009, De Vries et al. 2011, Hobolt et al. 2009), especially when EU issues are more politicized (Hobolt & Spoon 2012) and with regards to voting for Eurosceptic parties (Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Hobolt 2015, Van Spanje & De Vreese 2011).²¹

A central implication of these findings is that Eurosceptic citizens, i.e. those with negative attitudes towards the EU and European integration,²² are more likely both to abstain as well as to vote for anti-EU parties during European elections than their more Europhile counterparts. Moreover, both individual level attitudes and contextual factors matter for their behavior in EP elections. Yet, it is less clear what the *reasons* are for the respective electoral choice and under which *conditions* Eurosceptic voters choose one option over the other. The lack of knowledge on this matter is a remarkable observation, not only because non-voting and anti-EU voting can be considered as two options of the same electoral choice set (Turner & Eymann 2000), but also because Reif & Schmitt (1980: 10) already noted the general applicability of the Hirschman framework to European Parliament elections.²³ For the most part, however, EP election studies analyzed

²¹ When citizens vote according to their preferences on European integration, it is commonly called "EU issue voting" (De Vries 2007).

²² Since this article concentrates on the consequences of Eurosceptic attitudes, I leave aside a discussion on their determinants. Useful overviews are provided by Boomgaarden et al. (2011) as well as by Hobolt and De Vries (2016a).

²³ As notable exceptions, Giebler et al. (2017) and Weber (2011) use the Hirschman framework to study the effects of media information and national electoral cycles in the context of European Parliament elections.

the effects of dissatisfaction with the EU on turnout and Eurosceptic voting separately (e.g., Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Hobolt & Spoon 2012).²⁴

2.2. A theoretical framework for the electoral choice of Eurosceptic citizens in EP elections

If Eurosceptic citizens aim to actively express their dissatisfaction during EP elections, they are faced with two viable options: non-voting (*exit*) and voting for anti-EU parties (*voice*). Both choices bear the potential to constitute severe threats to the future of the European integration process. This is, first, because electoral participation is “commonly regarded as one major indicator of the health of a democracy, reflecting trust and confidence in the political system” (Norris 1997: 281). Thus, an increasing number of non-voters in European elections could indirectly undermine the legitimacy of the EU.²⁵ In this regard, “not casting a ballot is one way of expressing opposition to the European political system and the integration process” (Steinbrecher & Rattinger 2012: 171). Second, a greater seat share of system-opposing parties in the European Parliament might seriously affect the way that this institution functions, which means that voting for Eurosceptic parties could contribute to an erosion of the EU from within. Also, when anti-EU politicians obtain seats in the EP, they can express critical views about the EU and thereby give “voice” to the concerns of Eurosceptic citizens.

Since the latter mechanisms are much more directly affecting the EU’s legitimacy and stability, I argue that Eurosceptic citizens view *voice* as a more effective way

²⁴ One explanation for this gap in the literature is that political sociology usually distinguishes between electoral participation and voting behavior as two different objects of analysis.

²⁵ Consequently, the comparatively lower turnout in EP elections adds to the EU’s alleged democratic deficit (Flickinger & Studlar 2007: 386), but usually plays a minor role in this debate (Føllesdal & Hix 2006).

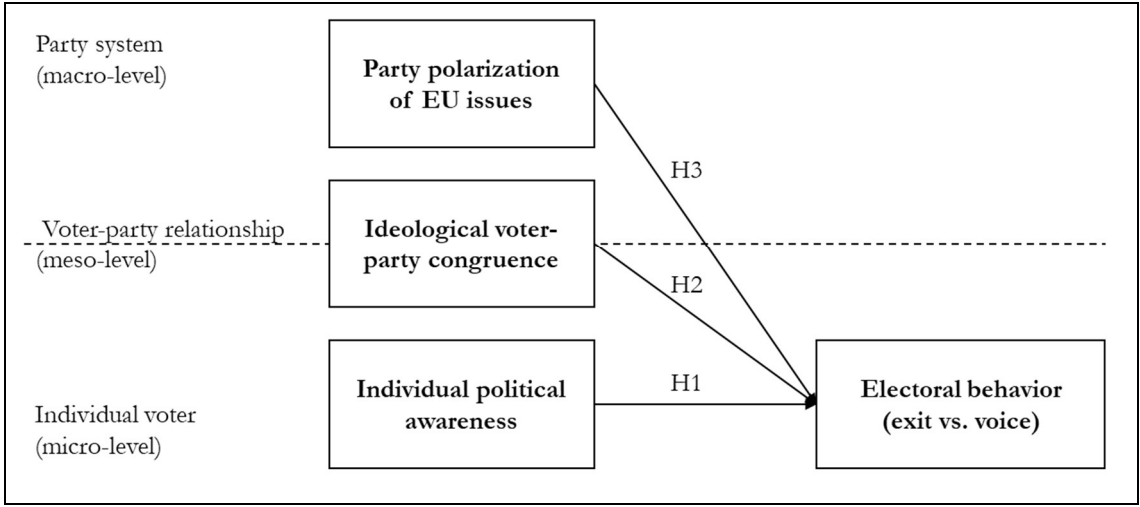
to punish and destabilize the EU than *exit*. Hence, Eurosceptic voting should be the preferred option that opponents of the EU and the European integration process choose to channel their discontent. However, where Eurosceptic parties are not available or identifiable, non-voting still seems like a rational choice for people who intend to protest against European integration and to punish the EU.

Based on rational choice theory, I argue that three central factors facilitate a citizen's ability to engage in Eurosceptic voting: (1) individual political awareness, (2) Eurosceptic parties that the voter can ideologically relate to, and (3) a political context where political parties diverge in their stance on European integration, i.e. where there is a high degree of party polarization on EU issues. These three determinants are situated on different analytical levels, depending on whether they are characteristics of the voter (micro-level), of the party system (macro-level) or a combination of the two (meso-level). [Figure 1](#) visualizes the theoretical model that I use to explain the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens, especially when it comes to choosing between protest-based abstaining (*exit*) and Eurosceptic voting (*voice*).

However, the model does not assume that all non-voters abstain due to political dissatisfaction. The literature on electoral participation shows that many other factors contribute to *conventional* non-voting. Among those, the most common explanatory approaches of individual turnout include certain sociodemographic, socioeconomic and sociopsychological variables as well as mobilization efforts during electoral campaigns and institutional features of the electoral system (see Blais [2006](#), Smets & Van Ham [2013](#)). It is therefore essential to differentiate between *ordinary abstention* from *protest-based* abstention, as only the latter can be captured with the concept of “exit” in the sense of Hirschman, i.e. as a behavioral reaction to personal discontent. Moreover, the model here does not exclude the possibility that Eurosceptic citizens vote for pro-European parties, because, for

example, they feel emotionally attached to these parties or base their vote choice on other political issues. Therefore, the theoretical arguments developed in the following section will also account for the possibility of ordinary abstention and voting for another, non-Eurosceptic party in EP elections. Nevertheless, the main focus lies in understanding the factors that shape the electoral choice between protest-based abstention (*exit*) and Eurosceptic voting (*voice*).

Figure 1: Theoretical explanatory model



2.3. Individual political awareness

Citizens are not equally informed about politics. Some are more interested in politics, follow political developments more closely, and have a deeper understanding of political processes than others. Zaller calls the “extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered” (Zaller 1992: 21) *political awareness*.²⁶ According to his definition, the concept consists of a motivational component (*interest*) and a cognitive ability component

²⁶ In the literature the term political awareness is often used interchangeably with similar concepts, such as political knowledge, political sophistication and political information. Although I therefore also use the other terms, the concept of political awareness is deliberately chosen, in order to grasp the combination of political interest for political information and the capability to understand them.

(*competence*). From a theoretical perspective, both components are essential for the rational choice model of voting behavior (Downs 1957). In order to gain benefits from voting, people need to receive and process information about the political offers, so they can identify a party that shares their own political preferences. For these reasons, individual political awareness affects the decision who to vote for and whether to vote at all.

Empirical research supports these assumptions. On the one hand, the more political interest and knowledge citizens possess, the rather they participate in elections (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996, Larcinese 2007, Lassen 2005, Smets & Van Ham 2013), also regarding EP elections (Bhatti 2010, Hernández & Kriesi 2016, Hogh & Larsen 2016). On the other hand, political awareness matters for voting behavior by moderating the interplay between existing political predispositions and the processing of new political information (Neuman 1986: 177). Hobolt (2005) shows this conditioning role for the case of EU referenda, where political awareness moderates the relationship between EU attitudes, elite cues and voting behavior. As a consequence, politically sophisticated citizens have a higher chance to vote “correctly”, i.e. according to their own political preferences (Rapeli 2018).

During European Parliament elections political awareness plays an even greater role, as European elections are usually less salient than national elections. For Eurosceptic citizens, there are two ways in which their level of political awareness matters for their electoral behavior (Schäfer 2019). First, higher political interest results in a greater chance of knowing about the election and being mobilized to express discontent with the EU at the polls. Second, greater political knowledge facilitates correct *EU issue voting*, meaning that voters have better chances to identify parties’ stances on EU issues and to vote according to their (negative) preferences on European integration (De Vries et al. 2011, Hobolt &

Wittrock 2011). This is supported by the findings of Beach et al. (2018) who show that EP election campaigns “provide information that enables voters to make decisions based on EU issues” (Beach et al. 2018: 792).

Therefore, I hypothesize that when Eurosceptic citizens are more politically aware, i.e. more interested and knowledgeable, they should have a higher probability of voting for a Eurosceptic party (*voice*). The likelihood of protest-based abstention (*exit*), in contrast, should be barely affected by the degree of a person’s political awareness. Instead, higher political awareness should increase also the tendency to vote for other parties, as it is a strong mobilizing factor. In contrast, lower individual political awareness should rather lead to *ordinary abstention* behavior, as citizens with little interest in politics can be expected to be rather indifferent about European elections (*hypothesis 1*).

2.4. Ideological voter-party congruence

A second factor shaping citizens’ electoral behavior is situated at the meso-level of political competition, i.e. at the intersection between individual voters and political parties. According to Downs (1957), voters choose the party that best represents their policy preferences, so that their personal utility is maximized when the chosen party is successful in the election. But ideological distances between voters and eligible parties do not only matter for vote choice, but also influences whether people turn out to vote at all (Lefkofridi et al. 2014) and how satisfied they are with the democracy they live in (Stecker & Tausendpfund 2016). This is,

because in the absence of ideologically congruent parties, voters have no chance of increasing their personal utility by the act of voting.²⁷

The relevance of ideological representation for European Parliament elections has been underlined on several occasions, especially in studies on electoral participation and voting behavior (Hobolt et al. 2009, Hobolt & Wittrock 2011, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Schäfer & Debus 2018).²⁸ Hence, the degree to which people feel ideologically close to eligible parties matters for whether they turn out to vote and who they vote for. This should be particularly true for Eurosceptic citizens, who often place themselves at the extremes of the left-right spectrum (De Vries & Edwards 2009, Van Elsas & Van der Brug 2015) and can thus be easily alienated when there is no party occupying their ideological space.²⁹

However, it is important at which end of the axis Eurosceptics locate themselves, because the basic motivations for opposing the EU are different depending on the underlying political ideology. *Left Eurosceptic* citizens hold negative views on the EU because of the market-liberal character of the European integration process, whereas *right Eurosceptics* believe that European integration poses a threat to national sovereignty and their cultural identity.³⁰ This implies that although Eurosceptics share similar attitudes towards the EU, they differ in their position

²⁷ Generally speaking, ideological and policy-related factors have become more important in people's voting decision following the phenomenon of electoral de-alignment in the second half of the 20th century (Lachat 2008: 687).

²⁸ In these studies, the degree of voter-party congruence is usually analyzed by using a single left-right dimension, but has occasionally also been tested with various policy dimensions.

²⁹ Indeed, Lefkofridi et al. (2014: 304) find that "the logic of refraining from electoral politics due to lack of congruent options does not apply to all citizens equally: citizens holding ideologically extreme positions [...] are [the] most likely to abstain when their positions are not congruent with available party positions".

³⁰ These different ideological origins cause the so-called inverted-U curve that characterizes the relationship between positions on European integration and positions on the ideological left-right dimension (Hooghe et al. 2002, Van Elsas & Van der Brug 2015).

on main ideological conflicts, which should influence their voting behavior. Therefore, an eligible Eurosceptic party in a country is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a Eurosceptic citizen to choose *voice* over *exit*. Instead, it is important that a voter can relate to this party and feels ideologically represented.

Based on this reasoning, I hypothesize that the more ideologically represented Eurosceptic citizens feel by the eligible Eurosceptic parties in their country, the more likely they should vote for a Eurosceptic party (*voice*). On the other side, the larger the ideological distance between a Eurosceptic voter's own position and the position of the closest anti-EU party becomes, the greater is the incentive to abstain from voting to express protest (*exit*). While the likelihood of ordinary abstention should not be connected to ideological representation by Eurosceptic parties, it seems reasonable to assume that the chance of voting for other parties increases if motivated Eurosceptics do not find a congruence anti-EU party (*hypothesis 2*).

2.5. Party polarization of the European integration issue

European integration has – more and more – become a contested issue in the national political systems across Europe. One main feature of this “politicization” process is the increasing polarization of preferences that political actors take on the issue of European integration (De Wilde et al. 2016, Hutter et al. 2016).³¹ However, this process has not only varied over time in Europe³², but is also “highly differentiated across countries” (Kriesi 2016: 36). Hence, in some contexts

³¹ Other facets of EU issue politicization – defined as the “expansion of the scope of conflict within the political system” (Hutter et al. 2016: 8) – are increasing salience and actor expansion (De Wilde et al. 2016: 4).

³² In fact, the process of EU issue politicization has not been steady over the course of the European unification process, but rather “punctuated” or “intermittent” (Kriesi 2016: 34).

political parties occupy more extreme positions on the European integration issue than in others. In particular, the rise of Eurosceptic parties has been the main driver of EU issue politicization within the last decade and it has made Eurosceptic attitudes “politically and electorally relevant” (Kriesi 2016: 32) in many EU member states. The degree of party polarization, which is situated on the macro-level of political competition, therefore presents another important explanatory factor for the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens.

The reason is that when political parties occupy more disperse positions on an issue, then more party-related information about this issue are available and the positions of parties are more clearly distinguishable. This can help voters to identify the different positions of political parties, offers them real choices and thereby makes an issue in question electorally relevant (Carmines & Stimson 1989, Vegetti et al. 2017). Empirical research provides evidence to these claims, as party polarization has been found to affect both electoral participation and voting behavior (Dalton 2008, Lachat 2008, Steiner & Martin 2012). This is also true for polarization on certain policy issues which can enhance people’s tendency to vote on this issue (Lachat 2011).

In European elections, polarization on the European integration issue dimension exerts similar conditioning effects, as it seems that “voters only take EU-specific considerations into account when political parties provide them with clear choices” (Hobolt & Spoon 2012: 719). It has been repeatedly shown that the degree of party conflict on European integration affects vote choices in EP elections (De Vries & Hobolt 2016, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Van Spanje & De Vreese 2011). For the 2014 EP elections, Hernández and Kriesi (2016) show that the presence and the mobilization efforts of anti-EU parties have increased the impact of EU attitudes for both participation and vote choice. These findings are supported by other studies which underline the importance of the European integration issue

dimension in Eurozone member states that have been severely affected by the economic and sovereign debt crisis (Schäfer & Debus 2018).

Therefore, I hypothesize that Eurosceptic citizens are more likely to vote for a Eurosceptic party (*voice*) and less likely to abstain for protest-related reasons (*exit*) in party systems where the European integration issue is more polarized. In contrast, the likelihood of ordinary abstention and of voting for another party should not be affected by party polarization regarding the issue of European integration (*hypothesis 3*).

Table 1: Summary of the hypotheses

	Protest-based abstention (<i>exit</i>)	Vote for a Eurosceptic party (<i>voice</i>)	Ordinary abstention	Vote for an- other party
H1: Individual political awareness	o	+	--	+
H2: Ideological voter-party congruence	--	+	o	--
H3: Party polarization on EU integration	--	+	o	o

Table 1 summarizes the theoretical expectations derived in the previous sections. In short, a Eurosceptic citizen's tendency to choose the *voice* option, i.e. to vote for a Eurosceptic party, should be increased with higher political awareness, higher ideological voter-party congruence and higher party polarization on European integration. The option to actively abstain for protest-related reasons (*exit*) should be enhanced by lower ideological representation and lower party polarization on EU issues, whereas it should not be affected by individual political awareness. The chances for ordinary abstention behavior should increase with low political awareness, whereas I do not expect any effect for ideological congruence and party polarization on European integration. Lastly, the

probability of voting for another, non-Eurosceptic party can be reasonably expected to increase for Eurosceptic citizens with higher political awareness and lower ideological congruence with Eurosceptic parties, whereas party polarization on EU issues should be a relevant factor.

3. Empirical Analysis

3.1. Research design and operationalization

In order to empirically test the theoretically derived hypotheses, I model the electoral choice as a simultaneous decision problem. Thurner and Eymann (2000) argue that this approach is justified on both theoretical and empirical grounds, since many factors determining the voting decision also affect the participation decision, and vice versa.³³ Orientations towards the political system, parties and issues, for example, all relate to both turnout and vote choice. Hence, the two decisions are inter-connected and are modeled here in a single step, which includes the two forms of abstention in the electoral choice set of voters (Hooghe et al. 2011: 1058, Lacy & Burden 1999: 234). Accordingly, I estimate multinomial logistic regression models to identify the impact of the three main independent variables on the behavior of Eurosceptic citizens in the 2014 EP election.

³³ The assumption behind this design is that the turnout decision and the voting decision are not two separate steps in a multi-stage decision where one decision hierarchically follows the other. Such a view would imply that citizens either first choose their preferred party before deciding whether to participate or that they first decide upon their participation before choosing a party. Both hierarchical decision assumptions seem far-fetched. Moreover, empirical tests confirm that modeling participation and vote choice simultaneously by non-hierarchical multinomial logit models appropriate and that “a hierarchical nesting structure is not necessary” (Thurner & Eymann 2000: 72).

The most comprehensive dataset available for this analysis is the post-electoral voter survey of the European Election Studies (EES) 2014 (Schmitt et al. 2016b). It contains around 30,000 interviews conducted in all 28 EU member states within one month after the EP election of 2014.³⁴ However, six countries are left out of the analysis, because no Eurosceptic parties have either competed for mandates or eventually received any seats in the European Parliament.³⁵ To identify respondents who hold Eurosceptic attitudes I make use of an EU support indicator developed by Hernández and Kriesi (2016) recurs on the political support concept laid out by Easton (1975) applied to the political system of the EU (Weßels 2007). It combines attitudes towards the EU's political system in general, its regime authorities (the EU institutions) and the political community of the EU into a single additive index scaled to a range from 0 to 1.³⁶ Respondents who score lower than 0.5 on this EU support index are defined as Eurosceptic.³⁷ This leaves us with a sub-sample of 7,006 respondents from 22 countries, which is around a third (31.3%) of all respondents with non-missing values for the sub-indicators of the EU support index (N=22,712).

The *dependent variable* is the self-reported behavior of Eurosceptic citizens in the 2014 EP elections, measured as a nominal variable with four categories: protest-

³⁴ The basic sample design applied in all states is a multi-stage, random (probability) sample. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes and in the appropriate national language using CAPI for the data capture.

³⁵ These countries are Croatia, Estonia, Luxemburg, Malta, Romania and Slovenia. For the same reason, I excluded respondents from Northern Ireland who are part of the larger UK sample.

³⁶ More specifically, the three sub-dimensions are operationalized using questions regarding the EU membership of one's own country, trust in the EU institutions and emotional attachment to the EU (see tab. A-1 in appendix for the exact wording). The three items correlate with each other rather strongly (Pearson r between 0.51 and 0.59) and show an alpha value of 0.77 revealing the internal consistency of the indicator. The three indicators equally contribute to the overall EU support index.

³⁷ The empirical results are robust to alternative operationalizations of Euroscepticism, such as different absolute thresholds or relative, country-specific thresholds (e.g., a score that is more than one standard deviation lower than the national average).

based abstention (*exit*), ordinary abstention, voting for a Eurosceptic party (*voice*) and voting for another, non-Eurosceptic party.³⁸ Whether a non-voter abstained for protest-related reasons is captured by an item asking respondents to indicate “the main reasons” why they did not vote in the recent EP election. Their abstention is characterized as protest-based, when they mentioned – exclusively or by majority – reasons that can be related to political dissatisfaction.³⁹ Regarding the vote choice of those respondents who participated in the election, I use an objective, behavioral operationalization to categorize the respective political parties. I assign the notion “Eurosceptic” to parties that have formed the political groups ECR, GUE/NGL (“soft” Eurosceptic parties), EFDD and ENL (“hard” Eurosceptic parties)⁴⁰ in the European Parliament after the election (see Brack & Startin 2015, Hobolt & De Vries 2016b).⁴¹ Within the Eurosceptic sub-sample of the EES, 20.5% of the respondents abstained due to protest-related reasons (n=1,433) and 34,1% due to other reasons (n=2,388), whereas 16.8% of the respondents voted for Eurosceptic party (n=1,177) and 15.2% voted for a another, non-Eurosceptic party⁴² (n=1,063).⁴³

³⁸ The notion of abstention also includes a small number of respondents who reported they “voted blank” (n=84, 3.5% of all non-voters), as this can be a form of *exit*, especially in electoral contexts with compulsory voting.

³⁹ Those reasons are: “lack of trust in or dissatisfaction with politics in general”, “not really satisfied with the European Parliament as an institution”, “opposed to the EU” and “vote has no consequences or vote does not change anything”. In total, respondents were allowed to choose between 17 different reasons (including “other” and “don’t know”), from which they could indicate maximum three.

⁴⁰ The results of the empirical analysis do not considerably change when I distinguish between voters of soft and hard Eurosceptic parties. Therefore, I have decided not to differentiate the dependent variable even further.

⁴¹ In addition, I also categorize four parties without group affiliation as Eurosceptic parties: Jobbik (Hungary), Golden Dawn (Greece), the Communist Party of Greece and the National Democratic Party of Germany.

⁴² As “other, non-Eurosceptic parties”, I understand the political parties sitting in the political groups EPP, S&D, ALDE and GREENS/EFA.

⁴³ The remaining 13.5% of the observations (n=945) are dropped, because they were not assignable to any of the four main categories. Most of these respondents refused to answer the question or

Regarding the three main independent variables, individual level *political awareness* is measured by an additive index capturing the two components of the theoretical concept formulated by Zaller (1992).⁴⁴ The motivational component is measured by people's subjective political interest⁴⁵, while the cognitive component is operationalized with seven factual knowledge questions regarding both national and European politics.⁴⁶ The meso-level independent variable capturing the *ideological congruence* between Eurosceptic voters and eligible Eurosceptic parties is calculated by computing the absolute distance between a respondent's self-placement on the 11-point left-right axis and the individually perceived position of the closest Eurosceptic party on the same ideological scale.⁴⁷ Both variables are rescaled to range from 0 (low awareness, low congruence) to 1 (high awareness, high congruence).⁴⁸

To capture the macro-level *party polarization on European integration*, I use information from the 2014 Euromanifestos dataset (Schmitt et al. 2016a) which contains all electoral programs published by political parties that competed in the 2014 European Parliament elections.⁴⁹ The main reason to make use of this data

did not remember their electoral behavior, whereas the rest have voted for parties that eventually did not receive any seats in the European Parliament.

⁴⁴ The medium-strong correlation between both indicators ($r = 0.38$) reveals that they are indeed related, but still capture distinct aspects of political awareness.

⁴⁵ Subjective political interest is measured by the respondent's answer to the statement "you are very interested in politics" on a four-point scale ranging from "yes, definitely" to "no, not at all".

⁴⁶ Two questions concern the EU, two refer to the respondent's national political system and the last three relate to the *Spitzenkandidaten* in the 2014 EP elections (see tab. A-1 in the appendix). All seven questions are added using a summated scaling technique (the Cronbach alpha value of 0.62 shows an acceptable internal consistency).

⁴⁷ The notion of a party being "Eurosceptic" is the same as used when constructing the dependent variable.

⁴⁸ See appendix for the distribution of the dependent variable (fig. A-1) and central independent variables (fig. A-2), also in comparison between the full sample and the Eurosceptic sub-sample of the EES (fig. A-3).

⁴⁹ The original dataset contains 942 manifestos from all EU member states. Included are parties that have been represented in the EP at least once and did not stop being represented for two or more consecutive legislative periods.

source is that manifestos most clearly express the official programmatic position of parties on the issue of European integration. Moreover, the cross-national character of the dataset and the time of their publication makes it an ideal source to combine it with the 2014 EES voter survey and, thus, to study the effects of party system factors on individual electoral behavior. For analyzing their content, the election programs have been coded according to a procedure from the Comparative Manifesto project⁵⁰, which implies that the manifestos are broken down in “quasi-sentences” as coding units.⁵¹

A party system’s polarization regarding the European integration issue is calculated using Dalton’s (2008) polarization index applied to the EU policy dimension (see also Lachat 2011). For that purpose, all manifesto categories that are part of the “pro-anti-EU” scale of the Euromanifestos dataset (Schmitt et al. 2016a) are integrated into a logarithmic pro-anti-EU scale⁵² resulting in a particular “EU score” for each manifesto/party.⁵³ The degree of EU issue polarization in a party system is then calculated as the standard deviation of the parties’ weighted EU positions, where a party system’s “mean EU score” is weighted by national election vote shares⁵⁴:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Party Polarization on European integration}_j \\ &= \sqrt{\sum \text{vote share}_i \times [(EU\text{score}_i - \overline{EU\text{score}}_j) \div 5]^2} \end{aligned}$$

⁵⁰ For more information see: <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu>.

⁵¹ Every single unit is then assigned a content category (an issue or a policy area), an evaluation of its connotation (positive or negative), and a political level that it relates to (European, national or unspecified).

⁵² Such a scale constructed with the “logit scaling technique” (Lowe et al. 2011, Prosser 2014) “combines the advantages of both additive and ratio scaling methods for manifesto data, whilst avoiding the problem of polarization found in ratio scales, with the additional benefit of a diminishing impact of repeated emphasis, mirroring natural language” (Prosser 2016: 739).

⁵³ $EU\text{score}_i = \log(\sum \text{proEU } QS_i + 0.5) - \log(\sum \text{antiEU } QS_i + 0.5)$.

⁵⁴ $\overline{EU\text{score}}_j = \sum EU\text{score}_i \times \text{vote share}_i / \sum \text{vote share}_i$.

Several variables that belong to the standard repertoire in electoral research will be controlled for in the analysis. On the individual level, I include measures for internal political efficacy, party identification, left-right self-placement (and its squared term), as well as mobilization efforts by political parties and other actors. Moreover, I also include the EU support indicator described above and a measure for support for the national government. Since electoral behavior – both in terms of vote choice as well as turnout – is also influenced by economic conditions (Rosenstone 1982, Weschle 2014), I furthermore include variables that reflect personal economic hardship and macro-economic evaluations.⁵⁵ Another important factor for individual turnout is a sense of civic duty to vote (Blais & Achen 2019, Downs 1957) that I cannot directly control for due to lack of an appropriate survey item. However, I model the absence of civic duty by including a dummy variable that captures all respondents who indicate that they “rarely or never vote”. Besides, I also control for the sociodemographic features age (and its squared term), gender, and education level. All individual level independent variables are scaled to a range from 0 to 1 (except for the respondent’s age) Lastly, several country level variables that are usually included in studies on EP election behavior, namely compulsory voting, years passed since the last national election (*electoral cycle*) and the unemployment rate as a measure for the macro-economic situation in a country (see, e.g. Hernández & Kriesi 2016) as provided by Eurostat.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The first reflects ego-tropic, pocketbook considerations, namely whether respondents have experienced a job loss or an income decline in their households within the last two years (Hobolt & De Vries 2016b). The second indicator reflects retrospective socio-tropic economic evaluations that are traditionally important in electoral research (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2000).

⁵⁶ See the appendix for the exact operationalization of all variables (tab. A-1), the summary statistics of all individual level variables for Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic citizens (tab. A-2) and the summary statistics of the country level variables for all EU member states included in the analysis (tab. A-3).

3.2. Results

In this section, I present the results of multinomial logistic regression models that aim to identify the effects of the independent variables on the electoral choice of Eurosceptic citizens between ordinary abstention, protest-based abstention (*exit*), voting for a Eurosceptic party (*voice*) and voting for another party. The nested structure of the cross-national data and the multi-level nature of the theoretical hypotheses demand an appropriate estimation method.⁵⁷ While there still is a lively debate about the most appropriate regression design to analyze clustered data (Huang 2016, Möhring 2012, Stapleton et al. 2016, Stegmueller 2013), I opt to use a rather conservative “design effect adjusted standard errors” (DA) approach (Huang 2016).⁵⁸ This choice implies that I compute standards errors which take the country-clustered data structure into account, when estimating the maximum likelihood models. Table 2 displays the regression results of an individual level-only model (M1) and a joint individual-country-level model (M2), whereas the coefficients are expressed as average marginal effects (AMEs) using an observed-value approach (Hanmer & Kalkan 2013).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ A variance decomposition shows that 88.9% of the total variance is located at the individual level, whereas 11.1% of the total variance is situated at the country level.

⁵⁸ Alternatives to such an approach would be a country fixed effects (FE) design or multi-level models (MLM) approach. However, both alternatives come with serious shortcomings. FE models are well suited to estimate the effects of individual level variables, as they are unaffected by omitted variables on the macro-level. But they do not allow to model the effects of country-level predictors, which is central for the research question here. MLM, on the other hand, allow for estimating country-level effects, but rest on methodological assumptions that are not fulfilled here (e.g., random samples on both analytical levels). Moreover, the number of higher-level units here is considered to be too small for correct maximum likelihood estimations and MLM are prone to omitted variable bias due to the low number of degrees of freedom (Möhring 2012, Stapleton et al. 2016, Stegmueller 2013).

⁵⁹ The appendix includes the full regression results with the logit coefficients of all independent variables, even for a model with control variables only (tab. A-4, A-5 and A-6). In order to show the robustness of the DA approach, I have additionally estimated a FE model (tab. A-7) and a

Table 2: Explaining the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens (multinomial regression analysis)

	M1: Individual-level model				M2: Individ. & country-level model			
Dependent variable (electoral choices)	Ordin. abstent.	Protest- based abstent. (<i>exit</i>)	Vote f. Eurosc. party (<i>voice</i>)	Vote f. other party	Ordin. abstent.	Protest- based abstent. (<i>exit</i>)	Vote f. Eurosc. party (<i>voice</i>)	Vote f. other party
Political awareness	-0.42*** (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.36** (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	-0.41*** (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)	0.32*** (0.04)	0.10* (0.04)
Ideological congruence to Eurosceptic parties	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.12** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.07)	-0.27*** (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.08* (0.03)	0.38*** (0.07)	-0.28*** (0.04)
Party polarization on European integration					-0.01 (0.02)	-0.05*** (0.01)	0.05** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Individ.-level controls	Included				Included			
Country level controls	Not included				Included			
Pseudo R ²	0.18				0.20			
N	3,415				3,415			

Notes: The observations are Eurosceptic citizens (clustered in 22 countries), the coefficients are the average marginal effects (AMEs) that each independent variable exerts on the respective outcome category of the dependent variable, displayed in parentheses are cluster-corrected standard errors, significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, see appendix for full results including all control variables (expressed in logit coefficients).

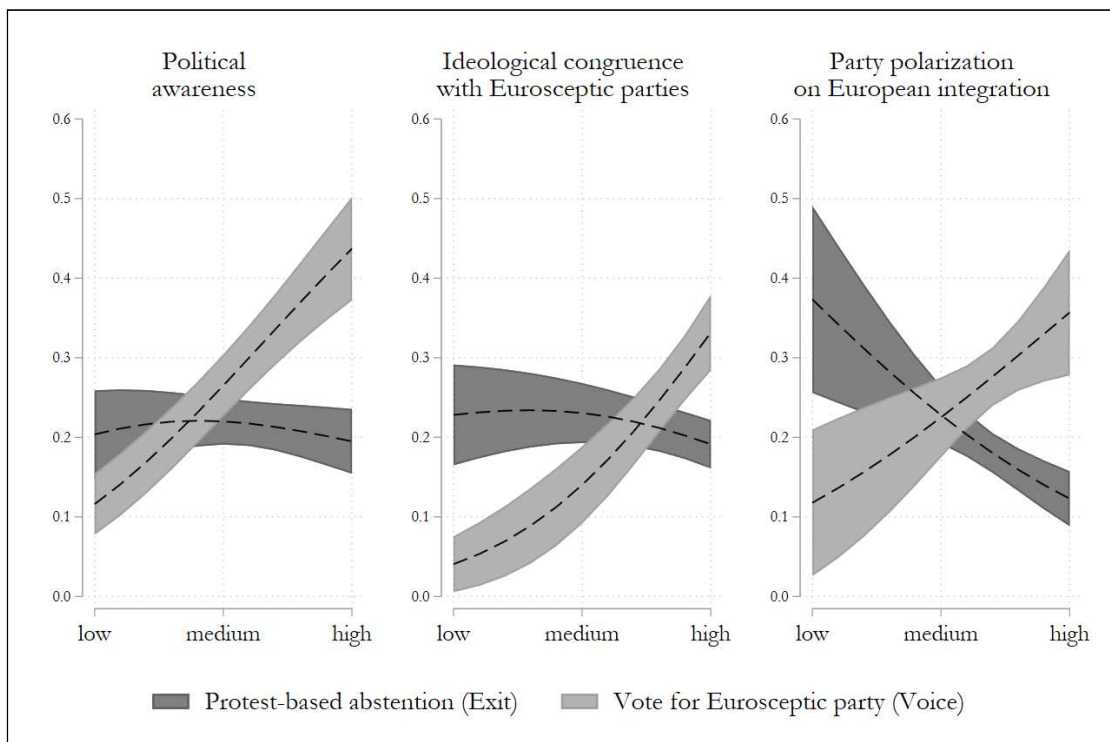
The results are largely in line with the theoretical expectations. First, increasing *political awareness* (H1) makes Eurosceptic citizens prefer the *voice* option over other choices, whereas the likelihood of abstaining decreases significantly. However, this only applies to the ordinary form of abstention, since choosing *exit* is not affected by a citizen's awareness level. There is even a small positive effect on the choice to vote for a non-Eurosceptic party, which reveals the strong mobilization effect of political interest and knowledge. Second, increasing *ideological congruence* between Eurosceptic voters and Eurosceptic parties (H2) has a remarkably strong effect on an individual's tendency to choose *voice*. In contrast, the chance for protest-based abstention decreases, which shows that *exit* becomes

MLM (tab. A-8) that can be found in the appendix. The results show that the findings are similar and, essentially, not sensitive to the method used.

more attractive when voters do not feel ideologically represented by the eligible Eurosceptic parties. While ordinary abstention is unaffected by ideological distances, it also becomes apparent that stronger congruence increases the chance to vote for other parties, even if those are not Eurosceptic. Evidently, left-right ideology is not only relevant for electoral participation, but is an even stronger determinant of vote choice.

Third, the degree of *party polarization on European integration* (H3) matters for a Eurosceptic citizen's electoral choice between *exit* and *voice*. Higher polarization simultaneously increases the likelihood of Eurosceptic voting and decreases the chance to abstain for protest-related reasons. In contrast, the two remaining options do not vary with the degree that political parties are divided on EU issues.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities for the electoral choices *exit* and *voice* among Eurosceptic citizens (in function of the three main independent variables)



Note: The model predictions follow from the full DA model (M2) and are calculated using an observed value approach, the shaded areas represent 95 % confidence intervals, the representative values for political awareness and ideological congruence range from 0 (low) to 1 (high), while they range from 0 (low) to 5 (high) for party polarization, the predictions for the two other electoral options can be seen in the appendix (fig. A-4, A-5 and A-6).

Since AMEs only demonstrate the average effect of an independent variable and are not very graphic, I additionally calculated predicted probabilities for the outcome categories of the dependent variables for different levels of the three central independent variables. This is, again, done with an observed-values approach for the full DA model (M2), of which [figure 2](#) displays only the electoral choices *exit* and *voice* in order to keep the graph demonstrative and in line with the original research interest.⁶⁰ The model predictions visualize the relevance of all three factors for the likelihood to *voice* discontent at the ballot boxes instead of *exiting* from political participation.

First, while the predicted probability of voting for a Eurosceptic party is only 11.6% for uninterested and uninformed Eurosceptic citizens, it ascends to 43.7% for highly interested and knowledgeable individuals. In contrast, the probability of abstaining for protest-related reasons does not significantly vary with the level of political awareness and stays around 20-22%. As mentioned, low political awareness tends to make Eurosceptic citizens stay at home. However, those people abstain primarily, because they are not interested or not affected, but not in order to express protest and dissatisfaction. While the predicted probability of ordinary abstention is only 14.5% for highly aware Eurosceptics, it amounts to 54.6% for those who show the lowest awareness level (see also [fig. A-4](#)).

Second, ideological voter-party congruence significantly affects Eurosceptic citizens' tendency to vote for parties that are opposed to the EU. While the probability of *voice* is only marginal (4.1%) for those who show maximum ideological distance to Eurosceptic parties, it rises up to 33.2% for Eurosceptic citizens who are

⁶⁰ See appendix for the graphically visualized model predictions of all four categories of the dependent variable ([fig. A-4](#), [A-5](#) and [A-6](#)).

fully congruent. Although the probability to *exit* decreases with higher ideological congruence (from 22.6% to 19.1%), this change is not statistically significant on the 95% level. Since this prediction is similar to the one for ordinary abstention, we can conclude that ideological representation is not a major factor for Eurosceptic citizens' participation decision. Rather, it greatly matters for their vote choice, which is also underlined by the stark decrease (from 43.9% to 13.5%) in the likelihood of voting for another, non-Eurosceptic party (see fig. A-5). A lack of political representation thus makes Eurosceptic citizens rather change their vote choice than stay at home during European elections.

Third, party polarization regarding the European integration issue is the only one of the three main independent variables that affects both *exit* and *voice* to a similar degree. The more divided political parties in a country, the less likely are Eurosceptic citizens to abstain out of protest and the rather they vote for a Eurosceptic party. In party systems with low polarization of EU issues, Eurosceptics show a predicted probability of 37.3% to *exit* and a chance of 11.8% to *voice* their discontent. However, in countries where parties are highly polarized on European integration, Eurosceptic individuals have a predicted *exit* probability of 12.2%, while their likelihood to vote for a Eurosceptic party is 35.7%. This finding provides evidence to the effect of party polarization and EU issue politicization for the electoral behavior of dissatisfied citizens. On the other hand, the chances of ordinary abstention and voting for another party are not significantly affected by elite polarization regarding European integration (see fig. A-6).

4. Discussion

In this paper, I aimed to understand the factors that shape the electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens in European Parliament elections. More specifically, I

identified the effects that individual political awareness, ideological voter-party congruence and party polarization regarding the issue of European integration exert on the electoral choice between protest-based abstaining (*exit*) and voting for a Eurosceptic party (*voice*). Relying on the rational choice theory of electoral behavior and employing an integrated approach modelling a simultaneous decision process, I analyzed a sub-sample of the 2014 EES voter survey and the Euromanifestos dataset from the same EP election. The results indicate that Eurosceptic citizens tend to choose *voice* over *exit*, when they are more interested and knowledgeable in politics, when they feel better represented by Eurosceptic parties and when the issue of European integration is highly polarized by the political parties in their country. In addition, the findings show that abstaining out of protest is not the same as ordinary abstention. While the latter is mainly caused by a lack of political awareness, protest-based abstention is more likely in contexts where political parties fail to represent Eurosceptic citizens and do not politicize the issue of European integration.

These findings have important implications for at least two areas of research, namely the political behavior of dissatisfied citizens and the nature of European Parliament elections. Regarding the former, the study concludes, first, that dissatisfied citizens act in accordance with the assumptions of rational choice theory. Greater political awareness enhances electoral participation, as it mobilizes people and provides them with the means to identify the party that is most in line with their preferences. The implication of this finding is that protest parties benefit when their potential supporters receive more political information. However, it might happen that increasing knowledge also leads to decreasing

dissatisfaction.⁶¹ Second, the results underline that the supply side matters for dissatisfied citizens, as they favor ideological congruence and representation, even when voting for system-opposing parties (see also Birch & Dennison 2019, Hernández 2018).⁶² Third, the findings confirm the electoral relevance of party polarization on single policy issues (see also Lachat 2011). When parties strongly diverge on an issue, dissatisfied citizens can better identify parties that match their own preferences and express their discontent at the ballot boxes. In consequence, parties have an incentive to take extreme positions on issues that they perceive as advantageous in an election, in order to polarize the issue and mobilize voters.

Addressing the second research area, the results of this study support previous findings regarding the changing nature of European Parliament elections (e.g., De Vries et al. 2011, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Hobolt & Wittrock 2011). Nowadays, “Europe matters” for many citizens, when they go to the polls. One manifestation of this trend is that Eurosceptic citizens vote for Eurosceptic parties and, thus, according to their preferences on European integration. This study has identified several factors that contribute to their ability of doing so. First, the more information people receive during EP election campaigns, the more they are able to match parties’ EU positions with their own (see also Beach et al. 2018). Second, the availability of ideologically congruent parties is essential for EU issue voting, since voters do not only consider EU preferences but also place great emphasis on a party’s ideological profile. Left Eurosceptic citizens, for example, hardly vote

⁶¹ There is still a lively academic debate about whether and how political knowledge affects people’s satisfaction with the political system in the first place (see, e.g., Karp et al. 2003, Osterberg-Kaufmann 2019).

⁶² From the perspective of democratic theory, this can be seen as a positive conclusion, as it confirms that “protest voting is therefore fundamentally a political act, not simply an expression of disenchantment with politics” (Birch & Dennison 2019: 122).

for right-wing Eurosceptic parties, and vice versa (see also Hernández & Kriesi [2016](#)). Third, voting according to preferences on European integration is still highly context-dependent (see also Van Elsas et al. [2018](#)). Where EU issues are more politicized by political elites, electoral behavior is more connected to EU attitudes and less in accordance with the second-order theory of European Parliament elections. Whether or not this trend continues, needs to be addressed by future empirical research.

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Appendix

Table A1: Operationalization of independent variables from the EES 2014 voter survey

Variables	Item (EES 2014)	Coding
<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Electoral behaviour in the 2014 EP elections (qp1 and qp2, see below)</i>	1=Ordinary abstention 2=Protest-based abstention (exit) 3=Vote for a Eurosceptic party (voice) 4=Vote for another party
Ordinary abstention	QP1: "European Parliament elections were held on the <i>(insert date according to country)</i> . For one reason or another, some people in <i>(our country)</i> did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?" QP2: "Which party did you vote for in these recent European Parliament elections?"	1="Did not vote" (QP1) or "voted blank" (QP2)
Protest-based abstention (exit)	QP4b: "What are the main reasons why you did NOT vote in the recent European Parliament elections?" [max. three answers]	1=Indicated exclusively one or (at least) two of the following answers: - "lack of trust in or dissatisfaction with politics in general" - "not really satisfied with the European Parliament as an institution" - "opposed to the EU" - "vote has no consequences or vote does not change anything"
Vote for a Eurosceptic party (voice)	QP2: "Which party did you vote for in these recent European Parliament elections?"	1=Voted for a party that sits in one of the following political groups (EP): GUE/NGL, ECR, EFDD, ENF or a "non-inscrit" party (NI)
Vote for another party	QP2: "Which party did you vote for in these recent European Parliament elections?"	1=Voted for a party that sits in one of the following political groups (EP): EPP, S&D, ALDE, GREENS
Excluded from analysis	QP2: "Which party did you vote for in these recent European Parliament elections?"	1="refused", "don't know", "other" or voted for a party that did not obtain seats in the EP

<i>Independent Variables</i>		
EU support	<p>QP7: "Generally speaking, do you think that (<i>our country</i>)'s membership of the EU is...?"</p> <p>QP6: "For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You trust the institutions of the EU (<i>qp6_2</i>) - You feel you are a citizen of the EU (<i>qp6_3</i>) - You feel attached to Europe (<i>qp6_6</i>) 	<p>Combined mean of three support indicators, that were re-scaled (to 0-1) beforehand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU regime support (<i>qp7</i>): 3-point scale (0="a bad thing"; 0.5="neither a good thing nor a bad thing", 1="a good thing") - EU institutional trust (<i>qp6_2</i>): 4 points scale from 0 ("no, not at all") to 1 ("yes, totally") - EU identity (<i>qp6_3, qp6_6</i>): Sum index of the two items (7-point scale) (DK excluded)
Political awareness	<p>QP6: "For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You are very interested in politics (<i>qp6_1</i>) <p>QPP23: "For each of the following statements about the EU, could you please tell me whether you think it is true or false. If you don't know, just say so and we will skip to the next."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Switzerland is a member of the EU (<i>qpp23_1</i>) - Each Member State elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament (<i>qpp23_2</i>) - There are (150% of correct number) members in the (<i>lower house of national parliament</i>) (<i>qpp23_3</i>) - (<i>Name of the head of government</i>) belongs to (<i>name of correct party</i>) (<i>qpp23_4</i>) <p>QPP24: "For each of the following candidates for President of the next European Commission, can you tell me which European party group or which (<i>nationality</i>) political party supports their nomination?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jean-Claude Juncker - Martin Schulz - Guy Verhofstadt 	<p>Mean of two added items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subjective political interest (<i>qp6_1</i>) measured on 4-point scale (0="no, not at all"; 1="Yes, totally") - Objective political knowledge as the mean of seven factual knowledge questions (<i>qpp23, qpp24</i>), where 1=correct answer; 0=incorrect answer or "don't know" <p>→ Thus, the indicator ranges from 0 (no subjective political interest and no knowledge question answered correctly) to 1 (high subjective political interest and all knowledge questions answered correctly)</p>
Ideological distance to the closest Eurosceptic party	<p>QPP13: "In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. What is your position? Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where '0' means</p>	<p>Absolute difference between the voter's own position (<i>qpp13</i>) on the ideological left-right scale and the position of the closest</p>

	<p>'left' and '10' means 'right'. Which number best describes your position?"</p> <p>QPP14: "And about where would you place the following political parties on this scale? How about the...? Which number from 0 to 10, where '0' means 'left' and '10' means 'right' best describes this party?"</p>	<p>national political party (<i>qpp14</i>) that sits in one of the following political groups (EP): GUE/NGL, ECR, EFDD, ENF or a "non-inscrit" party (NI)</p> <p>→ Scale ranges from 0 (maximum ideological distance) to 1 (absolute ideological congruence), after rescaling (originally the scale ran from 0 to 10)</p>
Internal efficacy	<p>QPP9: "For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion."</p> <p>- Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like you can't really understand what's going on (<i>qpp9_3</i>)</p>	<p>4-point scale from 0 ("yes, totally") to 1 ("no, not at all")</p>
Support for national government (dummy)	<p>QPP20: "Do you approve or disapprove of ...?"</p> <p>- The (<i>nationality</i>) government's record to date (<i>qpp20_1</i>)</p>	<p>1="approve" 0="disapprove" (DK excluded)</p>
Left-right self-placement	<p>QPP13: In political matters people talk of "the left" and the right". What is your position? Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where '0' means "left" and '10' means "right". Which number best describes your position?</p>	<p>Original 11-point scale rescaled to 0-1 (refusal and "don't know" excluded)</p>
Mobilized by party (dummy)	<p>QP12: "Did anyone from one of the national political parties contact you regarding your vote in the recent European elections?"</p>	<p>1="yes" 0="no" (DK excluded)</p>
Mobilized by GOTV campaign (dummy)	<p>QP8: "Personally, do you remember having seen on TV, in the Internet or on posters, read in newspapers or heard on the radio a campaign encouraging people to vote in the European elections?"</p>	<p>1="yes, remember" 0="no, don't remember" (DK excluded)</p>
Personal economic hardship	<p>QPP11: "Please tell me whether or not each of the following situations has happened to you or someone in your household during the last two years?"</p> <p>- You or someone in your household lost his or her job (<i>qpp11_1</i>)</p> <p>- Your household experienced a decrease in income (<i>qpp11_2</i>)</p>	<p>Mean value of both variables, which each have three response options: "yes" (1), "no" (0), "don't know"</p> <p>→ Thus the new scale is: 1=experienced both kinds of economic hardship 0.5=experienced one form of economic hardship</p>

		0=did not experience economic hardship (DK excluded)
Negative macro-economic evaluations	QPP15: "What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in <i>(our country)</i> ...?"	Measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 ("is a lot better") and 1 ("is a lot worse")
Party identification (dummy)	QPP21: "Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular political party? If so, which party do you feel close to?"	1=any party is indicated 0="no, you do not feel close to any political party" (refusal and DK excluded)
No civic duty (dummy)	QP3b: "When did you decide NOT to vote in the recent European Parliament elections?" - "You never vote" (<i>qp3b_1</i>) QP4b: "What are the main reasons why you did NOT vote in the recent European Parliament elections?" - "Rarely or never vote" (<i>qp4b_13</i>)	1=either indicated that s/he never votes (<i>qp3b_1</i>) or that s/he "rarely or never votes" (<i>qp4b_13</i>) 0=the rest
Female (dummy)	D10: Gender	1=female 0=male
Age	VD11: "How old are you?"	Original scale
Education	D8: How old were you when you stopped full-time education?	0="-15" and "no full-time education" 1="16-19" 2="20-" and "still studying" (refusal and DK excluded)

Table A-2: Summary statistics of individual level variables for Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic respondents

Variables	Eurosceptic		Non-Eurosceptic		Δ
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Ordinary abstention (dummy)	0.35	0.47	0.27	0.46	0.08*
Protest-based abstention (dummy)	0.21	0.40	0.07	0.26	0.14*
Vote for Eurosceptic party (dummy)	0.15	0.37	0.09	0.28	0.06*
Vote for other party (dummy)	0.15	0.36	0.42	0.49	-0.31*
EU support	0.27	0.14	0.75	0.14	-0.48*
Political awareness	0.39	0.22	0.51	0.23	-0.12*
Ideological congruence w. Eurosceptic party	0.78	0.23	0.74	0.24	0.04*
Internal efficacy	0.38	0.35	0.39	0.31	-0.01
Support for national government (dummy)	0.21	0.40	0.50	0.50	-0.29*
Left-right self-placement	0.48	0.27	0.52	0.26	-0.04*
Party identification (dummy)	0.58	0.49	0.69	0.46	-0.11*
Mobilized by party (dummy)	0.13	0.33	0.15	0.35	-0.02*
Mobilized by GOTV campaign (dummy)	0.60	0.49	0.76	0.43	-0.15*
Personal economic hardship	0.48	0.41	0.36	0.40	0.12*
Macro-economic evaluation	0.64	0.26	0.51	0.24	0.12*
No civic duty (dummy)	0.18	0.39	0.08	0.26	0.10*
Age	51.24	17.46	50.90	17.89	0.34
Female (dummy)	0.54	0.50	0.54	0.50	0.01
Education	0.52	0.36	0.66	0.35	-0.14*

Source: EES 2014 (full sample).

Notes: All variables (except age) range between 0 and 1; * = significant difference of means according to a *t*-test on 99% significance level.

Table A-3: Electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens (dependent variable) and country level independent variables over different EU member states

Country	Electoral behavior of Eurosceptic citizens				Independent country level variables			
	Ordin. abst.	Protest- based abst. (<i>exit</i>)	Eurosc. voting (<i>voice</i>)	Vote for other party	EU issue polar.	Comp. voting	Yrs. since last nat. election	Unemp. rate (2014)
Austria	0.38	0.22	0.15	0.11	4.16	0	1	5.6
Belgium	0.15	0.02	0.18	0.38	1.77	1	0	8.5
Bulgaria	0.31	0.31	0.02	0.24	1.90	0	1	11.4
Cyprus	0.23	0.29	0.12	0.11	2.74	1	3	16.1
Czech Rep.	0.47	0.37	0.04	0.09	2.50	0	1	6.1
Denmark	0.23	0.05	0.47	0.17	4.22	0	3	6.6
Finland	0.39	0.22	0.13	0.16	2.27	0	3	8.7
France	0.47	0.18	0.16	0.07	2.63	0	2	10.3
Germany	0.31	0.37	0.12	0.11	1.67	0	1	5.0
Greece	0.12	0.10	0.41	0.09	4.89	1	2	26.5
Hungary	0.50	0.16	0.08	0.22	1.92	0	0	7.7
Ireland	0.33	0.09	0.26	0.07	2.15	0	3	11.3
Italy	0.24	0.19	0.18	0.19	3.93	0	1	12.7
Latvia	0.40	0.35	0.02	0.16	2.22	0	3	10.8
Lithuania	0.32	0.11	0.13	0.29	1.63	0	2	10.7
Netherlands	0.24	0.25	0.30	0.12	2.31	0	2	7.4
Poland	0.54	0.22	0.15	0.03	3.83	0	3	9.0
Portugal	0.44	0.16	0.10	0.17	3.36	0	3	14.1
Slovakia	0.58	0.32	0.01	0.04	2.45	0	2	13.2
Spain	0.33	0.21	0.11	0.15	2.36	0	3	24.5
Sweden	0.11	0.12	0.25	0.42	3.00	0	4	7.9
UK	0.38	0.11	0.30	0.12	2.86	0	4	6.1

Source: EES 2014, Eurosceptic sub-sample (electoral behavior), Euromanifestos 2014 (party polarization), Eurostat (unemployment).

Table A-4: Individual level multinomial regression model with control variables only (DA approach)

	Protest-based abstention vs. ordinary abstention	Vote for Euro- sceptic party vs. ordinary abstention	Vote for other party vs. ordinary abstention
EU support	-2.37*** (0.44)	-2.01*** (0.55)	0.95* (0.48)
Left-right self-placement	-0.34 (0.65)	-2.30* (1.01)	-1.49 (1.10)
(Left-right self-placement) ²	0.42 (0.66)	2.41* (1.00)	1.09 (0.97)
Support for national government	-0.38** (0.14)	-0.93*** (0.21)	0.01 (0.15)
Experienced personal economic hardship	0.39** (0.14)	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.16 (0.15)
Negative evaluation of macro-economic situation	0.14 (0.28)	-0.07 (0.58)	-0.03 (0.32)
Internal political efficacy	0.23 (0.18)	0.61*** (0.18)	0.54*** (0.16)
Party identification	-0.22 (0.11)	0.68** (0.21)	0.76*** (0.19)
Mobilization by parties	0.10 (0.16)	0.88*** (0.20)	0.44* (0.19)
Mobilization by gotv campaigns	0.48** (0.17)	0.51*** (0.15)	0.25 (0.16)
Age	0.06*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.02)
(Age) ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00** (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Gender (female)	-0.19** (0.07)	-0.32* (0.13)	0.06 (0.08)
Education	0.36* (0.17)	0.55* (0.27)	0.42 (0.26)
No civic duty	-0.22* (0.09)	-20.05*** (0.30)	-19.99*** (0.28)
Constant	-1.95*** (0.49)	-1.52** (0.56)	-3.37*** (0.60)
Pseudo R²		0.14	
Observations		3,806	

Notes: The observations are Eurosceptic citizens (clustered in 22 countries); the coefficients are logit coefficients that display the effect that an independent variable exerts on the respective outcome category (of the dependent variable) versus the base category (here: ordinary abstention); in parentheses are cluster-corrected standard errors; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A-5: Individual level multinomial regression model with main independent and control variables (DA approach)

	Protest-based abstention vs. ordinary abstention	Vote for Euro- sceptic party vs. ordinary abstention	Vote for other party vs. ordinary abstention
Political awareness	1.35*** (0.35)	3.61*** (0.35)	2.22*** (0.35)
Ideological congruence to Eurosceptic parties	-0.40 (0.22)	2.42*** (0.50)	-1.25*** (0.31)
EU support	-2.58*** (0.48)	-2.34*** (0.56)	0.76 (0.53)
Left-right self-placement	-0.14 (0.69)	-1.55 (1.08)	-0.83 (1.00)
(Left-right self-placement) ²	0.21 (0.68)	1.73 (1.07)	0.38 (0.83)
Support for national government	-0.39** (0.14)	-0.90** (0.22)	-0.12 (0.17)
Experienced personal economic hardship	0.40** (0.14)	-0.09 (0.18)	-0.04 (0.18)
Negative evaluation of macro-economic situation	0.19 (0.26)	0.00 (0.49)	-0.01 (0.34)
Internal political efficacy	0.20 (0.16)	0.40* (0.18)	0.47** (0.16)
Party identification	-0.22 (0.13)	0.49* (0.22)	0.84*** (0.21)
Mobilization by parties	0.09 (0.18)	0.85*** (0.19)	0.45* (0.19)
Mobilization by gotv campaigns	0.34* (0.15)	0.31* (0.13)	0.29* (0.11)
Age	0.07*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
(Age) ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)
Gender (female)	-0.13* (0.06)	0.01 (0.13)	0.26** (0.09)
Education	0.20 (0.18)	0.17 (0.25)	0.11 (0.30)
No civic duty	-0.08 (0.10)	-18.31*** (0.31)	-18.32*** (0.28)
Constant	-2.04*** (0.46)	-4.13*** (0.82)	-3.44*** (0.58)
Pseudo R²		0.18	
Observations		3,415	

Notes: The observations are Eurosceptic citizens (clustered in 22 countries); the coefficients are logit coefficients that display the effect that an independent variable exerts on the respective outcome category (of the dependent variable) versus the base category (here: ordinary abstention); in parentheses are cluster-corrected standard errors; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A-6: Individual and country level model with main independent and control variables (DA approach)

	Protest-based vs ord. abstent.	Eurosc. vote vs ordin. abstent.	Other party vs ordin. abstent.
Political awareness	1.36*** (0.33)	3.52*** (0.38)	2.35*** (0.37)
Ideological congruence to Eurosceptic parties	-0.29 (0.21)	2.23*** (0.51)	-1.38*** (0.30)
Party system polarization on European integration	-0.21** (0.07)	0.34* (0.17)	0.10 (0.15)
Compulsory voting	0.48* (0.24)	1.32* (0.63)	-0.06 (0.45)
Years since last national election	-0.12 (0.11)	0.19 (0.12)	0.08 (0.18)
Unemployment rate (2014)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)
EU support	-2.66*** (0.48)	-2.00*** (0.46)	0.84 (0.50)
Left-right self-placement	-0.05 (0.66)	-2.12* (0.93)	-0.95 (0.96)
(Left-right self-placement) ²	0.09 (0.66)	2.34** (0.89)	0.55 (0.81)
Support for national government	-0.43*** (0.13)	-0.84*** (0.18)	-0.04 (0.17)
Experienced personal economic hardship	0.36* (0.15)	-0.30* (0.13)	-0.14 (0.13)
Negative evaluation of macro-economic situation	0.14 (0.24)	-0.25 (0.29)	-0.10 (0.33)
Internal political efficacy	0.20 (0.16)	0.33 (0.18)	0.42** (0.16)
Party identification	-0.20 (0.13)	0.42* (0.21)	0.84*** (0.21)
Mobilization by parties	0.09 (0.18)	0.59* (0.24)	0.37 (0.20)
Mobilization by gotv campaigns	0.33* (0.15)	0.40*** (0.11)	0.30* (0.12)
No civic duty	-0.10 (0.10)	-18.16*** (0.29)	-18.25*** (0.28)
Age	0.07*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
(Age) ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00** (0.00)
Gender (female)	-0.14* (0.07)	-0.04 (0.14)	0.26** (0.09)
Education	0.21 (0.17)	0.16 (0.21)	0.20 (0.24)
Pseudo R²		0.20	
Observations		3,415	

Notes: The observations are Eurosceptic citizens (clustered in 22 countries); the coefficients are logit coefficients that display the effect that an independent variable exerts on the respective outcome category (of the dependent variable) versus the base category (here: ordinary abstention); constant is suppressed; in parentheses are cluster-corrected standard errors; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A-7: Individual level multinomial regression model with central independent and control variables (country FE approach)

	Protest-based abstention vs. ordinary abstention	Vote for Euro- sceptic party vs. ordinary abstention	Vote for other party vs. ordinary abstention
Political awareness	1.31*** (0.28)	3.53*** (0.31)	2.34*** (0.32)
Ideological congruence to Eurosceptic parties	-0.39 (0.23)	2.07*** (0.31)	-1.58*** (0.25)
EU support	-2.65*** (0.37)	-1.45*** (0.41)	1.07* (0.44)
Left-right self-placement	-0.24 (0.62)	-3.36*** (0.69)	-0.90 (0.68)
(Left-right self-placement) ²	0.43 (0.59)	3.44*** (0.67)	0.65 (0.67)
Support for national government	-0.43*** (0.13)	-0.83*** (0.16)	-0.07 (0.14)
Experienced personal economic hardship	0.35** (0.13)	-0.29 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.15)
Negative evaluation of macro-economic situation	0.13 (0.23)	0.20 (0.26)	-0.11 (0.26)
Internal political efficacy	0.17 (0.15)	0.26 (0.18)	0.28 (0.18)
Party identification	-0.22* (0.11)	0.40** (0.13)	0.73*** (0.14)
Mobilization by parties	0.14 (0.18)	0.38* (0.17)	0.33 (0.18)
Mobilization by gotv campaigns	0.29** (0.11)	0.42*** (0.12)	0.29* (0.12)
No civic duty	-0.13 (0.12)	-19.43 (1,142.54)	-19.57 (1,365.52)
Age	0.07*** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)
(Age) ²	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	-0.00** (0.00)
Gender (female)	-0.15 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.12)	0.26* (0.12)
Education	0.20 (0.17)	0.22 (0.18)	0.13 (0.18)
Belgium	-0.13 (16,079.92)	21.45 (9,452.33)	20.79 (9,452.33)
Bulgaria	0.77* (0.38)	-0.75 (0.62)	1.62*** (0.42)
Cyprus	0.62 (0.36)	0.49 (0.42)	0.41 (0.42)
Czech Republic	0.61* (0.26)	-1.33*** (0.39)	-0.08 (0.35)
Denmark	-0.68 (0.43)	0.96** (0.35)	0.40 (0.39)
Finland	0.34 (0.31)	-0.31 (0.36)	0.34 (0.37)
France	-0.51 (0.31)	-0.60 (0.34)	-0.34 (0.38)

Germany	0.82** (0.30)	0.24 (0.36)	0.20 (0.39)
Greece	0.10 (0.35)	1.95*** (0.32)	1.35*** (0.37)
Hungary	-0.47 (0.36)	-0.85* (0.43)	0.30 (0.37)
Ireland	-0.30 (0.42)	1.28*** (0.37)	0.21 (0.49)
Italy	0.42 (0.34)	0.95** (0.33)	1.60*** (0.35)
Latvia	0.31 (0.31)	-1.59** (0.54)	0.02 (0.39)
Lithuania	-0.18 (0.44)	0.19 (0.43)	1.03* (0.41)
The Netherlands	0.74* (0.34)	0.82* (0.36)	0.32 (0.41)
Poland	-0.25 (0.38)	-0.11 (0.42)	-1.32 (0.69)
Portugal	-0.19 (0.30)	-0.32 (0.34)	0.81* (0.33)
Slovakia	0.19 (0.28)	-3.86*** (1.04)	-1.30** (0.44)
Spain	0.38 (0.30)	0.17 (0.36)	1.18** (0.36)
Sweden	0.64 (0.39)	1.00* (0.39)	2.37*** (0.39)
United Kingdom	-0.84* (0.35)	1.05*** (0.32)	0.16 (0.36)
Constant	-2.15*** (0.57)	-4.34*** (0.66)	-4.11*** (0.68)
Pseudo R²		0.26	
Observations		3,415	

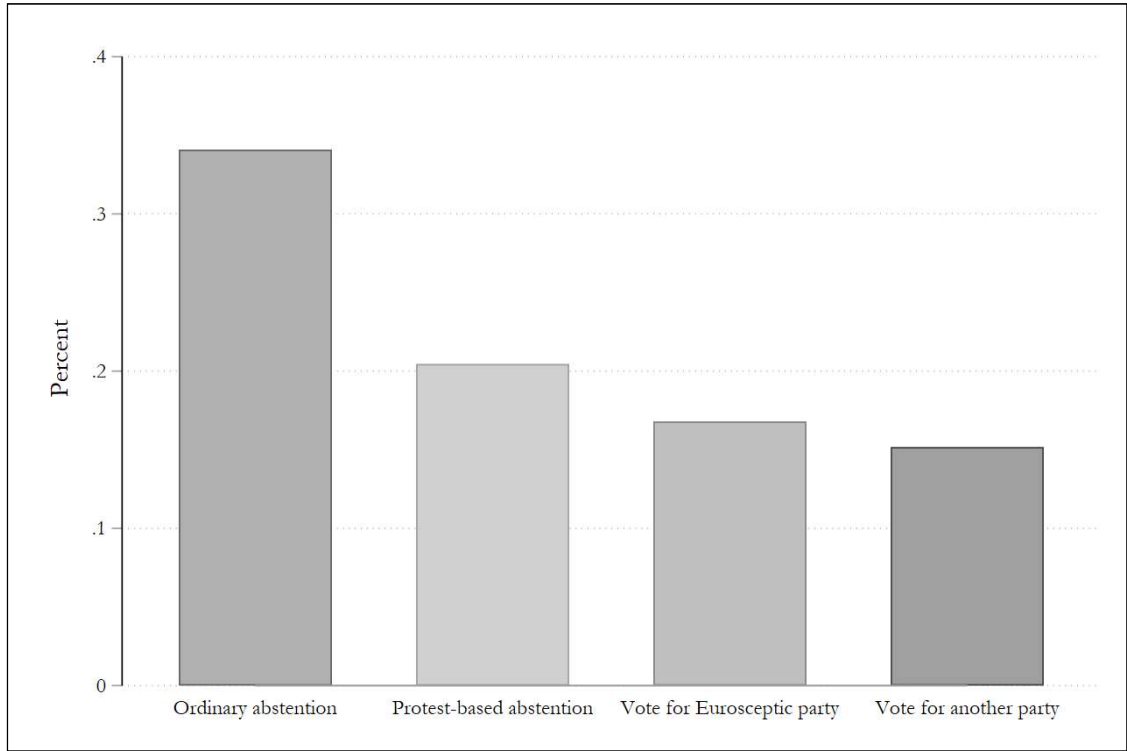
Notes: The observations are Eurosceptic citizens; the coefficients are logit coefficients that display the effect that an independent variable exerts on the respective outcome category (of the dependent variable) versus the base category (here: ordinary abstention); in parentheses are standard errors (not clustered); significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A-8: Predicting the choice between ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ with different modelling approaches (results of three binary logistic regression models)

	DA SE approach	Country FE model	Multi-level model
Political awareness	1.97*** (0.53)	1.98** (0.39)	1.95*** (0.39)
Ideological congruence to Eurosceptic parties	2.53*** (0.51)	2.44** (0.39)	2.45*** (0.39)
Party polarization on European integration	0.55** (0.19)		0.39 (0.33)
EU support	0.62 (0.54)	1.73** (0.53)	1.60** (0.52)
Support for national government	-0.41 (0.26)	-0.39 (0.22)	-0.37 (0.22)
Experienced personal economic hardship	-0.62*** (0.17)	-0.52** (0.20)	-0.53** (0.20)
Negative evaluation of macro-economic situation	-0.43 (0.33)	0.09 (0.35)	0.06 (0.34)
Left-right self-placement	-2.35* (1.10)	-4.69*** (0.95)	-4.45*** (0.93)
(Left-right self-placement) ²	2.65* (1.14)	4.85*** (0.92)	4.59*** (0.90)
Party identification	0.73*** (0.17)	0.77*** (0.17)	0.77*** (0.16)
Mobilization by parties	0.51 (0.29)	0.22 (0.22)	0.24 (0.22)
Mobilization by govtv campaigns	0.11 (0.19)	0.18 (0.17)	0.17 (0.17)
Internal political efficacy	0.14 (0.21)	-0.04 (0.23)	-0.01 (0.22)
Age	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)
(Age) ²	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender (female)	0.04 (0.14)	0.04 (0.15)	0.04 (0.15)
Education	0.08 (0.22)	0.21 (0.24)	0.21 (0.23)
Compulsory Voting	0.95 (0.75)		2.26* (1.07)
Years since last national election	0.43* (0.19)		0.30 (0.26)
Unemployment	-0.02 (0.03)		-0.08 (0.06)
Country dummies	Not included	Included	Not included
Observations	1,401	1,393	1,401

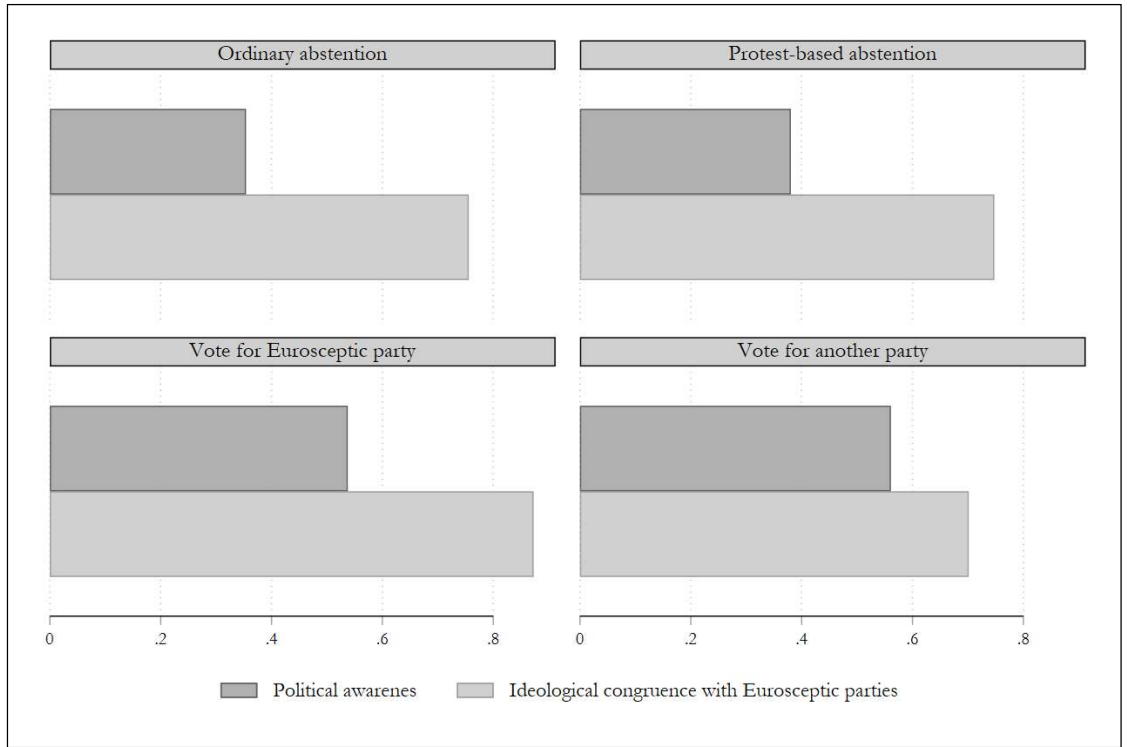
Notes: The dependent variable is the binary choice between protest-based abstention (0=‘exit’) and voting for a Eurosceptic party (1=‘voice’); displayed are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (for the DA approach, the standard errors are corrected for the country clusters); significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure A-1: Electoral behavior among Eurosceptic citizens (distribution of the dependent variable)



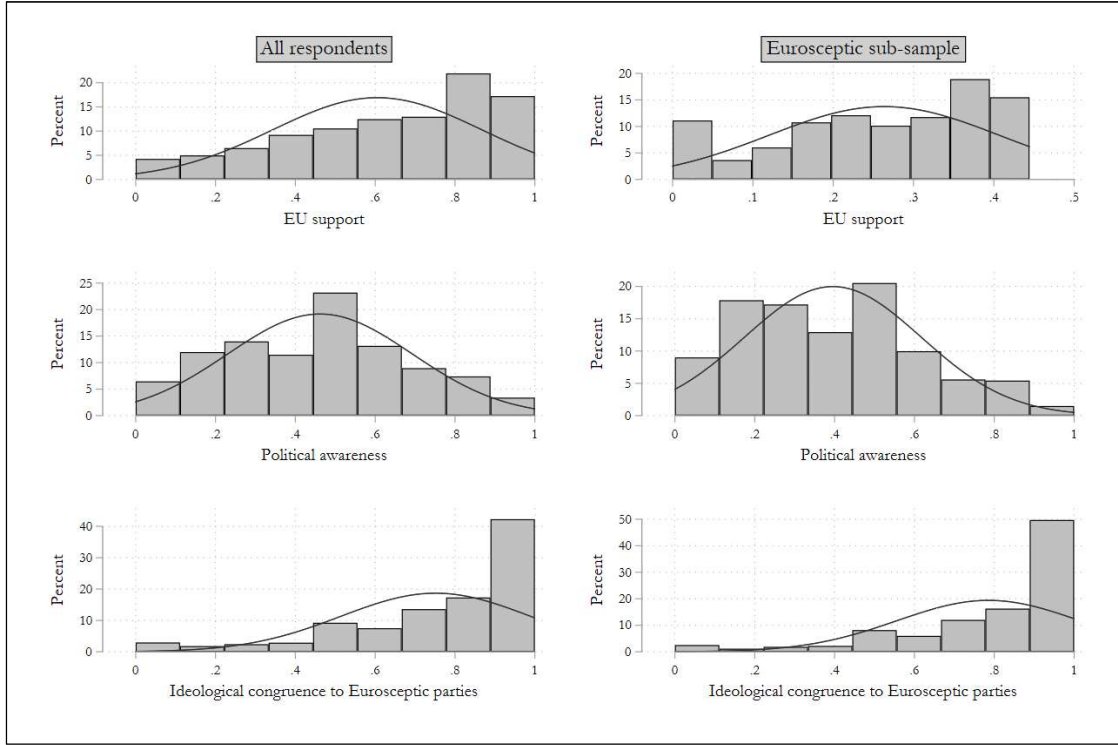
Source: EES 2014, Eurosceptic sub-sample (n=7,006 from 22 countries)

Figure A-2: Mean values of main independent variables over electoral choices



Source: EES 2014, Eurosceptic sub-sample (n=7,006 from 22 countries)

Figure A-3: Distribution of central independent variables among all respondents and among Eurosceptic respondents



Source: EES 2014, full sample (left side) and Eurosceptic sub-sample (right side).

Figure A-4: Predicted probabilities for four electoral choices among Eurosceptic citizens in function of individual political awareness

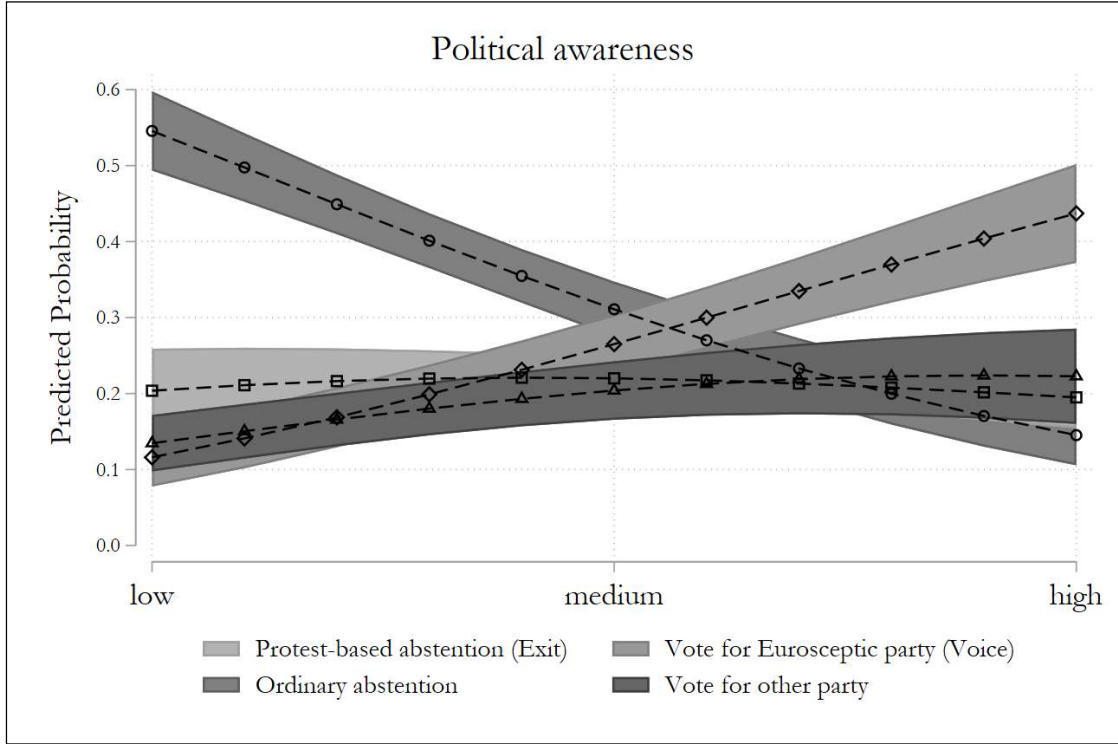


Figure A-5: Predicted probabilities for four electoral choices among Eurosceptic citizens in function of ideological congruence with Eurosceptic parties

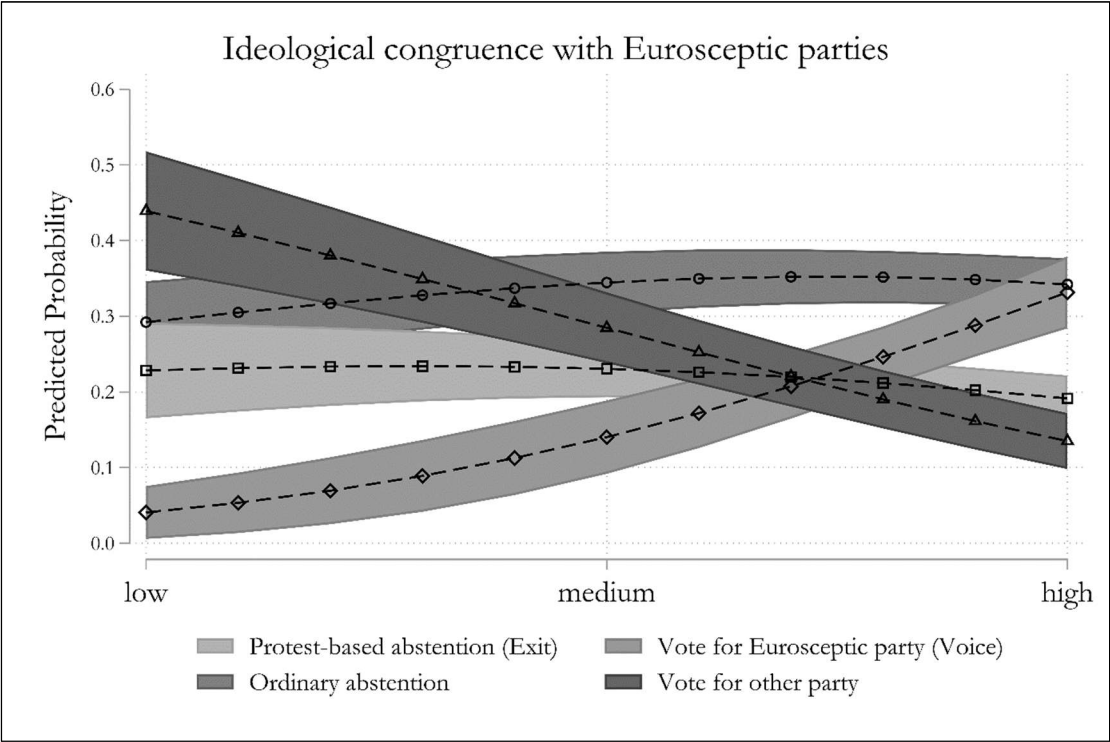


Figure A-6: Predicted probabilities for four electoral choices among Eurosceptic citizens in function of party polarization on European integration

